Interview with Scott Anfinson

Interviewed by Linda Mack

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Minneapolis Riverfront Redevelopment Oral History Project

Scott Anfinson - SA
Linda Mack - LM

**LM:** It is November 25, 2008 and I’m at the Fort Snelling Historic Site with Scott Anfinson who is now state archaeologist. But for a long time you were with MHS [Minnesota Historical Society, in the State Historic Preservation Office] with . . .?

**SA:** I started in October 1975 and was hired to be the municipal county highway archaeologist for Minnesota. I did that job from October 1975 to May 1990. In May 1990, I moved over to become the SHPO [State Historic Preservation Office] archaeologist, the first full time archeologist for the State Historic Preservation Office. I did that job until January 2006 when I took the state archaeologist job.

**LM:** When did your relationship or interest or research with the Mississippi River central riverfront begin?

**SA:** You’d think it would have begun earlier from the very fact that . . . I grew up in western Minnesota in a little town named Benson. But I went to the University of Minnesota right away, and there it is, sitting right there on the riverfront. And, you know, Linda, I don’t ever remember . . . I remember taking the 16A bus and going downtown to Dayton’s and things like that, but I never went over to the riverfront when I was a student. I had no need to go over there. A little later, I remember going over there when I sort of discovered Fuji-Ya as a restaurant.

**LM:** [Chuckles]

**SA:** I would occasionally take a date over there, take them to Fuji-Ya and really impress them. I’d take them downstairs and show them the teppanyaki style and they would really be dazzled by that. But it’s like my eyes were blind to everything else over there. The history, I really wasn’t interested in.
What makes it all the more ironic is that my mother [Pat Roth] graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1945, just as the war ended. And she went out to the airport because one of my uncles was flying in. She hadn’t met my dad yet. He had been in the Air Force. One of her sisters was married to this really nice guy who’d been in the Air Force, too. He flew in to the Minneapolis airport and needed a ride from the airport downtown, so my mother went to pick him up. In the car on the way back, he said, “What would you like to do with your life now that you’ve just graduated from the University of Minnesota?” It was the summer of 1945. She said, “I’d love to work for Betty Crocker.” He said, “Well, why don’t you?” She said, “Oh, I’d never get my foot in the door. That’s so hard to get in there.” He asked, “Where are they headquartered?” She said, “Oh, right downtown Minneapolis.”

So he took her right over to General Mills and they stopped there. He grabbed her by the hand and pulled her. They got in the elevator and they went up and they went right . . . He said, “Who’s in charge of Betty Crocker?” There was this woman executive there and her name was Marjorie Child Husted. Very fancy dress . . . she always had these big hats. Mom said she’d seen her a couple times because my mother had gone to the University of Minnesota at the Saint Paul campus and was one of the graduates of the Goldstein sisters that ran what are now the Goldstein Galleries over there. She wasn’t just a home economist; she really sort of knew what she was doing. My uncle had his uniform on. He brushed right past the secretary and blew right into this woman’s office. And I guess this woman was charmed by a young man in uniform.

LM: [Chuckles]

SA: He introduced my mother and said, “She’d like a job here,” and he walked out and the door shut. This woman just changed her demeanor and looked at my mother and said, “All right, young lady. You’ve got one minute to justify your being here.” So she talked to her. The woman said, “You’re hired.” For the next couple years, my mother was one of the key people at Betty Crocker and helped develop the early cake mixes.

Then she met my dad and they got married. They lived over at the University of Minnesota while my dad finished his degree there in English. Dad wanted to move back to our hometown and start a business or do something out there in the late 1940s. So Mom had to leave her job at Betty Crocker, which she loved. There was a big article in the *Star Tribune*, which I have a clipping of, talking about her and showing her picture. I remember the line. It says, “But Benson is the home for the Anfinsons.” No matter how much she loved that job, she just knew she had to go back to Benson. She raised six kids out in western Minnesota and was a dietician at most of the local hospitals out there: Benson, Morris, all over.

So here’s my mother, one of the early people who knows a lot of the lore about General Mills and Betty Crocker. When I was a little boy, she had a cookbook, and it’s the first *Betty Crocker Picture Cookbook*. She had a blue-covered copy and all the other copies I’ve ever seen are red-covered. One day I asked her, “Why is yours blue?” She said, “Staff got blue and everybody else got red.” It’s the first cookbook, and in that cookbook
are scattered her family recipes, because she was one of the staff. The snickerdoodle recipe is my great grandmother’s recipe.

**LM:** Wow, you are historic. [Chuckles]

**SA:** She’s known now nationally as the “Snickerdoodle Lady.” She still gets phone calls from people across the nation asking her about snickerdoodles. In the very beginning of the book—it’s kind of cute—there are all these artist’s drawings, these cartoons, of the Betty Crocker kitchens and the test kitchens, and she said she remembers the day the artist came. She said, “That’s me in the pink-striped dress.” There are these cartoon characters, and she’s got the pink-striped dress. She said, “That’s me.”

**LM:** Oh, how fun.

**SA:** It’s kind of fun. So here it is: I go to the university, which is a hop, skip, and a jump away and my mother worked downtown, because the test kitchens were actually in their main headquarters downtown, not at the A-Mill, as a lot of people think. But I never thought much about it. Then in 1981 when I was municipal county highway archaeologist, what lands on my desk but . . . There was a lot of federal funding coming into Minnesota at that time for highways associated with the Great River Road Program.

**LM:** Yes.

**SA:** The early planning for West River Parkway was getting Great River Road money, federal money, so it had to be reviewed to the federal review processes for historic preservation. Since that was a city road and it was federal funding, it landed on my desk. Well, I was a prehistoric archaeologist and had done all my work in southwestern Minnesota and got my master’s from Nebraska. I was a Plains archaeologist, prehistoric Indian archaeologist. All of a sudden, I have this urban archaeology project. I’ll tell you, I was sort of baffled by it. My first annual report that talks about it is just very, very . . . it just listed the project, didn’t anticipate it at all. In this 1981 annual report, I just list West River Parkway and give the state project number. I just basically say, “Detailed plans needed in Saint Anthony Falls Historic District.” That’s all I say.

**LM:** [Chuckles]

**SA:** Well, if you start looking at my subsequent annual reports . . . you can even see the covers are dominated by photographs of Saint Anthony Falls. And then I started really getting into the research. I think my wife almost divorced me during that time, because I probably spent more time at the Minneapolis Public Library than I did at home. It was very handy. I lived in north Minneapolis right next to Charlie Nelson, the historical architect for the State Historic Preservation Office.

**LM:** Oh.
SA: Charlie had got me a gorgeous old home there, so that, too, was very close to the riverfront. So there I am in 1981 with this plan with a hundred other plans on my desk, and I don’t think much of it. Then I started doing a little research on it in the winter of 1982, and I went, “Oh, my god!” Here I thought this was going to be no problem because it’s in the middle of Minneapolis, so all the sites have to be destroyed. It’s like a giant boot kicked me in the brain one night and said, “Minneapolis is a big archaeological site.” I started realizing, oh oh, I’m in trouble when I started doing the research and realized there, literally, could be a hundred archaeological sites hit by West River Parkway.

I remember just going to Dennis Gimmestad. I was the county highway archaeologist then and Dennis was over at SHPO. I said, “Dennis, I’m going to need some help with this. Who do I go to for help?” He said, “Two people. Go talk to Lucy Kane.” She still had an office at 690 Cedar Avenue at the Historical Society. He said, “Read her book and then go talk to her. Number two . . .” He gave me a copy of *Saint Anthony Falls Rediscovered*, which had been done by the Minneapolis Riverfront Development Coordination Board.

LM: Right.

SA: Jeff Hess had written this. He was a Minneapolis private contract historian, and he used to be with the Historical Society. He said, “Talk to Lucy and Jeff. If they can’t introduce you to the riverfront, no one can.” So I went over, and I still remember the day I went and talked to Lucy Kane in her office. I just sat and talked to her for a couple hours. She was very nice to me. I was just almost in fear of her because she was sort of the historian at MHS at the time, still. She gave me a lot of good insights of the history and gave me some references and where to go start finding references.

Then I called up Jeff Hess. I’d never met Jeff before. He said, “Why don’t you come downtown? I’ll take you for a tour.” He and I, on a cold, spring day, walked around the whole riverfront. He showed me what was what over there. He gave me his interpretations of what needed to be done.

Just as ten years later, I got the shipwreck project and knew nothing about shipwrecks, I had some wonderful help from people that really held me by the hand until I knew what I was doing. It was the same with the riverfront. It was Jeff Hess and Lucy Kane and then somewhat Bob Frame. As I got into the history of the milling district itself, Bob Frame, another former MHS staffer, was writing his dissertation on the Washburn milling complex and milling in Minnesota. I started talking to Bob, too. So between Jeff and Lucy and Bob, I couldn’t have had better help starting out over there. So that’s how I got started in the riverfront. Little did I know that a time would come when I would be considered the expert on the riverfront district.

LM: [Chuckles] That’s true.
SA: I had no intention of doing that. I wanted to get this project over with and get back to my Indian sites. It was as much a surprise to me as anybody. I was in the middle of my dissertation at the University of Minnesota at that time. I was writing on the pre-history of southwestern Minnesota. Dr. Gibbon over there, my advisor, had seen how I’d been sort of sucked into this black hole of the history of Minneapolis riverfront. He finally just said to me one day, “You know, you’re really distracted by this riverfront stuff. Why don’t you just switch topics and write your dissertation on the riverfront and not do it on southwestern Minnesota?” I said, “No, I’ve dug some sites down there. I’ve done a lot of research. I’ve got to do it on that. I’ll deal with the riverfront on my own.” It was a black, black hole of history. I loved doing it and I did a lot of it, but I had no anticipation of how deeply I would get involved in the history of the riverfront.

LM: So how pervasive are the archaeological sites in that central riverfront area?

SA: I had to start learning something, too, about urban archaeology. I knew something about historic archaeology, because I had actually, between my BA and my master’s, worked part of the summer doing underwater archaeology with Doug Birk when they were doing that Voices from the Rapids Project on the fur trade archaeology and the rapids. I’d gone up one summer and camped way back out in the woods and worked on this underwater site at Fort Charlotte at the other end of Grand Portage. So I knew something about fur trade archaeology.

I went to Nebraska to grad school the next year. Of course, they’d heard that I’d done this fur trade archaeology. I got down there and I walked into the lab and noticed all these boxes with my name on them, you know, and I thought, what are these? Well, the University of Nebraska had dug an historical site down by Saint Louis a couple of years before that, and they didn’t have an historic archaeologist, so they thought I was going to be the historic archaeologist. So I had to analyze all this stuff in all those boxes from some dig I’d never visited or anything, just because they knew I’d done some fur trade archaeology.

Of course, I would always run into little rural mills or little historic sites when I was doing my county highway surveys. It wasn’t just Indian archaeology, but dealing in an urban area in Minneapolis, to deal with that dense pack . . . The first thing I read was a book on urban archaeology. And the first sentence in the book is: The first thing you have to understand is that the city is the site.

LM: Hmmm.

SA: You can’t really split the sites out and say, “This mill is one site. This depot is another and this is another.” You have to think of the city as a site. Of course, when we give out our site numbers, we can’t do that, because we’ve got to talk about excavations in particular locations. In the end, there probably were, literally, a hundred loci along the riverfront that I could maybe give individual site numbers to. But my job as county highway and city highway archaeologist was to avoid impacts to any of those sites that
were important. What we ended up doing . . . there are some peculiar bends today in West River Parkway because the sites were too important to destroy.

LM: Such as where?

SA: Underneath the Hennepin Avenue Bridge. That bend was there before the new bridge was built. In the mill district, the original plan was to cut down to the riverfront sooner. And it would have gone right where the canal gates are, where now there’s a marker saying, “These are the water power gates.” I just basically remember saying, “If I have to pick two sites along the riverfront that the road is going to harm, ones that we should save, it’s the foundations of the first Hennepin Avenue Bridge. Because that was the first bridge ever built across the Mississippi River in 1854; the first one ever.” I said, “How much more satisfying would it be to have a plaque that reads, “Here are the remains of the first bridge built across the river.”” Rather than a plaque like you see in other places, “This is the site of the first bridge.” That wasn’t satisfying.

In the mill district, I said, “If there was an historic site that had more to do with Minnesota and Minneapolis’ economy than those water power gates, I don’t know what it is.” The lifeblood of the mill district was the water pouring through those gates, which had been developed very differently than the east side, which is sort of a hodgepodge of development and it had no big power canal. That’s why Minneapolis has the name Minneapolis, because of that power canal. The Saint Anthony side got a fifteen-year jump on settlement over Minneapolis, but why is it Minneapolis and not Saint Anthony when they had the original jump on the settlement? Well, the reason is that water power canal. I just said, “You’ve got to save the gates. You’ve got to save the ruins of the first bridge.” Bob Mattson, who was sort of running West River Parkway at that time, agreed. One’s a little S curve where you go around where Fuji-Ya Restaurant used to be and the other one is this little bend underneath the Hennepin Avenue Bridge. Now, of course, we have First Bridge Park over there that shows you the remains of the first bridge, and they’re excavated so people can see.

LM: Yes.

SA: Of course, in the mill district, they have that interpretive center. There still is a hope someday that those gates will be . . . We excavated them during the West River Parkway testing, but we covered them up again. There are just huge, massive [unclear] arch gates down there that are sitting there still underneath the ground that could be exposed. It would be wonderful for interpretation. So, you know, even though there might have been a hundred sites being hit . . . We did manage to save a couple, and we were able to avoid impacts to a couple more. It did blast through a number of the sites down there, but gave us an opportunity to do some archaeology, too. So that was good.

LM: Yes.

SA: In 1981, I get the plans on my desk. In 1982, I do my detailed literature search and have conversations with Jeff Hess and Lucille Kane. 1983 comes along, and basically I
had just told the Park Board, “The only way to do this is to really get an archaeological . . . I could tell you from the literature search what could be there, but we don’t know what is there anymore.” So they hired the Minnesota Historical Society Archaeology Department, under Bob Clouse, to go down there and to excavate and do a survey. My wife [Patricia Schissle-Anfinson], who had been a graduate of the University of Minnesota in archaeology, actually got hired by that survey, by the Archaeology Department.

LM: Oh, wow.

SA: There was no influence by me; she just applied for the job and got it. So it was kind of fun. There was my wife working doing the archaeology and I would kind of go out to Nobles County and do one of my road projects, come back, and buzz down to the riverfront and check on them. So I was sort of the overseer of everything, but that actual digging was done by the Historical Society—which I was part of, too. I felt part of it, but I didn’t have to get my hands dirty much on the riverfront with the digging of it. It was MHS Archaeology Department doing that. That started in 1983. They did the survey of West River Parkway. By then, I was totally invested in the riverfront.

I remember getting a call from probably Charlie Nelson or somebody, saying, “The Crown Mill is burning.” There were only five big mills left on the riverfront out of the original twenty-five big ones that had been down there, and the Crown was one of them. In a lot of ways, it was really nicely preserved, and had that mansard roof that had been replaced earlier. It originally had been a really neat looking mill. It had the big plaque on the west side. The Crown Mill was burning. I rushed down there, my wife and I, and my young son was with us. I remember standing in the parking lot of the Fuji-Ya Restaurant looking at the Crown Mill burning. As I’m sitting there, I’m almost in tears, because I’d gotten emotionally involved in the riverfront, too. This young reporter from WCCO was down there and she came up to me and started interviewing me. It was Colleen Needles. My wife has pictures of me, still, being interviewed by Colleen Needles with the Crown Mill burning in the background.

So that my first sort of real heartbreak on the riverfront. When I realized we lost the Crown Mill and how vulnerable . . . I’d been looking at all these archaeological sites and thought, gee, we’ve got so much left down there, and no one is aware of it. Well, we did have a lot left under the ground, even though it was fragments, but above ground, there wasn’t a lot left. There was a historic district, a fairly early historic district in Minnesota, and there wasn’t really a lot left. Even the things that Jeff had cataloged back in the late 1970s and early 1980s in that Saint Anthony Rediscovered, and if you’d go through that book, even when I was down there, there were a number of the buildings that were gone by then. Now they’ve really been whittled away. So it was really heart wrenching to see the Crown Mill burn. Little did I know I would go through that same emotion two more times down there; once when the Washburn A Mill burned and then when the Humboldt Mill burned. Two more times. When the Humboldt burned, that kind of put me over the edge in a lot of ways. But I’ll get to that.
We were starting to dig down there. It becomes, basically, a ten-year project down there for MHS. They’re there almost every other year doing something. Then I actually published my literature . . . I didn’t really publish it, I had it printed. I got about fifty copies of it and I made it a supplement to my annual report in 1984 for the County Highway Department, because I just thought it was too important. All that research I’d done should be printed and given out somewhere. So I did a supplement to my annual report as a separate little GBC-bound [General Binding Corporation binding] issue. Mn-DOT [Minnesota Department of Transportation] got their twenty copies, and copies went out to other people. Eventually, I refined it and published it in the *Minnesota Archaeologist* as Volume 1 in 1989. But I had to add the east side. I couldn’t say the Minneapolis Riverfront without adding the east side.

LM: [Chuckles]

SA: I had to do a whole bunch more research. And once again, my wife was frustrated with me. I’d be down at the library. I added the east side when I published it. Then a second project landed on my desk in 1985. If I wasn’t enough involved, here I get a second project. Hennepin Avenue is a county road, I think it’s County Road 51 . . . federal aid money to replace the Hennepin Avenue Bridge.

LM: Okay.

SA: So that became my project, too. All of a sudden, I had to deal . . . By then, I knew what was going on with the Hennepin Avenue Bridge, so I just told Hennepin County right away, “You’ve got to get someone down there testing to see what’s left.” They hired the Minnesota Historical Society again to go down there and test for the Hennepin Avenue Bridge Project. So that was my second project. That’s where we actually went down and we found incredible remains of the first two. The one in place, the green steel arch one, was the third bridge in that location. There had been a stone tower suspension bridge that was built in 1878 that had been down there, too. Now we’ve got the fourth bridge in that location, the new suspension bridge.

LM: So it’s 1855 . . .

SA: 1854 was the first one. 1878 was the second one, a suspension bridge with stone towers instead of wood towers. The third one would have been 1914 when it was finished. That was the steel arch bridge. Then, of course, the final Hennepin Avenue Bridge that was built in the late 1980s down there. I think in 1989 it was finished. Not only had I been fully invested down there, but I think there had been a few fits and start attempts to re-colonize the riverfront. It had really turned into no-man’s land down there. It was abandoned. When we were doing our archaeology down there, we would constantly scare out homeless men that were underneath the Hennepin Avenue Bridge or in the tunnels down at the mill district. They’d come out of nowhere. You’d be digging, and, all of sudden, somebody would be standing next to you. They were just coming out of these holes in the walls all over down there.
LM: [Chuckles]

SA: It was kind of spooky in a way, but they never threatened us or anything. That whole area was really, you know, depressed over there. And it was kind of depressing to be down there. Minneapolis, for it being born on the riverfront . . . it’s kind of ironic to me that Minneapolis is called the City of Lakes, when really it’s the city of the river and Saint Anthony Falls.

LM: Yes.

SA: That’s why Minneapolis was here: because of the waterfalls. Certainly by the early twentieth century the city was already turning its back on the river. After World War II, they completely turned their back on the riverfront. Just turned their back on it and went to the lakes and abandoned the riverfront. It was all railroads and crumbling mills and warehouses. Then the railroad started pulling up stakes in the late 1970s, and the riverfront all of a sudden became abandoned. The mills quit. General Mills moved their headquarters out to Golden Valley in 1965 and in the same year they shut down the A Mill.

LM: I thought they moved in the 1950s.

SA: They had started moving earlier, but they finally closed down their downtown operations in the mid-1960s. They had still had some operations in the A Mill and some other things going on.

LM: Oh, I see. Okay.

SA: They completely abandoned Minneapolis basically in, I think, 1965.

LM: Okay.

SA: They quit the A Mill and they left the riverfront. So all that was going on down there. There was still some grain handling in some of the elevators down there. By the time I came to the riverfront, it was only the A Mill anymore that was grinding any flour. I remember taking several tours with various history groups and milling groups through the A Mill when the old mill was still running. That was kind of fun to see. The technology hadn’t changed in a hundred years, except for electricity.

LM: It’s good you got to do that before it closed.

SA: Yes. I have a whole set of slides. I went through there when there was a big history conference here. It was the Association of State and Local History, I think. I went through the Pillsbury Mill with the machines running. They said that it was the last year [it would be operational]. I had my slide camera, and I took a whole set of slides of that mill still in operation.
**SA:** I still have them. That’s one thing I have. With riverfront redevelopment sort of now being on the radar screen in the early 1980s because of railroad abandoning . . . I think in 1978 the Great Northern Depot closed, about then, and they started pulling up the tracks. There was really no reason to be . . . When the big depot was gone, there was not much reason . . . I don’t know for sure when the Milwaukee Railroad Depot had closed, but that was probably a little bit earlier.

**LM:** It was 1981 or 1983.

**SA:** Originally, Minneapolis citizens were desperate to get the railroads to the riverfront, but by the mid-twentieth century, they were starting to abandon the riverfront. So there was lots of opportunity. There were a lot of abandoned buildings and there was a lot of abandoned land, so there was really opportunity to move back, and people started realizing that maybe we should move back.

In 1985, Russell Fridley anticipated this and he formed a committee, which he called the Saint Anthony Falls History Committee or something, and he sent out a memo. He knew that I was invested down there. So on that committee, he made Betsy Doermann in charge of it. Betsy, at that time, had just started running the Hill House and didn’t know that much about the riverfront either. He just saw in Betsy some talent. Betsy had energy and was motivated to get things done and could get things done, so he put Betsy in charge of it. He put me on it because of my knowledge of the riverfront, and he put Dennis Gimmestad on it because he was running the SHPO at that time. Then he also put Charlie Nelson on it, because Charlie had been involved with a number of buildings down there. Then Don Coddington, who was head of that division, was on it, too. Then the one other person who was on it was a guy named Nick Westbrook. Nick had worked for the Society for many years, a very bright, very talented interpreter. He subsequently left a couple years later and went out to run a big museum out east somewhere, a big history museum [Fort Ticonderoga in Lake Champlain, New York]. I think he’s still out east somewhere.

This little group sat down and we started saying, “We’ve got to figure out what to do.” The first thing we do is sort of nitty gritty. We’d been given a number of grants by various people. The Pillsbury Company had given us a check for, like, $100,000 saying, “I’ll tell you what. Let’s start investigating whether or not we should use the Pillsbury A Mill for a milling museum. But the first thing you have to figure out is if it’s sound enough, if it structurally would work for that.” Well, the catch to that check—we had the check; I remember seeing the check for $100,000—was that it was going to cost much more that $100,000 to do the engineering study, so Pillsbury basically wanted us to match their money. If we were going to have our museum there, why shouldn’t we pay for part of the study, too? There wasn’t much money around then. We kept that check for years and eventually we tore it up.

**LM:** [Chuckles]
SA: We realized we just couldn’t get invested in something like that, because it might not be structurally sound, and in the end, we’d get nothing for our money. Money was always near and dear. Especially in the early 1980s, there had been some financial crises in the state. Anyway, that’s how I started out getting broader MHS involvement, with that advisory committee that was formed in 1985. Then in the early-to-late 1980s there was just a lot going on on the riverfront. It got to the point where I had all these other projects to do, but the riverfront was so near and dear to my heart that when there was a private development down there that wasn’t going to get a contract for someone to look at it, I would go down and do it. When that big apartment complex down there . . . I call it the Wall . . .

LM: RiverWest Apartments?

SA: RiverWest was built. That was being built on the side of the Pray Ironworks, one of the most important ironworks in Minnesota. It was private development, private property, and didn’t have to be reviewed. So I went down there; I would sneak down there whenever I could to sort of take pictures and see what was coming out of the ground. I’d tell the workmen to pull things to the side if they saw . . . They’d leave these little piles for me, and I’d go look at it to see if it was important artifacts. That was one of many I did down there. For some reason, when they built the new post office, they didn’t have to do any archaeology, and they destroyed . . . That was where the Stevens House had been, the original. We had found on West River Parkway a lot of residential materials from the 1850s. They were destroying part of that.

LM: Hmmm.

SA: It was strange, because they basically moved over from being a strict federal agency to being sort of quasi-federal as they are today. The post office is sort of this private . . . They didn’t have to do anything. So I was running over there all the time to look at these. The Lower Saint Anthony Falls Hydro Station collapsed in the late 1980s, and I had to run over with my brother John, who was with the Corps of Engineers. We had to go over and look at that. Anyway, the late 1980s were very busy. With my job as county highway archaeologist, I did have some freedom to run over there and do things. That got all the better in 1990 when I went over to SHPO. I was ready for a change. Fifteen years of doing highway surveys, of being gone a lot, staying in a lot of motels . . .

LM: [Chuckles]

SA: I got to every town in Minnesota while I was county highway archaeologist.

LM: Oh, heavens.

SA: Every single town, I’ve been to. It was a good experience, but I was ready for something new. When I went over to SHPO, that was just great, and things were really starting to take off at the riverfront in 1990. Being part of SHPO, I had more freedom
then to look beyond roads. Officially, I could look. The whole riverfront *could* be on my agenda from then on.

Actually, in 1988, the MCDA [Minneapolis Community Development Agency] and several other agencies, the Park Board and City Planning, had these technical advisory committees [TAC], and they realized they needed a Riverfront TAC. So, in 1988, they started this Riverfront TAC. They might have had a small group going before then, but it sort of got formalized in 1988. Amazingly, here I am a county highway archaeologist, and I get appointed to the Riverfront TAC. The core people in that TAC—it was a very small group in the early days—were me, Dennis Gimmestad and Ann Calvert, who chaired the meetings. We usually had them at the MCDA. Then it would have been Bob Mattson from the Park Board and Fred Neet from City Planning. Dennis would come to some of the meetings. Especially when I got appointed as SHPO archaeologist in 1990, then Dennis just said, “You go to the TAC meetings. I don’t have time.” It was still that basic core group of Fred and Bob and Ann and I. Then, of course, when the Saint Anthony Falls Heritage Board was formed in the early 1990s, I believe . . . when that finally got formed, the Heritage Board . . .

**LM:** That was in the late 1980s?

**SA:** It was sometime in the late 1980s. We had the TAC first.

**LM:** Well, it was formed in 1988.

**SA:** 1988, yes, maybe.

**LM:** At least officially.

**SA:** Yes, it was 1988 officially. They passed the legislation. They had to get legislation through the legislature. So the Heritage Board was starting early on. The Riverfront TAC became almost an advisory panel for the Heritage Board. The Heritage Board was made up of sort of the big league executives, and we were all sort of mid-level staff. In a way, the TAC could get a lot done because we didn’t have to worry about . . . Well, ultimately we had to worry about political things, but that wasn’t on our mind when we made decisions. We’d sit around and we made a lot of decisions and set a lot of the tone for the riverfront then.

**LM:** Yes.

**SA:** Then we’d sort of filter it down and give it to the Heritage Board, and they could make it policy. We’d take ten meetings, like on that one show barge, that barge they were going to put on the riverfront for a theater. By the time we made a recommendation, it would go to a ten-minute presentation in front of the Heritage Board and was all refined, and we knew what to say.

**LM:** What a great way to cover it, isn’t it? [Laughter]
SA: It really got a lot done, that TAC did.

LM: Yes.

SA: It was a small group and a lot of real . . . Ann Calvert just had so much energy, took the lead for that TAC, and she does. We had monthly meetings and I still get the TAC memos.

LM: [Chuckles]

SA: I’m still technically on the TAC, but I haven’t really been active on the TAC since the mid 1990s because I just got too busy with other things.

LM: That’s really extraordinary: twenty years of continuity.

SA: Yes. Now, of course, I think Ann is the only original member left. By 1990, we got Thora Cartlidge involved. She was sort of the administrator or the staff person for the Saint Anthony Falls Heritage Board. Thora had a lot of energy, a grad student over at the University of Minnesota, a Canadian. Then Martha Frye became the staff person for the HPC [Heritage Preservation Commission], the historian for them. Fred Neet eventually came off and Bob Mattson eventually retired. But, I’ll tell you, that little group of five that we had in those early days, we got a lot done and we discussed a lot. Our meetings were full; they were fun and they were full. Everything was going on on the riverfront. It was just fun to be feeling the pulse of the riverfront almost. At our monthly meetings every month, we could just see what was happening, and it was really a great time.

Then I went over to SHPO in 1990 and I got sort of involved in technically more the federal end of things and more involved with the National Register [of Historic Places]. About that time, as I went over there, Susan Roth, the historian at SHPO, said, “You know, the old nomination for Saint Anthony Falls is over twenty years old. It’s time we re-looked at that district. There’s been so much development in there. Maybe we should pare it down and make a nice core area around the falls, which is the core of the district, and then maybe do some individual district or building nominations to really get the rest of the stuff that’s got good integrity.”

Well, the historic district had gone through a strange evolution over there. You notice the boundary of the district today up on the northeast end has got this strange sort of curvy line. It doesn’t follow blocks. It’s this strange sort of curvy line. I asked Susan right away, “Why is that there?” She said, “Well, that’s where I-335 was originally supposed to go.” They just went to Russell Fridley and they said, “We don’t want to have to deal with the historic district and there’s really not much over there.” So Russell Fridley, by executive authority, just lopped off a big piece of the heritage district over there. It’s got this sinuous curve because that was supposed to be the alignment of I-335.

LM: I-335.
SA: Yes. It was supposed to go up on the other end of the district, on the north end of the district, more by the Third Avenue Bridge area or Hennepin Avenue. That was kind of strange.

We started the work and we hired Jeff Hess to really sort of . . . We were going to have a district on Nicollet Island. We were going to have a district at the core of the falls with the old mills. We were going to call that the Waterpower District. We already had a double listed district up on the northwest, which was the Warehouse District, and that was double listed on the Register. That’s already got its own boundaries. Then individual nominations for the Pillsbury Library and a few other odds and ends were scattered through the district, historic buildings. Over in the Hennepin/Central area there were some buildings where we could have nominated like a block as a district or something, as a commercial district. We were all set to split this all up.

I remember going over to a pancake house over in Highland with Susan and a National Register historian, Beth Bolen, from Washington, D.C. who came out in about 1991. We had this all laid out, and Beth reads the rules and says, “That’s an early district. It’s grandfathered in. You can’t change the boundaries, unless there’s been a total loss of integrity. You can’t piecemeal it.”

LM: Hmmm.

SA: It was some technical rule. So we realized we were stuck with the exterior boundaries. Here we’d done a year’s worth of work, and had Jeff Hess on contract. In the end, we just decided to call all our work . . . It really upgraded the . . . The original nomination’s done for the National Register, they put like a paragraph in for every building. They wouldn’t mention every one. They’d just give a few examples. Jeff made a comprehensive inventory of every building that was historic down there and every building that was non-historic. They were called non-contributing elements. So Jeff analyzed the entire district, had this really detailed information.

I said, “What we really need now is an introduction to why we’re doing this.” So I basically wrote the introduction. Then Jeff and I both put our names on it, because he helped me tweak it. We ended up calling that “Additional Information on the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District.” We ended up with a fairly big document.

LM: That one, I haven’t seen.

SA: It’s in the files over at SHPO. We sort of give a little bit of administrative history and this additional information and sort of talk about the district as a whole. Then Jeff went through with his camera, so there is a full set of photographs, detailed, black and white, good high-quality photographs of the whole district dating to 1991 when that additional information was done. So that’s a very important document that’s over at the SHPO. All of the original negatives would be at MHS. So just go into the Saint Anthony Falls District file, and it should be one of the first things and it will be entitled “Additional Information.”
LM: Okay. And it was 1991.

SA: As I say, Jeff and I wrote the introduction and then Jeff had this massive document with detailed descriptions of every single historic structure or building, even including non-contributing, the strange-shaped, arched power towers over there. Those are even in there described as a non-contributing element.

LM: Oh, wow.

SA: That’s a real important district. I didn’t know a lot about the National Register. I had just come over to the SHPO, too, and that was my really sort of baptism into the National Register process, doing that. My technical title over at SHPO was National Register archaeologist, and Susan’s is National Register historian. So we did that redo. Then, of course, that same year in 1991, that was the Washburn A Mill fire. I went over there, I got a call on that one. I was living in Northfield at the time. Did that burn on a Sunday?

LM: It was the weekend.

SA: Yes. Well, I was still around, because I remember getting over there and the fire was still going on, although the raging flames had gone down. I was standing across from the Shiely Yards kind of watching them fight the fire, and I noticed they had these huge high pressure hoses trained right on the walls, I went up to the assistant chief that was there and I said, “What are you doing?” He said, “Well, the only way to fight this fire is to knock those walls down.” It was the Washburn A Mill walls. It was gutted on the inside, at least smoke was coming out, but they wanted to collapse all the walls in on it so they could really fight it. I said, “That’s a national historic landmark. Even though it’s burned on the inside, there are still a lot of the walls left.” So I got on the phone. I ran over to I think maybe one of the hotels or something there. I didn’t have a cell phone then. I called up Betsy Doermann, and I said, “Betsy, they’re trying to knock down the walls. I don’t think they need to. I know they’ve got to fight the fire, but can’t we do something?” Betsy called Nina Archabal. Nina called Don Fraser or Sharon Sayles Belton, whoever was the mayor then. They called the chief. They had a meeting, and they decided they wouldn’t knock the walls down. It was just luck that I happened to be there seeing them do that, I just got on the horn with Betsy and Betsy took over. She was a doer. I knew if I could make one call, if I had my one dime to get out of jail, it was Betsy I’d call.

LM: [Chuckles]

SA: And she got it done. So we saved the walls, and now, of course, that’s where the history museum is today. The milling history museum [Mill City Museum] is in there. So that was providential that I did go over there.

LM: You had undoubtedly been through the building and knew the machinery?

SA: Oh, I did. Once again, I have a detailed set of slides. I’d taken several tours through that building.
LM: Oh!

SA: I have a detailed set of slides taken maybe a year or two before it burned of all the milling equipment in there.

LM: Wow.

SA: So I knew exactly... Of course, after I’d gone through and taken that tour, we went to Marcia Anderson at MHS and said, “Marcia, what we really need is a detailed list of what’s in there.” So she sent some curators in there. We had a detailed list made, so we knew everything that burned in the fire. That’s what I was crying about. If you know anything about milling... millers call a mill the machinery not the building.

LM: Yes.

SA: So if you take the machinery out of the building, it’s not a mill anymore. We think of the building as the mill. What we lost in that 1991 fire was the mill. We still have the building. I would go in there during some of my tours and I would notice something sitting on the floor that had been pulled out. I think MCDA owned it by then. Ann Calvert would be with me on these tours, and I’d say, “Ann, what’s that on the floor?” “Oh, that’s still state-of-the-art milling equipment in a lot of countries. This stuff is all being shipped to South America.” They were still selling that equipment out of there, the newer stuff, because it was still valuable milling equipment. That was when I think we got hold of Marcia and said, “We need an inventory before it’s all sold.” [Chuckles] They were going to save examples.

Anyway, that was one of my low points, too, was 1991 over there. By then, I’d become so invested in the riverfront. And also by then, Lucy Kane had fully retired and Jeff Hess had even left his business and had gone to India or somewhere and wasn’t around anymore. So it kind of defaulted onto me as being one of the experts over there. I did know an awful lot about it. So, I would say, within two years of my research, I was starting to give talks, and soon after that, I started to give tours. There was no formal process over there.

I remember—I tried to find a copy of it this morning; I do have a copy of it at home—I wrote a long memo when Nina took over as director from Russell Fridley in the early 1990s or whenever that was. I wrote her a long memo and said, “MHS really needs a presence on the riverfront. It’s one thing to have the Heritage Board and all these TACs and these things and we’re all constantly saying, ‘You should do this,’ and, ‘You should do that,’ but how many historic places do we have open to the public in St. Paul? We have nothing open to the public in Minneapolis. Here’s Minnesota’s biggest city and we don’t have a presence. We don’t have a physical presence in Minneapolis. We absolutely need it.” I had analyzed everything over there, and I said, “What we need to do is have a milling museum. The building we need to put it in is the Humboldt Mill. Everybody says, ‘Oh, no, no. That doesn’t have equipment left in it. It’s kind of bare.’ Let’s go into the A Mill and take out the equipment and put it in the Humboldt Mill. The A Mill is too big.
It’s too big for us to handle. Let’s do it in the Humboldt Mill. That would be a wonderful place for it.” So I had this long memo to Nina just sort of pleading to get the presence over there. What they did then is they opened up a little office across the river on Saint Anthony Main.

**LM:** Yes.

**SA:** That was basically a little storefront office that they would give tours out of.

**LM:** Right.

**SA:** I’d been giving tours for years down there. When they opened that office, I had to take the tour guides on a tour to show them how I would give the tours over there. I would not only give land tours, I would get hired by people at night to give tours on the riverboat. I remember I took the Crosby family on a riverboat tour once for their family gathering. I went and talked to a Pillsbury family gathering once on it. They were having a birthday party for someone in the Cowles family at the History Center, and I was the guest speaker to talk about the history of the riverfront. I have notes from all those talks. I still have folders that say, “Riverfront Talks” and what I talked about.

**LM:** [Chuckles]

**SA:** I can’t tell you how many talks and tours I gave during the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was just constant. Then MHS started taking over the tours. I would still get asked for special events. But, by and large, I said, “Let MHS people do it.” Dave Wiggins was down there. He’s up at the Science Museum now. Wiggins really got into it, too.

**LM:** Oh, yes.

**SA:** I remember taking Dave around the riverfront. Then he became an expert on the riverfront, so that was good, too. I sort of passed the torch on to MHS guys, and that was great. We had a national conference in Minneapolis in 1993 called the Archaeology of Cities, which I was the co-chair for. We brought in the biggest urban archaeologists across the nation for this conference. Also here, I had to give a presentation and talk about the Minneapolis archaeology, gave a tour of the riverfront.

I wrote an article for a book on American canals, and I wrote on the Minneapolis waterpower canal. It was the only one that was a waterpower canal. All the rest were transportation canals. But they thought it was so interesting that I wrote this article. It was called, “Canals in Cities.” So I wrote an article for that. Then I published my work on the riverfront in 1990 and 1991. I have to tell you this: the stuff I published in the *Minnesota Archaeologist* was selfish in a way. In one way, I thought this deserved to get a wider audience. There were a lot of people interested in the riverfront. But I was editor of the *Minnesota Archaeologist* and no one was sending me any articles. I couldn’t get anything.
SA: I thought, I’ve got to get two issues out! I’m falling behind. I just decided I’d write it myself and just publish all the riverfront archaeology stuff, because it wasn’t getting out. So that took . . . once again, that was almost the third time I got divorced when I did those two volumes. It was a lot of work to put . . .

LM: It’s got to be.

SA: I typed them in WordStar. It was early word processor days. I had like a choice of two fonts.

LM: [Chuckles]

SA: It’s kind of in a strange font if you look at it today.

LM: It looks very old fashioned.

SA: Yes, it was either a strict-looking typewriter font or this. And this was a little bit more modern looking, in a sense that it was a little bit more artsy. I can’t remember the name of the font. It was one of two. So I did that and published it in the Minnesota Archaeologist. So I got that out, too.

I was still very active . . . I was attending TAC meetings. It started to get more intermittent. I think by 1993 I started tapering off on the TAC, and by about 1996 I wasn’t going much to TAC meetings anymore. But I still knew all those people and still talked to them. I was very close to the members of the TAC and still got memos from them. I think we had email by then, too, so it was getting easier.

In 1997 when the Humboldt Mill burned that broke a lot of things. Something broke inside of me. I had been . . . The Washburn A Mill fire in 1991 was not the only Washburn A Mill fire. There had been multiple fires in the A Mill during my time on the TAC. This piece would burn or that piece would burn. It just hadn’t taken the whole building. I would go over there, and we’d always get over there and they had sort of . . . MCDA had a tough thing to do. There were lots of ways to get into that building. There were tunnels and everything else.

Every time we’d go over there, you could see people starting fires, had been starting fires in there . . . the homeless people or kids. There was tagging on the wall, spray paint on the walls and stuff. There were beautiful tile walls upstairs where the food packing area had been. They had spray paint on them. I was getting pretty disgusted by that. We’d constantly say to Ann, “Can’t you do a better job with MCDA security?” MCDA owned it. She’d say, “Well, we try. But it’s hard to do it. It’s hard. We’re short staffed.” I understood that. When the Humboldt burned, I was really ticked off! I thought, this is inexcusable to let one of the major historic sites, part of a national historic landmark . . . burned. We’d already lost most of the A Mill.
I was over and one of the *Star Tribune* reporters was over there, Steve Brandt. Here’s the article. Steve could see I was upset. Steve said, “Do you want to talk to me on this?” I said, “Yes, I do.” He said, “I’m going to ask you some tough questions.” I said, “Ask away.” One of the questions he asked me was, “Did you think the security was adequate over there?” I thought for just a second and I said, “No, it wasn’t. This is an NHL [National Historic Landmark], one of the most important historic sites. It should have been better.” I’ll tell you, that set off a firebrand. When that article came out the next day, I got a call, from Ann Calvert saying, “We’re really upset at MCDA about this, Scott. You never should have done it.” Ann and I had been friends for many years—we still are good friends—but this put a little strain on our relationship. The head of MCDA at that time was Rebecca Yanisch, and Ann said, “She’s really burned up with you.” So that night, Rebecca Yanisch goes to some big cocktail party over there and goes up to Nina and asks Nina to fire me.

**LM:** Oh no.

**SA:** Steve found out about it and called me up the next day and said that Yanisch told him, “We’re going to get your boy fired at MHS for what he did,” Steve got really mad. He called me up the next day and said, “This is going on over there. She’s spoken to Nina and they’re trying to get rid of you. I will do anything I can to help you.”

**LM:** [Chuckles] Steve’s a good friend of mine.

**SA:** Yes.

**LM:** I can believe all of this.

**SA:** He was ready to go over the wall for me. I said, “Steve, you don’t need to. They’re not going to touch me over this. There are going to be repercussions from this, but I’m insulated enough from this.” I was telling the truth. I wasn’t casting aspersions on anybody. I didn’t use any names. I just said that I didn’t think MCDA did enough to secure that building—and they didn’t. A lot of historians called me up and supported me. At that point, MCDA was a big *partner* of MHS and it was all about *partnership*. That’s what the Heritage Board was all about was *partnership*.

**LM:** Yes.

**SA:** It’s sort of retribution . . . Betsy told me this, not right out, but sort of inferred to me. Betsy said, “Your days of being MHS’s point person on the riverfront are over.” And I was pretty much frozen out then by MHS. They never really would consult me again about anything official going on over there.

**LM:** Hmmm.

**SA:** I was done. I didn’t get asked to sit on committees, even when they started . . . To show you the ultimate of that is when they were building the Mill City Museum, I was
not asked to help with any of the history or anything over there. I was still the in-house expert on that. No one had surpassed me. About that time, Dave Wiggins left to go over to the National Park Service. So that kind of hurt in a way, but in another way, I was real busy, and it was maybe time for me to start letting go anyway. Since that article came out, MHS never really consulted me much anymore after that.

**LM:** Hmmm.

**SA:** I can understand their position. They wanted their very important partnership with the city to survive. I think that’s kind of been forgotten. I haven’t forgotten it. I still have the article sitting here.

**LM:** [Chuckles]

**SA:** I know very well what those few quotes in there did. They had big ramifications for me. Britta Bloomberg called me in her office and kind of chewed me out, too. I just said, “I was right. I’m not going to back off. I’m not going to call up Steve and say, ‘I’m sorry I said that.’ I was right.” Britta backed off, too. I got a little heat for that, but it was nothing I couldn’t handle. That’s when I sort of backed off.

There were still people at MHS that sort of knew . . . I had written a number of articles for *Minnesota History* on various topics like shipwrecks and stuff. So they were going to do that Saint Anthony Falls edition of *Minnesota History*. Anne Kaplan called me up and said, “We’d like you to write one of the articles.” I think that was by 2003, and it was old news, what had happened, and Anne wasn’t even aware of it. So I did get brought back in a little bit. They eventually ended up even selling those books; that’s why all of them are gone, those two issues of *Minnesota Archaeologist*. They bought them all up, the Mill City Museum did, and sold them in the bookstore. They sold out within about a year, because there were so many new residents over there. There really were. There were people actually living there.

The second half of my career at SHPO was spent sort of . . . I was given the shipwreck project and that took a lot of my time. For all of the 1990s, I was involved with shipwrecks in Minnesota. I just returned two weeks ago from . . . I still go to the Gales November Conference every year. I still know all the shipwreck people and still work with them a lot and really enjoy working with them. So shipwrecks kind of took over. And then we had some big urban projects in downtown Saint Paul: the new Science Museum, the Nina Clifford brothel complex. That ended up being really interesting and exciting, too. Once again, I was at SHPO then, so I sort of recommended that they do major archaeology, and they hired the 106 Group to do it there, so I got to be involved with that a little bit.

As I look back on my career as an archaeologist, it’s kind of ironic to me that here I am, this prehistoric archaeologist, and really the two things I’m probably known the most for throughout Minnesota is my work on the Minneapolis riverfront and my work with shipwrecks.
SA: Those were two areas that I originally had no expertise in. Now, I still have to say, I don’t consider myself to be an historical archaeologist and I don’t consider myself to be an underwater archaeologist. But if you look at my résumé, you’d think I was both by all the projects I managed. Boy, it was a great time on the riverfront. I don’t regret anything really I’ve done. My only regret is that I could have been a bigger advocate for maybe more preservation down there. It was frustrating to see development. I couldn’t have controlled it, but it was still frustrating to see . . . It was originally supposed to be this partnership, and I think the original line we used when we formed the TAC was—we had a line we used—“Good business. Good recreation. Good history.”

LM: Right.

SA: It might not have been good English, but it was . . .

LM: Right. [Chuckles]

SA: That was basically Ann Calvert, Bob Mattson and me who sort of said, “We should do all these three of things.” It was going to be in equal numbers. The West River Parkway was going to go through down there, which was really going to bring it back to the riverfront, which it did. I have to give a great deal of credit to Bob Mattson for that. I give a great deal of credit to Ann Calvert for rehabilitating a lot of the riverfront. She’s still working on it. Bob Mattson was the force behind. There were people above him, like Al Wittman, that needed to make executive decisions, but if it wouldn’t have for Bob, I don’t think West River Parkway would have gotten done. It certainly wouldn’t have gotten done with the sensitivity to the historic resources. Early on, Bob recognized that.

LM: What about Mill Ruins Park, which you haven’t actually mentioned?

SA: Right. That was an early concept. I think that the Park Board, if you go back into early minutes of their meetings, realized they were going through . . . they knew they were going through the heart of Minneapolis history in going through the Mill District. And I think they early on had some plans to maybe do some interpretation of the history down there. You can’t go by those buildings and those ruins down there without doing it. But whether or not they really wanted to develop a full-blown Mill Ruins Park down there is another . . . I think they more conceived it as putting up some plaques and showing like, see this ruin over here? That’s what this is. I think the main focus was probably going to be the little above-ground ruins that you could see in the little pocket park. There was kind of an informal park where the millstone sits, the Cataract Mill. The Cataract, the Holly, the Saint Anthony, and the Arctic Mill used to all sit in a row there. I think they were maybe going to put up another plaque there and just talk about the history a little bit.

By the time we would sit in these first meetings with Bob on the West River Parkway, in the early 1980s, I’d just say, “Bob, I’m just overwhelmed at the scope of what this could
be.” Bob would sit and think, and he never said, “Oh, we don’t have to do any archaeology. Why are we even doing this?” Finally, after about two years when the planning was done, the federal funds dropped out, and they didn’t apply for any more federal funds—or didn’t get them. So they built that Parkway with basically, I think, local money and maybe some state money, but no federal money. They actual construction did not use federal money.

LM: Really?

SA: Therefore, it didn’t need to go through the Section 106 [of the National Historic Preservation Act] review anymore. At that point, the Park Board could have said, “Sorry, we’re not going to take the historic preservation that seriously.” There were some state laws that could have kicked in a little bit, but they weren’t as powerful as the federal laws. But by then, certainly, Bob had become invested in the history and thought it was really interesting.

I remember when I was talking about the mill ruins down there, Bob saying, at one of those early meetings on the West River Parkway, right up loud, “I think it would really be nice to put a Mill Ruins Park down there.” He could see it. I have to give Bob the credit. He knew it was going to cost money, but he knew that in the end that portion of West River Parkway was all about the history and it wasn’t about the green space, and that recreation was more than green space. Recreation could also mean giving historic tours. Certainly, that fit right into MCDA’s vision for the riverfront, too. That would make it a tourist attraction, and make it attractive for people to feed into the history, too. So Bob, from the very beginning, was really supportive and got it. Bob got it right away from my viewpoint. Ann Calvert would have been under more pressure for the economic development. That’s a tougher thing to sell when you’ve got a bunch of old junk laying around, you know?

LM: Yes.

SA: I remember hearing one of the comments when one of the new residents moved into one of the big new condos, million dollar condos, down there. I remember going to the opening. I did for years, and I still do get invited to openings down there. I just have a whole folder full of openings I’ve been invited to and the brochure they would hand out.

LM: [Chuckles] Oh, great.

SA: That’s another good little resource, all my openings. I think maybe it was at the Plank Road opening, or something, that this woman who lived in one of the new towers complained that it wasn’t cute. It wasn’t pretty down there. I can’t remember the exact word she used.

LM: I think I know who you are talking about. [Chuckles]
SA: It really bothered me that she was complaining, “We’ve got to get rid of this unsightly junk here, and just make it all look nice and neat.” I wanted to turn around and say to her, “Well then move to Edina where you have all the freedom to do that.” Just make it nice and neat and make it look like Edina down there? It can’t be like that. Dennis Gimmestad gave me a line when I first started at the SHPO at my first interview with him. He said to me, “It’s not the National Register of pretty places.”

LM: Yes, right.

SA: It’s the National Register of Historic Places, and history isn’t always nice looking. It’s not always cute. That was kind of a battle we fought down there. Ann had the pressure and she fought as much as she could, but in the end, she had to be economic development. That’s what MCDA was. It wasn’t museum interpretations or preserving all the history down there. There had to be a balance. We had to lose some. All of us knew that. In the end, I said, “I suppose that’s been my biggest disappointment. That we’ve lost more than we should have down there.” There have been inappropriate things . . . that big apartment building down there right next to Fuji-Ya.

LM: RiverWest.

SA: RiverWest. That was wrong. I remember going to that groundbreaking. I was at the groundbreaking and Van White was there and Reiko Weston [Fuji-Ya’s owner] and her daughter were there. I think Fraser was the mayor then, and Ann Calvert was there and all the MCDA people. They were just giving speech after speech about how great this was. That was the first big sort of re-colonization of the west side riverfront. The east side had already had its Riverplace and a few other things going on over there, but this was the first big re-colonization down in the heart of the Mill District. Ann Calvert came up to me and was just bursting at the seams. She was really proud of it, because she’d worked hard. She said, “Scott, isn’t this great?”

LM: [Chuckles]

SA: I looked at her and I said, “No, Ann, it’s a tragedy.” She was stunned! I said, “I agree with you that we’ve got to get development down here, but this is wrong. This creates a wall from downtown Minneapolis to the riverfront and a wall between the east side and it’s wrong. It’s the wrong building in the wrong location. Move it three blocks away and you’re okay. It’s the wrong building for down here.” The only one who really agreed with me that day was Reiko Weston; she was already sick then. But I remember her nodding her head. She agreed with that, too. She knew it because it was right across the street from her. In subsequent years, everybody who had been involved, including Ann, has said, “That’s a mistake. We were wrong.”

LM: Yes, yes.

SA: Give them credit for that. But they were so desperate in those early days to get redevelopment down there. Since then, they’ve been a little bit more sensitive with some
of the architecture and things like that. Basically, the infilling of the Washburn A Mill has been done fairly well. I was at SHPO when the Guthrie Theater came through with their proposal.

LM: Oh.

SA: What’s interesting about that is we had some pretty tough staff meetings about whether or not that was an adverse affect to the Mill District, building the Guthrie. In the end, every single one of us, maybe with the exception of Mike Koop . . . Charlie Nelson and I and Dennis Gimmestad and Susan Roth, we all sort of agreed that we could accept the Guthrie. There was nothing deceptive about it. It was sort of at the far end. We had to tweak certain things, like the skyway and a few other things. It really bothered us that that was going in down there, but we thought it was okay. What the huge fight was about was when the Guthrie was tearing down the old building.

LM: Yes.

SA: We had Ian Stewart and I—Ian was the deputy director at MHS—with Nina in a meeting with us. That meeting was the tensest meeting I was ever at at SHPO, because do you know who started arguing with each other? Nina and Ian.

LM: Oh, boy.

SA: Nina thought that they should tear the old Guthrie down. Basically, Dennis was adamant, and I think Dennis sort of gave an ultimatum, and Nina knew that. That if you agree that the Guthrie is not historic, I’m leaving.

LM: Oh, wow.

SA: Dennis was down to that point. I’m not going to back off. There was going to be another Steve Brandt article in the Star Tribune about Dennis Gimmestad speaking out against his director. Nina knew that. She also—I have to give her credit there, too—knew that there was a history there that was important. And in the end, she sided with the SHPO staff. Ian was very mad about that, that he didn’t win.

LM: Was it the political . . . ?

SA: Oh, yes, that was political. But Nina was close to the people at the Guthrie, too.

LM: Oh, sure.

SA: The people she hangs out with are the heads of the museums. That’s what Nina is, is a museum person, and the people that she respects the most are the big museum people, people on her level. Her best friends are heads of the various museums. I really have to appreciate that Nina supported us on that Guthrie. Amazingly, we did not have the big, hard discussion about whether the new building should be built where it was built.
LM: It’s partly in the district. Is that right?

SA: It’s right on the edge. Well, actually, the original district is down quite a bit. It’s at Tenth Avenue South, you know, where the two big elevators used to sit. It was interesting that they drew the district boundaries and split those elevators in half even though they were connected by underground conveyors and everything. That’s Tenth Avenue there.

LM: Right.

SA: That’s the southern edge of the district.

LM: Okay.

SA: It went down where the bridge had originally been. There’s that bridge [unclear] river.

LM: So the Guthrie site was . . .?

SA: It was in the district.

LM: That’s funny. I wonder if isn’t totally in the Minneapolis boundaries.

SA: It might not be in the . . . There’s a separate boundary for the Heritage District, yes. That’s one of the things we may have done. Now that those elevators are gone, if we could redo the district, we would pull it back to, what is that, Chicago Avenue?

LM: Chicago, yes.

SA: We’d pull it back to Chicago if we could do it. When we were doing that even in 1991, the two big elevators were there. Washburn Crosby 2 and 3 were still there. Those were torn down later. The loss of the elevators is the one that gave us sort of the biggest conundrum because we know how critical elevators are to the Mill District, but there’s no reuse for elevators.

LM: Yes, right.

SA: We had looked at every single reuse possible. If you cut them up with windows like they did over by Lake Calhoun with that elevator complex over there, it not only hurts the structure. Why bother? It doesn’t look like an elevator. The best thing you can do with elevators . . . The two things I’ve seen that are successful is use them for signs, like Nordic Ware. That’s a single shaft [Peavey-Haglin Experimental Concrete Grain Elevator in Saint Louis Park, Minnesota]. I’ve seen that all over the nation. I’ve got a whole folder on the reuse of elevators.

LM: [Laughter]
**SA:** Either you reuse them to store some kind of granular material or you put signs on them and leave them vacant on the inside. I’ve often sort of regretted that the transistor came along because I thought if this was the age of the computers and we still had vacuum tubes, wouldn’t big elevators be great places for super computers?

**LM:** [Chuckles]

**SA:** You could heat all of downtown Minneapolis with that vacuum tube heat coming off the elevators.

**LM:** Oh, boy.

**SA:** That was a frustration that all the elevators were lost down there. It’s constantly being in-filled down there and there’s constant pressure. An example is over at the DeLaSalle High School now. I know my brother John at the Park Service bitterly fought that field. I was sort of ambivalent about it, because I didn’t think the archaeology . . . There had been some interesting buildings. There had been a couple mansions there, but you could see they mostly had been destroyed anyway. It’s still a living riverfront and people still have to live down there. You can’t stop everything down there. So I was sort of ambivalent about the field.

I think a lot of the sort of *cutesying* up of Nicollet Island in a way has done harm, too. When I was first in there, you’d go over there and there was the donkey sitting in the lot and kids swinging off the swing underneath the railroad bridge over there. They had the music festivals over there. It was still sort a hippie enclave over there. You’d step back into the past. The one place on the riverfront where you could really step back into the past and feel like you were there was that north end of Nicollet Island. Well, I no longer feel like that now. Phyllis Kahn lives there. Some people have kept their buildings. It’s a very nice residential neighborhood now, but it just doesn’t have the feel that it used to have. That’s one of the things you can’t stop in time. People should be able to have a nice residential neighborhood to live in. I’m not going to say, “No.”

It’s that sort of picking away at the integrity of the district that’s been going on constantly since the 1980s now. You see the original pioneers, like Pracna go in there and Saint Anthony Main go in. They were really pioneers, and they should be given a lot of credit . . . and the Grove Street Flats renewal over there. Susan Roth and I used to talk about this. You know, the National Register told us that until it totally loses its sort of integrity, you’ve got to leave the larger boundaries on. Susan and I have been real close a number of times. The city was moving in historic houses that were going to be torn down in other parts of the city. They’d move them into north Nicollet Island, because they wanted to sort of make it a zoo over there of historic houses. Susan got to the point where she told the Park Board, “If you move one more historic house in there, I’m taking it off the register.” She gave them an ultimatum, because she didn’t want it to be this zoo, an architectural zoo over there, of houses from all over the city. She wanted the original houses to be there. That was sort of interesting.
So I go down there now; I still go down there a couple times a year. I take my camera and I’ve done it for . . . All these blue books of I’ve mine that are sitting on the shelves and I have more of them . . .

LM: Wow.

SA: In April 1983, before we started the archaeology, I brought my slide camera with me and went down there and took a comprehensive set of slides of the whole riverfront area all the way from Plymouth down to Washington Avenue where we were going to see the Parkway develop. So I have a detailed set of slides of the whole district from 1983, and I have slides then from every year after that, until I took quit taking slides a couple years ago. Now I take digital photos. And still, even on my desktop, I have a folder of . . . I still go down there and you can see I have them by year since I started taking digital in 2003.

LM: Wow. So from Plymouth to where?

SA: Now, I don’t do as much. The West River Parkway extended from Plymouth to around the Washington Avenue bend that connected in with the existing West River Parkway below the University of Minnesota complex there on the west bank. That would have been the whole Parkway. Most of my pictures will, of course, focus in the area where the intensive buildings still stood and everything. No use taking pictures of something you can’t see, the stuff underneath the ground. I still go over there. I walk out on the Stone Arch Bridge. I sort of do a 360 off the Stone Arch Bridge with my camera. These are ones I took in September. I have a niece who is a coffee vendor over there and she sells this . . . Her husband, she met him in the Peace Corps, from Guatemala. Basically, I went over there and I took a few shots of her. Then I went up in the Guthrie and took some shots from up there.

LM: Yes, that’s good place.

SA: Then I usually go out on the Stone Arch Bridge, ultimately. This isn’t my big set. You can just see I was over there in July, over there in September, and I was over there for some reason in . . . Oh, I was over there and there was a fire over there.

LM: Hmmm.

SA: There are winter shots. I still go over there. I sort of do my 360 off the Stone Arch Bridge. I still keep up on taking photos over there. They’re digital now for the last five years. I think my slides someday are going to be a . . . I’ve got to start scanning them because they’ll start losing their quality pretty soon. I have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of slides of the archaeology that was done down there, of changes down there.


SA: One thing I learned about the photographs is I realized not everything was going to be on the . . . When I was doing the original research, I had the Sanborn maps. The
Sanborn maps are insurance maps that came out because there were not uniform insurance laws across the nation. In order for insurers in New York to insure a building in Minneapolis, they had to know the setting, what was around it. So in the early 1880s, several big companies, Sanborn, Rascher, a couple others, started coming out with insurance maps that would show you graphically in color what the fire setting was, basically. They’ll show you where all the hydrants are. They’ll show what the buildings are made out of. Wood is yellow. Stone is blue. Brick is pink. Then they’ll show you where all the water lines are, and they’ll show you where all the things that could start fires are, like boilers and things like that. They’ll show you where all those are on the Sanborn Insurance Maps. They’re very detailed maps, very detailed for all the major cities.

LM: Wow.

SA: The Minneapolis Sanborn’s came out in 1885. So they do a base map in 1885, and then what they do is the next year, if there are any changes in that district—they have local people that scope this out if any building changes—they have what’s called paste-up. If the Washburn A Mill added an addition on, you’d literally take some paste . . . They send you the sheet and you cut it out and you paste it over your 1885 version. Then in 1892, a Rascher Atlas came out and then Sanborn redid their atlases in 1903. So what you do is you get the base atlases, if people managed to keep those and didn’t paste them over. And then you get ones from various collections at the Hennepin County Historical Society and stuff where there were various companies that were local insurers, that kept up very diligently pasting up their atlases. There are copies of those paste-up atlases, so you can track changes in buildings through time.

LM: Wow.

SA: In the beginning, the person who does the pasting puts his initials and then says when the last paste-up was. Some of them get to be ten, fifteen paste-ups thick. Actually, the pages get 3-D because they’re pasting these new things in the book. I get real intensive when I do these literature searches. I was trying to figure out when was this building built, because I couldn’t find any records. It would drive me nuts. The Sanborn Atlases would be a dead end.

So I started going through the photographs just to try to track that, and I realized early photographers didn’t take pictures, like snapshots, like I do. Like I go over there and just take a snapshot. Except for maybe a few people like Edward A. Bromley and a few others. Most photographs that are in the Historic Society’s collection, certainly from the nineteenth century, are because of a reason. It’s like a Star Tribune reporter going over there taking a picture because this is a new building or taking a picture because this building burned. I first went through all photographs to get the scope of them both at MHS and the Minneapolis Public Library. Thousands of photographs I looked through trying to find things of the riverfront. I got to be real innovative at how I looked at the indexes, because sometimes they were under company names, sometimes under buildings names, sometimes under fire, sometimes under waterpower or flour milling or milling,
not just Minneapolis riverfront. The Minneapolis riverfront is the biggest folder, but there are lots of other things you can find.

The first time I went through them, I didn’t know what I was looking at and I didn’t know what my keys were. I would just look through them and say, “Oh, this is a neat folder and this is a neat folder.” They were sort of visually striking photos. The second time I went through, I actually had something to determine. When was this building built? I know what I’m looking at now. Let me find that building. And I would go through the second time. Then the third time I went through them just to figure out all the things I’d missed the first two times, and I found a lot more the third time. Every time I’d look at the photos, I’d see something I didn’t realize. I’d always say to myself, “Why did the photographer take the picture? What is new?” There’s a new building right there. So that building was probably built that year when this photograph is dated. A lot of photographs are misdated, too.

LM: Yes.

SA: I was able to start keying those off. I know this building was built then, and this is two years before that. So this photo is two years off. So I could make a lot of corrections to the photos, too. I got real sophisticated dealing with the historic photos down there. Whenever I see something, I’ll see a photo... wow! I’ve never seen that photo of the riverfront. There must be hundreds I’ve never seen in the collections of both places. I had a lot of time spent in the photo collections.

There was a woman—talk about another person who really helped me and was very kind to me and helped me through this stuff—who was the Minneapolis history collection manager at the Minneapolis Public Library, Dorothy Burke. Boy, was Dorothy good to me. She would come in. She enjoyed seeing me. Then I would help her. I would say, “Well, Dorothy, these photographs...” I would tell her what dates were wrong. So it got to the point where she was used to seeing me. I was up on the third floor of the old library all the time in their history collections. Dorothy was very good... I have her card still somewhere. I remember when she retired, I said, “Oh, darn it. Dorothy left. That’s too bad.” There was a woman there who was kind of her assistant who didn’t know as much. Dorothy was the expert.

LM: Oh, yes, big loss then of her expertise.

SA: Yes.

LM: You should actually apply to the Saint Anthony Falls Heritage Board for funds to get those scanned.

SA: I always think, well, I’m going to do it myself, but I don’t have time. They’re all labeled with dates, so we know what they are. Usually, I [unclear] the view. Just about every slide in there is labeled. I’ve got them even topically arranged. Here are my general views when I started: 1983 through 1989, 1990 through 1999, and then my more recent
ones that are slides. Now, of course, I skipped to digital, which I’m also backing up on a big hard drive. I have map slides of various map atlases I went through. The topical ones . . . the Hennepin Avenue Bridge, the Gateway. When I was at SHPO, I did get involved in one more big project down there, and that was the Federal Reserve Bank.

LM: Oh, sure.

SA: That did have to be reviewed. It was a federal action. I got really involved in the Federal Reserve Bank. We had not only big surveys, but two big mitigation excavations: one on the lower terrace that IMA [Institute for Minnesota Archaeology] did and one on the upper terrace. The upper terrace finding was really . . . Here we’d done all this archaeology, and it had basically really been industrial archaeology. We’d found roundhouses and waterworks and power plants and mills and canals and all this stuff, but we rarely got to seeing the individual. We always had seen the company or the industry.

LM: Hmmm.

SA: We hadn’t seen the individual. We didn’t find the workers’ lunchboxes. We didn’t find anything. But when we moved on to the upper terrace at the Federal Reserve Bank, we got our insight. The reason that was, is because there had been a whole set of little hotels up there.

LM: Yes.

SA: Those hotels . . . once you read those Sanborn atlases, you see certain things in them that puzzle you at first. Jeff Hess told me this. I said, “Jeff, what are all these little tiny buildings? They’re all little wooden buildings and they all say, ‘FB’ on them.” He said, “Female boarder. They’re houses of prostitution.”

LM: Oh.

SA: “FB means female boardinghouse, but it really means this.” So I thought, oh! There’d been a bunch of FBs . . . That had been the Berman Buckskin Building. But amazingly enough, when we went through the original literature search, I noticed the Berman Buckskin footprint, which had a basement, had not taken out where all the little hotels had been. I said, “We’ve still got a couple of those little hotels that are surviving underneath the parking lots.”

LM: Hmmm.

SA: So they excavated them and we did hit the latrines. Two things really struck us. Number one is we had pretty sophisticated archaeology by then, and we had a pretty good urban archaeologist, John McCarthy, doing that work. John actually analyzed the soil in there and found real high incidences of parasites. I can’t remember how he did it, but it was associated with gefilte fish or something. It was an interesting interlinking between
the Norwegians and the Jews in Minneapolis that he developed. He was a Marxist, so he sort of developed this theory.

**LM:** [Laughter]

**SA:** There were a lot of parasites, so that gave us an insight into public health in that district. We also found two fetal remains of humans, of children. You know, fetuses.

**LM:** Good heavens.

**SA:** These women had abortions and just put it in the latrine.

**LM:** Oh!

**SA:** That was kind of heart wrenching to see that. The old Dennis Gimmestad thing about it’s not the National Register pretty places. Archaeology is not about prettiness sometimes. Then, of course, we saw that real graphically over at the Science Museum in the boarding house when we found a lot of drug paraphernalia with children’s toys intermixed. You also realized these women . . . especially in the Mill District, we knew that very well.

One of the things I’d done in the Mill District was I really vacuumed every resource I could find to sort of understand it. One of the things I’d done is I read every single issue of the *Northwestern Miller* that had ever been published. Originally, it came out in the 1860s, and it was a weekly publication. For a long time, there was a column in there called “On the Platform.” The platform was the wooden ramp over the top of the canal. There was a reporter that would go over every week and find out what was going on in the Mill District. A lot of it was about, “They’re adding two new turbines into the Washburn C Mill this week.” I was able to track developments about milling and milling history. Or, “They’re replacing the millstones with iron rollers this week in such and such a mill.” So I would know the transition. But a lot of it was about, "Joe Miller got his arm caught in the mill and got it torn off today.” “So and so fell in the mill pit and was killed.” It was an OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] nightmare over there.

**LM:** Yes.

**SA:** The machines were all open, both the sawmills and the . . . Of course, there was the *Mississippi Valley Lumberman*, the publication about the lumbering, and the *Northwestern Miller* was about the flour milling. I’ll tell you, reading both those journals, I actually made indexes for them, because I could keep track of what was going on. I still have those indexes. It was very frightening, I’d always see this: “A collection has been taken up for his widow, and we raised thirty-five bucks.”

**LM:** Yes, right.
SA: I’d see that. When I go over and I read that plaque on the outside of the A Mill, there’s that quote on the bottom: “Labor wide as the earth, hath its summit in heaven.” I get a little choked up as I think about it. [Voice breaking] All those men over there that died in the milling business, and even the eighteen that were killed in the mill explosion itself . . . There was no welfare system for their wives or their families. What were the options? Here’s a woman with probably six kids. What are her options for sustaining her life? She can become a washerwoman or she can become a seamstress. Unfortunately, some of them had to become prostitutes because they didn’t have an option. I think a lot of the prostitutes in those days did not have a viable economic option, especially if they lost their husband. What a tough decision for them. What a tough life for them—not everybody . .

So that Federal Reserve Bank excavation gave me an insight into . . . There’s a very famous book on historical archaeology called *In Small Things Forgotten: an Archaeology of Early American Life*, by James Deetz, and that’s what this was all about. We knew about the Washburns and we knew about their mills. And I could reconstruct the building of the mill and the changing of the technology from the millstones to iron rollers and getting the middling purifier in there to get that dust out and the explosions all of that. But we didn’t know about the people living in the hotel over on First Street North. That was a totally different insight.

LM: Wow.

SA: Overall, I had frustrations about the development of the Mill District, but I’ve also had frustrations about the archaeology that’s been done down there. That’s one of the reasons I published some of that stuff. Anyway, I’ve been very frustrated. So much archaeology has been done over there. And unfortunately, Bob Clouse left the Historical Society in the late 1990s and went to Alabama, and a lot of the later stuff he did down there was never written up.

LM: Hmmm.

SA: He never finished those reports with the Park Board. The Park Board was very upset about it and everybody else at MHS, and I was upset about it. So some of the reports didn’t get done. The other thing was the archaeology was never taken to the next step of bringing the people in. It was about how we found these ruins and this is what they look like. Archaeology is supposed to be about understanding the past, not just about finding the past. Those little insights we got . . . You could have done that at some of those other locations. You could talk about the evolution of technology or building materials, but that was never done. It was always very descriptive. A lot of it is just sort of saying who was here and what they were doing.

When that hit me the hardest of tying sort of people today into the riverfront . . . We were finishing the Hennepin Avenue Bridge. We’d done the initial excavations on the west side of the river because that was open and we could get to those. But on the east side, the Nicollet Island side of the Hennepin Avenue Bridge, was a big berm of fill over there, so
we couldn’t actually get to the remains of the first two bridges until that fill was taken out. So it had to be done during the construction. So during the construction, we got all of that fill off and, sure enough, even better preserved over there were the ruins and the anchor supports and the iron. The first major castings in Minnesota were the anchor supports for the 1854 bridge, and those were still there, the first major iron castings. So all these firsts in Minnesota are going on there. We’re sitting there and Clouse is working away and I’m standing above him with my camera, and he starts uncovering some wood, and it’s cedar. I realize it’s the wooden sidewalk to approach the bridge. It’s still in place, because these would have been cedar plank sidewalks. Bob is uncovering the cedar plank sidewalk! That was the original approach to the 1854 bridge.

**LM:** Oh, wow.

**SA:** There were these three or four construction workers there with sort of their bellies hanging out and these cut off t-shirts, muscle shirts on, the hard hats on, and they’re kind of grubby. They’re watching Clouse do this and I can see they are very, very skeptical. Why are we wasting money on this?

**LM:** Yes.

**SA:** I could just see that. I looked at those guys, and I said, “I’m going to do something about this. If I can get these guys interested in the archaeology, I can get anybody interested.” So I said to them, “Do you guys know what that is?” They said, “No, we don’t.” I said, “Well, that’s the sidewalk that used to approach the Hennepin Avenue Bridge. That was built probably in the 1850s. Do you know who walked on that sidewalk? It would have been John Pillsbury, Cadwallader Washburn. You name any early Minneapolis historic . . . Here’s the founder of General Mills, the founder of the Pillsbury Company. They all walked, stepped at one time, on that plank.”

**LM:** [Chuckles]

**SA:** One of the guys reaches out his foot and stamps his foot on it and pulls it back, and then they all laugh. But he did that to sort of . . . Now, he probably went home and told his wife, “You know, I walked on the same sidewalk that John Pillsbury walked on and Cadwallader Washburn.” So it sort of brought history alive to them, that, whoa! That was something. Here it was, just a few simple planks . . . The amazing thing was Bob brought it out and it sat behind the loading dock for about two years, just sat there. I don’t know what’s ever happened to it.

**LM:** Oh, my gosh!

**SA:** It probably got thrown away.

**LM:** Oh, wow.

**SA:** It’s just some pieces of boards. Here it was a sidewalk from 1854.
LM: Oh, my gosh. Oh, they didn’t just cover it up?

SA: Who knows what happened to it. Maybe they took it and maybe it’s in the collections. I remember it sat out. I was over at the main building by then. I don’t know whatever happened to that. That, too, was one of those little sort of transforming events, when I could say, “I’ve got to capture the construction worker and make history relative to him.”

LM: [Chuckles] Right.

SA: When he put his foot on that plank, it made me feel good. It made him feel good, too, I guess.

LM: Great. Fantastic.

SA: I’ve had a wonderful time in my time at Saint Anthony Falls, and for the rest of my life, I’ll be involved with Saint Anthony Falls. I continue to go over there and marvel and sort of shake my head when I see what the fires have done, but that’s part of the history of the riverfront, too, the fires down there.

LM: Thank you so much.

SA: It’s been a fun journey.

LM: This was a fantastic interview.