

# LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

**Avigail Oren:**

So, this one is recording and now let's get this one recording. So, my name is Avigail Oren, I'm here today with Larry Schweiger. It is Friday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019. We're at the Over the Bar restaurant in Allison- in North Park in Allison Park, Pennsylvania. It is 11:30 a.m. So, today, we're going to be talking about the beginning of your work at the National Wildlife Federation and your relationship with Ed Burwell and- sorry, David Burwell, and the beginning of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. And, we'll sort of end up by talking about how trails have fit into the broader scope of your long and accomplished career in the in the field of environmentalism. So, let's start – I would like to hear- take me from, you know, maybe not quite your birth but your early years to how you came to work at the NWF.

**Larry Schweiger:**

Well, that's a great story. Back in 1970, I organized- I was one of the original organizers of the first Earth Day. So, we're coming on a 50-year anniversary of that. And, I was active in a number of fronts, but most mostly with the Sportsmen of Pennsylvania – working on reforming of our clean air, clean water, and mining laws in Pennsylvania. And so, as a result of that, I had the privilege of... At that time, there were thousands of students in Pittsburgh that marched with gas masks and, you know, we're protesting the air pollution in Pittsburgh. And, I took two busloads of students up to see the last bald eagles that were at Conneaut Marsh. And so, I was very active in the early formative days of the environmental movement as its- modern environmental movement as it's been described. And so, I got an opportunity to go to work for the Joint House Senate Environmental Committee. It was the full title of the Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee, terrible name, but the purpose was clear. And, during that time, we passed 28 major environmental laws. I arrived in Harrisburg just as the Pennsylvania voters adopted the language to protect our environment through a constitutional amendment. And so, things were really happening. The state legislature had gone from being dark brown to being green. And, most of the new lawmakers at that time – I think there were some 80 couple, that were elected the year that I came to Harrisburg, were pro-environment, but they didn't know quite what to do or how to

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

do it. So, there were a group of us, Pete Duncan, Ralph Obble, others. John Schoenberg, who incidentally was Linda Boxx's first husband – worked together on a number of environmental bills. And, we were able to pass quite a substantial number of things in Harrisburg, at that time, very different than today.

During that time, Pennsylvania was seeing the contraction of industry in the state. We had seen the loss of steel mills in Pittsburgh and the loss of glass manufacturing, and so on and so forth. And, concurred with that, there was a move to abandon rail lines in Pennsylvania. And, we had looked at the issue and were concerned about it, frankly because we recognized that during the Second World War, those rail route lines were absolutely critical for the delivery of product from places like Pittsburgh and Ambridge and elsewhere to the war effort. And so, we had a pretty lively discussion about how we would protect these rail lines. But, this was the back with the General Assembly lawmakers, you know, they were lawmakers that were particularly lawmakers from rural areas who were worried that they were losing their rail linkage. And so, they would bring it to our attention and would reflect on how we might do that. But, nothing came of it. And so, we had these conversations, worried about the rail, worried about the national security dimension of the rail lines. And so, back in when Ronald Reagan was elected president, my friendly lawmakers all- not all but most of them disappeared. And, we flipped over into a right-wing, anti-environmental dimension because of the energy crisis and because Ronald Reagan swept the House of Representatives in Pennsylvania by coattails. So, it was time for me to leave.

And so, I had an opportunity through a man by the name of Dale Gaskill to take a position at National Wildlife Federation. I had recently helped Lenny Green, who was a Pennsylvania environmental leader, to become elected to the board at National Wildlife. So, I had a long history at the Federation as a volunteer. So, I ended up going to work for them as an Eastern Great Lakes regional executive. And, during that time, I met Dave Burwell who was actually working for the Federation doing a couple of things. He was working on an

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

effort to build a case against James Watt who was Secretary of Interior during the Reagan years. And, David actually put together a very compelling case for why James Watts should be fired. And, he allowed our president, Jay Hair, to launch this major report showing all the bad things that Watt was doing. Incidentally, at that same time, Anne Burford Gorsuch was the head of EPA. And, she is the mother of the current member of the U.S. Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch. But, the two of them were doing enormous damage to our environment. And, we went after them quite aggressively. And, during that time, David and I became friends. And, he was a biker. And, we loved to bike. And so, I said, "Dave, you need to come out to Western Pennsylvania and ride the bike trail, bike and hiking trail through Ohiopyle State Park." And, I said, "Western Pennsylvania Conservancy," another organization that I was close to, "was instrumental in creating the Ohiopyle State Park." And, as a part of that, actually took title to the Western Maryland Railroad. And, I said, "They have turned a wonderful trail in through the park into a nice hiking and biking trail."

So, David came out and did that. And, he was very excited when he came back. And, we talked and he said, "Oh, I'd love to see that happen." I said, "Well, David, you know, one of the things that we've been noodling on is how to protect these old, abandoned, now abandoned railroad lines and how to protect them for future potential industrial and other transportation needs." And, I suggested to them that perhaps we could declare these rail lines as the national security interest. And, he jumped on that idea. And, he got real excited. And, he began to work on the what is now the trail, the railbanking, national railbanking that's been established. And so, David actually went to work making this national security case to Congress, to members of Congress to sponsors of the legislation and others and how we should take these abandoned rail lines that if it were not utilized as a trail, not secured as a national interest, that would revert back to the adjacent landowners. That was the fear at that time because, after a certain number of years, all those lands would have reverted back to adjacent landowners. And, that right-of-way would have been lost forever. And so, David deserves

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

enormous credit for working on this and getting others to do it as well and actually getting the railbank bill passed. And, after it was passed, David came back. And, when I say “came back,” I mean he came back to the office and witnessed this incredible moment in ‘83 where these things were now potentially available. And, he proposed to NWF that we create a program. And, at that time, I was on the senior staff of the Federation as a head of the affiliate programs. But, he proposed that we begin to run a campaign to create trails throughout America. And, Jay Hair, to his credit, said, “David, I don't think that that's a purpose of National Wildlife Federation. I think that's a separate purpose.” And, and he said, “Instead of doing it within National Wildlife Federation which would be at best a secondary interest of ours, he said, “I think you ought to launch it off as a separate institution.” And, he said, “NWF will help you fund it.” And, Frank Dechico who at that time was our treasurer, became the treasurer and mentor to David on how to set up a not-for-profit, to build the Conservancy, the Rails-to-Trails effort.

And so, Frank and David went off with- I don't remember the total amount of money, but I'm thinking it was around \$400,000 to launch this trail effort. And, David was a good writer and he was able to get some other foundational support. And, he was able to launch this project based on the legislation that he was instrumental in passing. And, it became his life's passion. And, he accomplished an enormous amount through Rails-to-Trails across America. The number of old rail lines were set aside for trails and were protected. And, it was an interesting combination that when you look at the politics of why that happened – it was the environmental advocacies, the various environmental advocacy groups. But, it was also people who understood national security and also local business people who understood that someday we need to have those rail lines back into use. And, that was the sort of dynamic tension that was at play when we were able to do this. I don't think the environmental community had enough horsepower to pull this off. But, coupled with those who saw the national security and local business interest, they were able to secure this bill that allowed for this type of protection.

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

So, to me, that was the golden moment that occurred and David certainly was a driver in all that.

**Avigail Oren:** That was a terrific overview. Now, I'm going to go back and ask specific questions...

**Larry Schweiger:** Yeah, go for it.

**Avigail Oren:** ...about everything. Okay, so take me back to the first Earth Day. How did you get involved and how old were you? I mean, was this high school, college, after school?

**Larry Schweiger:** When I was 14 years old... First of all, I grew up in Western Pennsylvania where I've seen the polluted air. When I'd go to stay with my grandmother in Pittsburgh, I used to have that black ring in the tub that everybody talks about. And so, as a youngster, I saw air pollution as a threat. I saw acid mine drainage. There was a number of burning coal banks in Western Pennsylvania that were just absolutely nasty. But, fishing was at a premium because most of our waterways were contaminated with pollution. So, and my dad worked for Brown Baking Company which was at that time a big bread producer in Pittsburgh and most people knew of Town Talk. But, dad didn't make all that much money. I think he made 60 bucks a week. And so, we had rare vacations. And, one of those vacations that we had was a trip to Lake Erie. And so, I fell in love with Lake Erie at that time. And, I returned when I was 14 years old to this lake that I was looking forward to this second vacation. And, when I saw what happened to Lake Erie, we witnessed at that time literally big massive dead, dying fish. And, yeah, would you like something?

The Lake Erie had deteriorated to the point where the blue pike, which was once a tremendous fishery in Lake Erie, had gone extinct. The blue pike actually is now extinct. But, at any rate, I saw this body of dead fish. And, I made a promise on the beaches of Lake Erie when I was 14 years old to spend my career, my life working to clean up the environment. So, that's how I sort of backed into this. And I met, shortly thereafter, a number of great environmentalists, Lenny Green, I had Ralph Obble as Scout leader. I later met Doc Goddard and so many others that were really inspirational in my career.

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

And so, that first Earth Day came naturally to me. It was something you have to do. And so, I was a part of that. I was a part of Earth Days ever since. I've spoken at scores of Earth Day events including a number of... We helped organize the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary Earth Day at National Wildlife Federation. We had John Denver and others involved in that event. So, Earth Day has been a bit of a mile marker for me. And so, as we approach the 50th anniversary, I see it as a mile marker.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay, so, and then when did you begin working at the state?

**Larry Schweiger:** I started at the Pennsylvania legislature in 1981. I believe that was right. It's been a long time.

**Avigail Oren:** I think you started...

**Larry Schweiger:** '71. I'm sorry. '71, '71.

[Chuckle]

Yeah, it was February of '71. And, I worked for a man by the name of John LeBadia who was chair of the committee. I said '81 – that's when I moved to NWF. But, at any rate, I worked at the legislature during a period of time when we were really incubating a number of environmental laws. One of the laws that I personally took ownership of was the law that protects wild plants. Pennsylvania had protection on fishing on wildlife. And, Ralph Obble had made sure that the fishery laws were stronger, extending those protections to amphibians and reptiles. So, Ralph understood the need to protect all of life. But, I wrote the original wild plant protection law which is now known as the Wild Resource Conservation Act. And, it created a wonderful program of tracking where endangered plants exist. I had originally written it for both green and non-green species. The green have gotten attention and gotten in the programs, the non-green still have yet to get that attention. But, that the state of Pennsylvania has done a really good job of building a program around that. And, I feel it's one of the chief accomplishments. I also wrote the bill that created the bear license which allowed us to go from 300 bears harvest a year to nearly, well, 3,000 today. So, the bear are really protects- there's been bears seen in North Park. So, bear are

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

coming back largely through better management. And, I take some credit in that. But, in addition to that, we had a number of other pieces of legislation dealing with mining, dealing with clean air, dealing with clean water. I worked with Senator John Heinz, convinced the senator to work on acid rain control bill which ended up being the Clean Air Amendments of 1990 which are currently being used to shut down coal-fired power plants. So, those are all good accomplishments. We were able to do a lot in those years because we had a sympathetic legislature and the public was sympathetic. And, we lost that along the way. And so, the generation that created the first Earth Day is largely sitting on their couch and not doing anything for the generation that comes after us.

**Avigail Oren:** So, that was a productive 10 years and were you living in Harrisburg at the time?

**Larry Schweiger:** I was. I lived actually right outside of Gettysburg for most of that time and spent those years in Harrisburg. I would commute from Gettysburg. We lived in York Springs, Pennsylvania which is halfway between Gettysburg and Harrisburg. And, during that time, I traveled the state heavily. I've been to every 67 county counties many times. I know the people who are working on various environmental issues. I've been a part of that movement for a long time and have great friendships as a result of that.

**Avigail Oren:** That's great. So then, in 1981, you explained what the impetus was to move on from the state and move to the National Wildlife Federation. So, my first short question is – did it also entail a geographical move?

**Larry Schweiger:** For my first four years, I stayed in Pennsylvania and I was an eastern regional executive – that's when I first met David Burwell. But, I was working out of York Springs. I had an office in my home and I had little children at home. So, I was doing the work-at-home father experience. But, in 1985, Jay Hair, who was president National Wildlife Federation, wanted me to come run the affiliate programs. I had done something as a regional executive that the others hadn't done. I held a major conference on the Chesapeake Bay, I served on EPA Chesapeake Bay Study Commission that looked at- I was an

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

advisor to the to the \$30 million study that was funded by Mack Mathias through the EPA studies. And so, I was heavily involved in Chesapeake Bay. I was also heavily involved in acid rain. I did a major acid rain conference in Pennsylvania and worked on trying to pass the Federal Acid Rain Control Bill. So, Jay wanted me to be the vice president of affiliate and regional programs. And, I turned them down actually five different times because I was having too much fun working at the grassroots level. And, I knew that job was much more bureaucratic than I was looking forward to. So, I turned it down. Finally, I was pretty much ordered to go to Washington to do this. So, I reluctantly took the job and moved to- actually, I moved to Frederick, Maryland. Because I didn't want my kids to live in D.C. it was too- there's too many out-of-town overachievers in D.C. for my liking.

So, we located in Frederick. So, I was still relatively close to Pennsylvania. And, that was kind of the compromise. And so, I did that for a number of years. That's when I became heavily involved with the various national issues that were going on. I had written a paper in '78 on acid rain and climate change, mostly on acid rain but, nonetheless, warranted climate change. It was one of two great threats facing this country. In 1988, I met Al Gore for the first time. And, we started a program at National Wildlife called "Cool It." We had 14 college-level people that we hired to organize Cool It chapters on various campuses around the country. And, it was premature because climate change was not ripe in the minds of college students then. But, we had students that were working on recycling and all sorts of other things through our Cool It program. And so, we were early investors in the whole climate change issue. We had also created a C4 organization to get wolves back into Yellowstone. And, we're successful with that campaign. And, part of that was a C4 operation that I was chair of the National Wildlife Action Fund. And, I was the founding chair of that group. But, we ended up raising \$400,000 that we didn't use in the wolf campaign – we actually were made it a net positive. So, we used that C4 money to actually... And, when Clinton/Gore we're running, we put together a "Get Out and Vote" campaign. Whoopi Goldberg and others were involved in it. We did radio ads and we spent



## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

that \$400,000 trying to get them elected. I saw it as an opportunity to get Al's BTU tax passed. And so, we worked really hard to try to do that. And, it actually paid off because every state where we worked in with Whoopi running as we got African American women particularly to show up to vote through Whoopi's efforts. And, that was what we're aiming at. Because we knew if we could get the people that don't normally vote every time to turn out and vote, we could turn the tide. So, there's lessons for today on that one.

**Avigail Oren:** So, this sort of leads me to, you know, a 10,000-foot question which is – I mean, I know about the National Wildlife Federation from TV spots during, you know, Saturday morning cartoons...

**Larry Schweiger:** Yeah.

**Avigail Oren:** ...panda bears. What exactly is the Federation? What was its mission in these years, like, during the 80s and 90s? And, what programs and methods was it using to meet those, like, to meet that mission?

**Larry Schweiger:** Great question. National Wildlife Federation was actually founded by Ding Darling and there's a lot of literature on Ding if you've never run across it. Ding was a was a famous conservationist. In fact, there's a wonderful video out now called "Ding" and I happen to be in talking about Ding Darling. But, Ding was our founder and he was also the head of the biological services which he then converted into the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Ding Darling also started the Wildlife Refuge Program and there's a refuge in Florida named after him, "The Ding Darling Refuge." But, beyond that, Darling was instrumental in migratory bird legislation. The Pittman-Robertson Dingell-Johnson Act were all things that Ding had worked on. And, National Wildlife Federation became an organization of 50-plus state and territorial affiliates that were mostly hunting and fishing groups. So, we started out as a hunting and fishing organization – over time evolved into a combination of hunting and fishing groups and environmental organizations. Some of our state affiliates were purely environmental, some were purely hunting and fishing, but nonetheless, it created this sort of hybrid organization devoted

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

to working on important environmental issues. So, it was a nice fit for me because I grew up in a hunting and fishing family and I had wonderful hunting and fishing experiences myself. And so, it was a good mix for me. After Ding, we had several really important leaders of National Wildlife – Tom Kimball, Thomas Kimball was a great leader who started all of our magazines including *Ranger Rick* and *Big Backyard* and *National International Wildlife*. Anyway, Tom ended up being instrumental in the passage of the Alaska Lands Legislation – deserves enormous credit for that – largest creation of national parks. Jimmy Carter does not stand out among environmental leaders. But, in fact, he actually created more protected lands than even Teddy Roosevelt who was one of my great heroes. So, we have that history. And, when Jay Hair was hired, I was privileged to help Jay get elected as president through my volunteer activities. And, I worked for Jay for 14 years. Jay was really an instrumental Ph.D. scientist who became a great advocate for the environment.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. And so, let's now... I want to ask you some more about David Burwell. So, what can you remember about what year it was when you convinced him to ride Ohiopyle?

**Larry Schweiger:** Well, I started in '81 and the law was passed in '83.

**Avigail Oren:** So, it must have been between that.

[Chuckle]

**Larry Schweiger:** Between that period. And, I wish I could have the exact date of that, but it was that window. David, and I would- he would come to our affiliate meetings because he was heading up an effort to run resource centers around the country after Pat Parenteau left. Pat is now at the University of Vermont Law School. But, at any rate, when Pat left which would have been probably at the end of '81 maybe, David took over that operation. And, he was a lawyer. David had a- he was a really thoughtful lawyer. He was very creative. So anyway, we met during that timeframe.

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

**Avigail Oren:** Okay, and tell me... So, you said he was a thoughtful lawyer. What else was he like? I mean, tell me what it was like working with him.

**Larry Schweiger:** Well, David was one of those guys who had a million ideas. And so, some people saw him as eccentric because I always saw him as an innovator, as a really smart guy, and someone who followed his own drumbeat. And, I think that enabled him to be that leader that formed the movement that became a wonderful success story in America. David worked closely with a number of local groups. He was an incubator in that regard. When he found a cluster of people interested in creating a trail and he saw a valuable railroad right-of-way, he would be a catalytic force to do to create a chapter in those areas to make these things happen.

**Avigail Oren:** Tell me- before we come back to sort of railbanking and trails. Tell me more about this story about James Watt. What exactly was it that he was or was not doing his Secretary of Interior that made him a target for this work?

**Larry Schweiger:** Well, Watt was an attorney. Our experience with Watt was that we had a natural resource center in Oregon. And, it was connected to a university where we were using law students as interns at our law clinic to litigate against some of these terrible timber management things that were going on in the northwest. We were a cutting virgin force. And, frankly, they were under-designed plans. They were clear cutting, they're causing mass failures of landscapes, pollution of waterways. And so, we knew Watt from his previous involvement. He was instrumental in actually killing our program. And, he was connected with an industrial group that was a front group for the timber industry. Watt, when he was appointed by... You know, Reagan had this notion that came from some looney tune that trees created more pollution than cars. And, he actually said that during a campaign. And, James Watt fully embraced that notion. Watt was also an Evangelical Christian who believed that the end of the world was nigh. And, in fact, at one point even suggested that by cutting our trees, we might accelerate the pace of this, this end time. And, he did that in a hearing before the Congress. And so, Watt believed

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

that the faster we could transfer federal properties to private interests, the better. And so, he was fast at work at doing those kinds of things of undercutting environmental laws, of bypassing the NEPA process, of just doing everything he possibly could. And, he was joined by Anne Gorsuch Burford who at EPA was notorious for her involvement as a state legislator in Colorado to undercut Colorado's environmental protections. So, we had these two people who were, frankly, very troublesome. And, Jay Hair – when he took over as president at National Wildlife – did not oppose Watt. It was the only environmental group that didn't do that. And said, "We need to give the man a chance to demonstrate his strengths or weaknesses." Which actually turned out I didn't agree with him at the time. But, it turned out to be a really smooth thing because Tom Brokaw and others – when Jay come out opposing Watt, Brokaw did a special and it was one of these really powerful segments that said, "Look, even the conservative National Wildlife Federation made up of hunters and anglers is it now opposed to Watt thinking needs to go."

So, at any rate, I had written a letter as did Ralph Obble to our dear friend, John Heinz, saying that James Watt needs to go and as a Republican senator, we're calling on him to talk to the president about this. So, Heinz called me up and goes, "Larry, have you ever met James Watt?" I go, "Actually, senator, I have not." He said, "Well, you know, Ralph wrote me a letter, you wrote me a letter, and others have complained. How about if I organize a breakfast with Watt to see what issues are there and see if we can't resolve some of this?" Senator Heinz was a real mediator, personality, wonderful guy. I dearly loved him. But, at any rate, so we agreed to do on this. So, we had this meeting on C Street at the Interior Department in James Watt's office. And, he had a table set up, a long table and he had served us breakfast. And so, we're all sitting around this table eating breakfast and included Ralph Obble and included Doc Goddard, Bob McCollough, John Oliver, who's the only living member besides me of that meeting. And, Ken Sink, who was head of Trout Unlimited at that time, national head. So, we started around the table with us sharing our grievances about Watt. And, I started off by talking about acid rain and the need to control acid rain which

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

Senator Heinz was a champion of. And then, Ralph Obble began to speak. And, Ralph talked about the mining rollbacks that Watt was doing under the... You know, the '77 Mining Act basically forbid the mountaintop removal and a number of other things. And, Ralph was- because Watt was rolling those procedures back and was gutting the intent of that '77 mining law. Ralph went on for quite a bit talking about that. And, Goddard added to that with talking about how the water and clean air and Goddard was a real knowledgeable person about western lands. And so, he was talking about that. Well, in the middle of this, what was a factual, thoughtful presentation of our concerns – Watt stopped and said, “You're nothing but a bunch of communists, liberal, pinkos.” Ralph Obble was a Republican. At that time, I was a registered Republican. John Heinz is a Republican. Doc Goddard was a registered Independent. Both of these men had served in the Second World War with incredible distinction. You know, Eisenhower, honored Doc and Ralph. Both of them had these wonderful military careers, you know, fighting for the future of America. And, James Watt is calling them a “communist liberal pinkos.” And, of course, John Heinz knew the history of both of these men.

**Avigail Oren:** Right.

**Larry Schweiger:** And, he got beet red. I mean, his face was bright red. He stood up and said, “Secretary Watt, this meeting is over.”

**Avigail Oren:** Wow.

**Larry Schweiger:** And, he instructed all of us to get up. And so, we all were headed to the door. And, Watt had taken the bison that was pointing left in the interior logo and had flipped it to the right, indicating a new direction for the Interior Department. And, he wanted us to get a photograph in front of this. And so, as we're headed to the door, Watt said, “Oh, before you all leave, can we get a picture in front of the bison?” And, Heinz said in no uncertain terms, “There will be no pictures today.” And, with that, we walked out of Watt's office. We went out onto the street. We're standing on C Street. And, John Heinz said, “I need to apologize to each of you for coming to Washington today. You're right, I was wrong. And, I'm going to make sure

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

the president knows about this.” And, he said, “I will do my part to make sure that this man is out of this Department.”

**Avigail Oren:** Did it work?

**Larry Schweiger:** Well, the interesting thing is he did that. But, what finally fixed it for Watt – he thought that having the Beach Boys singing on the Mall on the Fourth of July was an anathema because they were so such heathens. And so, he was going to prevent the Beach Boys from singing on the Mall when Ronald Reagan's wife loved the Beach Boys. And, she inserted herself in Watt's decision making. But then, later he did he described people with handicaps as he said, “They're nothing but a bunch of Jews and cripples.” That's what he said. And, that got him fired. It was that comment about Jews and cripples that took him down. You can Google that because it's still out there.

**Avigail Oren:** Not the trashing of America's national- natural resource...

[Chuckle]

**Larry Schweiger:** Or, the trashing of the Beach Boys.

**Avigail Oren:** Beach Boys, right.

**Larry Schweiger:** It was it was finally...

**Avigail Oren:** Did he, like, a completely blatantly intolerant person, yeah.

**Larry Schweiger:** Right.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah. Oh, my God.

**Larry Schweiger:** So, anyway, many years later, this is a footnote to this. I am president National Wildlife now. I get a phone call from Watt because this story resurfaces about his comments and about his hope that we would lead to the end of the world by cutting trees down. And, he called me up and he said, “Larry, the *Washington Post* just ran this story about me testifying before a committee.” And, he said, “You know, that's not true.” And, I said, “Senator Watt, I was there. You remember the meeting we have with John Heinz?” I said, “I was there during this time. and they had the committee named wrong,” “But, they had not- they had the story wrong.” I said, “So, you did say that in

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

front of a committee, wasn't that committee." And, he was trying to use that little error as a way to claim that that was not true. But, at any rate, so that was the end of our call. And, the last time I ever talked to the man. But clearly, NWF was instrumental as a part of this anti-Watt movement to set the stage for Reagan to find the right moment to get rid of him. And, Reagan didn't want to disappoint all his oil interest. But, he found a moment where it was...

**Avigail Oren:** It was a bridge too far.

**Larry Schweiger:** Bridge too far moment, yeah.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah.

**Larry Schweiger:** So, we helped him get rid of him.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, that's a phenomenal story. I'm so happy we have that recorded. So, I want to come back to... I think you'd explained how you got the railbanking amendment to the National Trail System Act passed – that the environmental case alone wasn't strong enough. It was in the national security case that really, you know, took it over the finish line. I want to... What I'd like you to fill in a little bit more is how trail advocates were thinking about it. Obviously, these railbeds were clearly very useful to be converted into trails and made for great trails. But, the whole concept of railbanking is that they could be turned back.

**Larry Schweiger:** Right.

**Avigail Oren:** Did that not give people pause? I mean, was it just generally understood that the with a "wink, wink, if" situation? Or, was it just a risk groups were willing to take?

**Larry Schweiger:** I think was a risk that most people were willing to take. And, you know, and when we did it, I mean, there was definitely some pushback on the notion that somehow some people want to make them permanent. So, you can't justify because we're talking about the eminent domain clause in the Constitution. You know, there has to be an overarching national purpose to do this. And, the overarching national purpose for doing this was to secure these rights-of-ways for

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

the future in case we ever needed to have them for purposes that we can't understand today.

**Avigail Oren:** Right.

**Larry Schweiger:** So, that was the whole bargain.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, this was the only feasible compromise?

**Larry Schweiger:** It's the only feasible compromise to do that. And, not only that, but there is a legitimate situation. Now, there may be some of these railbanks that at some point in time that we don't know about today that get taken back.

**Avigail Oren:** Right.

**Larry Schweiger:** And, it's it will be painful but...

**Avigail Oren:** So expensive.

**Larry Schweiger:** ...and expensive. But, it's a lot cheaper than it would be if we had to go out and take eminent domain and fight in court for years to reacquire some of those rights-of-ways. So, that's the challenge. And, people understood that when we pushed the bill through.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah, I mean, and I'm sure for trail groups too, I mean, acquiring an entire right-of-way is so much easier than... I mean, we see that with the GAP Trail.

**Larry Schweiger:** Right.

**Avigail Oren:** Hardest part was filling in the gaps in the GAP in Allegheny County.

**Larry Schweiger:** Right.

**Avigail Oren:** And then, negotiating with U.S. Steel for a mile or two miles.

**Larry Schweiger:** Exactly. With unwilling sellers.

**Avigail Oren:** Yes. Right.

**Larry Schweiger:** Distinctly unwilling sellers as you know.

**Avigail Oren:** Right. Yeah, absolutely. And so, now I want to turn to the early years of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. So, you described



## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

how it became sort of a spin-off of the National Wildlife Federation. Does there just there remain a relationship? Or, are they fully separate entities?

**Larry Schweiger:** Well, it's interesting because NWF purposely separated to make it clear that this was a separate institution. Our attorney, Joel Thomas, helped write... And, I don't know if Joel is still alive anymore. But, he wrote the original application for these 501(c)(3) status...

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Larry Schweiger:** ...the original bylaws and all that. And, David, then went out and recruited people to be on his board.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Larry Schweiger:** And, Dave had put a board together, Frank Dechico was a part of that and also serve this treasurer. Frank was the only remaining connection to National Wildlife. And so, I think it was a three-year deal where we had basically 100% of the money the first year was from National Wildlife. The second year was, like, 50%. The third year was, like, 25%.

**Avigail Oren:** So, it was a step down?

**Larry Schweiger:** So, we weaned ourselves from David explicitly for the purpose of building an independent organization that could go and focus 100% of its energy on trail building. And so, that's how we did it. NWF, interestingly, has never gotten any credit for doing that. Because it's just the one of the things you do.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah. So, I mean, effectively, after three years, David was no longer an NWF employee solely.

[Crosstalk]

**Larry Schweiger:** He was no longer- the first year, he was...

**Avigail Oren:** By the first year, okay.

**Larry Schweiger:** But, we continued to subsidize the institution.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. Okay. So, he essentially created his own...

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

- Larry Schweiger:** Parachute.
- Avigail Oren:** Yes, right. Okay. Did you have any involvement in RTC or you stayed completely on the Federation side?
- Larry Schweiger:** Well, David would call me from time to time and have me suggest it because I knew activists from all over the country because I was in charge of the 50 states of territorial affiliates. And, I mean, frankly, I've spoken and virtually every state. And so, I knew a lot of people. I had a Rolodex of people who were sympathetic. And so, we would often, you know, David would call me and say, "Do you know anybody that can help me put a chapter together in Iowa?" or wherever. And so, I would make suggestions to him. But, other than that, I pretty much had a hands-off with David and we remained close friends throughout his years at Rails-to-Trails. And, particularly here in Pittsburgh, you know, the mayor of Pittsburgh was sympathetic and actually active in the board. So, I had that connection as well. I'm sure you know all that history. So, yeah, it was pretty much just a friendship more than anything else.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, you leave the Federation in 1995. And, in 1996, you go to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. Is that when you ended up moving back?
- Larry Schweiger:** Well, I what I did is I- because I was around the original EPA, Chesapeake Bay people and helped to incubate the Pennsylvania arm of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation – I was hired by Will Baker. Jay was at the end of his career at National Wildlife. And, he was there 14 years, I was there 14 years. Jay made me publisher of the magazine.
- Avigail Oren:** Uh-huh.
- Larry Schweiger:** And so- which I wasn't looking for because the magazines were in financial trouble because the...
- Avigail Oren:** Magazines were. Right.
- [Chuckle]
- Larry Schweiger:** Magazines in trouble. So, he brought me in because he wanted my creativity in that space. And, I didn't particularly like

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

doing that. It was not my passion because I was an advocate. But, what I did was when I became publisher, Al had invited me down to the White House. And, Al, still unknown to people, Al wrote the ICANN law that created what is now the internet...

**Avigail Oren:** Right.

**Larry Schweiger:** And, because he wrote that law, he was very steeped in the knowledge of where the internet was headed.

**Avigail Oren:** Yes.

**Larry Schweiger:** So, Al invited me down. He tells me never tell people this, but I'll tell you this. He invited me down to the White House to show me what was then pre-Google Earth.

**Avigail Oren:** Really?

**Larry Schweiger:** Al had about 10 people working for him that we're developing what is now Google Earth. And, he was saying, he said, "Larry, you need to create a website for National Wildlife Federation and tie yourself into this because we're going to have a system out here where you can be able to look at environmental impacts all over the world from satellites." And, he said, "It's going to be a really powerful tool for environmental groups to use." So, John Mack Carter, who then was the founder, I don't know if you know that name. But, John Mack Carter founded the five sister magazines. He was the publisher of Hearst Publication. And so, all the Hearst publications, all the women's magazines – *Redbook* on down, *Ms.*, all those were all his.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Larry Schweiger:** So anyway, John Mack Carter had been working with Alice Walton, of the Walton family, to create an organization called "Animal Tracks for Kids." The singer- I'm now blanking on his last name, Michael Jackson. Michael Jackson was one of the board members.

**Avigail Oren:** Well, that takes on different valences today. Yeah. And so, John Mack Carter, who I knew because we were both publishers, he being a publisher of these magazines, called

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

me up, he said, "Larry, I have a problem." I said, "What's your problem?" He said, "I think you could help me with my problem." He said, "I'm on a board at the behest of Alice Walton called Animal Tracks and Michael Jackson is on that board. It's a kid's organization." And, he said, "Michael Jackson, as you may have been reading, has been a noted as someone who has issues with children." And he said, "So, I want to dispose of this organization called Animal Tracks. And, I thought *Ranger Rick* would be a great place to put Animal Tracks." He said, "Would you consider taking over Animal Tracks and bringing it into National Wildlife so we can abolish this board?" And I said, "Absolutely, John, I'd be willing to do that." So, I had a couple meetings with Alice Walton, who is one of Sam Walton's daughters, and she is now the wealthiest woman in the world now. But, at any rate, Alice agreed to give me basically close to a half million dollars to launch our website which we were going to have a piece of it called Animal Tracks to keep the name alive and to make the transition smooth. So, we signed a merger agreement with them to close down Animal Tracks, moved it over to National Wildlife with the \$400,000-\$500,000 that Alice Walton had funded. And with that, we launched our first website which was so early in the creation of websites, that the Smithsonian now has it in its digital museum.

**Avigail Oren:** Oh, very cool. And, what year was that? Was it '94-'95?

**Larry Schweiger:** Yeah, it's got to be in that same range. But, I had hired people who could pull- it was very complicated back in those days to put this together.

**Avigail Oren:** Squarespace. You know what I mean?

[Chuckle]

**Larry Schweiger:** Yeah. Exactly. There were not the tools that you have today to create a website. When I say "I created a website," people are like, "Aw, no big deal," right?

**Avigail Oren:** Right, right.

**Larry Schweiger:** But, it was really a big deal then. We hired two specialists out of New York City. And, they said, "If we run into trouble, we're

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

going to hire David.” I said, “Who's David?” He said, “He's a senior at a high school in New York, in the Bronx who knows all about this stuff.” That's how early this was. So, David has got this all figured out. So, at any rate, we had launched this website. And so, I figured at that time, I'd made some changes on the magazines as well. But, I figured my time as publisher of National Wildlife was over.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah.

**Larry Schweiger:** And so, I decided to step away from NWF. Well, the day I decided to step away, I got a call from Will Baker asking me to head is conservation brokers. So, that's when I went to the Bay Foundation for a year. And, I did that for a year. I convinced Will we should call for steeper regulations on blue crabs which we did. The watermen got all fired up about that and burnt down one of our buildings and threatened to kill me and Will and several others. But, we ended up, I think, getting better blue crab regulations. And, I helped him develop a strategic plan for... Did I bump it?

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah, but it's okay. I just wanted to make sure it was still on.

**Larry Schweiger:** Yeah. So, I helped them get a strategic plan together for the Bay to create the 10 drivers that they had. And then, I left that to go run the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy which was kind of a fun, circular thing. I did that after one year at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

**Avigail Oren:** What were the priorities of the WPC in those years? Like, what were the major projects you're working on there?

**Larry Schweiger:** Well, we restored Falling Water, the Frank Lloyd Wright house. We raised \$16 million to do that. We also created the last state park in Pennsylvania created – Erie Bluffs State Park – which area was a very special place for me. And so, I wanted to make that happen. We also bought a lot of land and we created gardens. We took a garden program from being a very small Pittsburgh program to being a regional program, launching gardens in various communities around the country. I believe that if you get people back working in gardens, you can recreate community.

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah.

**Larry Schweiger:** Community is disappearing. As you know, the “bowling alone” issue is clear. And, the idea of getting people to plant flowers together was a way to get people to work together to solve urban projects and programs. And, I think it's been a very good catalyst. Pittsburgh now has something like 5,000 volunteers working on gardens. And so, we saw that as a real plus. But, more than that, we were one of the driving organizations to implement the Wild Resource Conservation Act that I had started. And, during that time, I continued to harp on the need to do climate change. So, you'll see – if you look at the record, a number of my editorials that brought up climate change as a threat to all the things that we had fought for over the years at the Conservancy.

So, in 2004, I had decided that I needed to be working more directly on climate change. And, at that time, a friend of mine approached me about coming back to be the CEO of National Wildlife Federation. Tom Doherty was a dear friend and colleague for many years and he felt that I should be running National Wildlife Federation. So, I was able to come back to NWF and be the president. When I came back, I told the board at National Wildlife that I had two things that needed to happen. One, we needed to broaden the board out to bring in more philanthropic leadership because I knew the Federation was struggling with its magazines. And, the second thing was to, more importantly, was to work on climate change – making our top priority which we ended up doing during my 10 years at NWF. Shortly thereafter, Al Gore called me up because he heard that I was making it a top priority and asked me for help to create Climate Reality which I helped him to do.

**Avigail Oren:** And, you stayed for 10 more years?

**Larry Schweiger:** Ten years. I left in 2014.

**Avigail Oren:** And, was that an official retirement? Did you...?

**Larry Schweiger:** Well, I retired from NWF, but I went to work then for the PennFuture organization for two years.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

- Larry Schweiger:** They approached me to help them out because they were going through some transitional issues. And so, I told them I would do it for a transition. And, I recruited Jackie Bonomo to run the organization. And, I increasingly was letting Jackie take charge and she eventually became their CEO.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, you took that as, like, sort of an interim role as, you know, on an as-needed basis as you are sort of phasing into your next...
- Larry Schweiger:** Right. And, I don't consider myself retired, retired. I consider myself an author now. I focus on writing. And so, yeah, so retiring from NWF was a moment, a very important moment. We had worked really hard to get a climate bill passed. So, we got to work closely with Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid and with the Obama administration. But, it was clear that that was not going to happen when they lost the Senate. Mitch McConnell was never going to do anything worthwhile. So, I saw it as a time to leave and move on to do something else. And so, I continue to work with AI, continue to help with Climate Reality.
- Avigail Oren:** Right, and work on your own projects.
- Larry Schweiger:** My own projects, yeah.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, I want to – before we wrap up – to turn to the GAP Trail which I just want to ask you about any memories you have about and the process of building the GAP Trail. I know you weren't sort of hands-on, but it clearly was such a major effort in the state that it must have crossed- you must have crossed paths at that time.
- Larry Schweiger:** And, I did and here's a really funny story. First of all, Linda Boxx and I go back to when she was in college. She was at Bucknell. And, I spoke at Bucknell and I'm a few years older than Linda. And, I spoke at Bucknell to a biology group there. And, the biology teacher said to me, "You need to meet Linda McKenna." And, he said, "She's got a tree shack up here. She's an amazing woman, young woman," he said, "She's really special." So, I was introduced to Linda when she was a college student. And, I later had an opportunity to possibly run the Pennsylvania Federation Sportsmen's Club – an

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

organization that I worked with for years. They ended up balking at hiring as an executive director. But, during that time, when I was being hired as an executive director, I was interviewing Linda to come work with me. I really liked her a lot. And so, this whole thing blew up. Neither one of us ended up doing that. But, Linda ended up- when I went to the Joint Conservation Committee, I introduced her to John Schoenberg, who was her first husband. They married. It was one of those marriages that wasn't quite a good fit. And, I won't go into the details of that. But, Linda moved on, worked for Bill Clinton in Arkansas. I don't know if you knew that about her.

**Avigail Oren:** I didn't.

**Larry Schweiger:** Yeah, Bill Clinton in his first term as governor decided he was going to bring in a lot of brainiacs to run his government.

**Avigail Oren:** She was a good pick.

**Larry Schweiger:** So, he picked all these folks, including Linda, to work in his administration. Well, the local people in Arkansas were pissed that he brought all these elites into run as government and not hiring their good old boys.

**Avigail Oren:** Right.

**Larry Schweiger:** So, he lost his election. So, Linda came back to Pennsylvania. And, we continued to be friends on many a number of things over the years together. Linda helped me launch the Friends of Gettysburg National Park. I don't know if you know about that or not. We put together a vision for Gettysburg that would be to restore the original landscape of the battlefield. We got an amendment changing the law to allow the Park Service to acquire additional acreage. We also got a vision to restore the original battlefield scene, eliminating power lines and doing a number of other things. And, we also- my third thing that I convinced the board of Friends of Gettysburg was to create a truly Civil War museum. The Gettysburg Museum that was in existence was basically a battlefield museum that had a lot of guns and that sort of thing. And, Linda helped me fund the organization. And, her dad, Alex, was a big Civil War...



## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

**Avigail Oren:** Buff.

**Larry Schweiger:** Buff. So, they funded us to get this thing launched. And, I ran it out of my basement originally. But, it ended up becoming an organization that split and some of the people that were a part of that organization wanted to build museum. And so, they created that Gettysburg Foundation which carried out the original vision I had for creating this special museum. They raised \$100 million and built this museum. Meanwhile, the Friends were out there doing all these other projects. Then later, they reemerged back into a single organization. So, there's a lot more detail. I've actually been working on that as part of a chapter in this book that I'm talking about.

**Avigail Oren:** Uh-huh.

**Larry Schweiger:** But, at any rate, so Linda remains a good friend. She knew I was a political operative, all right, and she's a passionate trail person. So, one day, she said, "Larry, I need to meet up with you." I got her on the board of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah.

**Larry Schweiger:** And, Linda came to me, she said, "Larry, I need your help." I said, "What's that?" "I need to change the federal transportation laws to fund trails. And, we're running into a stone wall because Bud Schuster, who's the Congressman in Pennsylvania, who's chair of the Transportation Committee, hates trails, he absolutely hates trails. And, all the trail organizations, including Burwell and everybody else is pushing for monies from the transportation fund to be used to build trails and they're not making any progress. You have any ideas on how I could pull this off?" I said, "Linda, Bud Schuster has a lover."

**Avigail Oren:** Oh, you were the one who told her? Yeah.

**Larry Schweiger:** I said, "Bud Schuster has a lover and his lover, who incidentally has a weird relationship with his wife." I don't get it – who was instrumental in getting all the money from Boston to do the big dig in Boston. And I said, "I can guarantee you because I've been around this long enough – that whatever

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

she wants, Bud wants.” And, I don't know there's cash movement between the two of them. But, I know that there's something connected deeply there. I said, “What you need to do, she has a lobby firm. You need to hire that lobby firm to work on Rails-to-Trails.” So, Linda took the money from her various private sources, let's put it that way. I don't know where they came from. I don't ask, don't tell. Linda, came up with \$100,000, hired Bud Schuster's girlfriend. And, she said, “Larry, don't ever tell anybody that I did this. I'm sharing this with because it's true.” And so, she hired this woman to intervene with the Transportation Committee. All of a sudden, Schuster fell in love with trails. He went from being in a person opposed to diverting monies for trails to being a strong champion of this. And so, all of a sudden, we now have a bill moving through Congress that moves money from highway funds into trails.

**Avigail Oren:** Was that ISTEA?

**Larry Schweiger:** That was ISTEA. And so, all the trails people were like, “We're so powerful. We pulled this.”

[Laughter]

“We did it. Volunteers works. The system still works. We can do this. Together, we did this.” And, Linda said...

**Avigail Oren:** “Yeah, sure. You believe that.”

[Chuckle]

**Larry Schweiger:** And, never took an out... It's not even that much credit for any of this stuff. But, in fact, was that was the catalyst who pulled this off.

**Avigail Oren:** That's such a good story.

**Larry Schweiger:** It happens to be a good story because it's true.

**Avigail Oren:** I know.

**Larry Schweiger:** It's totally true. And, in a weak moment, show admit this.

**Avigail Oren:** You can't make this stuff up.

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

- Larry Schweiger:** No.
- Avigail Oren:** So, have you ever ridden the trail or the whole trail parts of the trail?
- Larry Schweiger:** Actually, Linda and I after that celebrated. I don't know if you're getting into the whole business of the Supreme Court Justice Douglas and his work on creating the C&O portion of this trail.
- Avigail Oren:** I personally am not, but I don't know how if they interviewed.
- Larry Schweiger:** Well, Douglas, Chief Justice Douglas was a great environmentalist.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Larry Schweiger:** And, Douglas – I happened to know his last wife. But, Douglas used to go out every year and gather people together and hike the C&O with the idea of creating a national park to protect the C&O Canal.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Larry Schweiger:** And, that was his passion among other things. I mean, he was a great environmentalist. But, he also was a man who had multiple wives and lovers. One of his lovers was- she was just a college student when he took up with her, yeah. But, she was an amazing woman, too. I mean, I really ended up liking her a lot. And, she told me the whole story about what he did and how this, you know, a justice of the Supreme Court was instrumental in creating this national park. But, at any rate, her name is Brown and she still- I don't know if she's still alive or not.
- Avigail Oren:** Can you spell it?
- Larry Schweiger:** It's Brown, B-R-O-W-N.
- Avigail Oren:** Brown.
- Larry Schweiger:** You can track her down somewhere. But anyway, I knew the history of that side of the trail. But then, I watched Linda put the final part of this trail together. And, it's really a great story.

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

- Avigail Oren:** Yeah.
- Larry Schweiger:** One of the reasons why the Conservancy actually bought- I don't know if you got this part of it...
- Avigail Oren:** Western Maryland?
- Larry Schweiger:** Railroad.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah.
- Larry Schweiger:** Except they would not accept the viaduct.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Larry Schweiger:** Because John Oliver went to his insurance company. And, they said, "If you took that thing, we cannot insure you."
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Larry Schweiger:** So, he did not accept that part of the trail which a real problem because Linda had to fix that problem.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Larry Schweiger:** And, she did through lot of hard work.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah.
- Larry Schweiger:** The tunnel and the viaduct were both big projects.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah.
- Larry Schweiger:** They were huge. So, at any rate, that's how that part happened. But, Linda and I, after this all came together, went out and got bikes and rode the trail.
- Avigail Oren:** Top to bottom?
- Larry Schweiger:** Not the- a chunk of it. But, I've hiked other parts of it. I've biked the C&O. I like the C&O. So, this was a part- this was in the central Maryland part of the trail. And then, I've done, obviously, the trail through Ohiopyle State Park. But, one of my bucket list things is to do the whole trail at some point.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah.

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

- Larry Schweiger:** Have you done it yet?
- Avigail Oren:** I've done pieces. Well, my uncle's house backs up onto the C&O. So, I've done C&O many times.
- Larry Schweiger:** Yeah.
- Avigail Oren:** A few weeks ago, I biked to the section from the Waterfront, to the Riverton Bridge.
- Larry Schweiger:** Cool.
- Avigail Oren:** Like, through the pipeline section.
- Larry Schweiger:** Yeah.
- Avigail Oren:** So fun. So, the last question I have about the trail is – what has trail building meant to you within your broader career? Like, how would you contextualize it in your broader career? Is it a small part, a big part, important part?
- Larry Schweiger:** The trail of my life has been sort of two parts. One part has been on natural resource protection and education. I served as a leader in a movement to promote environmental education in Pennsylvania. I ran the Cumberland County Conservation School for a number of years. I was on the Butler, board of the Butler County Conservation School for 17 years. So, I've been involved in environmental education, I helped write the first... Another woman and I wrote the first environmental master plan for education for Pennsylvania. So, I believe very strongly and my book has a chapter on this whole notion of reconnecting children with nature. I very much believe that we need to have that fundamental relationship. So, that part is natural resource, The Water Resources Conservation Act, the various amendments to our fish and wildlife laws, our efforts to protect parks – all that has been a big part of my life. I love nature. I want to see it preserved. I'm deeply concerned about what's happening in nature. And then, this other side which is the environmental side. I know the threats. And so, I've been working- half of my life has been on preserving the places that we care about, and the other half of my life has been on avoiding the catastrophic changes that are impacting our world. So, those are two sides of my life. And, I

## LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

think the trail stuff fits into the one side, not so much on the other side, but it's certainly on the connecting people to nature through trails is a big deal. Getting people in the outdoors is a big thing. My grandkids are now bicycling on the trails. And so, I see that reward for that payment made many years ago. But, I know that the biggest threat we have right now, the penultimate threat, is climate change. And, we need to stop that. We need to stabilize. I think population is going to shrink over the next few decades. And, we're seeing that already in Central America where people have completely run out food. I saw a piece yesterday in *The New York Times*. But, the people in Central America don't have food, they're starving to death. And, they're coming north because they're dying. And, that's the beginning of what we're going to see into the future. And so, yeah, I still see the opportunity to do positive things, but I also seen the opportunity to prevent terrible things.

**Avigail Oren:** So, any final thoughts that you want to commit to posterity before we conclude?

**Larry Schweiger:** Well, I think people like Linda Boxx are to be celebrated. Linda had this- first of all, she had the resources at the time. But, she also had more than that, a deep love of nature. That tree shack she had in college was a part of that. Her love of biking. Her love of being in the out of doors was a big part of that. And, her vision for this trail is to be celebrated. And, I think behind every great success story, there's a lot of people. But, there's generally this one spark, this one catalyst that keeps all those people together. And, those are leaders. Sometimes they're reluctant leaders like Linda. Linda is a classic example of a reluctant leader, but she is a leader nonetheless and one that I celebrate. I have a great love for Linda. We've been friends since we were both young pups. And, when I see her, I have those wonderful memories in my heart.

**Avigail Oren:** Well, thank you so much for sharing all of these stories with me. I'm going to turn off the recording.

**Larry Schweiger:** Sure.

# LARRY SCHWEIGER INTERVIEW

---

[End 1:10:18.7]

cr-t/p

**Www.aroundtheclocktranscription.com**  
**412-853-3299**