

LINDA BOXX INTERVIEW

Avigail Oren: Today is Sunday, September 15th at 2:00 p.m. This is Avigail Oren and I am here with Linda Boxx to have a conversation that cannot easily be summed up because it's going to cover such a broad scope of your involvement with the Regional Trail Corporation (RTC) and Allegheny Trail Alliance (ATA) beginning in early [19]90s and coming up – if we make it to the present – today.

[Chuckle]

So, I really wanted to get started by asking you to tell me a little bit about your youth since it's so instrumental to how you came to be committed as an adult to trail building in general and in Western Pennsylvania in particular.

Linda Boxx: Okay. Well, I think probably something- two things were very formative for me. I went to a small day school in Ligonier – Valley School of Ligonier – and it was set in nature. We had a little babbling creek right behind the school. We were outside all the time – we were playing sports. It was a very classical kind of education. I probably got as much by eighth grade as most people get by high school. Really excellent education. But, also being a Girl Scout – Brownie and a Girl Scout.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: You know, just being able to delve into all the merit badges and learn things, and helped me become very project-oriented. And, I found that very, very gratifying to start something, get my hands into it, learn a skill, and then have the badge at the end of the day.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: So, I was sort of – probably everybody is to some extent – competitive. Wanted to get every single badge I could and learn everything I could. And, I found both of those things very stimulating and balancing at the same time. Then went onto high school at Ligonier High School. And, that probably was the most remarkable in the sense of teaching me leadership skills. As I said, my Valley School education – I graduated first in my class and I don't remember... Well, I did study, but I don't remember studying way too hard. But, I got to be in

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every single club there was and took on leadership positions and it really gave me the ability to lead people, as well as learn how to organize people – very important. So, my family – my father’s business was Kennametal, which was a family business – that he was the very first employees of.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: So, I didn’t know it because my mother kept our situation in life a little bit obscured to us. I didn’t realize how privileged I was, really. We had to work hard, and buying clothes on sale, and we didn’t get presents unless it was Christmas or birthdays – things like that. So, I had a very, I would say, balanced, disciplined growing up. And, my father would always say to all of us, “I want you to be a productive member of society.” And, it was up to us to figure out what that meant for ourselves.

Avigail Oren: That’s really cute. I do know your dad was pretty politically active, right, and connected?

Linda Boxx: Well, for the company. I think they realized that they had to stay on top of what was going on in Harrisburg and in Washington, D.C. If governments were putting too much restrictions on the way businesses could operate, it would impact their business. So, Philip McKenna was the inventor of the patent for tungsten carbide and was the scientist, the genius, behind the development of the product. My father was more on the sales and company development side of things. He was not a gregarious, outgoing person, but his position forced him to be this outward person that was involved with political issues.

Avigail Oren: And, as a kid, did you feel like you noticed that or was that also obscured from you?

[Crosstalk]

Linda Boxx: Absolutely not. Yeah.

Avigail Oren: Okay. And so, then you ended up going to Bucknell for college.

Linda Boxx: Yes.

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- Avigail Oren:** What was that like?
- Linda Boxx:** Oh, it was great. I changed my major six times by the time I settled on a double major in Chemistry and Art History. And, my brother was a year ahead of me at Bucknell and it was... Well, I graduated from high school in 1970. The first Earth Day was 1969. And so, the consciousness of the world was changing to some extent around these environmental issues. And, I was very intrigued by that. Again, the nature that I grew up with – my personality – I didn't know what it meant, but I wanted to do something involved with the environment, which is why I think I led my Chemistry degree into more of an interdisciplinary kind of a degree, which now would be called Environmental Science.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** But, that wasn't invented at that time.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** So, did not know how well I would do competing against all these pre-med students at Bucknell, but I did pretty well and really enjoyed my time- enjoyed my time with my brother, as well. And, you asked about...
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah. So, tell me about your – perhaps unique – living situation.
- Linda Boxx:** Well, I didn't live there, I lived in the dorm.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Linda Boxx:** So, it's post-Woodstock. Everyone on campus looks like John Lennon, with long hair and hippie glasses, and bell-bottoms, and so forth. It was that era of time. And, my brother and some of his friends leased, for no cost really, some farmland and were able to build a cabin on it. And, we had a garden on the farm. It was a fenced-in area that the farmer wasn't using, so we were able to grow things and keep the cows out at the same time. I don't remember how we got building materials. The cabin was pretty small – 16x20 if I remember – built on stilts, right above a stream. And, we used to go out there and

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party. Occasionally, I would spend the night out there just for fun, but I didn't live there.

[Laughter]

Avigail Oren: Okay. All right.

Linda Boxx: And, it only looked like a treehouse in the sense that the step off the front porch was probably almost ten feet because of the hillside.

Avigail Oren: Hillside. Oh, okay.

Linda Boxx: But, it was great fun and, again, it gave me some very practical experience with construction.

Avigail Oren: Uh-huh.

Linda Boxx: And, I realized, if you knew, generally, what to do and you had the right tools, you could build things.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm. So, you make a pretty big shift when you graduate by going to Harrisburg for your first job, correct?

Linda Boxx: Well, I don't call it a shift at all.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: So, I wanted to work, you know, save the environment, work in the environmental field. And, I realized somewhere along the line... During my senior year in college, I did an internship with the Lycoming County Planning Commission. And, Tim Palmer – who is sort of legendary – was working at the Planning Commission at the time, and was my supervisor. And, my job was to go around to all the farmers and find out what kind of fertilizer they were using on their fields. And then, amass all this- and how many acres they had – and amass this information and try to determine how much excess runoff of the nitrites was getting into the waterways – primarily the Susquehanna River, and then primarily into the Chesapeake Bay. I mean, it was just sort of a model to try to figure out is there a way that you can calibrate what the farmers are using and create a relationship between the excess nitrates going into the waterways. So, it was very scientific, chemistry-oriented...

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Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: ...but it is very environmental. And, I realized, "Well, I don't have to sit behind a microscope and do that kind of work to be 'an environmentalist.' I could be a planner."

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: So, I applied for a job at the – well, many jobs – but the job offer that I was given was with the governor's Office of State Planning and Development (OSPD). And, it was the end of Governor [Milton] Shapp's first administration. They weren't hiring until they knew that he was going to be re-elected.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: So, January of 1975, I was made an offer to become a Planning Analyst I...

[Chuckle]

...for \$9,682 a year. And, I was thrilled. I didn't know what I was going to do with all that money because I was living on, at that time, about \$40 a month. So, I felt like I was on easy street. I worked there for about four years, left in 1979, but met a lot of the people that I would then, come around, 20 years later, and meet with the trail. They were still there – many of them were still there. And, it was really remarkable to come back and... A guy that was second base on our little baseball team was now the head of state parks and somebody else was doing all the data research for the abandoned rail lines, and so forth. So, it was just one of those miraculous, coincidental, serendipitous kind of things that happened that helped me be very comfortable when I was going back to Harrisburg. And, in fact, I spent a lot of – I'd go for overnights and I'd stay with my friend, George Burns and Eileen Burns, at their house, very often.

Avigail Oren: And so, you met George when you were working in Pittsburgh?

Linda Boxx: Yes.

Avigail Oren: And, what was his role when you were...?

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Linda Boxx: He and Bernard Tierny were the recreation planners for the governor's office. And then, after the governor's office was disbanded – the OSPD office, the State Planning and Development - was disbanded after the Shapp Administration – those two went to DER [Department of Environmental Resources] and were part of the recreation planning for DER. And, Van did the outdoor recreation plans – I think that's what it was called – until she retired just a few years ago.

Commented [AO1]: Confirm name?
Vanyla Tierney

Avigail Oren: Who were some of the other people you met at that time who would end up coming back during the trail years?

Linda Boxx: Well, John Oliver did not work in Harrisburg, but he was in Harrisburg an awful lot as the head of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. And, there would always be this ripple through the office, "Oh, John Oliver is on the floor."

[Chuckle]

And, I got to work with Western Pennsylvania Conservancy staff when we were doing this land policy project. Roger Fickes, again, I dealt with him, I would say, on a more peripheral basis. But, he was the head of state parks in the [19]90s or 2000s – probably 2000s by the time he was the Bureau Director of State Parks. I was sorry to say that I did not know Larry Williamson, but he was there at the same time. And, Ed Deaton was there at the same time. But, I really didn't get to know him until the later years. But, it was that relationship – because the people that I worked with at OSPD now worked with them – that I had this nice connection.

Avigail Oren: Yeah. And so, I heard from someone that after Harrisburg, you end up in Arkansas with the Clintons. Is this true?

Linda Boxx: Yes. So, the Office of State Planning and Development – the head of it was a man named Jack Brizius. And, he brought in two people from Illinois, where he worked, to our office. And, I worked for one there, Barrett Toan was his name. And, when the Shapp administration had gone from Democrat Shapp to Republican [Dick] Thornburgh, everybody in the governor's office, of course, lost their jobs.

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Barrett went to work for Price Waterhouse – smartest guy I’ve ever known. It was a delight to work with him because he was always 16 steps ahead of you and you just ran as hard as you could to keep up with him. But, I loved working for him because it was always like, “Okay. what am I going to learn today?” But, Bill Clinton – this is his first go at governor – won the primary and knew he would win the general in the fall. And, he hired Price Waterhouse to help him develop his budget.

Avigail Oren: Oh.

Linda Boxx: And, Barrett was assigned to the project. And so, Barrett would go to work very closely with – I think Clinton was 32 years old or so at the time and Barrett was about the same age. And, they got along really well. And, Bill Clinton asked him to be part of his cabinet. Barrett was there for a while. He called me in April, May-ish of [19]75 that would have been. And, he said, “Get down here to Arkansas. Nobody can write. We need a writer. Get down here.”

[Laughter]

So, I didn’t have a job at the time and I said, “Sure, I’ll come down.” And, I thought it was going to be a summer job, really.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: Went down and it was great fun being in Arkansas, and hanging out with the governor, and meeting Hillary Clinton. I ended up staying there for two years through his first administration. I think the people in Arkansas were not happy with his decision to bring in all these – as they called them – “carpetbaggers” to help run his administration. He tapped great experts from various states whose administrations were changing from D to R. And so, I think the head of transportation came from Florida, and the budget people came from Illinois, someone came from- well, I’m thinking Texas. But, they were all this wonderful wealth of talent that was coming into Arkansas to bring Arkansas up. There used to be a saying like, “Thank God for Mississippi,” because Arkansas was number 49 in all the ratings of poverty, education, crime – I mean, everything. Arkansas was way down there. And so, I

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think Governor Clinton felt he had a mandate to really, "What can I do to raise the level?" So, brought all these people in – we made a big difference. But, then, Bill Clinton lost the election so we were all disbursed again.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: So, that was 1979 to '81 was that administration, I believe, more or less. And then, I was out of a job again because my governor was not elected.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And, of course, I'm a Republican, and here I'm working for two Democratic governors. So, I ended up moving home – had a husband and baby at that point. And, it was January of 1982 – I have my dates a little messed up there. January of 1982 – moved back to Pennsylvania and started working for my father at the Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation and the Philip M. McKenna Foundation, working part-time about – I don't know – 12 hours a week, something like that so I could care for my little baby. Babysitter would come in for, like, four hours and I would go to work and then come home. And, I'd bring work home and work in the evenings, too. And, it worked out very well.

Avigail Oren: And, what kind of work were you doing for the foundations and, as part of that, what were the goals of the foundation at the time?

Linda Boxx: Well, the goals have stayed the same for the foundation. The Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation was oriented more around the quality of community life. Kay [Katherine] was very interested in cultural things, education, and it was very regional. So, she helped, and did build the Greensburg Garden Civic Center as a tribute to her son who had passed away in the [19]60s. She was very much involved with Phipps Conservatory, the Pittsburgh Civic Garden Center, helped start the Westmoreland Symphony – things like that, as well as supporting some of her garden clubs. And, garden clubs were sort of an early type of environmental organization, although some strictly dealt with flower arranging, but many did, like, community gardens and treescapes in communities,

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and so forth. So, she had a very strong environmental interest herself, which made it very nice for me to come in and take that interest of hers and go different directions with it. Philip's foundation was much more public policy-oriented and it was more of a national foundation really trying to promote free enterprise. My father would say, "Children don't know where food comes from. They go to the store and they just think that somehow the store produces the food." He said, "A generation ago, children knew that there were farms, and people worked on the farm, and this is- the wheat came from the wheat fields and turned into products through a process," where children of his generation – he was born in 1914 – understood what the economics of how daily life happens. So, he thought it was very important for people to understand just how the free market system worked and how economics worked for businesses as well as for an individual's life.

Avigail Oren: And so, were you helping with- like as a program officer? Like, were you helping...?

Linda Boxx: Yeah. Well, I was, yeah, basically doing everything. The secretary, an attorney, who was a corporate secretary for Kennametal was also running the two foundations and he was retiring. So, it was perfect timing for me to come in, pick up and figure out what was going on. But, there was very little outreach to organizations because they were busy running a company. They really weren't focused on the philanthropy side of it. So, with my father's blessing and actually encouragement, got involved with boards, learned how nonprofits worked. Dad truly believed in the value added of, like, my participation to help an organization be stronger, whether through board presence or whatever kind of assistance – just knowing what they needed. And then, our gifts could be more meaningful. So, he really directed me in that sense to be an active person on the other side, not just the giving away of the funds, but helping the organization grow.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And, I found that to be very valuable, not just with ATA and all this, but I would see a problem in one nonprofit – whether it

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was a governance issue, or bookkeeping, or whatever – and I'd say, "Oh, you need to go talk to this other organization because they've solved this problem. They've gone through this problem and they've solved it. And, if you go learn from their mistakes, you're going to be able to help yourself."

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: So, there was a lot of that cross-pollination of ideas and ways of handling things that I felt, really, it was very satisfying to do that.

Avigail Oren: Yeah. Well, so, I'm curious – a part of the timeline that I'm missing is, then, from the early [19]80s. You have young kids; you're working with the foundations up until the early '90s when you get roped into the Regional Trail Corporation. Are you with the foundation that whole time?

Linda Boxx: Yes.

Avigail Oren: Or, are you doing other things?

Linda Boxx: No, no, no. I'm working at the foundation. So, Nathan was born in 1981. I started with the foundation in '82 working part-time. Peter was born in 1983. And, I had a wonderful babysitter who came to the house. So, I'd put Peter down for a nap, run to the office, work for four hours, come home and he'd just be waking up. He'd barely even noticed I was gone. It was wonderful. But, then, I would work evenings, too, to make sure I catch up. And so, as the boys got older, like in preschool and grade school, I would tack on hours. But, it really wasn't until they were fully out of the house that I considered myself a full-time employee even though I was working more than 40 hours every week for all those years – but, in terms of going to the office.

[Chuckle]

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: So, I was on many boards directed by my father – Logan Watershed, involved in conservation work there. Was on the board of Valley School, was on the board of the Western

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Pennsylvania Conservancy, Adelphoi Village – which was great.

Avigail Oren: What was that?

Linda Boxx: You know, that's a program for dependent and delinquent children. So, whether they were- they needed foster care – there was a whole foster care section – or whether they needed an offsite, out-of-home placement for behavior modification...

Avigail Oren: Yeah, yeah.

Linda Boxx: So, that was an interesting... And, I ended up being President of that organization – really, really valued its mission a lot. But, I was also involved with the Latrobe Foundation. And, that's a Latrobe-based community foundation. And, on board with the Loyalhanna Watershed was a man named Bill Dzombak, D-Z-O-M-B-A-K...

Avigail Oren: Thank you for spelling that.

[Chuckle]

Linda Boxx: ...and he lived near me and we would ride back and forth to the Loyalhanna Watershed board meetings together. And, he was really interested in building trails. And, I questioned him. I can remember saying like, "Well, isn't that sort of, like, mission creep? I mean, we're supposed to be involved with water protection and watershed issues, and aren't building trails – isn't that sort of outside of our area of work?" And, he said, "If you don't get people to appreciate the water, and the streams, and so forth, you're never going to get them to want to protect it." And, it's much like the hunters and the fishermen were the big advocates for the Clean Water Act and a lot of the important legislation that happened in Pennsylvania in the [19]70s because it was, you know, I'll say self-serving – but beautifully self-serving.

Avigail Oren: Oh, yeah.

Linda Boxx: So, Bill was working on this trail up in Linn Run State Park and I remember going up and seeing it with him and I said, "Wow, this is really awesome." It's an old abandoned – it was a spur

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of the Ligonier Valley Railroad. And, I said something about, "Oh, this is really neat." And, he said, "Well, you can work on one in your own town if you want to."

[Chuckle]

And, he showed me this little bit of a pathway along the Loyalhanna Creek in Latrobe and we went down together and he had his grass whip and he showed me how a path could be built, and so forth. And, I said, "Oh, okay, all right." So, that was, I'll say, 1985.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And, by 1990, I had acquired about 200 acres and built a mile trail that Bill would laugh at. He said, "I was just thinking about a path through the woods. Here, you've built like..." It was like a rail trail.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: It was seven feet wide. It was paved with limestone dust just like our rail trails are and it was beautiful. And, it's still in existence today. People still find it and they're just astounded that this gorgeous trail – along the creek, in the woods, away from everything – exists. So, that was really, you know, fun. And, I have pictures of the boys down there planting trees, helping build bridges, and so forth. And, they loved going down there. And, they'd go down and fish, and so forth. So, it really became a family activity, too, for all of us. But, the next leg of it was heading towards Ligonier. And, there was the opportunity of an abandoned rail line. Part of Ligonier Valley Railroad was being abandoned and I didn't know how to capture it, so to speak. And so, I went to the Regional Trail Corporation and I asked them for some advice because I had worked with Malcolm Sias and Jack Paulik just a tiny bit up to this point. They had given me specs for trail building which I used on my little creek-side trail – and, just sort of advice from time-to-time. So, I went to them and they said, "Well, come on to the Regional Trail Corporation because we've done railbanking and I think that's what you're going to need." I think we ended up hiring Dick Wilson just very briefly but because many of the crossings had already been removed on this

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piece, it was no longer available for railbanking. It had, basically, already been abandoned. And, this property was not owned in fee by the railroad, it was a right-of-way for railroad purposes. So, all that land reverted to the adjacent landowners.

Avigail Oren: I see.

Linda Boxx: So, the corridor was lost.

Avigail Oren: Ah.

Linda Boxx: So, I probably went to the RTC meeting asking them for their advice and assistance in, maybe, [19]92 or '93, and went through the process of finding out that I was too late. And, I think, Malcolm – and it was probably the fall of 1993 that he said, “Well, you can’t build any more of your trail. Why don’t you come help us build ours?” And, asked me come onto the Board of the Regional Trail Corporation, which I did in 1994. And, it took me a little bit of time to get my schedule synced in with the Regional Trail Corporation because I already had meetings going on. There was a big Valley School – I was on the Board of Valley School – and there was a big campaign going on. And, there were meetings every week, at least, for this campaign. And, at that time, the Regional Trail Corporation had hired Teeter Associates. Bob Teeter and Sandra Finley, and others of their staff were working with the Regional Trail Corporation. But, I was also working with Bob on the Valley School campaign.

Avigail Oren: Oh.

Linda Boxx: He was the fundraising counsel for that. So, I saw him all the time during that period.

Avigail Oren: That helps to answer... I had heard these two versions of how you got involved. Malcolm says he pulled you on. And then, because he knew you through your work with the Westmoreland Art Festival or was it...?

[Crosstalk]

Linda Boxx: Well, Arts and Heritage Festival.

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Avigail Oren: Arts and Heritage. Yeah.

Linda Boxx: Okay.

Avigail Oren: And, I also heard from Teeter that they suggested you as being someone capable of taking on the challenge that, eventually, the ATA solved.

Linda Boxx: Yes. I'm sure that's- they're both true. Yeah, they're both true to some extent.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: This whole exercise of our history is you only know what you know.

[Chuckle]

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And so, I don't know what went on behind the scenes, but I do know that Malcolm was in the loop with me, with my creek-side project and knew that my opportunities had come to an end. I was no longer- there was no more land to build any more trail on my creek-side trail.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And, I'm sure Bob, because he's a very competent, you know, very competent – that underestimates the kind of work he does. But, he realized, of course, that as a fundraising counsel, he needs strong board members. He needs the board members to go forward with the message, not fundraising counsel. So, I'm sure they wanted to build a team of people in the Regional Trail Corporation that weren't digging trail trenches and putting in post and rail fences. They needed someone on the other side of things – the fundraising side.

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: So, I was asked to come on the board in 1994, as was Jim Linaberger. And, Jim and I then, of course, worked with Teeter Associates and Bob McKinley, who was the Executive Director or Trail Manager for the Regional Trail Corporation in putting together a fundraising plan. And, I would say Teeter certainly

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did that – had the long list of people whether they would be letters, or visits, or we would bring them to the trail and do site visits, and so forth. But, it was very much just that good, credible people as board members, that were solid and with my foundation hat on.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: That was the – regardless of what I was – I was still working for a charitable foundation. And, Jim Linaberger came from industry and he was the- he did a lot of the political work for the gas company he worked for. So, he knew all the politicians, and a lot of the movers and shakers in Pittsburgh. He knew many, many more people than I knew. And so, we made a really good team. We really did. I learned a lot from Jim.

Avigail Oren: So, what was your first task or project? What was the first thing that RTC said, “Please, go forth and help us tackle this?”

Linda Boxx: Well, I think it was already sort of a funding strategy in place. And, like I said, it took me a little bit of time to get my Wednesdays cleared, that I could start going to the board meetings. And, I guess this is sort of an interesting side-bar – I believe it was my first meeting of the Regional Trail Corporation. And, we used to meet at the Knights Inn in New Stanton. And, we were in this, I’ll say, small conference room and we were jammed around the outside of the room with the big table in between. And, if somebody wanted to use the restroom, everybody would have to clear out to let the person out.

[Laughter]

So, I can remember sitting there, not knowing anybody. I mean, I recognized Malcolm, and Jack [Paulik], and I’d met Bob McKinley. But, I think most everybody else was pretty much a stranger. And, the President of the Board – Larry Ridenour – during the course of the meeting, dressed down the Executive Director, Bob McKinley, so forcefully that I’m sitting there thinking, “What on earth have I gotten involved in? Is our board chair crazy? Is our Executive Director incompetent? What is going on here?” He just yelled at him.

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And, I'm sitting there shaking like a leaf and I'm thinking, [mumbles].

Avigail Oren: Like, am I coming back?

Linda Boxx: "I think I made a mistake here." But, a few months go by and I'm focused solely on the fundraising. And, whatever is going on at the home office between the President and the ED, I'll let them sort it out. I just kept my nose to the grindstone and did what I needed to do. I, of course, went to my own trustees for grants. And, I can remember doing a site visit with my mother and my sister, going to West Newton with Bob McKinley and sort of looking around. Everybody just being so impressed with what the trail could do to change a community. The big appeal for us was – as a foundation – that it was an economic development, a community development opportunity that was recreation-based.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: And, it hit all of Kay's sweet spots in her giving.

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: And, it was also- because of the broad-based nature of it, because of the level of volunteerism and just the enthusiasm for it, it just made it a really easy project to want to participate in – be part of.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: What was your question?

[Chuckle]

Avigail Oren: No, that was perfect. It was what were the first things you were working on? Were you at the meeting with R.K. Mellon when the idea for unifying the trail groups came up?

Linda Boxx: So, yes, yes. So, I think, if that's the same meeting that I think it is – was February of 1995.

Avigail Oren: Yeah. That sounds right.

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Linda Boxx: So, what I remember from that meeting was a little bit of a backdrop here. So, this was the beginning of the golden age of trail building. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and other national organizations had worked very hard to get into this new legislation, six-year transportation bill called ISTEA – I-S-T-E-A – the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act...

[Chuckle]

...of 1993 – ISTEA. And, in that legislation was a little spin-off that allowed for something called transportation enhancements. And, there were 10 or 12 categories that were part of transportation enhancements. One of them was trails. And, with the abandonment of all these rail lines throughout the country, having this money available for trail building was huge. It was 80/20 money coming from federal DOT [Department of Transportation].

Avigail Oren: Can you explain what 80/20 money means?

Linda Boxx: So, 80% of the money comes from the federal government, 20[%] has to be non-federal money. So, it could be state or private money.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: So, the taps turned on and the federal money is available. And, the Regional Trail Corporation applied for \$150,000, \$350,000 – you're getting these big numbers – but they needed to match it. At the same time, the state had a bond – well, there were two things – there was the- because it pre-dated Growing Greener – “Key '93” was what it was called, Key '93 and, oh, I'll have to go back. This is going back too far in my memory bank to tell you exactly how this all worked. But, there were funding sources both from the bond issue, as well as the real estate transfer tax that were available to communities or nonprofit organizations to apply for.

Commented [AO2]: Do you want to fill this in?

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And, that money could be used to match the federal money.

Avigail Oren: Match...

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Linda Boxx: But, this money required a match, too. And so, that's where the private sector came in. And so, all these foundations in Pittsburgh, with all these railroads that were being abandoned in the region, were trying to get their match for the state money so they can match the federal money.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And so, the foundation phones were ringing off the hook. I have a trail project – I need some money. And so, this meeting in February of 1995 with Mike [Michael] Watson [Senior Vice President and Trustee, Richard King Mellon Foundation]- and I knew Mike pretty well. His wife was the President of Valley School Board of Directors, so we were working hand-in-glove. And, I had known Mike for many years. And, he was very blunt, and he basically said, "You need to get yourselves organized. All these trail groups are coming in, asking for money. You need to get yourselves organized." There had been a prior meeting, and I think that was – I don't remember attending it – with the McCune Foundation. Hank [Henry] Beukema [Executive Director, McCune Foundation] had a similar plea, but his plea was much more specific because I found it in the Regional Trail Corporation Board meeting minutes where he wanted all of the trails in Western Pennsylvania to be organized and prioritized. He had a very clear, "I want them all under one umbrella" and whereas Mike was not that specific.

Avigail Oren: Oh, okay.

Linda Boxx: And, Mike had also, because of the Richard K. Mellon Foundation's interest in Ohiopyle State Park and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy – and, I think they had already provided money for Somerset County for acquisitions. It was around that time anyhow. I think he may not have said so at the meeting, but I always felt that he cared, probably, more about the Pittsburgh-Cumberland piece than all of the other trails in Western Pennsylvania. But, I'm just putting that together in retrospect, to some extent.

Avigail Oren: Right.

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Linda Boxx: But, he, basically, gave us a mandate to get organized. You know, “Don’t come in here helter-skelter,” but, gave us a mandate to work together. So, in April – the next month – I reached out and I met with Jeremy Muller who was with the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, and, they were charged with building the Steel Heritage Trail, as it was called then. And, John Stevens, who was with Friends of the Riverfront, just to meet them and say, “Okay, if we’re going to pull this together and look at things at least as a corridor... Hello, nice to meet you,” and, “Let’s see how we work together.” And then, sometime during the summer, I found out at a Regional Trail Corporation board meeting that there was already a summit being planned by Somerset County – and I think it was called the Somerset County Trail Summit – to look at and all the partners from Pittsburgh to Cumberland were invited to participate and talk about their trail projects. But, how to solve Somerset County’s problems was really the big issue because they had all the structures. They had all these enormous structures.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: Well, when I found out about it from Bob McKinley, I sort of jumped down his throat because I said, “Bob, that’s what I’ve been trying to do. I’ve been reaching out to all our partners.” And, he said, “Oh, that doesn’t have anything to do with what you’re doing.” I said, “Bob, it has everything to do with what we’re doing. We’re trying to pull all these people together.” So, somewhere along the line, I found out about a meeting that Dave **Mankamyer**, who was County Commissioner in Somerset County; Dave Steele, who was the Somerset County Conservation District Manager; and Susan **Thagard** who was the AmeriCorps person – I think she was AmeriCorps – doing a planning. And, Sandra Finley **and** I had jumped in the car and we tore up the mountain to The Lost Pelican near Hidden Valley. And, on the way up, I’m dictating to Sandra what the agenda should be and Sandra is writing it all down. And, by the time we get there, we have a beautiful agenda, completely different agenda for the trail summit and it’s called the “Pittsburgh to Cumberland Trail Summit,” hosted by Somerset County – that we’re going to look at broader issues.

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We're going to look at everybody's issues, and not just Somerset County's issues. And, it was a great conference. It really was. It was a lot of good interaction between people. Hank Parke – we asked Hank to develop a statement and we called it "What Trail is This?" And, he gave the most beautiful, chilling, poetic "What Trail is This?" And, he promptly lost his remarks because it was almost right after that I said, "Hank, we need to have that. That was just beautiful." And, he's, "Oh, yeah. I have the paper somewhere." And, it never turned up.

Avigail Oren: Oh, bummer.

Linda Boxx: And, it just was, like I said, poetic and just set the tone right for everybody to work together. At the end of the conference, September 29, 1995, Dave Mankamyer got up and said, "Well, I think we all need to continue this and stay working together." And, "You all should meet on a monthly basis." And, "Keep this thing going," and so forth. And, it was really at that Lost Pelican meeting when...

Avigail Oren: The planning meeting?

Linda Boxx: ...the planning meeting before the conference where Dave agreed to go with our agenda, rather than the strictly, narrow, Somerset agenda. That was my first real strong moment of ownership because I realized he's putting his faith in me.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: I am not going to disappoint him. I am going to prove to him that his decision to put his faith in me was not misguided.

Avigail Oren: So, I want to hear a little bit more about that meeting because it's the first I've ever heard of it. So, you roll up to the Lost Pelican, which is a...?

Linda Boxx: Little restaurant...

Avigail Oren: Okay.

[Chuckle]

Linda Boxx: ...which has changed names a hundred times.

Avigail Oren: Okay. And, yeah, it sounds like a Catskills resort.

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- Linda Boxx:** Yeah.
- [Laughter]
- Avigail Oren:** And, you and Sandra march in and throw down this new agenda and was everyone just like, "Yeah, sounds good. Great!" Or, was there some contention there?
- Linda Boxx:** Well, Dave Steele, I know was not happy about it because he worked for the county. And, I think their office was doing a lot of the grant application work and a lot of the project management. And, he had his job to do and he wasn't necessarily happy about somebody cannon-balling into his pond and causing all these waves, quite frankly.
- Avigail Oren:** Right. And, taking the focus off his county.
- Linda Boxx:** Exactly. Although, what it did in reality was put the whole Pittsburgh to Cumberland focus on his county.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** It just pulled everybody together to focus on his county.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** But, Dave [Steele] knew the funding was going to be problematic and I think he figured the more help he had, the better off he was going to be in terms of getting the ultimate success.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah. Right, right. I wanted to, then, ask about Hank Parke – his statement was giving a vision for what this...
- Linda Boxx:** For the whole...
- Avigail Oren:** ...trail would be. And, you described it as poetic and I'm curious – if we can't have the text itself, was it poetic in a sort of a Thoreau words with nature sort of way? Or, was it more of a...?
- Linda Boxx:** Is it aspirational? It was talking about the connection – that we would get to Washington, D.C. It was about the beauty of the region. It was about the people working together. It was about all the things that it was. It was just prophetic and aspirational

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of what we were all trying to do in our hearts. And, that's sort of an interesting thing – it's really a piece of my story, that only in retrospect did I really realize it. But, everybody said, "Oh, yes. We want to hold hands with our trail neighbors and we want to- our goal is to make this Pittsburgh to D.C., or Pittsburgh to Cumberland Trail, our part of it, a reality." But, they really weren't willing always to give up what they had to give up in order to do that. And so, there was a lot of rough spots through the years because of that, I'll say passive-aggressive behavior of, "Well, we want the money, but we don't want to change our name. And, we don't want to lose control. We want it to join the marketing issue. What do I have to give up in order to get the ultimate goal?" And so, there was a lot of- there was a rub for sure. And, different groups had different degrees of rub.

Avigail Oren: Of friction.

Linda Boxx: Mm-hmm. But, it was all quiet and behind the scenes and I had to pull the knives out of my back...

[Laughter]

Avigail Oren: Right, right.

Linda Boxx: ...any number of times.

Avigail Oren: Well, so then, do you say at the end of this, "Alright, it sounds like we're all going to work together. You all go home"? Or, did someone say, "What about calling it the Allegheny Trail Alliance?"

[Crosstalk]

Linda Boxx: Well so, somehow, I was involved because the meeting was at the Greensburg Garden and Civic Center and it was in November of that year, we had our first meeting. We had Dick Wilson come and help us with the incorporation of the organization. We had a discussion at that meeting whether we were going to be- that Hank Bukema vision – all the trails in the region coming together. We bring everybody together. We do this prioritization, and so on, and so forth. Or, since the people there were the Pittsburgh to Cumberland with the

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Montour Trail, or are we going to be the Pittsburgh to Cumberland trail with the connection to the airport?

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: So, the group wisely chose the more limited vision because it would have been impossible, quite frankly, to do anything else. And, our rationale was – or at least I remember mine was – that if we can complete Pittsburgh to Cumberland and then onto Washington, D.C., that will give focus to other trail-building efforts in the region to try to connect to the Great Allegheny Passage, which wasn't named that at that time...

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: ...and create a more diverse and complete network of trails.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm. Yeah, bike highway or...

Linda Boxx: Yeah, exactly. But, it would have been overwhelmingly impossible to try to do what we did for the seven trails of the ATA for the entire region.

Avigail Oren: Right, right. A degree of focus is necessary considering how hard this project was already. Was it at that meeting that the name "ATA" was chosen?

Linda Boxx: No, no. So, we thought we could name the trail at that meeting. Hah! And, that didn't go over so well. Because I thought, "Well, if we named the trail the XYZ Trail, then we would just be the XYZ Alliance."

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: But, that didn't happen, so we, for the sake of ending the meeting, just called ourselves the Spine Line Trail Association...

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: ...and kept that name for a couple meetings. It just – it made everyone queasy.

[Laughter]

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Spine Line... So, we shortened it, somehow nicely, to the Allegheny Trail Alliance – I don't know – February, March, or so of the following year.

Avigail Oren: Okay. But, it wasn't a moment. It wasn't just a meeting and everyone decided they didn't like the old name...?

Linda Boxx: Right.

Avigail Oren: ...and it was, "How about...?" And, this was what stuck. Okay.

Linda Boxx: Because we never felt that the organizational name was important. It was the trail name and the trail we wanted to brand and market – whatever the heck the trail would be called – and not spend a lot of time trying to market this alliance, which wasn't even its own separate nonprofit organization.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: We did not know – I did not know – whether this organization would continue for six months. There was no guarantee that the groups would remain cohesive. Any one of them could have said, "I don't feel comfortable with the way this is going. We are pulling out. I don't feel we're going to get return on our investments – whatever that investment was – if it was just even going to meetings." So, it just did not make sense to, first of all, have a separate nonprofit organization because we didn't know how long it was going to last or...

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: ...if the name mattered because we weren't marketing the alliance, we were marketing the trail that we were building.

Avigail Oren: Well, so then, when was the name, "Great Allegheny Passage," decided? I know this is a matter of great debate.

Linda Boxx: Yes. No, no. It was decided... I told Michele [Gornick, Program Associate, Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation], I said, "I need to tattoo it on my arm because I keep forgetting when it was," but I think it was January – we rolled it out at an RTC retreat January of 2001, I think, or '02.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

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- Linda Boxx:** Yeah. But, I think it was 2001.
- Avigail Oren:** So, at least, minimum, five years after you had settled on ATA, right?
- Linda Boxx:** Yes, yes. And, that was one of the- so, we were raising money – and we'll talk about that – but we also were working with the National Park Service and we didn't know what an interpretive concept plan was, but we got money to do one because that's what they wanted us to do. And, that was so important for us. It was a complete – no, complete is wrong – it was a distraction from our main task – from my main task, which was get money, get money, get money.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** But, it took us down this road of understanding more completely who we were, what this trail meant beyond what Hank Parke said it meant at the 1995. We had a history committee of outsiders, which was great. Different people wrote different papers. We developed with **Mary Shaw and Roy Weil** had this wonderful matrix of how to prioritize our interpretive moments – really genius way of looking at things – came up with this list of 125-150 interpretive opportunities along the trail. And, through that whole process of, really, that deep dive into who we were – that's when the name came out.
- Avigail Oren:** Interesting.
- Linda Boxx:** And, if we hadn't done that interpretive concept plan, I don't know what kind of a name we would have come up with.
- Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** It would have been more ordinary, I'm sure. There was a summit, and perhaps Sandra talked about it during her interview, but we had hired a marketing firm to work with us and the culmination was a big meeting in Confluence with all the trail groups, all the people coming together and trying to come up with the name of the system. We had to do it together. We had already gone through it once. And, our ATA group had said, "Well, you know, really what we are is the Chesapeake and Ohio Trail. The towpath is the towpath, but it

Commented [AO3]: Can you fill in their orgs/titles in brackets after their names?
(authors of Freewheeling Easy in Western Pennsylvania and Linking Up)

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was intended to go to the Ohio River. So, maybe, what they can be the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Towpath and we can be the C&O Trail." And, everyone thought that was just wonderful because then it created a name for the whole Pittsburgh to D.C.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: And, as ATA – as I always ran ATA's top-up, think of ideas, run it down to the bottom to all the trail groups, let them digest it, and come back up to the top where it's voted by everybody. So, that's what we did with the C&O Trail. And, I thought, "That was great! That was wonderful! Everybody bought into it and everybody loved it." It went to Doug Ferris who was the superintendent of the C&O Canal National Historical Park and I said, "Oh, Doug, guess what? We've named our trail the C&O Trail." He said like, "You can't." He said, "We've already branded the C&O as ours. I think there'd be a lot of people that would be upset if you started calling yourselves the C&O Trail." And, I can remember, later, "Oh, well, maybe I should have asked him first rather than last."

[Laughter]

So, it was back to the drawing board on the name. And, like I said, that meeting in Confluence – and I have the list – something like 80 names were getting thrown up on the board, it was those days. All these- from ridiculous names to generic names that people...

[Crosstalk]

Linda Boxx: ...the American Heritage Trail – things like that.

Avigail Oren: That's terrible.

[Chuckle]

Linda Boxx: Yeah, I know. But, we were just putting things up on the board. Everything. And, by the end of the day, the Great Allegheny Passage had been proposed and I think Allegheny was in, probably, 30% to 50% of the names anyhow, so that was pretty much there. I believe Bob McKinley was the one who came up with the word "passage" because at that time, it was

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presumed, maybe, that's just where we were in our evolution – that each trail section would hold onto its local identity because then there would be a system name encompassing the whole thing. And so, having a word like “passage” rather than “trail” implied this larger system. And, I'm sure “system” was in a lot of the words, too. So, we had Allegheny Passage and Bill Metzger came up with the G – what word begins with G because then we could have GAP, and I can already see the logo. And, he came up with the word “great.” But, we also had a recommendation, or an idea, that it be called the “Allegheny Frontier Trail.” And, I sort of liked the trail beginning with “A” just for the alphabetical prominence of being at the front of the alphabet. Having gone from “M” to “B,” I realized how nice it is to be at the front of the alphabet.

Avigail Oren: Right.

[Chuckle]

Linda Boxx: But, some of our colleagues at the National Park Service cautioned us against the word “frontier” because of the colonization aspect of it, and the sensitivity and sensibilities of what was going on at the time – that whole notion of...

Avigail Oren: Conquering...

Linda Boxx: Yeah.

Avigail Oren: Yeah. It's a bit of a triumphalist association. Yeah. I actually would like to ask about the historical committee. How long did they work on this? How many people were involved? How much did you have to be involved with it? Or, is this just sort of a group floating that would report back occasionally?

Linda Boxx: I was involved in everything.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: Sandra Finley definitely took the lead on it.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: She managed the process and I think 12, 15 people were involved to one degree to another. And, the end product was very solid and it gave us something to really dig our teeth into.

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So, it was very worthwhile. And, I enjoyed the process. I enjoyed learning the trail, learning about the pieces of it because I hadn't biked the whole thing, certainly. And, I had never really even been on the C&O Canal Towpath at all, except maybe touch it somewhere here and there, but not really experience it. So, it was really interesting to learn about the themes, the Native American, the early colonies, the Province of Pennsylvania and the Province of Maryland, the Calverts and the Penns. Then the industrial piece of it which was so important in building the railroad – oh, that was one of the names – “The Trail of” – I forget what it was – “The Trail of Heartbreak and Resource Exploitation.” Things like that. I love it.

[Chuckle]

Avigail Oren: Yeah. Was there anyone- you talked about Sandra having a leadership role. Was there anyone involved who really stood out for having extraordinary involvement or was it just...?

[Crosstalk]

Linda Boxx: Vagel Keller, who was a cyclist – and I think he's a professor of history at CMU – really stepped up and he wrote some nice, beautiful papers – white papers – for us. And, Mary Shaw and Roy Weil were very much involved. And, Don Briggs with the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail office was involved. I'm sure Bob Gangawere was involved. I'd have to really think. We'd have different meetings where people would come in on different pieces of it and walk away.

Avigail Oren: Yeah, put in their expertise and...

Linda Boxx: Right.

Avigail Oren: Okay. So, that yields that interpretive plan, that yields the name in 2001. All right, now we have to jump back. So, I was thinking of jumping to 1997 – April of 1997 – when you found yourself directed to go see Rick Geist.

Linda Boxx: So, Rick Malmstrom, who was a board member from Friends of the Riverfront, and I had a meeting with John Oliver on that

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day, April 7, 1997. And, I must say, I didn't know what I was doing.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: I just did whatever someone said was the next step, I just went and did it. And then, I'd discover what I needed to do to get to the next step. And so, there was no master strategy in my mind or probably in anybody's mind, but certainly not in my mind. I was not a political person, I was not, really – I don't know – I just didn't know what I was doing. I had never done fundraising at this scale nor sort of out on a limb with all my groups. There was sort of a bit of a disconnect. I was always out there steps ahead of the rest of the group because I needed to be, but I always wanted them to know everything that was going on, and we wanted their backing. And, felt like how far can I go without them knowing what I'm doing. There was a lot of – I'll say – confusion, at least in my mind, about what I should be doing. But, anyhow, so Rick [Malmstrom] and I went to Harrisburg to meet with John Oliver and talk to him about, "What should we do, John?" And, John was, by far, the most important person to my success in this whole thing because he wouldn't tell me how to do it, but he would absolutely tell me what to do – what my next step was. And, if ever I felt like I was spinning my wheels, I would just call up John. And, I was in Harrisburg a lot and a lot of times I'd have 15-minute meetings with him and he would just say, "Go do this. Go do that." And, I would.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: Figure it out – what to do and go forward. But, at this meeting he said, "Well, you need to go see Rick Geist." And, I said, "Oh, okay, well, the next time he comes to Harrisburg, we'll make an appointment." He goes, "You don't need an appointment. Just call his office and see if you can get to see him this afternoon." "Okay."

[Laughter]

And so, we called his office and he said, "Be there at 3:00." He was finishing up committee hearings, or whatever was going on, and we had a 15-minute meeting. And, in that 15-minute

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meeting, he discovered that I was Alex McKenna's daughter and my father, with Cliff Jones, had convinced him to run for state legislature. So, that was one big good checkmark on my column. And, I didn't know why John [Oliver] said we needed to go talk to him, but found out, also in that 15 minutes, that he loved to bicycle ride. He was a road rider more than a trail rider, but he was a passionate cyclist, and he loved all things cycling. And so, here we are coming to him with a bike trail on a railroad no less. And, I think railroads were his number two love, if not his number one love.

Commented [AO4]: Can you fill in their org/title in brackets after their name? (very active in PA politics ,at the time he was with the PA Chamber of Commerce)

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: Railroads and bicycling were his two. So, a rail-trail certainly fit. He said, "How much do you need?" And, we're, "Uhh."

[Laughter]

Avigail Oren: Pick a number?

Linda Boxx: Yeah, pick a number, exactly. And, I said, "Well, the Big Savage Tunnel is going to talk a couple million." He said, "\$6 million. \$6 million – Big Savage Tunnel." And, he said, "What else do you need? How much do you need to finish the trail?" Like a, "[mumble], um..." And, he goes, "\$10 million, \$10 million to finish the trail."

[Laughter]

Avigail Oren: Okie dokie.

Linda Boxx: And so, he calls one of his staff people down and he said, "Okay, we need two line items for the state capital budget." And, he said, "So, what's the name of your trail?" I go, "Well, we don't have a name of the trail. Well, we call it the Pittsburgh to Cumberland Trail." He goes, "Well, we can't use 'Pittsburgh.' We cannot have the word 'Pittsburgh' in this line item because..." because Tom Murphy had done something to alienate his fellow former house member colleagues. I don't know what it was. He said, "If we put the word 'Pittsburgh' in there, it'll be taken out of the capital budget." So, I said, "Well, let's call it the C&O Canal Extension." So, it was in, in two ways – two separate line items. There was a \$6 million line

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item for Big Savage Tunnel, and then a \$10 million line item for the C&O Canal Extension. And, it was under the community reinvestment part of it, which was a 50/50 match – that the municipality would have had to apply for. And, it was also duplicated under the DCNR's [Department of Conservation and Natural Resources] budget, which would be 100% money because that's capital improvements for the various departments. So, we get in the car, head back to Pittsburgh area, and I'm thinking I have \$16 million in my pocket.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And, I thought, "How did that happen? That was so easy. I can't believe it." I had no clue that getting a line item in the state capital budget was just the first step, was just, basically, the authorization to then pull together all the political forces to try to get it released from the governor.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: But, I didn't have a clue. I was just beside myself – stunned. Stunned at how easy it was to get all this money out of the government.

Avigail Oren: Popping champagne.

Linda Boxx: Yeah. Exactly, exactly.

[Laughter]

So, it was quite amazing. John [Oliver], in a subsequent meeting because he knew eventually the state capital budget would pass – he said, "You need to get a lobbyist."

Avigail Oren: John Oliver?

Linda Boxx: John Oliver. "You need to get a lobbyist." I said, "Okay, okay. How do I do that?" So, just fortuitously, the Montour Trail Council was having a little bit of an issue with the developer near Southpoint. And so, this Michael Zamagias had called a meeting, and Dick Quasey and Marshall Fausold were there and Marshall must have invited Bob Teeter and myself to this meeting. Sandra might have been there – I can't remember –

Commented [AO5]: Can you fill in their org/title in brackets after their name? Zamagias (Zamagias Properties)

Commented [AO6]: Same Quasey
Montour Trail Council

Commented [AO7]: Same Fausold
Montour Trail Council

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but, Bob for sure. And, Mike Zamagias were meeting, and it was in the private dining room at One Oxford Center. And, he pulls out this – it's lunchtime – this \$100 bottle of wine, pouring it around. I went, "What's going on?" But, the issue was is the Montour Run, a watershed organization – it was really involved with the Montour Trail Council – was protesting some of their development. And, Mike was trying to find out what he can do to get everybody on the same page. I didn't know what the issue was. But, that issue was not really talked about much because Mike – again, he loved the trail. He would take his whole staff on bike rides on the towpath every year.

Avigail Oren: Oh, lovely.

Linda Boxx: He thought it was a great way to build teamwork, and so forth, so he loved the whole idea. But, the whole meeting, then, turned in... And, did I say his lobbyist was there?

[Laughter/Crosstalk]

Avigail Oren: You didn't. Key point.

Linda Boxx: Okay. So, LeRoy Kline of Delta Development, and I think one of his associates – it might have been Tony Seitz – I'm not sure – was there. And, I'm sitting at this end, Mike's at the far end of the table and Dick Quasey and Marshall are over on the left, and Bob [Teeter] was probably was beside me. And, Mike immediately says, "LeRoy, get up and sit by her." And so, Bob switched places and LeRoy and I then got into this discussion about, "Well, we have a line item in the state capital budget, and we have all these needs, and we're trying to raise money," and so on, and so forth. And, we hit it off immediately.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: And, Mike was just delighted. As we were walking back to Mike's office, which was the Dollar Bank with the lions in front on Fourth Avenue – he owns that building and his office is up there. As we're walking back from One Oxford Center, whatever that is, up to his office, he gives me, within a block, my marching orders – that were my marching orders for the next five to ten years. And, he said, "You need to hire Delta and I'll give you \$25,000 towards that. You need to act now."

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You need to be big, and better, and fast. You need to get going. You have a governor – Governor [Tom] Ridge – who’s a cyclist, you need to get going while he is governor. You have Jack Murtha who is very powerful in Congress, and he can help you. You have Bud Shuster, who is the chairman of the Transportation and Construction Committee who can help you. You need to get going – because your time is now – and take hold of it.”

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm. And so, he gave you \$25,000 of his own personal...?

[Crosstalk]

Linda Boxx: Well, he never did.

Avigail Oren: Oh. Oh, my God. What chutzpah, right?

[Laughter]

Linda Boxx: But, so I’m saying, “Well, John Oliver said we need a lobbyist. Here’s a guy who is willing to give us \$25,000. I like the guy. He was full of, like, guts and vinegar. And, I think I could work with him.”

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: So, we started a process to get Delta on board. They were expensive. Our foundation footed the bill for Delta to come on board and I kept reminding Mike [Zamagias] that his \$25,000 is going to come in handy about now. And, he sort of was, “Oh, [mumbles]...” many evasive tactics. Only never, never came through. But, we hired Delta at the end of 1997. A week later, when we get into the contract – oh, I’m sorry... So, sometime in the fall – and I looked for the date and I couldn’t quite find it – but sometime about October, the state capital budget bill had passed...

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: ...and our line items were only in once, and they were under the DCNR side of things.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

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- Linda Boxx:** Which was good news and bad news.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** But, it was in. And, we had a press conference at Cedar Creek Park in October – Rick Geist, he was on his way to Pittsburgh for a Pennsylvania Pedalcycle Advisory Committee – PPAC.
- Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** It used to be called the Bike-Ped Committee, but then you had to be more inclusive and you couldn't call it "bike," so it's the Pedalcycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. But, they had this press conference – and also the fact that we had gotten, along with everybody else in the state, had a line item in the state capital budget. But, the whole idea, I think, was to really get awareness out about it because we were going to need everybody's support to get that money released. So, the press conference was great. We had county commissioners there, and legislators there, and the whole field of our trail folks there, and so forth. It was a nice event and we rode from Cedar Creek up to Boston and back or something like that – nice little bike ride and it's a beautiful fall day. And, again, I was still not understanding, really, how everything was working, but it's okay, I just do the next thing I have to do.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** So, we hire Delta in December and the next week we had a meeting with Secretary of the Budget, Bittenbender.
- Avigail Oren:** What's his first name?
- Linda Boxx:** Bob – Bob Bittenbender.
- Avigail Oren:** Wow. What a name.
- Linda Boxx:** Yeah. Secretary Bittenbender. And, LeRoy, and Rick Geist, and John Oliver, and Dick Sprenkle who was one of his deputy secretaries, myself, Bittenbender – there might have been, maybe, someone from... LeRoy was there and maybe someone else from his staff.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.

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Linda Boxx: And, I was scared out of my wits because I felt that I had one chance to get this money released from Bittenbender. And, if I failed, I wasn't going to get these millions of dollars for the trail project. And so, LeRoy had – he was fabulous to work with because I don't know how he did this, but he had booklets made up – he'd worked for us the whole week. And, he had booklets with maps, our funding strategy, and what it was going to cost, and all this great material. And so, we sit there – and the meeting was actually sort of short. I did a little song and dance about what the trail was. And, [Bittenbender's] shaking his head. He didn't want to hear it. He didn't want to hear it.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: And, he, basically, turned to John Oliver really quickly in the meeting and he said, "John, this is not coming out of your budget. If you want to fund it, fund it; if you don't want to fund it, don't fund it. It's all on you." And, I realized he wasn't going to give us more money. The DCNR had a fixed appropriation and it was up to John to decide how much out of his own budget he wanted to take for building the Great Allegheny Passage. And, I think John had to go somewhere else, and I can remember walking back from Bittenbender's office down to the rotunda and realizing what this meant to DCNR's budget.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And, by the time Dick and I had reached the rotunda, I vowed to him that I would raise the money to replace the money that we were going to be taking, and I was going to create an organization for the state parks – which became the Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation. And, they've raised millions and millions of dollars that's gone back into state parks through this. But, I felt like, "I can't leave you without the funds you need for the boat launch ramps, or repair picnic tables, or what – all those capital needs that all the state parks employees needs. And, we were sucking it out to do, basically, the Big Savage Tunnel.

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- Avigail Oren:** Right. I have a couple of different questions to unpack there. So, I think the first is really in hearing the story again, I was really struck – probably because we went back into your backstory a little bit more - by how instrumental your relationship to John Oliver was in this story. Do you think the money would have worked out if you didn't have a decades-long relationship with this person?
- Linda Boxx:** I think John was, first and foremost, interested in the trail.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Linda Boxx:** He had been with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy had acquired that first 27 miles for Ohio State Park. And, he was part of the due diligence and the recon team looking at that Western Maryland abandonment in the [19]70s.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** So, he knew firsthand, probably better than anybody, how wonderfully scenic this opportunity was to finish this trail. So, I think that was a huge motivator for him. And then, I had been on his board – The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy – so I knew him and had worked with him, and had credibility. And, I think, again I'll say, having the foundation backing – I think that was failsafe – that if something went wrong, I could raise the money back home.
- [Laughter/Crosstalk]
- Avigail Oren:** Right. You pony up. Right?
- Linda Boxx:** Yeah. Beg to my parents about like, "Please help."
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** So, I think that helped. But, we had a very good relationship. But, I think it was 95%, if not more, John's true, true interest in the trail that kept his interest going the whole time.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah, okay. And then, this is the first time I've heard about this Parks and Forest Foundation. Is this a public-private partnership that supports...?

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- Linda Boxx:** State parks.
- Avigail Oren:** ...State parks.
- Linda Boxx:** And, state forests. Yes, yes. And, it's celebrating its 20th year, or it did last year, or this year.
- Avigail Oren:** And so, you spearheaded that?
- Linda Boxx:** Yes.
- Avigail Oren:** At the same time?
- Linda Boxx:** Yes.
- Avigail Oren:** Did you sleep through...?
- [Chuckle]
- Were you awake for a decade?
- Linda Boxx:** Yeah, or two decades. Yeah. So, I served as its first President and its first Executive Director until we were able to hire somebody.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Linda Boxx:** And, pulled together this board. It was great – Cliff Jones, I'd mentioned him earlier in context with my father and Rick Geist. He knew everybody in Harrisburg – great guy. Had been secretary of DER for a while and I think Labor and Industry, and he had held several cabinet positions in different Republican administrations. But, he helped me put the board together, and he was always sort of the godfather that I could go to about how to make something work, and so forth. Tom Norris was **Glatfelter Paper Company** – a really fine group, Bob Griffith from Parks and Recreation Society. So, we had a nice team of people working together to build a board and get things going.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Linda Boxx:** But, what I wanted to see was how much money was coming back to the various park funds because when I'd get to \$10 million, I paid them back.

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[Chuckle]

Avigail Oren: Right, right.

Linda Boxx: You know, they'd been paid back.

Avigail Oren: Right. And, decided to keep going?

Linda Boxx: And, it did, yeah.

Avigail Oren: Yeah. That's very interesting. Let me ask this one last question. You described your motivation for doing it, but why doing a foundation? Why not backing away from the state capital budget and saying, "Okay, I'll fundraise it instead?" Why was the foundation the solution to that – to what you felt was a moral problem, or a political problem?

Linda Boxx: You mean The Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation?

Avigail Oren: Yeah, yeah.

Linda Boxx: Oh, it was because strictly that we were pulling money that John [Oliver] would have spent on his parks.

Avigail Oren: Right. No, so, I mean, but why, why that...

Linda Boxx: Why that answer?

Avigail Oren: Yeah. Why a foundation and not doing a different course of action?

Linda Boxx: Well, because it seemed the most practical. I couldn't- if I could have raised \$10 million to pay him back, I would just have raised \$10 million and not take his money.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: I mean, \$10 million's a lot of money. The foundation, at least, was something over time. It could be raised by many, many people, many, many gifts, in many, many ways.

Avigail Oren: Right, right. And, it doesn't have to be done in order to do the tunnel.

Linda Boxx: Right, exactly.

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- Avigail Oren:** Okay. I see. Okay. So, you leave that meeting, the foundation comes out of it – take me then from that moment to, really, the moment that money shows up, or where you know you have the real, actual, popping of the champagne because you know you’ve got it.
- Linda Boxx:** Right. So, the money is released incrementally. And, I think at the end of the day, we ended up with about \$10 million and we didn’t ever see the other \$6 million. The first project was the trail section between Confluence and Fort Hill. And, that was about \$1.5 million. And, that allowed us to finish the first hundred potholes, which was huge.
- Avigail Oren:** Right. Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** The Big Savage Tunnel had to be engineered. There was a lot of back-work that had to be done. And, just sort of a story about Big Savage Tunnel – **Linc Van Sickel** was on the Somerset County Parks and Rec board, and was also the project manager for construction of the Allegheny Highlands Trail in Somerset County. He had reached out to a fella – I think was in the **Department of Energy**. A guy by the name of Tony Iaccaroni. He was a mine engineer and he came up with the solution **in 1996** for Big Savage Tunnel **which** was that you just insert, basically, 10x10 sections of concrete culverts into the tunnel, back-fill it, and away you go.
- Avigail Oren:** Right, right.
- Linda Boxx:** And, it could cost well less than \$1 million to get that done. And, I can remember – and this is before the meeting with Rick Geist, right? And, I can remember thinking, “I am not working on a trail and building three-quarters of a mile MRI chamber...”
- [Laughter]
- Avigail Oren:** Right, right.
- Linda Boxx:** “...that you’ll be completely claustrophobic.” In my mind, it was one of the standards I placed upon myself, and therefore on the whole ATA’s performance. It was going to be a high-quality, it was going to be a first-rate trail. It wasn’t going to be

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cheaped down just because we didn't think we could afford it. I was willing to go raise the money to do it right. And, that happened any number of times during the course of building the trail – that the cheap solution was not going to cut it with me.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: And, I would put my efforts into making sure we had the money to do it the right way. But, I wasn't going to take the discount version. To his credit, he's just trying to do something that's affordable.

Avigail Oren: Right, right.

Linda Boxx: But, I said, in my mind, "Oh, no."

[Laughter/Crosstalk]

Avigail Oren: Right, yeah.

Linda Boxx: So, that's why getting the Big Savage Tunnel done properly was very important to me.

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: So, that first project was happening. The state was in charge of the process because it was a DCNR project now. And, it was all managed through the Department of General Services (DGS). And so, it added a whole level of bureaucracy and non-accountability to the whole process, which ended up costing – I don't know – at least a million, maybe \$2 million to the whole Big Savage Tunnel project because it was inefficient. DGS is fine for building prisons, or school administration buildings, or warehouses, or whatever, but recreational facilities and tunnels – yeah, that wasn't their area of expertise.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: And, when this whole thing was over, I begged John Oliver, I went to Mike DiBerardinis, his successor, and Cindy Dunn, his successor, and I said, "You need to get your recreation projects out of DGS and manage them yourselves."

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Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: But, politically, it's...

Avigail Oren: Untenable.

[Chuckle]

Linda Boxx: Yes.

Avigail Oren: So, yeah.

Linda Boxx: But, I had made my pitch and lost on that one. So, Big Savage Tunnel was on more of a slow track because of the engineering. And, the point I was going to make – there were three or four engineering firms that had put together their qualification package to do the engineering. And, the facility's design group at DCNR looked at it and they told John, "You've got to tell the Secretary of DGS that the other two are fine, but AWK [AWK Group of Companies] is unacceptable. We've worked with them before and they are terrible." So, John goes over to DGS and has the meeting about who's going to be the engineer – and AWK was chosen. And, John tried to protest and they said, "Doesn't matter – that's who we're going with." And, it's not a bid because it's just a percentage of the project. And so, the boys – Jim Epply and Rhody Rhodomoyer were steaming because they did not like working with AWK. So, AWK came up with a proposal to do the tunnel and it was not the way it ended up being done. But, they came up with an engineered solution and put it out to bid. And, all that bidding – let me see my notes – was done, I guess, in 2001.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: I guess in 2000, AWK was appointed the engineers, but then come middle of the year – like August – there was the bid conference and then the bids were due, and then in January of 2002, there was a job conference in Harrisburg – Dave Mankameyer and I, and... We had four in the car. Linc was probably in the car and I think one of the county commissioners. Another county commissioner was in the car. And then, by January 31, 2002, the contract went- it was the low bidder, and then the low bidder was disqualified, and then

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the Canadian firm, ACT, got the bid. But, they started in January of 2002.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And, they promptly hired their own engineers, threw out the AWK proposal and said, "Well, we're going to do it our way." And, DGS didn't know how to handle these crazy guys from Canada. These guys just ate everybody alive. It made life miserable for everybody. So, they hired Gannett Fleming to come in. It was sort of good cop/bad cop because those guys were great.

Avigail Oren: Uh-huh.

Linda Boxx: They want to do the right thing and Jim Cockburn, who was the President of ACT, was just miserable to work for. His foreman, Victor Chasin, was more miserable to work with. They were just arguing, and they would just yell and scream all the time. It was just awful. But, through then, that whole year – they worked on the tunnel and they said, "Uh, we need another \$2 million. You know, prices have gone up. This is what we want to do and we need more money." And so, their low bid went up \$2 million, up another million and a half, up – it kept going up, up, up. And, they threatened – I can remember once – and there was snow on the ground – said, "Well, we'll just leave. That's fine. You don't want to pay us any more money, we'll leave. We're out of here." And, tunnel wasn't done. We'd spent \$5 or \$6 million. And, I'm thinking, like, "Do I drive down the trail," which was snow-covered, getting back to Frostburg and thinking, "I have to go back on my knees, back to Harrisburg, beg for more money, see if I can get another \$2 million released again for the third time or the fourth time." And, I thought, "I can't keep doing this. I just don't have the strength – how do I keep begging to John [Oliver], to take more money out of his budget?" Well, by the time I reached Frostburg, I thought, "Okay, let's do it."

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: Get on the phone tomorrow morning...

[Laughter/Crosstalk]

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- Avigail Oren:** Okay, having a moment of panic.
- Linda Boxx:** Yeah, exactly. Okay, okay. So, we kept getting money released. And, we had a secret weapon or two. So, it was Governor Ridge's administration. I think Rick Geist and Governor Ridge had a nice relationship. And, Rick was probably always promoting our project, but Eileen Barbara Melvin from Somerset County was the Vice-Chairman of the state Republican party at the time. And, Big Savage Tunnel was in her county – it was in her county. And so, I became good friends, and she was a delightful person. And, she was pleased that I was going all out for something in her county and she, in turn, was very willing to – every time she saw the governor – to remind him that he needed to release more money for the Big Savage Tunnel.
- Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** And, the chairman at the time was Christine Jack-Toretta from Indiana County and she and Eileen made a real powerful team. And, I can remember, whether it was Chris or Eileen telling me that they were on a private plane going somewhere with the governor, and she said, "We spent the whole time just telling – you know, [mouth utterances] – you have to support the Big Savage Tunnel. We have to get this trail finished." I think he felt completely exhausted by the time they got to their event. But, they felt that they'd really made great inroads.
- Avigail Oren:** Right, okay.
- Linda Boxx:** We also had, through Jim Linaberger, access to the governor's office because his daughter worked in the governor's office. And, we did not have to meet with Tom Ridge anymore, really – we met with his chief of staff, Mark Holman. And, Mark was just great. But, again, I didn't feel comfortable when I said like, "We need more money. We need more money. Oh, Mark, you know, when I said a month ago that that was it, well, now we need another \$2 million." So, it was really agonizing for me to always have to keep going back for all that money. But, they were okay with it.
- Avigail Oren:** Right. It was in the capital budget, right?

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- Linda Boxx:** Yeah, yeah.
- Avigail Oren:** I just want to clarify – so, Geist puts in the line items, it goes under the DCNR budget, it's then John's call whether to spend it or not, and then the governor has to sign off on it? I'm missing a step between John and DCNR and the governor's office. Why can't John Oliver just say, "Here's the \$10 million."?
- Linda Boxx:** Well, that's a good question. But, I think we had to show the political support for it or we told John that we would do it this way. That's a very good question.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Linda Boxx:** But, we felt we- probably every time we went to the governor's office and said we needed more money released, they would probably check with John, make sure that it was okay.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Linda Boxx:** But, that's a great question. I don't really – that's a nuance I hadn't really thought about. All I know is we had to go to the governor's office...
- Avigail Oren:** That was just a step. Right, okay.
- Linda Boxx:** That was just how to do it.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. Well, we might have to go back to John Oliver and find that one out. So, between 1998 and 2002-ish, when you got started on Big Savage, what other projects are you making sure are- like, how are you keeping the show on the road with the other projects that are going on in Somerset County? Or, are you pretty removed from them at this point?
- Linda Boxx:** Well, okay, so in 1997, '98, we undertook what we called our "master implementation plan." And, that was because Rick Geist said, "Well, you need to have some answers," and so forth.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** But, we needed to know – well no, I'm sorry – we had the master implementation plan by the time we went to see Rick

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Geist. Excuse me, that was wrong. But, we did the master implementation plan because we need to know how much it was going to cost to finish the trail. We could not fundraise if we didn't know what the bottom line was.

Avigail Oren: Is this the big binder?

Linda Boxx: Yes.

Avigail Oren: Yes, okay.

Linda Boxx: So, the meat of it is the one chapter called "Construction Needs."

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: Okay. And so, we had hired Mackin Engineering to do that study. They must have had a blast. They got to go on every inch of the trail – the unbuilt trail – and took pictures, and came up with a number of roughly \$25 million to finish the trail, which was not right.

[Chuckle]

But, I'll tell you, if they had said what it was really going to cost, it would have been overwhelming and we probably would have all...

Avigail Oren: Dead in the water.

Linda Boxx: Well, yes. Run screaming out of the room, saying, "Oh, no!"

[Laughter]

Avigail Oren: "Yeah. We're not taking that on."

Linda Boxx: Yeah. And, that was also a marketing plan, an organization structure – other chapters. But, the big piece was what it was going to cost to construct. So, that took pretty much a year, well, six months anyhow to get that out.

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: And, we had a big release at the Three Rivers Rowing Association.

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- Avigail Oren:** Oh, cool.
- Linda Boxx:** I remember Bob Genter – he still does work for us for the trail – made the presentation and went through flip charts, and big maps, and pointed to things. The bottom line was this roughly \$25 million price tag. And, I think it was a funding strategy. Although, the funding strategy was somewhat fluid because you don't know if you're going to get everything you asked for. You don't know what the ratio of state to federal to private is going to be.
- Avigail Oren:** Right, right. So then, does that plan really set you up to know, "Okay, we're going to do Salisbury Viaduct first, or we're going to do Keystone next." Or, was it...?
- Linda Boxx:** Those decisions needed to be made, really, at the local level.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Linda Boxx:** Let me get my years going here. So, we had the state capital budget money that was being, basically, oriented towards two projects – the Confluence-Fort Hill and the Big Savage Tunnel. We really hadn't talked about our high-priority project. So, we hired Delta Development and first half of 1998, I ran around with LeRoy Kline and his staff. We had meetings with all the trail groups. They were tasked to write letters of support so that we could get something together. He knew that the next ISTEA was going to be re-authorized. Six years had gone by and it was called TEA-21 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.
- Avigail Oren:** Right. But, it's effectively the same thing?
- Linda Boxx:** Yes. It just has a new name. So, TEA-21 was getting ready to be voted on in June of [19]98 and we were just getting started trying to get a line item in that bill.
- Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** So, LeRoy – and, I would say those were the whirl-windiest...
[Laughter]
- ...six months of my life because we needed – not only to all the trail groups – we went to Harrisburg, we met with the

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Southwestern Pennsylvania delegations over and over again. We went to Washington, D.C. and we met with Bud Shuster and his colleague, Ann Eppard. We met with- we went to [Senator Rick] Santorum's office. We went to Congressman [John] Murtha's office, [Bob] Casey's office [then State Auditor General] and presented our booklets. And, you basically have 3 to 5, to 15 minutes to make your pitch and get out of there...

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: ...because the next people are coming. But- or was it April? The bill was passed in June – June of '98. So, in six short months, we had a high priority project line item...

Avigail Oren: Federal bill.

Linda Boxx: ...in a federal bill.

Avigail Oren: And, that was for how much?

Linda Boxx: So, we were all excited because our request in the line item was \$12 million.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And, about a month or a couple weeks beforehand – the bill was out of control and every project across the board...

[Crosstalk]

Avigail Oren: Yeah, got like a 10% cut.

Linda Boxx: ...took a 25% haircut.

Avigail Oren: Oh, wow. Whoof!

Linda Boxx: So, we were down to \$9 million. And, I was like, "Oh, my God – \$9 million." And, the day the bill passed – I can remember, I was driving around Somerset County and that was the day I had my big old analog cell phone – bag phone.

[Laughter/Crosstalk]

And, I can remember talking to Darren Asper who worked for Delta Development. And, he called me to say, "Oh, hey, it looks good for \$6 million." And, I was mad as a hornet. And, I

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said, "Six million? We had \$12 million a month ago, \$9 million yesterday, and now we're down to 6."

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: He said, "Look, this is great." I said, "No, it isn't. I wanted \$12 million." But, then the bill stalled on the floor of the House. And, I'm going, "Oh, okay, six, okay, six!"

[Laughter/Crosstalk]

Avigail Oren: "Zero dollars!"

Linda Boxx: "Please!" And, we were going out there, some event. I can remember being all dressed up and having whatever – CSPAN or CNN on, whatever it was – and the bill passed. [panting] "Oh! We got \$6 million."

Avigail Oren: "Six million, yeah!"

Linda Boxx: You know, I must say, I was still a little grumpy about it because I felt like it was promised to us. But, it was fine. I got over it.

Avigail Oren: Yeah. Right.

Linda Boxx: In that bill also- and I was thinking the best person to really find out, to help us solve this riddle of some of this back money that I don't really know too much about, would be a former PennDOT employee named Dana Accurti, A-C-C-U-R-T-I.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: And, in the transportation bill, discretionary money came to PennDOT and its distribution was governed by this Transportation Enhancement Advisory Committee – TEAC. So, we get the \$6 million, and the TEAC, which was chaired by Rick Geist, gives us 4.3 million extra dollars because it was for a project of statewide significance. And, ours certainly was. But, I don't know – it makes up for not getting the \$12, at least I got \$10.3.

Avigail Oren: Right.

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- Linda Boxx:** And, that was when I know Rick took a lot of negative...
- Avigail Oren:** Heat...
- Linda Boxx:** ...yeah, feedback from others about that. And, I don't think we ever got any more TEAC money, but that was fine because PennDOT money, the TEAC money was hard to spend anyhow, so we were fine not getting any more.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** But, it was great. So, I was validating the benefit of this alliance to our trail groups. The money was coming in. We had \$16 million authorization – state capital budget – and \$10.3 real dollars from the federal government. So, all of a sudden, the groups were feeling pretty good about this alliance. So, you asked about how it was spent. So, that was one of the beautiful things that Delta Development did for us. We had all the projects – what their likely costs were and where the money could come from. They actually helped develop the funding strategy.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Linda Boxx:** And, we would review it at every meeting to see which projects were really ready to go, and did we need to shift some money around because everybody realized – and I tried to make it very clear, “We’re going to get this project done. Your project may not be the first on the list, but it’s going to get done. We have to do the ones that we can get done first, first. And, the ones that are harder will get done later. But, we’re going to get the whole thing done.”
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** And, I think with all this funding coming in, they believed it. They bought into it and felt comfortable that they could wait their turn.
- Avigail Oren:** Right. It’s a good compromise. Yeah. So, this is not a point of friction that you were talking about earlier?
- Linda Boxx:** No, no, no. Oh my gosh, when the money’s rolling in...

[Crosstalk]

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- Avigail Oren:** There was action.
- Linda Boxx:** Right, right, right.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah, so, I'm curious – we talked a lot about fundraising and about strategy – but, you've made so many mentions of being in the car, on the ground, at the site, driving the trail. How hands-on did you feel with the building? Or, did you really feel like you're- the bird's eye view and it's really the counties that are handling everything else?
- Linda Boxx:** Well, with the Regional Trail Corporation, by the time I had gotten onto that board, it was basically done.
- Avigail Oren:** It was done.
- Linda Boxx:** Yeah. The Yough [Youghiogheny] River section did not benefit a dime out of ATA because Teeter Associates, Jim Linaberger and I had already raised all the money to fund that section. And, we just took that expertise that we had gained there and elevated it to the ATA level.
- Avigail Oren:** Got it.
- Linda Boxx:** But, I did interject myself quite often on any number of projects because I wanted to make sure they were done correctly and to a high standard. And, I could interfere the way nobody else could interfere. And, a good example of that is there was not enough money- the Salisbury Viaduct had started to be constructed and there wasn't enough money.
- Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** But, Rivers of Steel – it was Steel Industry Heritage Corp. I think at that point – Augie Carlino and Jeremy Muller, who had served as our first President for that first year... But, I think Jeremy was- no, Jeremy was probably still around. He'd left the area. But, I went to Augie and asked him for his money. He had ISTEA funding that was going to expire because they couldn't build any trail because they didn't have any property, and they were going to lose their funding. And, I asked him if he would consider shifting that money not only to a different county, but it was a different PennDOT engineering district.

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Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And, he said he would do that if we would, next time a funding round came around that they would be supportive of that – and help them get the funding. And, I said, “Yeah, of course. We want your section to get built. It’s just that this is ready to go and this needs your money. And, you’re going to lose your money if you don’t...”

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: So, he, through the PennDOT process, we shifted money from his project to Somerset County and it was really remarkable. And, it was because PennDOT viewed us as a system – as a transportation system. And, that was so important in so many ways. We weren’t just a piecemeal project. We were one transportation system.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And, that’s something that PennDOT can certainly relate to.

Avigail Oren: Yeah, yeah. Much more so than counties, right?

Linda Boxx: Yeah. But, you asked about how detailed I got in.

Avigail Oren: Yes, right.

Linda Boxx: For instance, Keystone Viaduct – this is the kind of living hell I made poor Brett Hollern’s life.

[Chuckle]

So, Keystone Viaduct is this big steel structure and it’s rusting. And, underneath the ballast underneath there is red- orange red – because of the iron depositing on.... And, I said, “Well, you know, when we put a concrete deck on Keystone Viaduct, it’s going to turn red because- so let’s make it red to begin with.” And so, we used pigment from a mine drainage project and dyed the concrete the same color as the ballast underneath the bridge. And so, it’s faded a little bit, but it was sort of this salmon color and it actually was beautiful as it got deeper red, and it blended out, and it was really sort of beautiful. And, that’s the kind of thing that my aesthetic, my art

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history, provided with my chemistry – “So, let’s do this pavement because we know it’s going to turn red.”

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: “Instead of having it look like an accident, let’s have it look like a work of art.”

Avigail Oren: Yeah. No, let’s be intentional about it. Yes, that’s really cool. Because you got a PennDOT and we talked about DCNR already – you were working so closely with government agencies this whole period. I guess I wanted to get a sense from you – in what ways were they your complement? What were they able to do that you couldn’t do that made that working relationship either pleasant or a struggle? Because we had the experience together interviewing Larry [Williamson] and Ed [Deaton]– and at the time, it really struck me how invested they were in your project when they were also working on lots of other projects. But, also, that you seemed to know – their family is their partner’s names – that you clearly had grown to have strong relationships, too, through the work. And so, I was wondering if you could reflect a little bit on what it was like working with government offices and employees.

Linda Boxx: Well, first and foremost, they were real human beings. And, that comes out in those kind of interviews – that we worked together. It was also part of the – well, I’ll say it again – this was a big project.

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: This was a winner. This wasn’t just from little town A to little town B. This is a trail that’s going to connect Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C. It had all the makings of a superstar trail. And, in fact, was named by the Rail-to-Trails Conservancy as its first Hall of Fame inductee, which was a huge honor for us. But, it’s because of what it was that it’s caught everybody’s attention.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

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Linda Boxx: So, a lot of the agency people were wanting it to succeed. They were giving money for it. And, if they had to go to bat publicly or privately to make sure it succeeded, they did. But, at the same time, I paid my dues. I was running back and forth to Harrisburg because I accepted to be on the statewide Greenways Commission and we developed this greenways plan that was, I'll say, maybe a blueprint for DCNR but it was not really anything revolutionary. But, it took up two years of my life running back and forth to Harrisburg. And, I was asked to speak at 100, 200 different conferences, talking about our great trail system, how we were doing it. And, by this time we had started our Trail Town initiative – how we were really trying to promote the economic development access of it.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: So, I was paying my dues and I was becoming an asset to my public partners because they were helping me build trail and I was helping them spread the gospel of what rail-trails should be.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And, I think that's why we developed such a good relationship is because I was always willing to speak to – whether it was a group, or conference of landscape architects that came in, or a DCNR in-service training kind of thing – I mean, whatever it was. I was always willing to participate and work with them, to give them what I could give because they were giving me a tremendous amount of assistance.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm. Yeah, indeed. You brought up trail towns. And, I am realizing that I don't think in any of the interviews that we've talked directly about trail towns. Obviously, the economic development benefits have come up. But, what was the genesis of trail towns and how did it relate to meeting the goals of finishing the GAP?

Linda Boxx: Well, it really related to fulfilling the promise of the GAP.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

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Linda Boxx: That's what I always said. So, to get PennDOT money, you have to testify before- they do the 12-year-plan, the 4-year-plan, the 5, all these different plans. They have these public participation panels in each county where if you want to get on the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission's list of projects to even be eligible for federal funding, you had to be on that list.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: So, we would go periodically, whenever the right time was, and testify about our project just to make sure it was on the list.

Avigail Oren: Got it.

Linda Boxx: So, one of these meetings, early 2000s, Jack Paulik, Sandra Finley, myself, and I think it was Bob Keeler, who was with the Coal & Coke Trail, Regional Trail Corporation chapter. And, it was a Westmoreland County hearing. Afterwards, we went to some restaurant afterwards and we're talking trail building, and so forth. And, Jack just made the casual comment, he said, "You know, we're doing a really good job of building trails, but we're not doing a very good job of telling the communities how to take advantage of these trails." And, I remember turning to him and I said, "Jack, you are right. And, I'm going to do something about it." And so, that's really the moment that Trail Towns was formed. And, if I had been a low-energy person, this could not have happened. And, why I kept taking on these major things that could be a whole career unto itself...

[Chuckle]

Avigail Oren: Yes.

Linda Boxx: Yeah. I did it.

[Laughter]

Got a grant from DCNR for Larry Williamson. And, he absolutely wanted it to be a statewide effort and not just be a program about the Great Allegheny Passage. He said, "This really has to be a model for any trail – all trails – to be able to

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do.” So, I created a statewide committee – really good people. We talked things through. I was using this term “trail towns,” knowing that the Appalachian Trail actually has a column in their magazine called “Trail Towns,” so we weren’t inventing anything, but we were creating a different sort of slant to it. And, it was an economic community development model. And, everybody liked the name. I said, “I don’t want to do what we did with the GAP and have to build something and then name it afterwards.” I said, “If we’re okay with this, let’s just call it ‘Trail Towns.’”

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: So, we developed the manual. It’s still being used.

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: And, it laid out – and it wasn’t for planners – it was written for the elected officials or the business owners who’d be able to understand it. It was very prescriptive. It wasn’t highfalutin and a lot of technical... It was, “Do this. Count how many of these you have.” It was very prescriptive in the way it was laid out. And, it allowed any community to pick it up and to proceed to try to make themselves more friendly to the visitors that were coming in by bike.

Avigail Oren: Right. And, once that was done, was the project done? Or, did you continue to...?

[Crosstalk]

Linda Boxx: So, I did not want to run up the program because we really had our hands full. And, to try to run this – and this was not my area of expertise. It was one thing to manage trail construction because I had really great people. Like, Brett was great with what he was doing and Jack [Paulik] was fantastic. And, there were people who knew what they were doing. So, all I was doing was leading them. There was nobody I would be leading with this trail town initiative. So, I went to the Allegheny Conference. Harold Miller was still there. And, I said, “Okay, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. How can you help us with this trail town thing? We would like to do this.” And, I remember showing them a map and I said, “Here

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are our communities that are all a bike ride away from each other.” And, I said, “Connellsville is the black hole in the whole system. There is no place to stay, and what that’s going to do is it’s going to cut off Pittsburgh from the rest of the trail. Everyone’s going to love biking from D.C. up to Ohio and turning around because they can’t get any further. We have got to help Connellsville to try to get lodging and that’s the most important thing. There are other things – more restaurants, more bike shops, and so forth, but really, the focus has to be around Connellsville. Get that community, really, on a positive, economic development track.”

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: So, there was some foundation people there, too. And, Richard King Mellon and Benedum had been funding the Progress Fund, and they really felt that the Progress Fund and **David Kahley** would be the right place to host this Trail Town program. And, they willingly, eagerly accepted it. Our foundation gave them money to help develop their applications of it, and so forth. We front-ended so they didn’t incur costs.

Commented [AO8]: Can you fill in their org/title in brackets after their name? Kahley President & CEO of The Progress Fund

Avigail Oren: Got it.

Linda Boxx: And, David was able to get funding from DCED for a Main Street regional position. And, that provided, I’ll say, \$100,000 a year for so many years. But, we supplemented that because I realized once we hired Cathy McCollom as our chief, she was going to need help. And, there was one young woman that we interviewed that I just thought was terrific – Amy Camp. And so, we gave extra money to David so he could hire a second person. And, Cathy and Amy were a really good team together. They worked off each other. Cathy was sort of the high flyer and she was great at facilitating meetings. Amy was good at getting the things like...

[Crosstalk]

Avigail Oren: Nuts and bolts.

Linda Boxx: Exactly. Getting things done.

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Avigail Oren: Okay. So, you weren't the puppet master of that. Well, okay, I guess...

Linda Boxx: So, David, basically, did not supervise it.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And, that was a bit of a frustration for me. And, he'd say, "However you want it run, you just run it however you wanted to run it." And so, I worked a lot with Cathy, particularly, and getting things going.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And, she and I were – I remember, I think, yeah, we started to work the gaps in the GAP at that time and Jack Paulik said, "Is Cathy taking you away again?" Like, "You're not supposed to be working with Cathy. You're supposed to working with me. We've got this to do."

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: But, it worked out. We got things started and it took off on its own. But still, it was birthed at the ATA.

Avigail Oren: And, are they still doing statewide work, or...?

Linda Boxx: I honestly don't know what they're doing.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: I honestly don't know.

Avigail Oren: Good. I'm glad. It seems that you have some of your life back. Okay. I'm wondering if we want to shift back and do the end of the Savage Tunnel and then go to the gaps in the GAP.

Linda Boxx: Okay. Well, we- I didn't put a watch on.

Avigail Oren: It is 4:15. Do you want to take a break?

Linda Boxx: Well, let's finish Big Savage Tunnel. And, we'll see how we go. This is fine.

Avigail Oren: Okay. Sounds good to me. So, I think the last thing we were talking about with Big Savage was good cop/bad cop. That

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you had the Canadians threatening and then you had Gannett Fleming...

Linda Boxx: Yeah. And, I think we're probably almost wrapping up with Big Savage because once it got underway, it really was just a matter... So, interesting aspect of it because it was funded through DCNR's budget. Somerset County had to turn over ownership of the tunnel to the State of Pennsylvania and then it was run as a DGS/DCNR project and then when it was completed, it was turned back to Somerset County.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: But, so, we hired Rhody Rhodomoyer to be the project manager. He had just retired from DCNR and he can't do any work directly for DCNR for a whole year, and so this was the perfect- they call it the annuitant year.

Commented [AO9]: Can you confirm if this is correct?

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: So, we hired him and he did a fabulous job, but he was really representing, really, the state on this. They were the client. Somerset County – Brett was involved in, I'm sure, every job meeting because ultimately, he was going to have to take control of it, so he wanted to make sure, I'm sure – just know everything that was going on. But, I went to many, but certainly not all, of the job conferences. It was always- it was like Wild West up there. They had so many buildings up there, two job trailers. It was – I don't know – 20 people, 30 people maybe, working at any given time. And, Rhody talked about the Viking and...

[Chuckle]

Avigail Oren: The seal hunter. Yeah.

Linda Boxx: Yeah, right. So, they were really quite a crew. But, the workers were great. I liked them all but it was, really, the arguments – the blistering arguments, the battles every day over everything that was just so tiring working with them. But, Rhody took the brunt of it.

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

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- Linda Boxx:** I mean, he absolutely did.
- Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** And, they worked for a year and finished up, I think, in the spring and were gone and never came back.
- Avigail Oren:** Then, the hurricane came.
- [Chuckle]
- Linda Boxx:** Yes. So, 2003 we're going to have a big opening and [Hurricane] Isabel came through and closed- you know, we never had that opening. And then, they kept the tunnel closed because we had to build from Big Savage to the state line and from Big Savage to Sand Patch. So, there's two pieces of trail – there was no point of opening the tunnel when you couldn't get to either side of it or those pieces would be under construction.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** So, those were done and, in the meantime, Maryland – who had been not successful in building any trail – Governor [Bob] Ehrlich came in and he made a commitment to get the trail built. And so, in 2004 the first section was opened; 2005, the second section; 2006, the final section – just in time for all the pieces to be done. So, we were connected from McKeesport all the way to Cumberland in 2006, and it was just a remarkable thing.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah, yeah.
- Linda Boxx:** And, had a double celebration then. So, we opened up, had an event for opening Big Savage Tunnel and then had an event in Meyersdale celebrating the connection – finishing in Somerset. And then, in December, had a big event celebrating the connection to the towpath when the Maryland piece was done, so a lot of events in 2006.
- Avigail Oren:** I think that's a great transition – the gaps in the GAP, right, because 2006 – you're sitting there thinking, "All right. The next part is hard, but we could probably get it done in two years with the right support."

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[Laughter/Crosstalk]

Famous last words.

Linda Boxx: Well, actually – so gaps in the GAP. You know, we might go back. We'll do what we can do now, but I'll just get things started. So, really, that started in 2004 because ATA really couldn't do anything because Rivers of Steel had positioned themselves to be the ones to develop the trail. And, we couldn't take it away from them because they said that's what they were going to do. I think the back and forth between lawyers from Rivers of Steel and U.S. Steel about the 1.89-mile coke-gas pipeline...

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: ...going back and forth and they each wanted each other to set and indemnify them and they couldn't come to any conclusion. Finally, Augie Carlino said, "Well, we're out of here. We're not going to do this." And so, that was our opportunity to jump on it. So, "We'll take it," because we're not afraid of liabilities. That's what we do. We build trails on brownfields. And, we know how to build them and we know how to protect our users...

Avigail Oren: Riders. Yeah.

Linda Boxx: This doesn't make us afraid. So, we jumped in and started negotiations with U.S. Steel ourselves. And, Hannah Hardy was- she might have been Hannah Ehrlich at the time, but somewhere along the line she became Hannah Hardy. But, she was in a wonderful position. She worked for the Pennsylvania Environmental Council at the time and was doing water trails. And then, our foundation gave her the 50% match money that she needed for the DCNR money to work on land trails – especially in that corridor between Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. And, she'd already been involved, to some extent I think, with the Steel Valley Trail Council, but now it was part of her job. And then, she'd worked at the city prior to this so it was all sort of a happy family.

Avigail Oren: Right.

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Linda Boxx: She was President of the Regional Trail Corporation. She was my Vice-Chairman, Vice President of ATA and President of Steel Valley Trail Council – all at one time. And so, she and I were inseparable for those several years while things were really churning and coming together. And, she was wonderful because she was just so calm, and level-headed, and loving – everything she did. And, if she said she would do something, it was done, like, the next day.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And so, it's just a delight to work with – and was done well. It was done with a high degree of professionalism and so it was just a delight to work with her. When she left, I tried to position her to become the next President of ATA – and, she got the job with the county. It just broke my heart because I thought of her as my heir apparent.

[Laughter]

Avigail Oren: Yeah. I get it. So then, it's 2004 or into 2005...

Linda Boxx: So, we start the negotiations with U.S. Steel and looked at the pipeline. U.S. Steel wanted to remove those enormous double-stacked pipes – like four feet diameter each one of them.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: It looked like these giant snakes winding itself along the roadside. It was amazing. But, they wanted to do the removal and remediation before they turned it over to us. And, it cost them well over a million dollars. I don't know what their cost was to do all that but they spent a good amount of money. And then, we ended up acquiring it from them for \$550,000.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: So, sometime in 2005... I'm going to check my note numbers here. I've have too many little pieces of paper. Sorry. Well, I can't find it, but I'm going to say it was 2005 – sorry about that. I sat on the board, of course, of this French and Indian War 250.

Commented [AO10]: Do you want to fill in?

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- Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** We were getting ready for – in 2008 – for the **sesquicentennial celebrating** the creation of Pittsburgh. And, it was more of an academic effort to try to get the historical sites working together and getting them visitor-ready to better tell the story of the French and Indian War. And, the Allegheny Conference, Chuck Queenan, and Laura Fisher, Mike Watson was very much behind this. It was a very good group led by Chuck to-how do we really tell the important story of what this region meant to the development – the war that made America, basically. So, that was going along and then the Allegheny Conference – unbeknownst to me – was looking for signature projects to help celebrate Pittsburgh 250. And, I got a call – and I believe it was from Laura Fisher – that basically said, “Oh, we’ve chosen finishing the Great Allegheny Passage as one of our signature projects to help celebrate Pittsburgh – the Pittsburgh 250.”
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** And, I was like, “Holy cow!”
- Avigail Oren:** Right?
- [Laughter]
- Linda Boxx:** I said, “Oh, thank you because we need help.” Because we, of course, had finished up to McKeesport, but we had this horrible section because there was no rail left.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** And, just an aside – this whole vision thing – I absolutely never claimed, no one could ever say that I had the vision for it. But, it came upon – I have to say – somewhat incrementally because the Western Maryland was abandoned in the early [19]70s.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** So, there couldn’t have been – and so you only had Connellsville to Cumberland that we’re working with. It was another 20 years until the P&LE [Pittsburgh and Lake Erie

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Railroad] was abandoned. So, at that point then, in the [19]90s, then there was this possibility to create the Pittsburgh to D.C. trail and that's when it really, really – the groundswell really started.

Avigail Oren: Right. Mm-hmm.

Linda Boxx: So, the Western Maryland pieces, the Ohio State Park, and Somerset county pieces were underway because that rail line was available.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And then, 20 years later – you know, 10 years in Somerset – the P&LE was available. I just want to make that clear that there really couldn't been a vision for the whole trail in the [19]70s because there wasn't...

[Crosstalk]

Avigail Oren: Logistics, right, right.

Linda Boxx: Yeah, exactly. So, two big acquisitions – the Western Maryland and the P&LE got us from Cumberland to McKeesport. And, there was a little piece down in Pittsburgh along the Eliza Furnace Trail.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And, we had helped also create a funding to help get the Hot Metal Bridge constructed. But, there was no route; there was no corridor. And, we didn't know how we were going to get from Point A – being McKeesport – to the end of Sandcastle.

Avigail Oren: Right, right.

Linda Boxx: Nine-ish miles and – except for the coke-gas pipeline possibility – there was no other piece of real estate that we could build trail on.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: So, with Pittsburgh 250 saying, "Hey, we'll get this done for you," was a godsend. We could not have done it without Pittsburgh 250.

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Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: It entailed acquiring about 30 other pieces of property. Up to this point, for all those miles we had two, essentially.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And, the Conference certainly did not understand how complicated and the challenges – what challenges we were facing. They were just saying like, “Oh, good. Only nine miles left. No, that’s great. That should be easy.”

[Chuckle]

Avigail Oren: Yeah. Famous last words, right?

Linda Boxx: Yeah. In 2005 finishing the Great Allegheny Passage was named as a legacy project for the Pittsburgh 250 Celebration. Work started in earnest in 2006. And instead of going to Harrisburg twice a week, I was going to Pittsburgh four times a week.

Avigail Oren: Right, right. And, this is also when Jack [Paulik] is hired.

Linda Boxx: Jack was hired in August of 2006. We had started the acquisition of the coke-gas pipeline but he was on board by the time we completed that acquisition on April 26, 2007.

Linda Boxx: But, I can remember, we had offered the position to Brett. Brett wanted to leave Somerset County. I think his wife was getting transferred or some reason it was just perfect timing for him.

Avigail Oren: Yes.

Linda Boxx: And so, we offered the job of finishing the gaps in the GAP to Brett and he was going to take it and then he stepped aside and said, “No, it’s just not going to work out for me.”

Avigail Oren: Yeah. I think he has no regrets.

[Laughter]

Linda Boxx: I’m sure. So, at a Regional Trail Corporation Board meeting – and, they were our fiduciary.

Commented [AO11]: Do you want to fill in? yes, thanks!

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- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** And so, everything I told the ATA board, I told the Regional Trail Corporation board.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** I mentioned that Brett Hollern was not going to take the position of the circuit rider – I think is what it was – to help the gaps in the GAP. And, I was sitting beside Jack and Jack gave me a nudge and he said, “Hey, I’ll help you. I’ll take that. I’ll do that job.” And so, I said, “Oh, okay.”
- [Chuckle]
- Avigail Oren:** Terrific.
- Linda Boxx:** Terrific. Yeah.
- Avigail Oren:** Also, not knowing what he was getting into.
- Linda Boxx:** Yeah. Well, he didn’t have a clue, which was good. And, just as we couldn’t have done it without the Conference, we couldn’t have done that section without Jack.
- Avigail Oren:** Correct.
- Linda Boxx:** Jack’s experience and expertise, his low-key way of doing things and bringing people to the table and quietly demanding that they stay on schedule and just do what they’re supposed to do was just invaluable.
- Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** And, he, like I, wanted a high-end product.
- Avigail Oren:** Yes.
- Linda Boxx:** He wasn’t going to settle for something that was not befitting the rest of the Great Allegheny Passage. We were not going to limp into Pittsburgh, as I said.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** I wanted a good ending to this whole trail system.

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- Avigail Oren:** Right. Or, bomb out before you even get on the – that's another direction, right?
- Linda Boxx:** Right.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah. And so, tell me a little bit about 2008 and the **sesquicentennial** comes around and...
- Linda Boxx:** Well, so the Conference had all these big plans that we'd be completely done by 2008.
- Avigail Oren:** What?
- [Chuckle]
- Linda Boxx:** And, we would go to meetings and they would say, "Well, what's the progress? What's the progress?" And, I was doing very well raising money – and that was a godsend, too. We had a lot of private support which allowed us to be fast – like the Riverton Bridge was done – \$1 million from COLCOM and \$1 million from the state – and we got the pieces done. If we'd tried to use federal money...
- Avigail Oren:** You would still be... right, yeah.
- Linda Boxx:** Exactly. And, they had all these big plans of companies donating time and having this day of caring that all these contractors go out and build so much trail and it all gets done instantaneously. But, you know, we didn't own the land, so we couldn't do anything.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** And, the companies were not going to- that section cost us, you know, whatever, \$11 million. I mean, that was real money.
- Avigail Oren:** Oh, yeah.
- Linda Boxx:** They weren't going to donate \$11 million worth of goods and services. So, what we did get – and it was a wonderful thing – we had a great relationship with Cliff Rowe and Tom Carey at PJ Dick Trumbull/Lindy – the paving.
- Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** And, they, basically, waived their profit margin.

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- Avigail Oren:** Oh, wow.
- Linda Boxx:** So, everything we did, they just billed us at cost.
- Avigail Oren:** Wow.
- Linda Boxx:** So, that was their big contribution for the Pittsburgh 250, and it was tremendous. But, we paid them.
- Avigail Oren:** Right, right.
- Linda Boxx:** But, they just didn't make any money. There was no profit for their shareholders or for their family, or whatever.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** But, they were doing other work, too.
- Avigail Oren:** So, I feel like we have the story of Sandcastle and the flyover bridges from a couple of different people. So, I'm thinking, unless there is a particular story that you want to tell about specific gaps in the GAP, I think we could just turn to a little bit of conversation about the finishing and how you feel looking back over those 20 years of work.
- Linda Boxx:** Well, it's the most remarkable moment of my life when- because we had biked from D.C. up to Pittsburgh, spent the night in the Waterfront, and that morning I was removing graffiti from a stop sign or one of the signs. It was right there. Luckily, there was a **Lowes nearby.**
- [Laughter]
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah.
- Linda Boxx:** Ruining my nail polish to try to get obscenities off.
- Avigail Oren:** The Linda Boxx story of all Linda Boxx stories.
- [Laughter]
- Linda Boxx:** And so, I'm buzzing around and trying to get stuff done, just saying hi to people, and both my boys are there. It was so nice. So, finally, we get on stage and I look out in the crowd and it's like a thousand people...

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- Avigail Oren:** What?
- Linda Boxx:** ...and I looked and I practically teared up and I was like, "Oh, my God," it was just a sea of people.
- Avigail Oren:** At the Point?
- Linda Boxx:** No, no, no. This is at Sandcastle.
- [Crosstalk]
- Avigail Oren:** Still at Sandcastle. Okay. Took the ride in, okay.
- Linda Boxx:** Because we had our big event there.
- Avigail Oren:** I see. Okay.
- Linda Boxx:** Because there wasn't room for everybody...
- Avigail Oren:** Arts Festival.
- Linda Boxx:** ...the Arts Festival is going on. So, we had an event at the Point, but we couldn't have this big event.
- Avigail Oren:** Got it.
- Linda Boxx:** And, we had speakers, and so forth, all that good stuff.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. I don't think I knew that. I thought it all happened at the Point.
- Linda Boxx:** Yeah. No, no. So, we had this event there and the politicians – all the mayors – said things. And, it was just a nice – everyone recognized what a wonderful asset the trail was. But, I just remember that moment of jumping up on stage and going, [gasp]
- Avigail Oren:** Oh, my gosh.
- Linda Boxx:** Everybody showed up. It was just unbelievable. And, it was a nice hot day – sunny day – and just the enthusiasm and energy and I remember the Conference had hired a photographer and they were videotaping people coming across the Hot Metal Bridge. And, you know, I was the furthest away from my bike because I was up on stage, and so I worked my way through the crowd. I was in the tail end of

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getting to the Point. Everyone was biking. And, a lot of people didn't stay for the second event at the Point. But, we had a smaller event and probably, I'll say, our thousand probably dwindled down to 100 or maybe 200 – stuck around for the event that we had on the stage at the Point. And, had Kevin Brandt representing the C&O Canal National Historical Park. We asked Andy Masich [President and CEO, Senator John Heinz History Center] because we thought it was a very historic place, and he certainly had a role to talk about Fort Pitt, and so forth. Jim Rohr, the PNC CEO, was the master of ceremonies, I believe. And, he was so supportive – and joyously supportive – the whole time. I mean, PNC never gave us any money, but they gave us so much momentum in terms of making sure that the project got done. He was, at some point, maybe then, chairman of the Allegheny Conference, so it was part of his role there.

[Crosstalk]

Avigail Oren: It wasn't PNC, necessarily, but he brought PNC to bear through the...

Linda Boxx: Yes. And, they did their own relay. They did a 24-hour relay.

Avigail Oren: Cool.

Linda Boxx: Yeah. And so, there was a PNC team that relayed the whole way and then our trail people that went side-by-side with them. So, that was a pretty remarkable thing.

Avigail Oren: Cool.

Linda Boxx: And so, people were standing there who'd been up all night biking.

[Laughter]

Avigail Oren: Right, yeah.

Linda Boxx: So, yeah, the day was just great and I just always laughed because when I see Jim Rohr, he always remembers that. So, we had a big facsimile of the medallion that we put at the Point commemorating, in a very small way, the Western Terminus of the Great Allegheny Passage, but in a larger way what the

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Point meant. And, it tied into the interpretive themes of Point State Park and it was really for all visitors to the park, not just the Terminus of the Great Allegheny Passage. And, we paid for it, we helped design it. Landesberg was the contractor and they did a beautiful job. But, I remember, I think if we wanted to put Western Terminus of the Great Allegheny Passenger in five-foot letters, the park would have let us but this sort of the place needed the respect. It's so, a thousand times, a million times bigger than just the end of the trail. It's...

Avigail Oren: It's the Point.

Linda Boxx: It's the Point. Yeah.

[Chuckle]

So, our piece is maybe four-inch diameter survey marker in this big seven-foot diameter tribute. But, we had a big mock-up of the medallion. And so, I think Kevin and Jim Rohr standing on one side, and Andy Masich and I are standing on the other side, and we're flipping over the drape that was covering it up. And, Jim Rohr tells the story how Andy almost pushed me off the stage so he could be the one...

[Laughter]

But, the truth of the matter was he was way taller than I was and I couldn't really reach up over.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: But, I like Jim Rohr's take on it because it just made me laugh. And, the fact that he saw that whole dynamic happening, which was funny. But, it was just a celebratory day. We weren't really finished because you could really get to Smithfield Street and then the piece- the ramp down to the Mon Wharf wasn't done, and it's still not done – the connector from the Mon Wharf to Point State Park is still not done. So, there'll probably be another celebration but as John Oliver said, "You can't have too many ribbon-cuttings or groundbreakings. Just keep having them. Doesn't matter. Just keep celebrating."

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Avigail Oren: It's a very big lesson that I've learned from all of these interviews. Thank everyone, lots of balloon arches. And so, then what? All of a sudden, you had a lot of free time?

Linda Boxx: Well, no, not exactly.

[Laughter]

So, I stayed on as President until the end of 2013. There was still a lot of work to do. We had grants to close out, we had an RACP grant that was a bear to close out. There was all kinds of stuff. We were working on that for another a whole year until that was all finished because we had to jump through any number of hoops, go through an audit until we got that money back. So, there was still a lot of...

Commented [AO12]: Can you confirm this is in/correct?
RACP

Avigail Oren: Paperwork.

Linda Boxx: Exactly.

Avigail Oren: So, I think that's something important to bring up because I think if you're not someone who's ever built anything, you think, "All right, the structure is there, the crew has left, now it's done." But, in reality, oftentimes these things aren't totally paid for or there's still clean-up to do.

Linda Boxx: Right. Well, everything was paid for but we had to- whether it was private funding or public funding, we had to do the proper paperwork to close the grant out.

Avigail Oren: Right. Sorry, I shouldn't have said paid for it, but it's not...

Linda Boxx: Right. It's not finished.

Avigail Oren: It's not finished.

Linda Boxx: Yeah, we don't just write a check and walk away...

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: ...like you would hire someone to re-do your roof.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: But, we also, then, in [20]15 – I think it was – did the Pinkerton Tunnel. So, when we got all the reimbursement money back,

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we now were flush with cash again and we directed that to the Pinkerton Tunnel. So, that was another project that Jack and Brett worked on together. And, I was also interjecting myself into it, as well, because it was sort of interesting – I had brought the first team to the table to take a look at it. And, it was my relationship with Paul Lewis, of Gannett Fleming – they're the ones who actually did the design/build for us.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: So, I was involved in that pretty substantially. So, that was going on.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: And then, after that, I still worked on the trail guidebook. We didn't even talk about that. That's another couple of hours. But through that, we were raising money for projects on the Great Allegheny Passage and the C&O. And, one of the things we wanted to do was get the towpath up to speed. And, again, John Oliver, okay, "Let's have lunch, Linda." "Okay." And, he and his wife had taken a trip – they loved it. But, he's yelling at me. He'd say like, "But, the towpath is in terrible condition. You need to do something about this. It's terrible. It was awful. It was muddy, it was rutty, it was terrible." I go, "John."

[Laughter]

Avigail Oren: You live in Maryland.

Linda Boxx: I said, "It belongs to the National Parks Service." I said, "You own it as much as I do." And, he said, "Well, you need to do something about it." So, "Okay, John, you tell me what to do and I guess I'll do it."

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: It's just the nature of the whole relationship. And so, we took money from the trail guide, went to the National Park Service and Kevin Brandt finally – just hit him at the right moment – was interested because he presented these ruts, and mud,

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and roots presented a safety hazard. And so, we did a safety assessment.

Avigail Oren: Right, okay.

Linda Boxx: And so, I worked out a framework of what it might be. Jack was always good to add his expertise, and then the engineering company we hired – Senate Engineering – added their refinements. So, we came up with a methodology with which to assess the towpath. And, we did a week-long tour. We had two bikes and a car. I was mostly behind the wheel of the car, and Matt Pitsch and Jack riding side-by-side. But, sometimes Matt would drive the car and I would ride his bike, and so forth. But, Jack and I had already gone out and done up the section near Paw Paw tunnel. It was going to be really hard to do all of the miles if we only had a week. And then, we went back again and did 22 – from Mile 22 – down to Georgetown in a separate assessment.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Linda Boxx: So, we had the whole trail covered. And, looked at maps, cranked the numbers, and came up with an amazing report. If you could have gotten an engineering company to do the quality of work that we did, it would have been easily a quarter-million dollars, if not more.

Avigail Oren: Yeah. Right.

Linda Boxx: Because you have to know what you're doing to do this. You couldn't just say, "Well, I need to go out and assess the towpath."

Avigail Oren: Right. And, was this in 2016?

Linda Boxx: '16 – I think it was released... One thing I didn't say, there's these moments that were very important and I did not mention in 1999, Mary Shaw and Roy Weil who were sort of like godparents for all trails, insisted that I come with them on the inaugural Yockatomac Trek, which was a self-supported bicycle ride starting in D.C. and heading to Pittsburgh. And, I didn't want to do it – take off a week away from my little family.

[Chuckle]

Commented [AO13]: Last name? Pitsch

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- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** And, they insisted, and I did it. And, it was life-changing because seeing the towpath – first of all, I really hadn't – and knitting this whole trail together – we had to jump over sections...
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** ...but, biking the whole thing – I understood what I was working for. I understood what I was doing in a way that I couldn't have done just looking at maps and listening to what this tunnel might cost and what that bridge might cost.
- Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.
- Linda Boxx:** And, it just gave me this reverent appreciation for the sacred mission that we were on to pull this trail together and make it as good as it could be.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah. Well, I mean, I think that- I think it's a good segue into it concluding, which is how you... Do you see the trail as part of your legacy or where does the trail fit into- when you look back on your adulthood and your career, where do you see it fitting?
- Linda Boxx:** Well, it's certainly one of the major accomplishments. I spent an enormous amount of time. There was no other project... I did plenty of other projects, but there was no other project that I spent the kind of intense time, dedication, focus on this.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Linda Boxx:** And, too, for my legacy, but also for the foundation's legacy, it was something that I think Kay McKenna would be very proud of. My father died after the first meeting of the ATA, The Spine Line Trail Association. So, I was sorry he was never able to even see it begin. And, my mother passed away in [20]11, so she knew it was coming along. She'd go like, "Are you still working on that trail? Really? Aren't you done yet?"

[Laughter]

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But, I think for a foundation to have allowed me – which is what they did anyway – underwrote the expenses of ATA, underwrote all of my travel expenses – which were significant...

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Linda Boxx: ...all those conferences I went to – ATA wasn't paying for it. The Katherine McKenna Foundation was paying for it.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: And so, it was really the foundation's generosity in allowing me to do what I was doing. I was the chairman, but I needed my board to be supportive of this, too.

Avigail Oren: Right, right.

Linda Boxx: So, absolutely, it's something I'm immeasurably proud of and my boys are proud of it, too. Nathan has a job here in Pittsburgh. And, when he started working, "Oh, you're Linda Boxx's son."

[Laughter]

"You know Linda Boxx?" He heard of her. "Well, I like." So, it's given him like, "Oh, yeah, she's my mom."

[Laughter]

Yeah, yeah.

Avigail Oren: Love her!

Linda Boxx: Yeah, yeah. In passing, yeah.

Avigail Oren: That's so cute. Do you think that this could have gotten done without that support?

Linda Boxx: I really don't. It was a unique combination of my family's willingness to release me into this project. The fact that I worked for a foundation that there were many times I thought, "Well, I'm going to gamble on this. We're going to go forward on this but if it doesn't work, I'll just throw myself on the mercy of my trustees and see if they'll fund it." And, that never had to

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happen but it gave me the courage to do some really crazy things that a normal person would not have done.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Linda Boxx: I went out on a limb many, many, many times. I was aggressive enough without being, hopefully, overbearing, certainly enthusiastic about the project all the time. All that combination of whatever qualities I have – bringing it to the table – the relationships I had, both in Harrisburg and, to some extent, it was the foundation community. Although, I didn't really know the foundation community well before I started. I knew the Richard King Mellon Foundation folks because we shared a lot of those same granting priorities, but the rest of them, they were new to me. And, I met them and built relationships.

Avigail Oren: Right, yeah. There's a little bit of a secret sauce element to, you know, what you brought. Well, I think we should wrap it up here. All right, I'm going to turn off the recording.

[End 2:56:06.0]

jvh-t/cr-p

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