

2017-06-07 LINC VAN SICKEL – Revised per Linc

Eric Lidji: Today is June 7th, 2017. I'm Eric Lidji, this is the Great Allegheny Passage Oral History Project and I'm speaking to Mr. Linc Van Sickel at his home in Somerset. Is that technically where we are?

Linc Van Sickel: The town of Bakersville.

Eric Lidji: The town of Bakersville.

Linc Van Sickel: But, it's Somerset County and Somerset school district.

Eric Lidji: It's an overcast day and it's a little too rainy to mow, is what we've determined. Before we get started, I was just poking around in the old newspapers and I found this, I don't know if you've seen that article.

Linc Van Sickel: Oh, my gosh. That was the first summer we were married, I don't even know if I got a copy, I have a copy here somewhere.

Eric Lidji: You can have that. I copied that out for you.

Linc Van Sickel: That was written by Tom Morgan, was an old college friend.

Eric Lidji: What were the circumstances?

Linc Van Sickel: We got married in – here's the situation. We got married in December that year and we went to – for vacations, I mean, I was subject to the draft, this was during the Korean War, I think '51. My company kept getting me deferred that I was working for.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Who were you working for?

Linc Van Sickel: And, I never knew I was going to – I always thought I was going to get drafted, but I mean. So, anyway, we had some vacation time and let me say when I was 16 years old, my brother was 14 and my friend, Bunk Swat, was 15 and we decided to build a boat and float down the Allegheny River from Corydon, Pennsylvania.

Eric Lidji: That's way north, right?

Linc Van Sickel: Which is right up, right next to the New York State line to Pittsburgh where my grandmother lived. So, we built the boat. We actually bought the lumber and built the boat ourselves and we started up and we waited until higher water because high water gets you fast moving, it was sometime in July. Here was a boat with oars and we had a sail, but the wind was always going the wrong way and we put a sail in it, but we never used the sail. Anyway, we camped overnight on the shore on a little island and so forth and when we got down to Oakmont, we quit, and we called my mother up. Well, we had to send a telegram to her because the phones were down.

[Laughter]

We ran out of money. I remember, the last meal we had, I thought I was buying hamburger. It said hamburger relish, I thought there was a hamburger in it.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Was it pickles?

Linc Van Sickel: Oh, it was crackers and hamburger relish.

[Laughter]

Mother did arrive and carried us & the boat home in a pickup truck. Anyway, so back to the trip with my wife, my parents were still living in Corydon and so this was '52, this would be 6 years later after that first trip. We went back up and took the ride, the same ride down the river. It took a week.

Eric Lidji: You and your wife did?

Linc Van Sickel: My wife and I did the same trip and stayed overnight in a pop tent up on the river banks and islands.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: There's a line in here that I thought was so funny. The reporter asks you if you're nervous and you say, "It's really very simple, no danger at all," and then your wife says, "What's the gun for?" And you say, "Just to shoot crows," and she says, "How about the binoculars?" and you say, "So, you can tell me when

we're approaching the rapids, of course." And she says, "You mean we're going to have to carry the boat partway?" And you said, "Nope, I just to like to know what we're getting into."

[Laughter]

Linc Van Sickel: I know, we've got to tell people what we did and it's crazy, but it was a lot of fun. I lived along the river and I grew up along the river.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: We left the boat that had come down the river twice, it was pretty well used up by that time and we left it on the bank of the Allegheny River. A friend picked us up and took us home. An interesting side story about boating on the Allegheny River is my brother became a pilot in the Air Force later, had 25 years in the Air Force as a jet pilot. He put an airplane engine, not jet engine, but a propeller, driven engine into the back of a little rowboat we had at home. But anyway, he built this thing and then he could roar over the rapids going upstream.

[Laughter]

He would roar up and down the river; people thought it was crazy with this boat. But anyway, that's another part of the – that's how we lived up there in Corydon.

Eric Lidji: So, how did you end up down in this part of the state from up there, living?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, when I graduated from college and I expected to be drafted, I took a job with a company that offered me a job in the Pittsburgh area.

Eric Lidji: What company was it?

Linc Van Sickel: The Wallace and Tiernan Company. I was installing and repairing chlorinating equipment and the Lime-feeding equipment for water supplies and sewage plants and steel mills, we did stuff for steel mills too.

Eric Lidji: They were based in Pittsburgh?

Linc Van Sickel: No, they were based in Newark, New Jersey. When I was interviewed, I mean, well anyway, that's the job I took coming out of college and expected to get drafted at any time, but after I worked for the company for a while, they said, "Well, we'll get you a deferment." In the meanwhile, we talked about getting married, so, let's get married and get deferred. I did get drafted eventually, but the war was pretty much over – it was still going on, but I ended up very safe – they sent me to Aberdeen Proving Ground.

Eric Lidji: Where's that?

Linc Van Sickel: In Maryland – because it turned out that they had a policy not to send engineers to Korea. If you were an engineer, they wanted you to stay safe in Aberdeen. There were 6,000 of us guys sitting down there doing, well, I worked at a drafting machine for two years, but it was pretty safe compared to the rest of my basic company, they all took off for Korea.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: I was looking at one of the guide books for the trail and it mentioned that in, I guess in Ramcat, there used to be a lumber company, a Van Sickel lumber company. Are you related to those Van Sickels?

Linc Van Sickel: Probably. But, my grandfather –

Eric Lidji: It was back in the '20s, EW Van Sickel Lumber near Ramcat.

Linc Van Sickel: Well, that would have been my grandfather's brother. There was my grandfather- my ancestors are from Somerset County, but I never lived here until I – the company I worked for had a big operation in Johnstown – we were bought several times and I was Vice President of Sales and they wanted me to move to Johnstown. Well, I had a daughter living here in Somerset at the time and her husband was a doctor and I thought, "Well, this would be a better move down to Somerset." It was a lot easier to get to the Pittsburgh Airport because I was flying all the time for business.

Eric Lidji: For work?

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Linc Van Sickel: ...for work than it was to get out of Johnstown to fly. So, I bought this place. That was four/five years before I retired. Also, I was skiing all the time, so it was a great place to live.

Eric Lidji: You were coming down from Pittsburgh?

Linc Van Sickel: I used to drive, out almost every weekend and ski at Hidden Valley most of the time, at Seven Springs also. We started skiing – well, I grew up skiing up there in Corydon, you had to get skis to get to school on time.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: Really?

Linc Van Sickel: We were right in the snowbelt out of...

Eric Lidji: Lake Erie.

Linc Van Sickel: ...Lake Erie there. And, we got snow in Thanksgiving and it melted some time at the end of March. It was always a long winter.

Eric Lidji: So, you came down to Somerset because your daughter was here, and the company had been bought?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, the company that I worked for, their headquarters were in Pittsburgh at that time. Anyway, the company was sold.

Eric Lidji: This is the Wallace Company?

Linc Van Sickel: No, I worked at the Wallace and Tiernan until I got drafted and when I got out of the army, I changed jobs, and then I changed jobs another six years later. I went to work with this Penn Machine company and their headquarters was in Pittsburgh, they had a number of interests. They had a little bit of a minor conglomerate. They had an iron foundry out in Canton, Ohio, they had a couple of other things. They also owned Lakeview Country Club down in Morgantown.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Really?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah. And so, the headquarters were there and that was a convenient place for me to work. My job, when I was hired, was to develop – a steel mill business, Penn Machine Company was 100% into coal mining equipment and parts for coal mining equipment. My job, primarily, had been selling stuff to steel mills mostly, gearing, crane wheels and so forth for steel mills. I was hired by Penn Machine to put them in the steel mill business because they wanted to get into the steel mill to get into something besides coal mines, because every several years, they'd have a strike and the whole place would shut down for three months, no business. John L. Lewis would take the miners out, you know. And, they wanted to diversify the business and that's what I did, I got them into the steel business and a couple of other businesses. I worked for them for 35 years; I retired from that company. Then after I retired, they asked me to stay on as a consultant. I worked another four or five years as a consultant part-time and so, it was a good deal. I liked the country anyway, I lived in the country when I was a kid. My wife had never lived in it, she'd always lived in a city. And, she takes to it, she loves it out here, so it's been a good transition for us.

Eric Lidji: So, how did you get involved with the trail?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, that's interesting. It was different, I don't know. We lived in Forest Hills – you probably know Forest Hills, eastern suburb of Pittsburgh.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: ...yeah. and for 30 years, I guess. But, the last 20 of those years, I was a member of the Parks and Recreation Board. We built a couple of parks and put in a swimming pool and tennis courts, good times doing all this stuff.

Eric Lidji: This was just a volunteer thing?

Linc Van Sickel: As a volunteer, yeah. So, when we moved here, we moved here in '92 and we got the *Daily American* newspaper. I remember, like July – we moved here in June and it went about a month – I'd read the paper and there was an article that they wanted to form a Parks and Recreation Board in

Somerset, they were looking for volunteers; it was a front-page article in the paper. I thought, "Boy, that might be a good way to get to meet people and get acquainted to the community," I mean, I have some experience. I wrote a letter to them. I think it was Bob Will who was chairman of the county commissioners, so I wrote a letter to him and told him that I would be willing to serve if they would like me. I never heard from him until, like, December.

[Chuckle]

He called me up and said, you know, "We've read your letter." Bob called me up and said, "We'd like you to come to this organizing meeting." I don't know perhaps it wasn't maybe December, maybe November. It was three or four months after I wrote the letter, I had forgotten all about it and this guy called me up and, I could hardly remember what I had done. I said, "Okay, I do remember writing that letter." They had the organizing committee and the organizing committee was designed to – this committee, the Parks and Recreation Board – was to maintain the trail that they were building. They were getting ready to build a trail and they had bought the right-of-way. The Somerset county commission had bought this right-of-way and they needed an outfit to maintain it. So, this was a committee job and...

Eric Lidji: The Parks and Rec Board was going to maintain...

Linc Van Sickel: ...maintain and operate the trail after it was built. I went to the first two meetings, the third meeting, I couldn't make, I was out of town. And when I came back, I found out I was elected chairman.

[Laughter]

I didn't know anybody, but I figured nobody knew me, so I guess they elected me, I don't know. But anyway, I got elected chairman. I served as chairman – that was in December of '92.

Eric Lidji: You were elected chairman in December of '92?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah. From that point until January '96 I was chairman in December of '92 and then during Christmas week that year – I

remember this, which is interesting – after I got elected chairman and told what to do and so forth, I'd never been on this trail, you know. I didn't know what we were talking about. Some of our family – I've got a big family, six children, and 18 grandchildren – so there were a number of people here for Christmas and I decided to take a hike on the trail. The first section of trail, we were working on was from Markleton to Rockwood or Rockwood to Markleton, that is six-miles long. So, there were eight or 10 of us – some of them were grandchildren that were pretty young – but anyway, we walked. We'd go in one car or a couple of cars down to Markleton, we had another couple of cars at Rockwood instead, we all walked from one end to the other.

Eric Lidji:

Like a caravan?

Linc Van Sickel:

Yeah, we left a couple of cars at Rockwood and drove down to Markleton, and then walked up.

Eric Lidji:

And, the whole family walked up?

Linc Van Sickel:

All of us that went, my wife, several grown children and a few grandchildren - walked the six miles at Christmas.

[Laughter]

It was a cold, windy day. It was winter, but we went just to see what the trail looked like.

Eric Lidji:

Was there actually a trail at that point?

Linc Van Sickel:

No, it was still a railroad bed.

Eric Lidji:

Were the tracks still there?

Linc Van Sickel:

No. The tracks had been taken up and most of the ties had been taken up. I think the railroad took the ties up maybe. I don't know, the ties weren't there. I do know that on some sections that we took over, the ties were still there, and we'd salvage what we could and sell them, because they were good, sellable pieces.

Eric Lidji:

Just the salvageable metal?

Linc Van Sickel: No, the salvageable ties. There was no metal. The rail was always taken, but the ties we did salvage in places. Because I remember where we got some money from them. So, that's my start on the thing and we actually built – I went to – there was a Rail-to-Trail Association, that was a Somerset County Rail-to-Trail Association was actually in charge of building the trail. They are the ones that spearheaded buying the property, getting the county commissioners to come up with the money, and they got grants and so forth to buy the trail. Hank Parke was the chairman of that. He was also, I think at the time, he was chairman of the – I forget the name of the committee – promotion, civic promotion, Chamber of Commerce.

Eric Lidji: Like the conventions and visitor's bureau kind of thing?

Linc Van Sickel: Something like that, yeah, but he was chairman of that in the area and he did this as a volunteer. Hank grew up in Hidden Valley. His father, George Parke, was the owner of Hidden Valley Ski Resort and George sold that. And, George was the one that sold me this land. He went into the real estate business and I bought – he was the one who was the realtor that we bought this property from. I knew George Parke from – before it became a ski resort, Hidden Valley was sort of a retreat center. The church that I was a member of had gone out there for several meetings, retreats and so forth, and I met George there. His brother, Bill Parke, was a member of our church in Pittsburgh. But, it was one kind of a connection out here. Hank is still active in the community and now works for Somerset Trust. We've been friends for a long time.

Eric Lidji: So, the Somerset Rails to Trails Association had been formed a few years before you got here?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, and they...

Eric Lidji: You were in charge of building it.

Linc Van Sickel: They were in charge in building it, they bought the property and got the county to buy this right-of-way. So, at that point, we started...

Eric Lidji: And, just before you go any further, how did the public feel about the trail at that point? Were they in favor of it? Were they skeptical of it?

Linc Van Sickel: I think probably more or less skeptical, I don't know. I wasn't really involved with the public relations that much. People I was involved with were gung-ho. The county commissioners were all gung-ho, those three county commissioners said it was a great idea. There were, I forget, one or two Democrats, I mean, regardless of political party, I never had any trouble with them on anything we did. They were all in favor of doing it and I don't remember- the only guy that was against it was a member that was on the committee, on the Somerset County Parks and Recreation Board, **Dr. Broadmarkel** owned a big hunk of property below Fort Hill. He owned, like, 250 acres and it included about a half a mile of trail and he didn't want the trail people coming through his property and he was very vociferous about it. But, he joined the committee; they invited him to join the committee and he joined the committee, I think, to protect his property. I think, in the process, he became convinced that maybe this was a good idea.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: That's really interesting.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, so Dr. Broadmarkel was one of the guys on the committee. But, as far as public acceptance, I'd say, I don't remember anybody being against it, outside of Broadmarkel. And, there was a farm- yeah, there was one guy up in – boy, I can't remember now exactly. It was a farm.

Eric Lidji: Petenmeyer?

Linc Van Sickel: No, the big farmer? Now, he was all right. I mean, we had to work with him to get the bridge over the trail fixed up, but he was okay to work with. There was a farmer up beyond Meyersdale, but I can't remember his name, I could probably look it up, but that's probably not a good idea. Anyway, that man gave us some trouble, but, turned out that we had clear rights to the trail there and we just told him, you know, jump in the lake, that we were putting the trail in and it wasn't going to

bother him. But, after it was built, I don't think we ever heard from him again with any problems. I'd say this, in Somerset County at least, I know there's other places people have been against these trails, but in Somerset County, I think it was pretty well accepted and today they all love it. They're walking on it and they use it themselves and it brings in a terrific amount of people coming here anymore. I don't know what the numbers are, but you could probably get that from- if you'd like, but there's people from all over the world using this trail. It's been a great accomplishment, much more than we ever imagined when we started. I mean, I had no idea what I was getting into.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: So, how did you get pulled into construction after you got on to the Parks and Rec Board?

Linc Van Sickel: As they say, I got elected chair and I just look at some of the things I did as the chairman of the Parks and Recreation Board in April '93 of- we had a dedication. The Rockwood to Markleton section was opened on April 24th, 1993.

Eric Lidji: So, that had been in the works before you?

Linc Van Sickel: That had been in the works, I guess it must have been in the works at the time I walked up there, but the dedication was April of '93. And then we spent a lot of time cleaning up the garbage along the trail. We had cleanup days that were staggering. We had people get trucks and bring them down a trail. Old tires and, you know, parts of automobiles and everything, people just threw stuff over the trail as a garbage dump and we'd have dumps that would take four and five, six trucks worth of stuff out of it, and recycle it. That was a big community effort to get people to do this. And also, we had a lot of youth, community service kids, the ones that got caught doing something wrong and they had to work and do some community service, community service youth. We worked their butts off. They worked well, I've got to say. We didn't have much trouble with them. They seemed to enjoy doing this, I bet it was because we'd pick a nice Saturday because we always did it on Saturdays. We did a lot of that work. Anyway,

I'm just looking at some of the things we did. July of '93, we cleaned up the Rockwood to Garrett section. The Meyersdale Railroad Station Committee was organized. That Meyersdale Railroad Station, which is a really big thing for that community – I don't know if you've been to that railroad station?

Eric Lidji:

No, I've read about it.

Linc Van Sichel:

There are some people down there that might be interesting to talk to because they've been involved heavily from the beginning and that was quite an effort down there to get that railroad station rebuilt- and the funding. They had parties and ox roasts and things to raise money to do it. Everybody stops there on the way. And so, that was organized in '93. In '93 also, we had bids for the Pinkerton Tunnel and that was supposed to be renovated, but that didn't work out. We had to fire that guy. The guy that would rebuild the Pinkerton Tunnel wasn't performing up to snuff and we canceled the contract.

Eric Lidji:

What was wrong with the work?

Linc Van Sichel:

Well, he wasn't getting anywhere, and he wasn't doing – I think he underbid the thing, I don't think he knew what he was doing. I had nothing to do with putting the bids out or getting the design and I really didn't have anything to do with canceling it. The county commissioner did that. All we did was find out that it had been canceled.

Eric Lidji:

They'd put a fair amount of money into that already, right?

Linc Van Sichel:

They put in like \$100,000 at that time and then just recently, it's been about two years ago, it finally was done. Meanwhile, we ran a path around it because the river ran around it. Big Savage Elbow, the...

Eric Lidji:

The Pinkerton Horn?

Linc Van Sichel:

Yeah, the Pinkerton Horn. It wasn't the Big Savage up there; it was the Pinkerton Tunnel, yeah. And, by the way, the Pinkerton Tunnel, one interesting footnote there is that my grandfather at that time, when it was built in 1911, he ran a team hauling dirt out of- he was a teamster building that tunnel.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Really?

Linc Van Sickel: 1911, yeah. So, that's a little bit of history. He lived in Casselman, my grandfather grew up in Ursina and lived in Casselman. My father was born in Casselman and lived there until he graduated from engineering school in Penn State in 1922 and left. We went back to Casselman as a kid a lot over the years, two or three times a year, every year. And so, I'm sort of familiar. I was familiar with the area and the trail goes right across the river from Casselman. Casselman's between Rockwood and Markleton, Casselman was on the west side. It's across the river from the trail.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. When you first got here, and you were doing the Parks and Rec Board, was the trail that they were working on here envisioned as being part of a much larger trail yet?

Linc Van Sickel: No. We never thought about that at the time. In the fall of '95, meanwhile, we built the trail from Rockwood almost to Garrett – we didn't quite get to Garrett at the time and that was in '94.

Eric Lidji: Rockwood to almost Garrett opens in '94?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: So, at that point, you can go from Markleton all the way to Garrett?

Linc Van Sickel: Almost, yeah.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Linc Van Sickel: The Pinkerton work was stopped, Pinkerton tunnel work. Anyway, in the fall of '95, I had back surgery. I had a disc in my back removed and I remember I couldn't walk very well, I could hardly walk, I wasn't supposed to do much walking and I wasn't supposed to sit down at all, I was supposed to lie down. But, they had an organizing meeting of the Allegheny Trail Alliance in Hidden Valley. I don't know whether the Allegheny Trail Alliance, was even in business before then. This was the fall of '95. It was a meeting of a whole bunch of Rails to Trails people. I mean, there was a lot of organization going on and

work on the same trail, the same railroad down below, Montour Trail people and so forth. There were about six or eight organizations. And so, I was lying here in the bed or sofa, so I went to the meeting. They got me a cot, I had to have a cot to be there.

Eric Lidji: Like a hospital cot?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, it was sort of like a hospital cot. They had a cot there and I attended the meeting in the cot, and in December, I retired.

Eric Lidji: So, you had been doing consulting work for those few years?

Linc Van Sickel: I'd been with them 35 years at that point. And so, I retired in January '96 and I know I still worked with them enough that year, I couldn't draw Social Security, I made too much money.

[Laughter]

So, I mean, I was a big consultant the first year. I knew everybody in the business and they wanted me to go to conventions. If they had a big problem in a transit system, by that time we were making transit wheels and axels and we had sold a big job in Dallas and they had problems. They asked me to go down and solve the problem. I always went to places where there was trouble.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: So, there were three or four years when you were living in Somerset and on the Parks Board, but still working?

Linc Van Sickel: Still working, yeah.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Linc Van Sickel: Part-time, yeah. I'd say six or seven years. That's when I got involved with the ATA.

Eric Lidji: So, you went to that meeting just out of curiosity or just to get out of the house or what?

Linc Van Sickel: Probably both. I really wanted to see what was going on. It was pretty well hyped-up as here we are already working on

our trail with groups for like three years at that point and I kind of liked to see what other people were doing.

Eric Lidji:

So, what was the idea of the Allegheny Trail Alliance originally?

Linc Van Sickel:

Well, I think it was to share knowledge, problems, and so forth because we were all working on the same railroad. I think there were six different organizations, There was a very active group in Maryland and there was a big active group in Westmoreland County, a couple of groups, I think. In Allegheny County, there was Steel Valley Trail Alliance and there was a group in Pittsburgh, Three Rivers Trail – I think they're still working bike trails and so forth down there. Anyway, it was a very worthwhile effort.

But, then we got together and got this idea of building this thing from Cumberland to Pittsburgh; it was a very exciting idea. We all bought into it. I never thought about it before. Somewhere along the line, it must have come up and we got excited about it. And then, I retired January 2, 1996 and January 3rd, Dave Mankamy, who was on the county commissioner. The county commissioner called me up and said, "Can you come down and talk to me? I want you to come to work for the county."

[Chuckle]

And so, I went down there, and I went to talk to Dave and we worked out a deal. I was supposed to work one day a week. My job was to be Trail Construction Coordinator. They had received a \$1.25 million grant and they were having a hard time getting it spent, getting stuff done. They had the Parks and Recreation Board, they had the Rails to Trails Association, they had the conservation team from the county, but there was nobody really keeping it all together. They wanted to get this money spent and get things built, get things done.

Eric Lidji:

Was it all being done volunteer before that?

Linc Van Sickel:

Of course, the county commissioners were getting paid. Dave Mankamy was a huge worker, he did a huge job, he was

great. And, he was the spearhead for the county commissioners. You know, they sort of divide up their duties. Dave Steel from the conservation agency here in the county, he worked a lot with us to really plant- in fact, they're the ones that developed the plans and did the surveying for the first couple of jobs like Rockwood to Markleton and Rockwood to Garrett – they engineered the thing and put it out for bids and oversaw their construction. My job, at that point, was to – I mean, we got bigger than that. We hired Killam Engineers, an engineering firm. Sean Isgan was the principal or the vice president of the company; he now has his own engineering company here and they got a big-time operation here in Somerset. So, Sean and I worked together.

From '96 on I was the construction coordinator, we designed the Salisbury Viaduct; that was a huge job. We also, at that time, started the engineering work on the Big Savage Tunnel. Going up and looking at that thing and I figured, there has to be a way around this Big Savage Tunnel. You couldn't get in; the water was two and three-feet deep; there was a stream coming out of it. I did walk through it. I put on hip boots, a couple of us did, put on hip boots to walk. The water was three-feet deep in places in there. We had flashlights and there's stuff falling, there's stuff hanging out from the ceiling, and water kept trickling down everywhere. It's like a half a mile long or something; it's a scary thing to walk through.

[Laughter]

Anyway, the first time I went there – I'll tell you this story because it's interesting – my wife and I drove out to look at this thing one Sunday afternoon. I think we had a picnic supper or something. We were eating out there by the tunnel and we hear noises in the tunnel. I can see looking in, I can see headlights. And, there was somebody who had driven in from the other side with a truck and it being in the summertime, the water dries up. They were in there honking the horn and having a good old time; I don't know what they were doing. Anyway, they turned, or they backed out. Rock falls didn't let them drive out the west end of the tunnel. I

remember walking over that mountain two or three times, trying to find various routes that we could take a bicycle.

Eric Lidji:

Literally walking over the mountain?

Linc Van Sickel:

Yeah, to try to figure out if there was any way to bypass this tunnel because there's got to be some way to get around it with a bicycle, but I just couldn't. I mean, there is a road that goes way up north and back around you could have probably used. We decided we had to go through. And, it was quite an engineering job there to figure out how I got an initial estimate from Bethlehem Steel Company, it might have been Bethlehem Steel. Bethlehem Steel made the mine arches, you know, you could buy these, collapsible steel arches you could use for coal mines. And, we could line the whole tunnel and clean the place up for about \$3 million. However, after I retiree as trail construction coordinator and from the Allegheny Trail Alliance, the tunnel was rebuilt by repaving the concrete walls, as much bigger and better job for \$12 million.

Meanwhile, I was also going to meetings of the Allegheny Trail Alliance. Their 1st president was also president of the Steel Valley Trail Council in Pittsburgh and was not giving the ATA the attention and effort needed. So it was decided to reorganize in 1997 and everybody wanted Linda Boxx, head of the Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation in Latrobe, to be president. She agreed to take the job if I would agree to be Vice President. I felt this to be quite a compliment and accepted and we severed together until 2005.

In 2005, I was asked to be the chairman of the building committee for our church and I think I had to quite doing something. By that time, I already had quite a long time in trail-building and we had gotten the trail pretty well built by that time.

[Laughter]

In the meanwhile, I had been taking vacations in Canada for years. My brother-in-law, my sister, they owned an island up there and I shared the island with them and shared the cost of it. We had August, they had July. I never got away for more than a couple of weeks. After I retired, I could spend more time up there and I love fishing and it's a great spot. So anyway, we overpopulated the place, I mean, we had too

many kids and they had too many kids, grandchildren. It turned out the last year we were there – it only slept 12 and you could only feed 12 at a time – and so, we had 23 people on the island. We had two tents and we decided to buy our own island, so I put together a family partnership and we went out and bought another island and built another cottage and, you know, a whole other construction project; that was in 2000. We built that cottage in 2000; it's still going on, I mean, it's big-time. I was up there last month for two weeks, I'm going back end of June, I'll spend two months up there. One of our children has bought another island.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: You guys have an Archipelago now.

Linc Van Sickel: My sister's family still owns – my sister passed away – but my sister's family still have their island, we have three islands up there now. That's a whole other story.

Eric Lidji: So, let me make sure I understand. When you got hired as the Trail Construction Coordinator in early '96, you had been on the Parks Board for a couple of years and you had done a lot of projects that were related to the trail, like cleanups and things like that?

Linc Van Sickel: Oh yeah. We were basically maintaining and operating the trail that was there. I was cleaning up before the trail was built even.

Eric Lidji: And so, you were hired because there was about \$1.25 million that was sitting there, in hand, but it wasn't being spent correctly or just...?

[Crosstalk]

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, they wanted to get it done.

Eric Lidji: And so, the projects that you had on your plate at that time were the Salisbury Viaduct?

Linc Van Sickel: Yep.

Eric Lidji: The Big Savage Tunnel?

Linc Van Sickel: Yep.

Eric Lidji: Were you doing the Keystone Viaduct at that point?

Linc Van Sickel: We did all that later.

Eric Lidji: Okay, so when you started...

[Crosstalk]

Linc Van Sickel: Salisbury Viaduct was the first thing and we had \$1.25 million to do that. What Mankamyer wanted to do was have the trail go from Confluence to Meyersdale. He figured if he'd get that done, he'd done a good job, which is great.

Eric Lidji: Meaning, even if the rest of the thing didn't work, that's a nice length of trail?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah. He'd have the county pretty well-connected and everybody would be happy. So, my job was trying to get that done, Confluence to Meyersdale. My job was primarily to get that Salisbury Viaduct done.

Eric Lidji: What was involved in that?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, it's a long viaduct, it's probably half-a-mile long, and, I don't know, a couple hundred feet off the ground. The land coming up to it – we didn't quite get to Garrett, we had to go through – well, let me put it this way – this is another interesting little learning process. PennDOT was involved with the money. The money had to go through PennDOT.

Eric Lidji: Was it federal money?

Linc Van Sickel: A lot of the money we were getting was federal money. The federal gasoline tax has 10% of the money going, it goes to trails or other development besides roads. It can be trails, transit-related projects. So, we were getting money through that money and that was a big hunk of money we got. And, PennDOT Engineers had to approve everything and so, you had to take them out and survey the property and what you're going to do, and you work with them. I had no trouble working with them. But, the first time I took them on the section where the trail ended before Garrett to Meyersdale, there was a

section there where the ditches had gotten plugged-up and there was water over the railroad right-of-way and there were cattails there. They wouldn't let me build on that. They say you can't build there, that's wetlands. We had to get off the Rail Trail and get on a little country road and use that and then get back on.

[Chuckle]

I said, "Well, I'm never going to do that again." Before I ever took them out again, I always walked the trail myself to see if there were any wetlands and whenever I found one, I'd get somebody with a backhoe to come in and clean out the ditches and make sure we had no wetlands when I took them out there.

[Laughter]

And, that worked; I never had other wetlands. Eventually, we had to go back. I mean, after I retired from all this, the guy that replaced me, Brett Hollern he got enough money to go in – what you have to do is put in remedial wetlands, you have to go over and build wetlands somewhere else to take place of the wetland that you need - and he did that, he got the remedial wetlands. So, anyway, we got this section built to the Salisbury Viaduct.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji:

So, what had to be done on the Salisbury Viaduct?

Linc Van Sickel:

Well basically, we had to have a big engineering study to find out if it was structurally safe. There was a stream running underneath it, we had to go down and check all the foundations, which we did, and everything was all right. And then, we had to have a design, a design of how they're going to put up the railing. They had to have the railings up so that the bicyclers not to fall off the thing. Then, we had to take up the ties; I think the rail was still on there because nobody wanted to take it off that viaduct. One of the scariest things I've ever seen in my life, we got the rails picked up and the ties out of there. They actually backed semi-trucks, flatbed semis backwards across that viaduct on the old railroad tracks, backed over the ties and then they picked up and loaded the ties on one at a time and the truck it kept going forward, and then after they'd get that load out, they'd back another one. I

don't know how anybody in their right mind would- and there's no guard rail. I mean, if you go off that thing, you're dead.

Eric Lidji: Right.

Linc Van Sickel: They did it and they never had a problem doing it.

[Laughter] Even standing down on the ground, looking at these guys doing it, was enough to drive you nuts. You just can't imagine doing that stuff. Anyways, they did it.

It turned out one of the most important results that came from our association with the ATA was how they helped us get the funds to rebuild the Salisbury Viaduct. When Dave Mankameyer got the \$1.25 million grant he hoped it would rebuild the Salisbury Viaduct plus the rest of the trail from Garrett to Meyersdale.

By the time we got the bids in, we were short of money. I announced this at an ATA meeting. I remember this, the Steel Valley Trail people had a grant that they had not been able to use, and it was about ready to be taken away from them and they thought if they asked PennDOT, they might move that money to us. We talked to PennDOT; I didn't know if it was possible, but PennDOT said, "Yeah, we can do that." They gave us all the money we needed from that grant, which was over a million dollars. We did a lot more work. We did the section from – we not only did that section, we did the section from the Fort Hill bridge – a lot of that money was used from the Fort Hill bridge down to Confluence.

Eric Lidji: So, you were short of money, this other trail council had too much and was running up against a deadline and because you had this umbrella group, you were able to arrange a transfer?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, that we found out that they had the money and then we talked to the PennDOT people and they said, "Well, that'd be hard to do, but let's see if we can do it." And, they came back and said, "We can do it."

[Laughter]

They were amazed at the district down there in Allegheny County, this was District 9, I think that was District 11. That District 11 would give them up, give the money. They said, "They'll never give us the money." It turned out that District 11 agreed to give them the money so I don't know how that worked, but it did and that was a huge thing at the time.

Eric Lidji:

Was it hard to have to run everything through PennDOT? I mean, how do you do that and not have it take forever?

Linc Van Sickel:

Well, that's what I was hired to do.

[Laughter]

Let me say, it went from being a one-day-a-week job to about three, three-and-a-half days. My wife got tired of this after- I did it for three-and-a-half years. She said, "You're retired, you're not going to..." Meanwhile, I was working part-time with my old company, it was like full-time work, but I was having a good time too, I enjoyed the heck out of it. I didn't mind doing it. I know this, I worked up until March of '99, I worked- and told the county commissioner, I said, "This is a full-time job. You got to have a guy in here full-time, not only doing what I'm doing but overseeing the maintenance of this trail. It's more than a Parks and Recreation Board, you need a full-time guy." I mean, I was taking my pickup truck and driving down the trail after it was built and being prepared, in order to make sure that there weren't trees falling over. We had a storm come through one time and a whole bunch of trees fell across the trail between Rockwood and Markleton. There were six or eight, I mean, these are big trees. I remember I got the old man down there at Rockwood that ran that – I can't think of his name now – he was a volunteer. His wife had died, he lived five houses up from the Rockwood Trailhead and he came down and we had a visitor's center there where you hand out literature and sell t-shirts and coffee cups and stuff like this. They made money for us all the time and he kept a log and registered people that came through and they would tell where they were from and so forth. Maynard, Maynard Sembower.

Eric Lidji:

Oh, yeah.

- Linc Van Sickel:** You've ever heard of Maynard?
- Eric Lidji:** I've heard of him, yeah.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Yeah, Maynard was, he was close to 90- he was 88, I think. Maynard and I – because I was like 70 or so – we'd go down there with chainsaws in my pickup truck and saw these things up. We did about six or eight of them, we got it opened. But, we worked like a dog for a like a day or day-and-a-half to get the thing back open, Maynard and I. It was things like that we did, you know, besides...
- Eric Lidji:** You were responsible for doing on-the-ground...?
- Linc Van Sickel:** No, I wasn't, I just did it.
- Eric Lidji:** You just had to do it.
- Linc Van Sickel:** To keep the trail open, I don't know, I just did it. And, Maynard just did, you know, we weren't getting paid for this kind of stuff. But I said, "You need a guy full time just to know those things happened." I mean, if you don't have somebody walking up and down those trails, you know, you can drive on a trail – I'd take it early in the morning when nobody else was around, I'd drive down the trail. You know, I could open the gates and get in and I wouldn't walk the whole way, I'd just drive down and I'd find ditches that were getting filled up and stuff like that. I'd make a note and we had volunteers that would go out and clean up things and do for us. That was part of my job and that's part of Brett's job and Brett's done a good job. Brett Hollern was hired in '99 and he's still working there for the county as our his title's not Trail Construction Coordinator, his title is, it's Manager of Trail or some different title, I mean, he's a full-time employee for the county and he's been there since I left. And, the trail is complete, of course, at this point in time as far as Somerset County goes.
- Eric Lidji:** So, when did the viaduct get done?
- Linc Van Sickel:** The Salisbury Viaduct?
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: Going into Meyersdale. Well, it was done before I retired from the job.

Eric Lidji: Let's take a step back. It seems like 1998 was the year where a lot of things were happening all at once, is that right?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, I could tell you when the Salisbury- do I have a file on the Salisbury Viaduct?

Eric Lidji: That's okay, you don't have to do that right now.

Linc Van Sickel: Maybe I have a note here. In '97, I got the engineering done and bids in on the Salisbury Viaduct. It must have been done in '98. I would say it was '98, but at the same time, we were able to complete the trail up to Meyersdale.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Linc Van Sickel: At that point, I know this, I did not do the work on the next viaduct, the one past Meyersdale.

Eric Lidji: Keystone?

Linc Van Sickel: Keystone Viaduct. I did very little engineering on that. Brett handled all that one, that was done later. But, I did do quite a bit of work on the Big Savage Tunnel and I got one bid on that, one estimate of what it was going to cost, \$3 million, but it ended up, I mean, I was totally out of the picture when it was done. In fact, I was pretty much out of the picture at the time and it cost \$12 million. It was a much better job than what I has estimated. It's all concrete-lined with doors that close every year in the fall and spring, open in the spring, which needed to be done. That's absolutely vital for a tunnel, is to close it off in the winter.

Eric Lidji: What happens if you don't?

Linc Van Sickel: The freezing and thawing routine just destroys it because there's so much water up there and no matter how much drainage you have and so forth- I mean, you take any tunnel in the road- I mean, that's why the turnpike always wants to get rid of tunnels and dig big canyons through the mountain, it's cheaper than maintaining that tunnel all winter long, because they're always patching it and they freeze and thaw

and there's not much they can do about it in this kind of climate. That's why they took the Laurel Mountain Tunnel on the PA Turnpike out and cut in a big chasm, but if you do that everywhere on the whole road, it cuts off a migration route for all the animals, for one thing, and it's unsightly besides for the landowners that live around there. We have a hiking trail up here that goes across the turnpike. Have you seen it?

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: Seen that hiking trail? That was another operation. We have a big mountain trail that goes from Confluence to Seward, 70-miles long. From Ohiopyle to Seward, up along Laurel Ridge.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: That goes over the turnpike there. I haven't been active on that. I have walked it, but I haven't helped build it.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: Were you doing the Casselman River Bridge at Confluence?

Linc Van Sickel: Yes, we did do that. One thing I did there was we came up with a pre-built section – I was just reading notes on it, I had forgotten all about it. We leave the ties on the bridge and then we put down whatever you were going to walk on – boards or whatever you were going to ride the bike on and so forth over those ties – we'd take the rails out but leave the ties in. We took the ties out to Salisbury Viaduct.

On the bridge across the Casselman River at Confluence there, we came up with the pre-engineered, pre-built section that came in on a big truck, like two truckloads and we took up the rails and so forth and just ran these pre-built sections through and we had the railings and everything all in one, we just kept setting them down; it was a lot cheaper going across that way. And, I don't know whether they've done that on other railroad bridges or not; I thought it was a great design, but Sean Isgan and I came up with this idea, there's got to be some way cheaper to do this, and we did.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: So, you were actually doing a lot of engineering in addition to all the administrative and management and things like that?

Linc Van Sichel: Well, I'm an engineer, I think these things out. Somehow you think of these things out and you realize how difficult it is doing it the way we're doing it, so there must be a better way and we did it. And, Sean is a great engineer, he was terrific, he was a good man to work with. The other thing I did down there at Confluence is I found a piece of land to buy for our trailhead down there. We could have tried to build a bridge across the river if it still existed...

Eric Lidji: Is it the Casselman River Bridge or the 281 Bridge?

Linc Van Sichel: It was the bridge on the railroad going across the Casselman River and PennDOT was building a bridge across the Youghiogheny at about the same time we were looking to rebuild all this and we talked to them about putting a bike trail on the side of the bridge so they added 10 feet for a bike trail and when we came out of the bridge and onto the south side we circled down underneath, there was room underneath the bridge so we didn't have to go across traffic and it was a heck of a lot cheaper than us re-building that bridge across the Yough. So, that's what we did.

The old railroad bridge across the Yough has been rebuilt by the people in Confluence, because they wanted people riding the trail to come over to their restaurants and stores. We didn't have anything to do with that, although some of us did contribute to their fund drive.

But, I did work with PennDOT to get that bridge across the Yough and also, I was able to find a piece of property to buy to put the trailhead in because there wasn't much to buy down there. You know, we wanted a parking lot and so forth, so we got that in there. I think that was about the last thing I did.

Eric Lidji: Was the trailhead at Confluence?

Linc Van Sichel: Yeah. Because as I have said, it was really a full-time job and I needed to move on. I think I stayed with the Board, I don't know how long I stayed with the Board after that, but I think it was until 2005, I mean, I stayed with Allegheny Trail Alliance

and went to their meetings and participated in opening ceremonies. If Linda Boxx couldn't make it, I would, things like that.

Eric Lidji: What compelled you to stay on that Board for so long?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, I enjoyed it. I like doing those kinds of things. You know, it gets you out of the house.

[Chuckle]

I do know this, that when they asked me to be chairman of the building committee at St. Paul's in 2005, there's only so many things you can do.

Eric Lidji: Right.

Linc Van Sickel: It took us six years to build that building. I don't know if you've seen it - that was a huge project.

Eric Lidji: Would I have passed it on the way in?

Linc Van Sickel: No, it's up across from Lowe's, up on North Center Avenue. We had an old church that was built in 1834 or something like that. There was a fire, a fire in Somerset that burned everything down in 1852 and that church burnt down. They built a new church. And, we were growing and so we decided to put an addition on. We bought a property next door to us for double the price it was worth, and we were going to put an addition on. Adding a new building to an old building is very expensive these days with, all the requirements for handicap access. We had four bathrooms that had to be rebuilt, and we had to put in an elevator. By the time we got done doing all this, it was going to be over \$2 million for this. We thought we could build a new building for this much, which we did, well, we could have. The church kept growing and we went out and one of our members, Marlin Sheubine, gave us a beautiful piece of property, so we ended up spending \$5.5 million, but we got it done. It was a big job. We didn't get that built until 2011.

Eric Lidji: So, that's what pulled you away from...

Linc Van Sickel: That pulled me away more than anything, I think, plus the fact that I had this island that I was working out of.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: Chain of islands, yeah. So, it seems like- one of the things that struck me was you have all these projects – when you were working on the trail, you had all these big infrastructure things that you were doing simultaneously. It seems to me like a lot to do at once. In the engineering world, is that a lot to do at once? It seemed like a lot in a very short period of time.

Linc Van Sickel: Well, they built the Panama Canal in one big project.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: Right, that they had more than one trail for it.

Linc Van Sickel: I don't know, I didn't feel like it was that – we started out, it was going to be a one-day-a-week job, but I was working three and four days a week, I mean, it was much bigger than I was getting paid for.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. Wait, so you were working three days a week on a one-day-a-week salary?

Linc Van Sickel: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I never got paid more. I got paid \$800 a month, plus I paid my own expenses, so I wasn't very profitable.

[Laughter]

But meanwhile, my old company paid me \$100 an hour and plus expenses, so I was making money there. But, I enjoyed it. I've got to say this, I never really counted the time, it was fun doing it. It wasn't the money, I was well enough off that I didn't need the money anyway.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. What was fun about it?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, I don't know, that's hard to explain. I mean, that's just the way you're made, I guess, I don't know, I like building things.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: My father was a civil engineer and that was what I wanted to do. I wanted to be in the construction business and I got side-tracked by the army, I mean, the army was breathing down my neck and I took this job, I was thinking I was going to get drafted and I took a job just to get a car. I didn't have a car and this company offered me a car, that's why I took the job.

[Laughter]

Well, I guess, I don't have to buy a car and I got started, you know, selling stuff and got involved with the steel industry, but mainly selling them stuff. The guy I was working with in that company, another salesman from Wallace and Tiernan, when I got out of the company and I got out of the army, he got a hold of me and wanted me to go to work with him at about twice as much money as any other offer I had and I could have had 25 offers when I got out of the army for a job. I mean, you could get a job anywhere as an engineer. I think you still can, but in those days, it was a terrific shortage of engineers. Anyway, this guy outbid anybody else and I worked with him for six years and then I got this better offer from Penn Machine Company to go work for them and so I did. And, that's how I ended up, up here in Somerset.

Eric Lidji: Is the stuff that you were doing on the trail, those big projects, were you doing projects of that size when you worked?

Linc Van Sickel: No, no.

Eric Lidji: These are the biggest things you'd ever done?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, I've got to say this, while I was working for the Parks and Recreation Board in Forest Hills, I mean, we built a swimming pool and tennis courts. That swimming pool was probably \$500,000 and the tennis courts were \$150,000 and we acquired land. We organized work parties and so forth to clean up things and we were used to working with people. But, then the other thing I did, I was a member of Beulah Presbyterian Church in Churchill. I don't know if you- if you drive past it on the parkway, as you're going into Pittsburgh on the parkway where Westinghouse used to be on the one side and Beulah Presbyterian Church was on the other. I was a

member of that church for 37 years, I think, and I ended up chairman of three building committees, so I was used to doing pretty big jobs.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: It seems almost like you were doing bigger jobs on the side than you were doing for your...?

Linc Van Sickel: For my company, yeah, I know. Well, I was doing construction work on the side and that company I was always, I did engineering work, but the work I was doing was more industrial management and metallurgy. I had to take courses in metallurgy, because there was an awful lot of things I did in the steel industry that had to do with metallurgy and I had to take courses in that to just figure out- anyway, I became basically, for a long time, I was the only graduate engineer that Penn Machine had. I had eight guys that were draftsmen that I would go in and tell them what to do and they'd draw up all the drawings and so forth, they were good, but I was the one that figured out, you know, the engineering part. I dreamed up the idea and so forth. I'd say this, I felt more rewarded doing this kind of stuff than what I did at work.

Eric Lidji: Huh. How come?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, it was easier, for one thing.

[Laughter]

I don't know. You know, when you sell gears to a steel mill, it's not quite the same thing as- I've got to say this – there were times that I solved some major problems at steel mills and I solved some major problems at the Transit Authority. I mean, I did do some engineering work. I don't know, this was such a great project and the people, I mean, people love it, you know, it's not quite the same thing.

Eric Lidji: You're an outdoors guy as well, too?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, yeah, that's another one, yeah. I mean, I grew up in the country and I love this. I mean, how many people live out in the woods like this?

Eric Lidji: Right. Were there any hiccups along the way? I mean, you guys were doing so much in such a short period of time. Were there any moments where you had to be kind of clever, street-smart, or think on your feet or flexible?

Linc Van Sickel: Hmm, that's a good question. I'm trying to think of the biggest problem we had. We sort of had to learn as we went along. I mean, Broadmarkel was a problem.

Eric Lidji: Did you have to deal with that?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, we had to work that through. I think what helped us more than anything else was that- I think maybe the biggest problem was keeping the ATVs off the trail. That was probably the biggest thing that we had to do and that's the thing that helped us get Broadmarkel's property, to get him to agree to everything we wanted to do.

Eric Lidji: How did you do it?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, because the ATVs were coming up. They had found their way up the old railbed up to his property. He knew he couldn't control them like we did. I mean, we built fences and we did everything we could. We still have to work hard, I'm sure Brett's still working hard keeping ATVs off the trail because you allow an ATV on a trail, it just tears it up.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: You can use it for ATVs or you can use it for bicycles and pedestrians, but you can't use it for both. Snowmobiles are okay, you can have a snowmobile and it doesn't hurt you any.

Eric Lidji: But, the ATV actually tears up the trail?

Linc Van Sickel: Oh, yeah, terrible. In fact, up there in Canada, there's a beautiful railroad right-of-way abandoned about 12 miles long from Espanola right down to some mountains and it comes out along the lake and it goes into the town of Little Current. I thought to myself, "Man..." I thought even today, but the ATVs just own that thing. I walked it, I would try to ride a bike on it, but it's so full of puddles and so forth.

Eric Lidji: You were thinking maybe you'd make another trail?

[Chuckle]

Linc Van Sickle: Yeah, I've thought about that – no, I've done that once. But, it would be a great trail. I've thought if anybody ever asked my opinion – nobody ever has – I would have told them that you could do it if you can handle it. **If Linda Boxx and I want something else to do, we can do it.** But, you have to have local people. I think up there in Canada, the ATVs are dominant; there are more ATVs than bikers, that's for sure. They're all over the place.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickle: And, you have to fight to keep them off. We do have some hiking trails up there and we also have some cross-country skiers and it's a battle between the hikers and the cross-country skiers to keep the ATV guys out. They try to have some privacy or someplace where the ATV guys don't tear everything up. They put in terrific potholes.

Eric Lidji: The ATVs?

Linc Van Sickle: Oh, yeah. I could take you out here at the end of our- we have a trail that goes up and out over the hill, and there's a gas line about half-a-mile or so up here and it goes up that way and angles up across Kuhn Town Road. There's a big gas well a half a mile down in there. That was a nice trail to walk and today, you can hardly walk it. The ATVs have got mud holes in there that are two-feet deep, they're so deep, they don't even ride it anymore. I mean, they're filled with water and you have to sort of walk out through the woods and come back and they keep traveling on into the woods and then they make the holes bigger. I mean, it's just awful. Anyway, I'm against ATVs.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: Were there ever any – it seems like all of the political people were surprisingly on the same page.

Linc Van Sickle: Yeah. I know the other trail-biliders have had big problems that way, we never did. And, I've always said that I know how county commissioners fight down in Allegheny County and so forth, I knew the president down there for a long time and they

were always fighting. But, Somerset County, they seem to get along, I mean, there has been very little, I mean, even today, I think there's very little- we had terrific cooperation. I try to remember, I know that Brad Cober was a Republican. I think Bob Well and Dave Mankamyer were both Democrats. I'm not really sure what Bob Will was; I'm sure I knew it at the time. Anyway, they all worked together.

Eric Lidji: But, even on the state level, I mean, you were getting state money and it seemed like a lot of people seemed to understand the vision of the trail.

Linc Van Sickel: Well, the PennDOT people didn't want to give you a lot of time, but they worked with you.

Eric Lidji: What does that mean, they didn't want to give you a lot of time?

Linc Van Sickel: They'd give you what they could, but I found the PennDOT people were a pretty hardworking group.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. Did you have to run a lot of engineering through them?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, I mean, I'd get their approval for a lot of things and we'd get engineering work done and then get their approval, they had to sign off.

Eric Lidji: Was that hard to get the time for them to look at it?

Linc Van Sickel: No, I don't think so. I mean, we got it done, I don't think it was hard to do. The outfit that I thought was the worst state outfit to work with, the Department of General Services, they were awful.

Eric Lidji: Huh. That's a state agency?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah. And, they had to sign off on some things. The Department of Environmental – the one that takes care of the Parks and Recreation- it was Environmental something or other.

Eric Lidji: Conservation?

Linc Van Sickel: I forget what the state title is now, The Department of Recreation- anyway, they wanted to run the park, the people

that run Ohio State Park and those guys. They were very good, I mean, they had to work hard, they'd work overtime, they have no problems.

Eric Lidji: Conservation and Natural Resources?

Linc Van Sichel: Yes, that's it, CNR, Natural Resources, that's it. We had a meeting one time and we need to get the Department of General Services onboard about something – I forget what it was about now, geez – it was in Harrisburg. And, Linda Boxx and I and a guy from the Department of Recreation- parks and- what did you say?

Eric Lidji: DCNR.

Linc Van Sichel: DCNR. DCNR and I- there were two guys from DCNR and we were meeting with the head guy at the Department of General Services in Harrisburg at his office. And, we drive down there, we had the meeting, like, at 2:00. And, we were going through the agenda, we had an agenda going over these things. At 4:00, he gets up and walks out. I thought he was sick or something and he never came back. I thought he had to go to the bathroom, but he never came back. And, I asked the Parks guy, I said, "What the hell happened to him?" He said, "That was his quitting hour and he quit." He was the guy that called the meeting.

[Laughter]

He said before he left, "You take over." He told one of DCNR guys, "You take over." You can't believe that somebody would do something like that and this guy was the chairman of the whole darn thing. I've had the same problem. I've heard the same thing from other people, the Department of General Services is just full of a bunch of SOBs.

Eric Lidji: Yeah, but for the most part, you didn't have any problem when you were working with the state on things?

Linc Van Sichel: No, we didn't.

Eric Lidji: You didn't have to, like, put any pressure on anybody to get stuff done?

Linc Van Sickel: No, and the other thing we had going for us was a guy that was chairman of the Transportation Committee for the state legislature.

Eric Lidji: Geist?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah. He's from Altoona?

Eric Lidji: Rick Geist?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah. He was good. He was all for the trail.

Eric Lidji: Was he a biker or something? Outdoors?

Linc Van Sickel: I don't know. And, the other guy was Ridge, Tom Ridge.

Eric Lidji: Governor?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, he was governor. He was a biker. I mean, he came down here after the trail was built, pretty much, I think we were still working on it, but Tom Ridge was governor. We invited him to go on a bike ride with us, it was a three-day bike ride. He's a big guy. Ride beside him, I mean, he's big and he's in shape. I remember the first day was easy, it was like 20-30 miles and we stopped someplace and had dinner. Then we stayed overnight. I guess it was only two days. We ended up in Connellsville, I think. The trail was built all the way to Connellsville. I forget where we took off. We went through some of the trails and ended up in Connellsville and then we were bussed over to and stayed overnight in Mt. Pleasant. There was a Sony shop, a Sony TV was there, and Sony had a big reception for all of us at a dinner party, you know, for the whole crowd. There was a hundred or so of us.

Eric Lidji: He was governor at the time?

Linc Van Sickel: He was governor, yeah, he was there.

Eric Lidji: So, he took two days to come ride the trail with you?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, we rode the trail, that was one day. And, the next day, we took the buses back to Connellsville and rode from there all the way into- that trail wasn't done. At some point, we had to get along the highway. I remember we went down, we were riding the streets. So, they had police, police escorts for us on

bicycles. We had a sag wagon behind us. I remember my wife was with me, she got picked up. We went 60-some miles that second day and she quit going up a hill, I think into Forbes Street in Pittsburgh going up the hill and towards Squirrel Hill, you know. Maybe she quit before that. I almost quit there, I mean, I was peddling up that hill.

Eric Lidji: You came all the way from Somerset into Squirrel Hill?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah.

[Laughter]

We were biking up that thing and the sag wagon was about 300 yards behind me, picking up people. I thought, "Man, I've got to keep ahead of this guy." I got to the top of the hill, we had to stop at the top of the hill. Who's up there but Cower...

Eric Lidji: Bill Cower, the Steelers coach?

Linc Van Sickel: Yes, Bill Cower. I mean, here he is, he's 30 years younger than me and he's up there and he- he had his bike. He hasn't ridden anywhere. He's on top of Squirrel Hill in Pittsburgh and all he has to do is ride downhill the way to the Point.

[Laughter]

And, the mayor of Pittsburgh was there. Anyway, I think there were like 100 of us left maybe and Tom Ridge, the governor, and we all rode down, I forget, Murray Avenue or something. We got on that bike trail that was built along the parkway there.

Eric Lidji: Right, the Eliza Furnace trail.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, we got on that someplace and rode down and got off at Grant Street and then down the Boulevard of the Allies, they had all the traffic stopped across the Boulevard of the Allies, it was 5:00 rush hour. We rode down the Boulevard of the Allies all four lanes, they had policemen at every corner stopping all the traffic and we rode down to the Point and we had a dinner. They served us a steak dinner at Point State Park outside.

Eric Lidji: That's great.

Linc Van Sickel: And then, we got a room at the Hilton Hotel that night. How the devil did we get back? I think we took a truck back. Wait minute. Yeah, they trucked us back. Wait a minute. We didn't ride all the way back. Yeah, we got trucked back or bussed us back somewhere. I forget how far back we came, we didn't have to ride our bike, but that was a fun, fun trip. I really admire Tom Ridge, he's a good biker.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Yeah, 60 miles.

Linc Van Sickel: It was 60 miles in one day, that's a lot.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. Do you still go on the trail now?

Linc Van Sickel: I haven't ridden the bike. I'm physically past that point, I've got both knees replaced and I don't think I can do it. Two years ago, I rode a bike and I'm not safe. You know, I'm 87 years old now.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: You're not close enough to walk it though?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, I'd like to walk down – I haven't seen the Pinkerton Tunnel opened. I'd like to walk that and, drive down to Markleton and walk in, it's about a mile-and-a-half and walk through it just once. Maybe I'll do that this summer some time.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. This is a silly question, but what's the difference between a bridge and a viaduct?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, I don't know.

Eric Lidji: Just the name they call it?

Linc Van Sickel: Viaducts are a lot longer than most bridges, yeah. A viaduct is a long structure. I don't know if there's a definition of a bridge length versus, I mean, you take San Francisco Bay Bridge, that's probably as long as some viaducts, but they don't call it a viaduct.

[Chuckle]

And, the Oakland Bay Bridge, when you think about it, the Oakland Bay Bridge is longer than the Salisbury Viaduct, so I think it's just a name...

Eric Lidji: Like a street and a road with...

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, a street, and a road is about the same thing.

Eric Lidji: Okay. Is there anything that we didn't go over that we should go over?

Linc Van Sickel: I think I probably more than I know, let's see here.

Eric Lidji: Did you go when they opened the Allegheny Highlands Trail and they had the hundred continuous miles. Did you go to that?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, yeah, I went to that, yeah, we were there for that.

Eric Lidji: Where was that?

Linc Van Sickel: That was down in Homestead, you know, down there, maybe Munhall. It was on the- that last section, about a half a mile.

Eric Lidji: Where the pumphouse is and all that?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, down there, you know, below that water park place.

Eric Lidji: Yeah, Sandcastle?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, Sandcastle, yeah. Yeah, that's the last time- I think that was the last thing that we've done. I went to that. In fact, I got a t-shirt. I got it in there now called "Point Made." You've seen one of those?

Eric Lidji: I've seen those, yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: I've got one.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: What were the Circuit Riders? There was something right around the time that Brett got hired where they had a Circuit Rider program where people got paid sort of like on a five-year timetable. Does that ring a bell?

Linc Van Sickel: No.

Eric Lidji: Okay. All right. Well, while I'm here, do you want to tell me kind of what you got in your paperwork, just so I can get a sense of...

Linc Van Sickle: Well, I'm just looking through here. This right here is the paperwork, this is the minutes of the Parks and Recreation Board from October '92 to December '97, that's five years. That's when I was chairman. That's all that paperwork, those are minutes. I just pulled that out just to try to figure out what I'd done. It's been a while since I did all this stuff. And, over here, this is engineering trail number one, it's number one file. Here's a memo regarding, it was a memo to Dave Mankamyer and Brad Zerafoss. Brad Zerafoss also was a key player. He was chairman of the planning commission and he's a full-time employee. Actually, I reported to Brad. I mean, Dave Mankamyer had been the guy that hired me, but Brad Zerafoss was my normal boss. I had use of an office there, the planning commission to do work for me when I needed it done, like a drawing or something. A copy to Cameron Mock, whoever he is, I don't know. It says, "Regarding preliminary view of Killam Associates trail plans to specifications by PennDOT." That's July 30th, 1996. And, I got drawings. I mean, this is all...

Eric Lidji: The drawings are of the trail of the bridge?

Linc Van Sickle: I don't know. Let's open it up. [Reading] "On Friday, July 26th, I reviewed the construction plans for the sections from Fort Hill to Pinkerton to Garrett to Meyersdale with Cameron Mock of Killam Associates. We made a lot of decisions about drainage and wetlands, which was straightforward and which you can review if you wish. However, there's one problem: We need some guidance on the section of trail going to the Petenberg property. There was a spring box constructed right next to where the trail surface should go and on county land, a plastic pipe runs through a culvert under the trail down to several houses and trailers down by the river. In order to properly construct the drainage ditch at this point, the spring house needs to be moved or removed. For the record, the location is Station 10416 plus 21. This waterline does not serve the Petenberg farm. In an earlier meeting, Mr. Cecil Petenberg

told me of the existence of this spring box. Attached is a drawing showing the location. I suggest we first search our deed to see if there's some agreement about the spring box. How do we proceed from here?" That's my memo to Dave Mankamyer That's long. I needed Dave's input on what to do about the spring box.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Okay. So, that whole folder is just bit-by-bit of all these little...

Linc Van Sickel: All these little things. This is from Sean Isgan, Professional Engineer, Vice President of Killam Associates. To David Sherman. David Sherman is the guy at PennDOT that I worked with a lot in Altoona. [Reading] "Recently Linc Van Sickel informed me of your meeting on the trail with Stu Keller." Stu Keller was their environmental guy. "Mr. Van Sickel expressed concern that Mr. Keller was going to perform Level 1 research on a trail section from Meyersdale to Salisbury Viaduct. It was my understanding that PennDOT would perform a Level 1 in this section. I sent Mr. Keller a letter and a map dated May 13, 1996, copy attached, which delineates the area requested for Level 1." Anyway, that's the kind of stuff I did.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: This is all this stuff here. I mean, you wonder how you did it all.

[Chuckle]

I still got the files. I don't know what to do with these things. I think they'll be thrown out when I pass away.

Eric Lidji: Well, you know, they're looking to start an archive of stuff from the trail, so it might be useful.

Linc Van Sickel: Are they?

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, if somebody wants it, I don't know how useful it would be to anybody, but, I can't hardly get the thing open.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. So, don't throw it away; that's what I'm saying.

Linc Van Sickel: I won't throw it away right now, but, at some point, if something happens to me. I forget which file this came out of. This was...

Eric Lidji: It was number one.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, I think it was over here. Well, that's the minutes of the Parks and Recreation, this was over here.

Eric Lidji: I think it was this one.

[Crosstalk]

Linc Van Sickel: That one. This is the number two. Yeah, this is out of this one. Okay, it was right there, yeah, okay. Anyway, obviously, it was a lot of work.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: I mean, that's only- here's a bunch of files. Here's files. Here's a file on the Salisbury Viaduct, the Keystone Viaduct, Big Savage Tunnel, Big Savage Tunnel, Big Savage Tunnel number two – Big Savage Tunnel, that must have been the first file. Then, there's Big Savage Tunnel 2000, Big Savage Tunnel number two, Big Savage Tunnel 2001, Salisbury Viaduct, the two-hour straight route 2011. Anyway, and I got more files. This is just some stuff. Are there any more?

Eric Lidji: That's mine.

Linc Van Sickel: That's yours?

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: I thought I had another file here. [Sorting through files] Trail Engineering number two. ATA Economic Impact Study, Alliance, ATA. Here's Alliance, Uniform Standards- oh, that's another we did, the Allegheny Trail Alliance, try to come up with uniform standards.

Eric Lidji: You were involved with that?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: What was the nature of that work?

Linc Van Sichel: Well, we tried to come up with, the width of the trail. Like one section of trail, they're making it eight-foot wide and the rest of it was for 10-foot and that's a big thing. Eight-foot is not wide enough to have people pass each other on bicycles. So, we tried to get things like that straightened out and signage and mileage. I mean, we actually measured the trail, the ATA measured the trail so that our mileage posters were all uniform. In other words, I think it started in Cumberland as mile number one, it ended up in Pittsburgh as mile a hundred-and-forty-something or something like that. You didn't have every trail starting number one again.

Eric Lidji: Right, right.

Linc Van Sichel: Those are the things we did. And then, people had markers on the trail, too, they knew when they went the whole length, they had some idea how far they had to go. I mean, if you had a map and the mapping of the trail, so that, you know, you can get maps to ride the trail anymore. I mean, I think you can get books.

Eric Lidji: Right. Yeah, every year they put a new book out.

Linc Van Sichel: So, marking was important. And, just the uniform standards. Let's see what we got here. Here's Federal Recreation Symbols – these are signs you put and these are letter size, how high they should be. Here's something: Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning, Design Guidelines by the Maryland Department of Transportation and State Highway Department. Here's the Allegheny Highlands Trail, Allegheny Throughway – 228 miles to Washington D.C. I guess that's somebody's idea of a sign. Ninety-eight miles to Pittsburgh; I don't think we ever did it that way. I remember when we came up with a name, the Great Allegheny Passage, which I think was a great- we were calling it something else for a long time.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sichel: But, Bill- the guy was sort of handicapped, he had a recumbent bike, he couldn't ride a bike. Bill, he'd be a guy for you to interview too. He lives in Confluence.

Eric Lidji: Metzger?

Linc Van Sickel: Metzger, Bill Metzger, yeah.

Eric Lidji: Is he still alive?

Linc Van Sickel: I don't know. Maybe he died.

Eric Lidji: I think he's on the list of people.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, because Bill came up with that name and he was always sort of an inspirational guy.

Eric Lidji: What do you mean, inspirational?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, I mean, he was always gung-ho to do things and he's handicapped to begin with. But, Bill came up with the name, which I thought was a great name. As soon as I heard it, that's it. So, we were trying to come up with a catchy, a good name for it.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. Well, it looks like we've gone over everything.

Linc Van Sickel: I think so. You've done a better job- I have never been through one of these things, so I had no idea what I was getting into.

Eric Lidji: Do you want me to take any of these files?

Linc Van Sickel: What would you do with them?

Eric Lidji: I'd take them back to Sandra and Linda and just put them with their files.

Linc Van Sickel: That might be a good idea just to do that anyway.

Eric Lidji: It's up to you if they're in your way. If not, just hold on to them.

Linc Van Sickel: I'm trying to think what else would they...?

Eric Lidji: I mean, at some point, they're thinking they might do a book, so whoever does that, it might be useful for them to be able to go through minutes and things like that. And, there's some thought they might donate it to a public archive or something along those lines.

Linc Van Sickel: I mean, you can tell Sandra I've got them.

Eric Lidji: Okay, I wrote down what you have.

Linc Van Sickel: I think that, you know, Somerset County might like to have them.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: I'd like to ask- I don't know if there's any interest there or not before I just get to it...

Eric Lidji: I wrote down what you have, so I'll let them know.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: And, just the most important thing is that if – just don't throw them away.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, I won't throw them away and at some point- maybe I should leave a note there in my will.

[Chuckle]

I've got more files than this in building the church. I'm going to write a book on building the church.

Eric Lidji: You are?

Linc Van Sickel: That's my next project.

Eric Lidji: That'll be fun. So, if you want to fill out this top part here, sign, and then date, address, telephone.

Linc Van Sickel: And, I got a pen.

[end 1:43:07.9]

js-t/cr-p

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