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Sierra Club Oral History Series

Susan D. Merrow

SIERRA CLUB PRESIDENT AND COUNCIL CHAIR:
EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP, 1980s-1990s

With an Introduction by
Marlene Fluharty

Interviews Conducted by
Ann Lage
in 1992

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the Nation. Oral history is a modern research technique involving an interviewee and an informed interviewer in spontaneous conversation. The taped record is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The resulting manuscript is typed in final form, indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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Susan D. Merrow, "Sierra Club President and Council Chair: Effective Volunteer Leadership, 1980s-1990s," an oral history conducted in 1992 by Ann Lage, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1994.

Copy no. _____



Susan D. Merrow, 1993.

Photograph by Nancy Nasseff

Cataloging information

MERROW, Susan D. (b. 1946)

Environmentalist

Sierra Club President and Council Chair: Effective Volunteer Leadership, 1980s-1990s, 1994, viii, 89 pp.

New England background and joining Sierra Club in 1971; involvement in Connecticut politics; Sierra Club involvement: national membership committee, council member 1979-1985, council chair, 1983-1985, board of directors, 1985-1990, vice president, 1990-1991, president, 1990-1991; discusses leadership styles, staff-volunteer interaction, gender roles, club culture, Douglas Wheeler, Michael Fischer, David Brower.

Introduction by Marlene Fluharty, Sierra Club Board of Directors.

Interviewed 1992 by Ann Lage for the Sierra Club Oral History Series. Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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PREFACE--Sierra Club Oral History Program to 1978

In fall 1969 and spring 1970 a self-appointed committee of Sierra Clubbers met several times to consider two vexing and related problems. The rapid membership growth of the club and its involvement in environmental issues on a national scale left neither time nor resources to document the club's internal and external history. Club records were stored in a number of locations and were inaccessible for research. Further, we were failing to take advantage of the relatively new technique of oral history by which the reminiscences of club leaders and members of long standing could be preserved.

The ad hoc committee's recommendation that a standing History Committee be established was approved by the Sierra Club Board of Directors in May 1970. That September the board designated The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley as the official repository of the club's archives. The large collection of records, photographs, and other memorabilia known as the "Sierra Club Papers" is thus permanently protected, and the Bancroft is preparing a catalog of these holdings which will be invaluable to students of the conservation movement.

The History Committee then focused its energies on how to develop a significant oral history program. A six-page questionnaire was mailed to members who had joined the club prior to 1931. More than half responded, enabling the committee to identify numerous older members as likely prospects for oral interviews. (Some had hiked with John Muir!) Other interviewees were selected from the ranks of club leadership over the past six decades.

Those committee members who volunteered as interviewers were trained in this discipline by Willa Baum, head of the Bancroft's Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) and a nationally recognized authority in this field. Further interviews have been completed in cooperation with university oral history classes at California State University, Fullerton; Columbia University, New York; and the University of California, Berkeley. Extensive interviews with major club leaders are most often conducted on a professional basis through the Regional Oral History Office.

Copies of the Sierra Club oral interviews are placed at The Bancroft Library, in the Department of Special Collections at UCLA, and at the club's Colby Library, and may be purchased at cost by club regional offices, chapters, and groups, as well as by other libraries, institutions, and interested individuals.

Our heartfelt gratitude for their help in making the Sierra Club Oral History Project a success goes to each interviewee and interviewer; to everyone who has written an introduction to an oral history; to the Sierra Club Board of Directors for its recognition of the long-term importance of this effort; to the Trustees of the Sierra Club Foundation for generously providing the necessary funding; to club and foundation staff, especially to Michael McCloskey, Denny Wilcher, Colburn Wilbur, and Nicholas Clinch; to Willa Baum and Susan Schrepfer of the Regional Oral History Office; and last but far from least, to the members of the History Committee, and particularly to Ann Lage, who has coordinated the oral history effort since 1974.

You are cordially invited to read and enjoy any or all of the oral histories in the Sierra Club series. By so doing you will learn much of the club's history which is available nowhere else, and of the fascinating careers and accomplishments of many outstanding club leaders and members.

Marshall H. Kuhn
Chairman, History Committee
1970-1978

May 1, 1977
San Francisco
(revised March, 1992, A.L.)

The Sierra Club Oral History Program, 1978-1992

Inspired by the vision of its founder and first chairman, Marshall Kuhn, the Sierra Club History Committee continued to expand its oral history program following his death in 1978. In 1980, with five ROHO interviews completed or underway and thirty-five volunteer-conducted interviews available for research, the History Committee sought and received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a major project focusing on the Sierra Club of the 1960s and 1970s. In a four-year period, NEH and matching Sierra Club funds made possible the completion of an additional seventeen major oral histories conducted by the Regional Oral History Office and forty-four volunteer-conducted interviews.

Oral histories produced during and following the NEH grant period have documented the leadership, programs, strategies, and ideals of the national Sierra Club as well as the club grassroots at the regional and chapter levels over the past thirty years. The work of the club is seen in all its variety--from education to litigation to legislative lobbying; from energy policy to urban issues to wilderness preservation; from California to the Carolinas to Alaska, and on the international scene.

The Sierra Club oral history program, together with the extensive Sierra Club papers and photographic collection in The Bancroft Library--a collection of 1325 linear feet of archival records, more than 34,000 photographs, and films, tapes, and Sierra Club publications, all recently processed and catalogued--help celebrate the Sierra Club centennial in 1992 by making accessible to researchers one hundred years of Sierra Club history.

Special thanks for the oral history project's later phase are due Maxine McCloskey, chair of the Sierra Club History Committee 1988-1992; Ray Lage, cochair, History Committee, 1978-1986; Susan Schrepfer, codirector of the NEH Sierra Club Documentation Project; members of the History Committee; and most importantly, the interviewees and interviewers for their unfailing cooperation.

Ann Lage, Coordinator
Sierra Club Oral History Program
Cochair, History Committee
1978-1986

Berkeley, California
March 1992

INTRODUCTION--by Marlene (Marty) Fluharty

There are those who say that Sue Merrow is too nice to serve in strong leadership positions. Don't ever believe them. Her power is the best example of what M. Scott Peck describes in A World Waiting to be Born, "Spiritual power is the power to influence others through one's own being--by example, by kindness, by humor, by wisdom and love." It's the way Sue has lived her life, all aspects of it, whether in the role of daughter, wife, mother, friend, neighbor, or leader.

The request that I write the introduction to Sue's oral history brought forth a rapid series of images of this wonderful friend of mine: precious pictures of the fine woman that she is, of the loving family that has supported her, and of the hundreds of lives, including mine, that she has touched. It is an honor to know her and her family.

Sue tells you of the tasks, the journey of her Sierra Club work, and glimpses of her family through her book and the pages of this oral history. I have been asked to write about Sue, and perhaps it is best to give you a series of snapshots; you'll have to put them all together.

The Connecticut farm that she mentions: it isn't really a farm. It's a full fledged retirement home for all sorts of animals. Over the years Sue has taken in horses, dogs, sheep, and rabbits, most of them delivered by their owners who just can't care for "old folks." I can assure you that she is as at ease carrying buckets of grain and pails of water and offering words of gentle comfort to old horses as she is with balancing budgets, standing firm on policy, and soothing the frayed nerves of exhausted volunteers.

It was late, seems that's how most planes are, but there stood this smiling young woman with a weary child hanging onto one hand. "Glad that you made it. We'll head up to Litchfield in my car. Annie's used to these meetings so she's going too." My first introduction to the "sunshine lady," Annie. All seven years worth of growth scrunched into the back seat with her own reading light and book. What is with this child, I wondered. She's reading fourth and fifth grade level books; that's what happens when your parents believe that reading and conversations offer much more richness to life than television sets.

Richness of life is an obvious core value for Sue. She is awed by historic buildings, the Great Lakes, the accomplishments of one individual, a spider's web, the Maine coast, her daughter, and a Double Rainbow ice cream cone. She can lobby with unabashed conviction, smile through a banquet of strange oriental food, teach in bluejeans or high heels (just not too high), call home to Arthur (Bless his heart), plan

snowplow routes for East Haddam, find the good in every human being, and laugh at her own humanness. She'll leave a note of welcome on a pillow for a late arriving roommate, apologize with head hung low for being "just a little late," use "grazing on the commons" to illustrate a point, command a U.S. Senator's respect, and stand tall as a mentor for hundreds of Sierra Club volunteers.

Perhaps Sue's greatest power is in her ability to help uncover the strengths of others by not telling how to do something but asking the questions that make you feel you always knew what to do and by offering support and encouragement to those who are attempting to stretch beyond their comfort zone. Her ready ability to say, "I blew it on this one," or to take full blame as easily as taking credit, set very high standards for all who know and respect her.

I don't get to spend much time with Sue and her family anymore. Our lives have changed, our work much more demanding (we each now have a "real" job), even our Sierra Club lives are more diverse. We've shared the raising of our children. We've laughed and cried together. Maybe one day when we both feel the earth is better protected and now in the capable hands of thousands more volunteers, we'll sit in the sun and remember...

Marlene (Marty) Fluharty
Sierra Club Board of Directors,
1978-1983

March 1994
Mount Pleasant, Michigan

INTERVIEW HISTORY--by Ann Lage

Sue Merrow's oral history is one of a series of interviews with past presidents of the Sierra Club. In 1990, the Club board of directors made a commitment to record the recollections of each of its presidents--the club's chief volunteer officer at the national level. This series documents the key issues in environmental policy and club management of their respective presidential terms. At the same time, it records how club presidents came to be involved in the environmental movement and the club; how they participated in local campaigns and chapter and regional club entities; and how they rose to positions of leadership in the national club. Thus, the presidents' series will document not only top national leadership but also grass-roots activism and the institutional culture of this complex organization.

Sue Merrow's interview serves as a supplement to her recently published detailed account of her year as club president, from May 1990 to May 1991. In One for the Earth: Journal of a Sierra Club President (Susan Merrow and Wanda A. Rickerby, Champaign, Ill.: Sagamore Publishing Company, 1992), she presents a candid and personal account of her presidency, its challenges and rewards and its effect on her family and future. In this oral history interview we attempted to cover some of the topics not fully addressed in One for the Earth, including further discussion of the development of her outlook and her leadership style, her steps up the ladder of club leadership positions, and insights into the inner workings of the top management circle of volunteers and staff in the Sierra Club.

The two interview sessions took place on November 12 and 13, 1992, in the midst of a typically busy Sierra Club national meeting weekend. It was a club "circus", several days of meetings of national, regional, and local club entities at headquarters in San Francisco. Here were gathered what Sue calls her Sierra Club family--national issue and internal committees, regional vice-presidents, and the Sierra Club Council, an assemblage of delegates from all the club's fifty-some chapters nationwide. Sue was there as a member of the board of directors, on a few days' leave from her new position of first selectperson, the equivalent of a mayor, of her community of East Haddam, Connecticut.

Despite the circus going on just outside the executive director's office where we met, Sue was focused and relaxed for the four hours of interviewing. Readily apparent in her remarks and manner were her personableness, openness, attention to process, and respect for the many currents of thought and style among Sierra Club leaders--all of the

qualities that have made her an effective leader of the diverse and sometimes divided club governing circle.

She reviewed the transcript on one of her many cross-country flights and made no substantive changes. The tapes of the interview are available for listening in The Bancroft Library.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to record the lives of persons who have contributed significantly to the history of California and the West. A major focus of the office since its inception has been environmental history. Funding from the Sierra Club and the advice and encouragement of the Sierra Club History Committee made possible this addition to the Sierra Club Oral History Series. (The series list is included at the end of this volume.) The Regional Oral History Office is a division of The Bancroft Library and is under the direction of Willa K. Baum.

Ann Lage
Senior Editor
Coordinator, Sierra Club History
Series

March 25, 1994
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name SUSAN D Merrow

Date of birth 6/10/46 Birthplace BOSTON, MASS.

Father's full name Edwin S. Ditchett

Occupation FLORIST Birthplace BOSTON, MASS

Mother's full name Bernice TRULSON Ditchett

Occupation Teacher Birthplace Norwood, MASS.

Your spouse Arthur S Merrow

Occupation Engineer Birthplace Hamburg, NY

Your children Anne L. Merrow

Where did you grow up? BROCKTON, MASS

Present community East Haddam, CT

Education BA, English, Tufts University

Occupation(s) Chief elected OFFICIAL (FIRST Selectman)

former lobbyist - State Capital on environment and local government
regulations

Areas of expertise public policy, especially state law -

pesticide laws

Other interests or activities OLD HOUSES, Farm life, horses

Organizations in which you are active East Haddam Community League,

CT. Greenway committee (co-chair),

I ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND

[Interview 1: November 12, 1992]##

Early Environmental Influences

Lage: One of the things that researchers are often interested in is the development of an individual's sense of moral commitment, and that usually develops early on, so let's begin at the beginning, with the date when you were born and something about your family as it relates to your later interests.

Morrow: Sure. I was born on June 10 of 1946 and lived in South Weymouth, Massachusetts. Then when I was about nine, my family moved to Brockton, Massachusetts, where my father ran a greenhouse and my mother was an elementary school teacher.

I don't know that there were any committed naturalists or environmental philosophers in my background. Looking back, the only thing that I could sort of associate with my later environmental interest was the fact that I did get to spend all summer every summer for many years, with my grandmother up in Maine in a very rural coastal area where we had no running water and no television, and no telephone, and no car, and where the natural environment was very special. The Maine coast is a very special kind of a place which gets into your blood and into your soul.

Lage: As a child, did you realize that this was getting into your blood?

Morrow: Well, I had a sense that this particular part of the Maine coast was a sacred place, that it was important to me that it never change or that it always be there and that it not be spoiled. I had a sense of that, but this was, you have to remember, well

before the word "ecology" was used, or any of those concepts were even talked about.

Lage: But it can be an emotional feeling.

Morrow: Yes, it was definitely an emotional sense that this was sacred ground, and it's still my sacred place. And of course, over the years there have been changes to that place, which I have never come to fully accept. There are some places--they seem like they are special wild places that should never change.

But I guess I was sort of a textbook case of one of the people in the late sixties-early seventies when there was a lot of interest in Earth Day--the kinds of thinking that led up to Earth Day, those forces must have been at work on me because I sort of vaguely remember the first Earth Day.

Lage: Where would you have been at that point?

Morrow: In 1970, I was already married, and I was a teacher of high school English in Bloomfield, Connecticut. I remember around that time reading about environmental degradation, and especially wild places. I remember seeing some sort of a special on TV about endangered species, and these things that were being lost, and this sense that somebody had to do something, somebody had to speak out.

Joining the Sierra Club, 1971

Morrow: I had a dear friend from college who told us she belonged to the Sierra Club. And then my husband and I read some article about the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund and how they sued polluters, and one thing and another. We went to a little country fair near where we live now, and in a bookmobile they had a display of books about the environment--this is like 1971--and we picked up a brochure, the old "Why the Sierra Club" brochure, and it just sort of all came together.

Particularly there was a quote in that brochure, it was the Wallace Stegner quote that said, "Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wild places be destroyed," and that just sort of spoke to me.

But when my husband and I joined the Sierra Club, we had no notion that we were going to get involved. We didn't think we had

anything to offer. We didn't even know that involvement was an option.

Lage: It just seemed like a membership--

Marrow: Yes, we'd send off--at that time, I can't even remember, maybe \$12 a year, and we would feel like we were at least doing something. It didn't even occur to us that we would have anything to offer. I didn't know anything about public policy processes, didn't know much about issues or anything like that.

Lage: Let me just back up for a minute: where did you go to college?

Marrow: I went to Tufts University, and my husband did also. We met there.

Lage: Did you get involved in any students activities then? This was an era of activism.

Marrow: No, I really didn't. I had a work scholarship, so I had to work fifteen hours a week in the library, and so I didn't have a lot of free time.

Lage: So you didn't come into the club as a political activist, or a veteran of civil rights and the anti-Vietnam War movement?

Marrow: No. I was an English major and I taught English for three years in Connecticut. So I just sort of slipped into the Sierra Club by joining, and then got a postcard soon after my husband and I joined inviting us to a local meeting in New London, which is maybe twenty miles from where we live. We thought, "Well, we'll just go and check this out."

And then we were invited to come back, or I was asked if I would bring the refreshments to the next meeting, and I said, "Sure."

Lage: Sounds like getting involved in PTA or something.

Marrow: Exactly right. Then pretty soon I was asked if I would help keep the membership records, and I could do that. I just slowly got in deeper and deeper.

Lage: Did you see this responding to some need? Had you been thinking you wanted to get more community involvement, or anything like that?

Marrow: No. I don't think it was extremely--it was just sort of a slow, progressive, keep the membership records for the group, and then

eventually do a little more for the group, and then lead some hikes for the group, and then become chair of the group, and then represent the group at the chapter level, and then become the council delegate. The Sierra Club began to be our social life, too. And then we got deeper and deeper into the issues.

Lage: Was there a particular person who kind of directed you into the issues? Or who directed you into deeper involvement in the chapter?

Morrow: No, I don't think so. There were just always opportunities there. There was always just enough of a little vacuum that you could be drawn into doing--

Lage: How many people--it was a group, not the chapter?

Morrow: It was the local group, the Southeast Group. I guess at that time in that group there were maybe 150 people in southeastern Connecticut. The group is probably 500 or 600 today.

Lage: And then where was the chapter?

Morrow: The Connecticut Chapter.

Lage: Where was its chapter headquarters?

Morrow: In Hartford. The chapter, when I got involved, didn't have a chapter headquarters. They were sort of a dining-room-table sort of operation. But then by 1976, they had rented a little corner of an office from the Connecticut Audubon Society in Hartford, and then began to have more of a state presence in Hartford.

Then I got involved with that and worked on state issues.

Involvement in Connecticut Politics

Lage: What issues did you get involved in, and why?

Morrow: Well, I guess at the state level, the first issue that I really remember being involved in up to my ears was the bottle bill in Connecticut, which was a hot issue in the state legislature in, say, '73-'74-'75, and it kept failing. And then in the seventies --

Lage: This was a recycling measure?

Merrow: A bottle deposit law. You know, a deposit on bottles and cans. Connecticut is a small state where you can be at the state capital within an hour from anyplace in the state practically, so there's a very hands-on feeling about state government. The environmental community is very well networked.

There was a good environmental network going well back into the seventies, and a group of environmental folks got together and decided that '76 was going to be the year of the bottle bill. We were going to get that bottle bill passed.

It happened that the state legislator who was the chief sponsor of the bottle bill got together with us every week during the legislative session, and before the session, and we planned this elaborate strategy and a real grassroots lobbying strategy. We involved a huge coalition, and targeted legislators. It was a classic--it was the issue in Connecticut that spawned a whole bunch of grassroots activists, because we all learned how the legislature worked through working the bottle bill.

And the bottle bill, it failed in '76, but it passed in '77. We knew it was going to--

Lage: You could see the momentum building for it.

Merrow: Yes. It was going to pass. And Connecticut happens to be a state where there is no referendum.

Lage: You can't go the route California goes.

Merrow: Right. So it had to be a legislative battle. So we all really learned grassroots lobbying from the bottle bill.

Lage: Who did you say trained you--was it a legislative person?

Merrow: Well, there was a state legislator named Rusty Post, who was a state representative. And there was a young woman named Mary Mushinsky, who worked for the Connecticut Citizens Action Group and had worked on recycling going well back into the seventies.

Lage: So it sounds like a coalition of environmental groups, not just Sierra Club.

Merrow: Yes.

Lage: Was that common in Connecticut, that you'd ally with other groups?

Merrow: Yes. Connecticut has always been very well environmentally networked. There was something called the Connecticut

Environmental Caucus that still meets, and has a monthly meeting. Mary Mushinsky, who was an organizer for a citizen action group, then went on after the victory of the bottle bill, ran for the state legislature in 1980, and it was the first experience that a number of us had working on a political campaign.

This group of Connecticut environmentalists got together and decided that we were going to get Mary Mushinsky elected to the state legislature. She had a four-way primary against three men, and we all learned about grassroots and electoral politics through helping her with her campaign. It was my first time I ever phone-banked and got out the vote.

Mary won her primary, and then she went on to win the general election. She's been in the legislature ever since. She's now chairwoman of the Environment Committee of the Connecticut State Legislature.

Lage: So you really saw on a first-hand level how the electoral politics fits in.

Morrow: Yes. Even before the Sierra Club had local political action, we tried it out in Connecticut, just working as individuals on her campaign. And as a matter of fact, she just had a tough race again in '92, and we all--the old crowd goes out every two years and works for Mary and helps her get reelected.

Lage: Now, what's the old crowd like, in terms of kind of socio-economic--?

Morrow: It's the same old mixed bag of people. A lot of them have gone on in the environmental movement to have responsible policy-making jobs. One of the people that worked--well, of course Mary is now a state legislator, and one of the other people that worked hard on the bottle bill headed up our Connecticut Hazardous Waste Management Service, which was a quasi-public state agency. Wanda Rickerby, who ran the Connecticut Audubon Society, Hartford office, went on to be the press person for the Department of Environmental Protection, and is now just retired and was the co-author of my book. They're all still there, in the movement.

Lage: Were there more women than men? It sounds like it as you talk.

Morrow: Yes, there really were more women than men. The people from the League of Women Voters, and from all kinds of local groups that are still there, still working.

Lage: And are they primarily middle-class, college-educated types?

Morrow: Yes. Sort of the same--

Lage: Same as you'd find everywhere.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Okay. You mentioned clean air in your book, that you got quite involved with the clean air campaign.

Morrow: Well, I actually got involved in the 1977 revisions of the Clean Air Act. I remember a group of us from Connecticut organized a bunch of people to get on the train in Hartford and go to Washington, we called it the Clean Air Train. We went to Washington to lobby for the '77 Clean Air Act.

I remember around that time a couple of other big environmental laws that were going on in Connecticut. We passed an automobile inspection and maintenance for air pollution. It's hard to believe that there was a time when you didn't have to have your emissions tested.

We passed a law that created Connecticut's program whereby the state sets aside money every year to buy the development rights to agricultural land that's under threat of development. The state bonds money and buys the development rights. The state now has thousands of acres under that program.

Lage: It sounds like you got a lot of good legislation passed.

Morrow: In the mid-seventies and late seventies. And then my daughter was born in '77, so that slowed me down a little bit, but also gave me more time to--

Lage: You stopped teaching at that time?

Morrow: Yes. Well, actually I had stopped teaching in the early seventies when we moved to East Haddam, the town we live in. We were part of the back-to-the-earth movement--maybe that's something I should go back to.

Back to the Land

Lage: Yes, I think that would be interesting. You referred to living on the farm, but I'd like more about how that happened.

Merrow: Well, at the time that you're living through it, you think you're the only people who've had these thoughts, and you think they're original thoughts. And then when you look back, you can see how you were just sort of a subject of sociological trends that are working on everybody. It's like the same thing when you come up with what you think is the most unusual name for your child, and then you discover that a whole bunch of people came up with that same name.

Around 1968 to 1971, I was teaching, and we were getting concerned about environmental issues. We were very friendly with some people who--eventually two other couples--who became dear friends of ours, who sold their houses in Connecticut and pooled their money and bought an old farm in Wisconsin, to go back to the earth. They talked about simplifying your life.

One couple particularly were followers of Scott and Helen Nearing, and simplifying your life. These two couples together bought a farm in Wisconsin, and went back to the land. Looking back, this was a big influence on us, but we weren't ready to move out of New England. We were both pretty firmly rooted in New England. So when it was time for us to buy a house, we wanted to simplify our lives too and live in the country. We looked hard for an old farm house with some land. Arthur wanted to have an old house, and loved old houses.

Lage: Were you going to subsistence farm?

Merrow: Yes, we thought we would see how far we could get. We would at least live the simple life and only work--Arthur wasn't quite ready to unplug himself from his job at Pratt & Whitney, but I would live the simple life, and can and garden.

We bought the old house, and we gardened, and we canned and so forth and so on. But during that time, I was getting more and more involved in the Sierra Club, which eventually in the mid-seventies drew me more and more to Hartford.

Lage: And off the land.

Merrow: And off the land. So it was ironic that, here we were living in this old farm and trying to go home at night and live the simple life, and go to Hartford in the daytime.

Lage: And work on the politicians.

Merrow: Work on the politicians.

Lage: What kind of work does Arthur do, or did he do?

Morrow: He still is an engineer for Pratt & Whitney, a mechanical engineer. He works for Pratt & Whitney in engine design and research.

Lage: What is Pratt & Whitney?

Morrow: It's a maker of jet engines, part of United Technologies, in Connecticut.

Lage: I see. So that's a very technical, up-to-the-minute profession.

Morrow: Yes. Although he's an engineer, he frequently--you know how we environmentalists always talk in sometimes less than glowing terms about engineers, and that engineering mentality. He does too. He's not a typical engineer.

And we still live in that same old farm house, and we still have a couple of horses, and I keep chickens, and I have a six-burner wood cook stove in my kitchen, but we have made some concessions. Just this last spring, we got our first ever in my life dishwasher. [laughs]

Lage: That's a nice concession. How about a microwave, have you done that?

Morrow: We do have a microwave, and that my family bought out of self-defense. They decided that they were tired of eating cold junk food for dinner, so they decided they'd at least have hot junk food.

The environmental movement became our social life, it became our contact with the--it was our friends, grew out of that movement.

Lage: So it became a whole community.

Morrow: Yes.

The New Ecologists

Lage: Now, are you sympathetic with--shall I call them the new ecologists, the part of the environmental movement that says, "We have to change the whole structure of society and get out of this urban-industrial complex"?

Morrow: I guess fundamentally I am, although now that I've had a chance to sort of look at the issues from all sides, I realize that it's not nearly as simple as I thought it was in 1971. Just going back to the earth was--I couldn't go and hunker down on my own little farm and not be concerned about the larger environment.

Lage: But there seem to be a group that think that organizations like the club are too much part of the power structure, that we need a radical change.

Morrow: Well, I guess sort of the fundamental notion of the Sierra Club is being the people who--. People are out there talking about radical change, and people are out there lying down in front of bulldozers and so forth and so on, and that's important, and part of me goes with them when they do that. But then the Sierra Club comes along and mops up. We take all that excitement and that concern and figure out how to focus it on the public policy process, and how to make changes, how to take that--I usually, when I have to speak to groups, I speak in terms of that we're like a big magnifying glass, and we figure out where the concern is and then we focus it in the right place to light a fire. Somebody has to stir people up and get them aroused, and then we come along and clean up afterward and make democracy work for the environment.

Lage: More of the political expertise.

Morrow: From the inside, right.

II INVOLVEMENT WITH THE NATIONAL CLUB: MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE AND COUNCIL

The National Sierra Club

Lage: Let's talk about how the chapter was governed, and who took care of it, what types of people, what their goals were. Did you become chapter chair at that point?

Morrow: I was never chapter chair. I was a group chair, I was chapter fundraising chair, and then I was council delegate starting in 1979. As a matter of fact, I came to my first Sierra Club national meeting in November of 1979, which was thirteen years ago right now.

Lage: As council chair?

Morrow: As council delegate, from Connecticut.

Lage: What impressions did you have then?

Morrow: Oh, I was absolutely dazzled. I was just swept away by this wonderful group of people that I had fallen into the midst of out here. It was just wonderful. I almost--when I came home, I almost wept when I got off the plane, it was so moving, it was so stirring.

Lage: What in particular can you remember?

Morrow: Well, you felt immediately at home, and this incredible commitment and the camaraderie. The Sierra Club was no longer--the national organization was no longer sort of a faceless monolith. It was real people just like me trying to make something happen.

Lage: Who were the officers at that point?

Morrow: In the council at that time I believe the chair was Bob Howard, and active at that level were Gerry Lieberman. I remember Paul

Lowe, who is not involved any more, but I believe Gerry and Bob are still involved. Marty Fluharty was a director at that time, I think. She and I remain fast friends. We are roommates tonight. Some of those people are still there.

Lage: So again, it seems like almost a family thing that attracted you.

Morrow: Yes. I think so. And you do whatever work is at hand. You get involved in doing--you set your hands to work on whatever job is at hand, and then you find that you've made friends and you've gotten in a little deeper, and so forth.

Lage: When you were involved in the Connecticut Chapter, you must have gone to executive committee meetings.

Morrow: Sure.

Lage: How did they view the national club? You mentioned the faceless monolith. Was there any--?

Morrow: Well, I don't recall any animosity. I know from experience later on, and it's taken me by surprise, that in chapters there is this antipathy towards "the national." In my chapter, I didn't get that sense. I remember we had a visit from Ted Snyder, and we were very proud to have him come. Bill Futrell came to one of our chapter meetings, and we were happy to show him what we were doing, and so forth. So I don't sense that there was this division between us and the national organization in Connecticut.

Lage: How does your chapter relate to the national club now?

Morrow: I haven't been as close to them in the last year or two as I used to be, but I don't feel that there is a great deal of animosity, although our chapter is one of those chapters that sort of does its own thing.

Lage: Did the chapter see the club as a California organization?

Morrow: I don't think so.

Lage: Because you just mentioned Ted Snyder and Bill Futrell, both from the South. You had a lot of Southern leaders at that time.

Morrow: Yes, these were Easterners, right. Although from a New England parochial perspective, if you're from somewhere as far away as South Carolina, you might as well be from California. [laughter] Because if it's west of the Hudson, it's--

Lage: It's West.

Morrow: Yes, a long ways away.

Lage: So there wasn't a sense that the club was sort of a transplanted organization?

Morrow: I don't think so, because New England has the Appalachian Mountain Club, which is nearly as old as the Sierra Club, maybe even older. We have a lot of old environmental organizations and a lot of old conservationist movements there. So no, there was no sense that this was just a Western organization that had come to rest. And I know that--as I said, I joined a combination of friends that I respected and had a sense that this was an organization that was doing something, making something happen.

Lage: You didn't join because of the books, in particular.

Morrow: No. I don't think I even knew about the books when I joined.

Lage: Everybody has their own story to tell on this.

Morrow: It's fun to ask people, "Why did you join the Sierra Club, or what made you join?" and they give you lofty reasons. And then it's funny to ask them, "Where did you get the form on which you sent in your first check?" and that's always another story about where that came from. And for us, we picked it up in a bookmobile.

Lage: So did this affect how you go about your membership activities, because I know you've been involved in that.

Morrow: Yes, it actually has. I did eventually get more and more involved in the Sierra Club Council, and then became a member of the membership committee. The membership committee was a real shaping experience--

National Membership Committee

Lage: Was this a committee of the council?

Morrow: No, the national membership committee. At that time, there was one membership committee. The council didn't have a separate membership committee, there was just one membership committee, which I think is the case today. The membership committee was a shaping experience for me because at that time, the membership committee had a real sense of collaboration between the volunteers and the staff.

It was staffed by--her name was Kim Martin-Carroll, and she has since become Kim Shaffer. But she was the staff person for the membership committee, and Gerry Lieberman was the chair. And there was a real sense in that committee of working shoulder-to-shoulder. There wasn't any tension between the staff and volunteers. We really worked together; we really collaborated.

Lage: You didn't see a division?

Morrow: No. It was a real shoulder-to-shoulder sort of effort, and it didn't matter where creative ideas came from. There was no turfiness, and we did a lot of great things around 1980, early eighties, on that committee. And to me, that was sort of the shaping experience for how staff and volunteers should work together.

Lage: It sounds as if you think it doesn't always work out that way.

Morrow: Well, I know that there are other cases in which the volunteers feel that if there's a vacuum on the volunteer side, the staff will come in and just do what has to be done. And if there's a vacuum on the staff side, the volunteers will do--there's a dynamic tension which I don't think is a necessarily unhealthy thing, although it does sometimes take up a lot of our energy figuring out who should be in charge here. But the ideal for me, the pattern was how the membership committee worked together and were collaborative without regard to whether you were staff or volunteer.

Lage: That's interesting. What kinds of things did you do in the committee?

Morrow: I can think of a number of simple things, like getting the computer ready to be able to spit out reports of who your twenty-five and fifty-year members are so that you could recognize them, and special life membership pins, and enhancements of the life membership program. We did contests, getting membership, getting more members.

Out of that committee grew the FRIP program, the Field Recruitment Incentive Program. That whole idea came out of that committee during those years. And even just learning about membership. I remember that we were well schooled in how a membership works, and notions of retention.

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Lage: Now, where did the expertise come from? You mentioned that you learned a great deal, sort of technically, about membership.

Morrow: Right.

Lage: Did that come from the staff, or from the volunteers?

Morrow: I guess it did come from the staff. Of course, this was around the time that the club was--I guess before the 1980s, the club didn't even really have a membership program. People just--if they joined, they joined, if they didn't, they didn't. So this was right after the club sort of woke up to the idea that maybe you could go out and influence people to join this organization.

So they were just beginning to gather data about keeping records of membership and acquisition and retention and so forth--

Lage: And then the computer, of course, allowed that.

Morrow: Yes. I suppose that we were learning from staff, although there was a sense that we were learning from one another.

Lage: Did you investigate other similar operations?

Morrow: Yes, I'm sure that in different programs that we looked at, like Field Recruitment Incentive Program, we looked at Common Cause and we looked at other organizations. The staff would go out and get data that we requested and bring it back. It seemed like a really fruitful time for membership development.

Field Recruitment Incentive Program [FRIP]

Lage: The Field Recruitment Incentive--is that where the chapters get some benefits?

Morrow: The chapters get a kickback, if you will, for any member that's recruited at the local level. Every chapter and group has what's called a FRIP number, so that, for instance, if membership comes in on a form that has your field recruitment number on it, then your chapter gets credit for that, and you get like a \$10 rebate, or there's an incentive to go out and get members, because it's very expensive. During this time, we were also investing more and more heavily in acquisition through direct mail.

Lage: And that's expensive.

Morrow: It's very expensive. It costs probably more than the price of a first-year membership to recruit that person. So any time you can get that member through a less expensive way, then you save.

Lage: Do you have an incentive program to get people to become second-year members?

Morrow: That's what they're talking about now, as a matter of fact, and it even has an acronym: it's something like SYRIP, and I forget what it means. Second Year Retention Incentive Program, SYRIP.

Lage: That sounds very fruitful.

Morrow: Yes. [laughs] I think that's what it's called. I think it's something like that. And then we learned also that, for instance, people who join, who get a letter in the mail and join, are people who respond to the mail. We had this notion that if you recruited somebody face-to-face, then they would be more likely to join for a second year because they would be somehow a higher quality member if they'd been recruited face-to-face.

Well, it turns out that that's not necessarily so, because people who join--you can join by being recruited by another member, but the only way to re-up for a second year is through the mail. So that people who join through the mail are people who open and read their mail. The people who join because another friend recruits them may not be people who open and read their mail, and they could only rejoin through the mail. So we were all learning about all the dynamics of membership recruitment.

Lage: Learning some marketing skills.

Morrow: It was a fascinating time. I was also at that time getting more and more involved--I eventually became council chair--

Sierra Club Council

Lage: Yes, I want to talk more about the Sierra Club Council, because that's something we don't have a whole lot of talk about in our oral histories.

Morrow: Right. Well, as you know, the council is now probably thirty-five years old. They might be celebrating their thirty-fifth; it seems like it's been ten years since we celebrated the twenty-fifth.

The council's purpose is to connect the chapters up with the national organization. It grew out of the need for the board to have a body to delegate to, specifically issues of governance and administrative issues, issues like membership and finances and non-conservation issues, to have a body of people--

Lage: That doesn't seem to have happened, though. In terms of finances, at least.

Marrow: Well, it has in terms of finances of the chapters. So the council fulfills a couple of functions: one, it's a body that the national organization can delegate administrative issues to, but it's also a two-way conduit of information between chapters and the national organization. This is a way for chapter people to have their concerns heard at the national level, and a way for the national organization to have its concerns heard at the chapter level.

Lage: And does it work?

Marrow: Well, sometimes better than others. One of the things that I think over the years, chapters have grown, and so now we have a body that has one delegate from every chapter, and we have a chapter of 60,000, and then we have a chapter of 750. The needs of a chapter of 60,000 are--60,000 people is bigger than the entire club was when the council was formed.

Lage: And they still only have one representative.

Marrow: Yes. So the whole council system still depends on one delegate from each chapter, and I think it's probably time to examine whether that's the best link-up. Right now the chapters have the option of having a council delegate be elected at large or being appointed from their excom [executive committee].

But a lot of times, the council delegates have historically not been as much movers and shakers within their chapter, so if they're going to go home and be opinion leaders, if they're going to go home and carry the organization's banner back in their chapters, you have to make sure you get the right person.

Lage: Why would they not be movers and shakers?

Marrow: Well, if they're not on the executive committee of their chapter, or if they're not an officer, I don't think council delegates are always taken very seriously.

Lage: In their own chapter?

Marrow: Yes. We have to make sure that they're people who are listened to and can get on the agenda, and be heard.

Lage: So would you rather see the chapter chair come?

Merrow: That's the other option, and that's been brought up over the years: "Well, maybe the thing to do is have the council made up of chapter chairs." And that would be ideal, but again, with the diversity in chapters and the demands on a chapter chair of a 60,000-member chapter, and the likelihood that that person with everything else he or she is doing is going to be able to take on this added responsibility of being the main link--.

So somehow we have to re-examine that linkup and see if it's--I think the purpose is still very much there, the two-way conduit function is very much needed, and the board needs to have somebody to delegate administrative issues to. But whether or not we've got the right link is very much something that needs to be examined.

Lage: Now, what about the link between the board and the council? Does that work well?

Merrow: It works better or worse depending on--you know, the council's chairs have varied over the years. If the council chair has the--how to say this--has the respect of the board, then more and more things get delegated to them. If the council chair isn't seen like a trusted insider of the board, then the council gets ignored, which is too bad.

Lage: Is there kind of a tension there? Hopefully a creative tension.

Merrow: Sometimes. Sometimes I think the council feels like the poor stepchildren; they're not getting their voices heard. They come and demand to be taken more seriously, and so forth.

Lage: There seem to be some board members who have come up through the council, and some board members who come up through the issues. Does that make a difference in outlook?

Merrow: It does, I think. Well, I'm not sure if that makes so much of a difference as the fact that there are some--I probably show some of my biases here, that--

Lage: That's good, that's what we want.

Merrow: There are some directors who come up through the process, and there are some directors who are strong loners. The Sierra Club tends to bring along people who are the strong--the lone wolf, out there on the cutting edge, the person out there taking an unpopular stand, and who is out there all by themselves, and who as an individual has made a huge mark on an issue or whatever.

Lage: And made a name for him or herself.

Morrow: Right. Although sometimes those people have a hard time delegating, and sometimes they have a hard time remembering that not everybody is a natural-born strong lone wolf and needs support, needs nurturing, needs training.

So I guess another way to look at the--what is it, there's an expression, "There are two kinds of people: those that divide people into two kinds, and those that don't."

Lage: Oh, that's wonderful! [laughter]

Morrow: But dividing people into two kinds, I think that in the Sierra Club another one of these dichotomies is the issues people and the process people. So I think that there are directors who are issues people, and sort of loners, and then there are process people who have more patience with other humans' frailties.

Lage: Right, and you'd find more of the process people in the council, I would guess.

Morrow: I believe so, yes.

Grassroots Effectiveness Project

Morrow: Another effort that was coming along during the early and mid-eighties that I was a part of, that shaped me, was the Grassroots Effectiveness Project, GREP. That was really started by Marty Fluharty, who got the board's attention back in the early eighties to the fact that, as I was saying before, new leaders are not necessarily born, they have to be made. You have to give them some resources and some training.

She got the board's attention to the need to provide training. The Grassroots Effectiveness Project set as their mission to go out and train trainers, so that every chapter would be equipped to meet, to diagnose and meet its own needs for skills training. So GREP went out to train trainers for each chapter.

Lage: So this is a different effort from, say, training people to lobby in Washington.

Morrow: Right. Training people at the chapter level to meet whatever their own identified training needs are.

Lage: How did that work?

Morrow: Well, it was terrific, actually. We would pick out a region of the country, or one or two regions a year, and get the chapters to designate a training coordinator and send them to us. We would teach them training skills and--

Lage: Did you use consultants to teach the training skills, or did you use Sierra Club people?

Morrow: Sierra Club people. We pretty much developed our own materials. A lot of the training from that time ended up in a book called Grassroots Training. Besides the training coordinators' effort, we also had another effort which was to create an organizers' library. So in the mid- to late eighties, we were producing these volumes called The Organizer's Library. And one of them was a manual for trainers that had training modules and ideas and stuff on how you could--

Lage: So you were training trainers to go back and train leaders.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: And were you training the leaders how to run a chapter, or how to lobby in your state capital, or--?

Morrow: Depended on what the chapter identified as its own needs. They equipped people to be able to train to whatever needs the chapter had, and they were all so very different. We couldn't sit here in San Francisco and say, "This year, we will have training for newsletter editors. This year, we will train conservation chairs." It turned out that--the notion was to train the chapters to meet their own needs.

Lage: That's very interesting.

Morrow: And I think it has fallen on hard times a bit, because for some reason in the late eighties, people--the board sort of, there was a sea change and the board began to think that this training stuff was too touchy-feely.

Lage: Was it touchy-feely?

Morrow: It was touchy-feely, it really was.

Lage: [laughs] How was it touchy-feely?

Morrow: Well, the people who went through this training felt--had a real sense of camaraderie and a sense of mission, and some of the so-called issues people thought this was all too much pop psychology.

Lage: Did it use techniques from pop psychology? Did you draw on things from outside the club?

Morrow: Well, yes. I'll tell you another sort of shaping experience for me was on one of the very first meetings that I came to out here, the board or the council had hired a consultant, consultants called [Michael]Doyle and [David]Strauss, who wrote a book called How to Make Meetings Work [Playboy Press: Chicago, Ill.,1976]. And they taught us what a facilitator does, and they taught us about facilitative behavior, and consensus-building through--the sort meeting where you brainstorm and you--and this was the start of the Sierra Club's meetings where you cover the walls with butcher paper, and so on.

Lage: Collaborative, it's very collaborative.

Morrow: Yes, collaborative problem-solving and so forth, I think led into the kind of approach that we were teaching in the GREP program.

Lage: But I don't think of that as touchy-feely--I mean I've heard, even companies like Pacific Telephone was criticized for their training program at one point as being too touchy-feely. But I think when they said that, they really meant it, like holding hands and more seventies-type, Esalen and that. Now, did any of that come in? Or are you talking about facilitating meetings?

Morrow: Well, I guess during the training sessions, we would be off in some remote scout camp or something, and the people that were there would develop a strong sense of camaraderie and so forth and so on. So I don't know that--maybe touchy-feely is too--but I think that there were other leaders on the board, at the board level, who found all of this--there was an impatience with--if you're going to be a leader in this club, you just ought to know how to do it. You go out and do it.

Lage: Right, natural-born.

Morrow: And go out, and not spend this money and this time in holding people's hands and showing them how to--

Lage: So there you have the loners who seem to be born knowing how to do it.

Morrow: Right. And that dichotomy still exists, I think, to a certain extent.

Lage: Did you get feedback from the local chapters? Do you think this program--I'd like to interview someone on the local level to tell me if that made a difference.

Morrow: Yes. I mean, I still get feedback. People will say, "You know, I went to that training session back in '87, and it really changed my life." Or, "You know, I went to that one back in '84, and I remember what so-and-so said, it really made a difference to me as a leader." Just basic leadership skills. Teaching people how to develop ownership in the people that they're working with, and how to delegate, how to recruit and inspire and reward and organize volunteers, and how to get them--.

I think of that as--maybe touchy-feely is too loose a term, but there was sort of a heyday of this in probably the mid-eighties. It's fallen off; it was, I think, a victim of budget problems lately, and also I think that there was sort of almost a backlash.

Lage: That's very interesting. Just kind of a psychological phenomenon within the club. Any other molding things in your career, pre-board, with the council or any of the committees you served on? Are there other committees we should mention?

Morrow: No, I think before I got on the board, the membership committee and the council were probably the two that I was most involved with.

Connecticut Legislative Electoral Action Program

Morrow: Although outside of the club, back in my own chapter, based on our electoral work helping Mary Mushinsky get elected, a number of progressive people in Connecticut got together in 1981 and formed a progressive political action committee called LEAP, Legislative Electoral Action Program, and within that a state environmental PAC called ELECT, which stood for Environmentalists to Elect Legislators in Connecticut.

Lage: They're wonderful names that you've brought up, these acronyms.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: And this was a coalition?

Morrow: Yes. And ELECT was the environmental--we formed a state environmental PAC called ELECT that organized people to work for good state-level environmental candidates. And the Sierra Club at that time did not have a state PAC in Connecticut. We had the--

Lage: We had SCCOPE [Sierra Club Committee on Political Education] by then, did we not?

Morrow: We had SCCOPE at the federal level, and the Sierra Club was doing federal races. But ELECT was doing state house races in Connecticut. So that was an organization that I put a lot of time into all through the eighties. ELECT still exists and still continues. Starting in '82, around '82 and '84, there was a lot of interest in state-level political action that continues to this day.

Sierra Club Council Training Program

Lage: As council chair, were there particular issues that you remember during that time?

Morrow: Well, see, I was elected to the board in--let's see--it would be '85. So I must have been council chair from '83 to '85. It must have been around there. I'd have to go back and check.

But one of the things we did during the Morrow administration in the council was the council would meet a Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. And Thursday and Friday were devoted to their own meetings and training sessions.

Lage: The different groups within the council?

Morrow: Yes. And when I took office, they sort of had scatter-shot training for council delegates. Whoever had a hot issue to train on, or whoever was a hot trainer, and one of them came and trained council delegates.

Lage: What kinds of things would this be?

Morrow: Well, they brought in the Doyle and Strauss people, and then another time they might have a membership thing, or they might have a certain issue that they--.

Lage: So whoever organized a program would come at that point.

Morrow: Right. And when I was council chair, one of my efforts was to sort of regularize and systematize the training for council delegates. We worked out--if a person were going to be council delegate for, say, two or three years, then we thought, what do they need, what skills do they need, what information do they need to be a good strong council delegate?

And we came up with what we called the core curriculum, so that if you came to three successive council meetings, then you got everything you needed. So every council meeting, we would do a certain course, and so that after three meetings, you had the whole core curriculum. And then there were some electives that we would change around periodically.

Lage: And with the hope that they would go back and train their people, or were they just learning how to be a good council delegate?

Morrow: They were just learning how to be a good council delegate.

Lage: So hopefully they would stay on for a few years.

Morrow: Yes, right. And along about that time, instead of depending on council delegates to go home and train their people, then there were these training coordinators who were coming along also.

Lage: Your teaching background is coming out here.

Morrow: I guess so.

Lage: Are there other teachers involved in these efforts? Is that a large group in the club?

Morrow: I don't know that they've ever all found each other, although I believe that Marty Fluharty was also a teacher, and she's been a mentor and certainly somebody that shaped my thinking about the Sierra Club.

Lage: She should really be part of this interview program.

Morrow: Absolutely.

Lage: She seems a person who's always tried to bring others together.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Was there any conscious discussion between you, or was she a mentor in that regard?

Morrow: Well, she drew me into the GREP program. I guess--I don't remember discussions, except that we've always roomed together at board meetings, and it rubs off.

Lage: Yes. [laughs] Maybe you just both came with the same orientation.

Morrow: Must be.

Lage: I asked on this outline if you could talk some about the strengths and weaknesses of the Sierra Club Council. Let's focus on weaknesses first, from your vantage point as council chair.

Morrow: Yes. Well, as I think I said before, I think that the main weakness is the dependence on strength of the council delegates. If the council delegate is the link between this national organization and their chapter, then that person better be the right person, better be the right link.

Lage: And that's up to the chapter.

Morrow: That's up to the chapter. Typically, years ago--I don't know if it's improved much since, but a lot of times chapters would think of council delegate as being the reward for several years of service, take a retiring somebody, put them out to pasture and make them a council delegate and give them a trip to San Francisco [for council meetings].

And the work of the council depends on these delegates--if it's the right person, if when that person goes back, if they're listened to, if they're heard, if they're in a position of leadership and influence in their chapter.

Lage: And if they're motivated to really be active.

Morrow: Yes, right.

Lage: And then in terms of the strengths of the council, what kind of contribution do you think it makes?

Morrow: Well, the strength I think is that without the council, there's no way for this organization to keep in touch with its chapters, except sort of by hit or miss. And those links are important. We're all tenuously connected. Somebody once described this organization as more like a cheese co-op.

Lage: [laughs] Tell me how--I don't get that picture.

Morrow: That, like in a co-op, people get together and pool their buying power. We get together and--it's very effective at the state level to be able to say, "I'm from the Sierra Club, and I have 600,000 people standing behind me," when you want to say that. But then there are other times when you want to just be nimble and move real quickly. So you pick and choose when you pull out your big Sierra Club 600,000-member national organization club, and when you play your other--"I'm a nimble local organization, and I can make up this policy as I go along."

Lage: I see. So sometimes you just want to be that chapter, sort of divorced from the club, and sometimes you want the whole strength of it behind you.

Merrow: Yes. You bet.

Lage: That's an interesting dichotomy.

III SIERRA CLUB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Election to the Board, 1985

Lage: Shall we talk about how you came to run for the board? Were you approached, or did you decide on your own?

Marrow: Well, I guess when you get to the level of council chair, you're starting to be looked at and possibly groomed, I suppose. As council chair, you're invited to attend directors' retreats, the summer retreat. And then you begin to be regarded as a national-level leader.

It was interesting, when I was council chair, Michele Perrault was club president, and Carol Lee Baudler was SCCOPE [Sierra Club Committee on Political Education] chair, what was SCCOPE at that time. So I remember, this raised a few eyebrows that these women were all in charge, which was great fun.

But the way that the process works is that the nominating committee comes up with a long list of people that they are looking at as potential directors, and then they send them a letter inviting them to submit their resume and answer questions. I figured after coming toward the end of my second year as council chair, that this would be a logical next step.

I must confess that in my whole life I don't--I haven't gotten where I am by careful planning. I usually sort of sidle up to a vacuum and then just sort of let it suck me in, which I think I probably did.

Lage: It was there, the opportunity was there.

Marrow: It was there, and I thought, "Hey, what the heck, we'll give this a try, and see what happens."

Lage: But you are developing a different self-image of yourself along the way, as a national leader.

Morrow: Oh, sure. You bet.

Lage: Which is kind of an impressive change that you may not even have noticed.

Morrow: Probably. So I got the questionnaire, and I said, "Well, I'll fill this out and send it in." And then you go through an interview process, and then they pick their list of nominees. I happened to be one of--I forget if it was seven or eight that year--that survived the process. And then had to run in an election, and then survived that process.

Lage: Was that a year--I've read since then that some years they've had trouble getting people to run. Was that the case in those days? We're talking about it as if it were the ancient years, but it wasn't. That was just seven years ago.

Morrow: I don't think so. I think that they readily got people to run.

Lage: You didn't feel put off either by the time requirements or the functioning of the board?

Morrow: No. I mean, I had been drawn into the--I went into this with my eyes wide open. At that point, I had been coming to board meetings, every board meeting for five or six years, and knew exactly what I was getting into, and what to expect.

Lage: Did you have some sense of what you wanted to see, what contribution you wanted to make or the direction of change that you were thinking of?

Morrow: No. I don't think I had a specific agenda, except that I knew that I had come out of the process part of the club, the chapters and the grassroots and the process stuff. But you don't survive long as a parochial director. You have to set aside your own regionalisms and your own agenda and take a larger view.

And the day that they counted the votes when I was elected happened to be the very day that the board also voted to hire Doug Wheeler. And I remember thinking--when I was thinking about running for the Sierra Club, I thought well, this would be--I had never gone to graduate school, and had always felt somehow that I had missed out on something.

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Morrow: I had hoped to at one time go into the Yale School of Organizational Management, growing out of my interest in organizations and how they run through the Sierra Club, I thought

well, maybe I'd go back and get a graduate degree. But you could only go full time, and it wasn't in the cards for me to go full time. I had to earn some money.

So I thought, well, if I run for the board of directors and get elected, this will be my graduate school of organizational management. This would be my grad school experience, and won't it be fabulous to watch a real true professional, like Doug Wheeler, come in and pick up the reins of this organization? And what a terrific experience for me to get in on the ground floor, and watch this process of this person coming along.

And then of course, it turned out that he wasn't with us too long; it was like--

Lage: Two years?

Morrow: Eighteen months, or so--less than two years. So it was a good graduate school experience, but not quite in the way that I had expected.

Lage: We'll start with that next time, and your board experience before you were president. Because I'm sure that must have shaped what your thoughts were as you became president.

Gender Roles in the Sierra Club

[Interview 2: November 13, 1992]##

Lage: We're starting up the second day of interviewing, on the 13th of November. And we were talking informally and something came up that we decided to put on the tape.

Morrow: It's always been sort of my perception that women are not--in the leadership of the Sierra Club, gender has not been a big factor. I don't know that--your gender is the least of your problems [laughter].

Lage: You don't divide people by gender, in other words.

Morrow: Really, I don't think so. But then it would be hard to explain why so few women have become president. And up until recently, of course, men were the majority on the board, although this board has a majority of women.

Lage: For the first time.

Morrow: For the first time. But it seemed to me that the reason that there were so few women is more a function of the fact that in order to be president, you have to be able to completely reorder your life, where you have to be able to have the kind of support at home that you can essentially put your home life second for that time.

And women have not had that luxury. Women have been the support system; they've been the supporter, never mind the supportee. So in order for women to be president of the Sierra Club, you have to have a very strong support system at home.

Lage: But if you were looking at it to make the contrary argument, men might have more difficulty taking off from their jobs, since they're more often the financial support of the family, traditionally.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: But they have found ways to do that.

Morrow: Yes. A number of our presidents are people who are either independently wealthy or have been able to put their work aside, and somebody else was at home keeping the home fires burning. For me, my husband stayed home and kept the home fires burning, which is an unusual circumstance.

Lage: Right, it is. Even now. So I wonder how long before we have another woman president.

Morrow: Gosh, it seems like, with all these women on the board, something--

Lage: It's going to happen again.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Well, you know, we didn't have many women on the board until the seventies. There were sort of token women--Charlotte Mauk, some women who were on after their husbands retired, like Marge Farquhar, or Harriet Parsons who came on during the war when the men were off fighting. And then in the seventies, a few women came in, Claire Detrick and--I can't remember the other names. But that was sort of the beginning of the women who really began to take formal leadership roles.

Morrow: Yes. And yet, I imagine at the most fundamental levels of the club--we have an expression in my house, "The rooster crows, but it's the hen that lays the egg." And I have a sense that women

are doing a lot of the day-to-day, hands-on grunt work at the local level.

Lage: I think so, and I think that might have been the case even back in the earlier days. But women that I've talked to of an earlier generation would often protest that they didn't like to take a public role. And I think some of it was self-image, not necessarily what the club was doing to hold them down, but their own self-image as working behind the scenes and letting the husbands be the board members or presidents. Who knows what all the subtle constraints were.

Morrow: Interesting.

Lage: But you're implying that you haven't felt any particular prejudice or--?

Morrow: No. I haven't personally. Although we have the follies.

Lage: That the council puts on.

Morrow: Yes. And there's a musical that Jane Elder writes every year, takes a musical and then makes it over. We'll probably talk about this later under the fun stuff. And tonight's musical will be "Brigadoon," and there's some reference in it to a glass ceiling at the Sierra Club. So it must be an issue that's been talked about with the women staff, whether women in the staff are rising through the ranks. All of the staff chiefs here, the head of the Washington operation, the head of the field system, the executive director--are men, and whether there's some barrier to women coming up through the Sierra Club. You know, Carl Pope came all the way up through the ranks, and Doug Scott came through the ranks. And is there some reason why women are not doing that?

Lage: Do we have any field office headed by women?

Morrow: Yes, we do.

Lage: And we have some women among the top staff--Joanne Hurley--but wouldn't she be considered the level beneath the executive director?

Morrow: Right. But I guess maybe it's more that the big conservation jobs--the head of the Washington office, the head of the field system, the conservation director, the executive director--

Lage: I understand some women were in contention for the executive director position.

Morrow: Yes. And the final choice was between Carl and a woman, and it was tough. I mean, she's extremely well qualified. But I don't-- I suppose there's reason to at least question whether there's something in the conservation arm of the club, whether there is a glass ceiling really.

Lage: Or even in the movement as a whole, the environmental movement as a whole.

Morrow: Yes. Ironically, in the conservation part of the club, it's the men who seem to be moving up through the ranks. In the fundraising area of the club, it's actually a little bit of a joke that we have to have affirmative action to hire men, because the top fundraisers are women. Women are doing the development and the fundraising. I know when we've been hiring for senior development people, there's been a joke that they have to have affirmative action to get more men.

Lage: [laughs] That's very interesting. Who knows why that is.

Family Background

Lage: I realized after we finished last time that we hadn't gotten quite enough picture of family, your early upbringing, just in brief. You mentioned your grandmother's influence and Maine. Could you just tell a little bit about your family in terms of religion, politics--your mother was a teacher--

Morrow: My mother taught fourth grade, and my father was a florist, he ran a greenhouse.

Lage: There's your green background.

Morrow: It must be. And looking back, I think my parents were Republicans.

Lage: [laughs] It doesn't sound like it was talked about a lot.

Morrow: No, it really wasn't. Wasn't much. They were just working people struggling to make ends meet. I think I became a member of the Congregational church when I was growing up, but we weren't extremely religious people. We were just sort of very ordinary, middle-class people, just trying to pay the bills and so forth.

As a matter of fact, when I was a freshman in college, my father ran a greenhouse, this florist shop, and he had financial

struggles and lost the business. There was a period of lots of financial problems that my family never really recovered from, I don't think. The house was--we lived at the business and they lost it all.

So there really wasn't a lot of time for--there wasn't money for expensive vacations or private education or--

Lage: So you went to public schools.

Marrow: I went to public schools. I went to a private college, but had a scholarship.

But the one thing about my dad particularly that I suppose looking back was perhaps a shaping influence was that he was always a civic activist. He got involved in--I played in a youth orchestra, and he organized the parents' auxiliary. He took it upon himself to organize the kids of my age to be companions to handicapped children, and we each had a handicapped kid that--and they had a little businessman's association.

Lage: He was an organizer, sort of the way you became.

Marrow: He was an organizer and an activist, and it was sort of, when the roll was called up yonder, it was expected that we would contribute and do something to help out.

Lage: So that kind of community-mindedness.

Marrow: I suppose that was really from him. But I can't point to any strong--there are no John Muirs lurking in my family tree.

Lage: What kind of goals did your parents hold out for you, were you aware of that?

Marrow: Gosh. I did well in school. I was sort of an over-achiever, I guess, but I don't remember them ever pressuring me to achieve. They seemed to be--if I did well in school, they were always pleased, and mildly surprised, and "Isn't this nice how--"

Lage: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Marrow: I had an older brother. And they sort of said, "Well, isn't this nice, that our child is doing well."

Lage: Did you sense expectations for you as a woman, a girl, different from your brother?

Morrow: I graduated from high school in 1964, and college was expected. But then I was part of the generation that was expected to marry, and as indeed I did; I got married two weeks after I graduated from college. And then after a few years, that you would have children, and that--

Lage: Which you did.

Morrow: Which actually, we were again sort of caught up in the pressures of the time. I was married in 1968, and in the early seventies, when we were going back to the earth and getting sort of our consciousness raised, we went through a long spell where we thought we would have no children. All of a sudden we realized that we had a choice. I mean, there were choices to be made here, and there were issues to be thought of, and there was environmental issues--

Lage: Were you thinking of population?

Morrow: Population, and the demand for resources, and probably a little bit of leftover adolescent rebellion against the fact that it was expected that you would have children, and we weren't going to fit into this middle-class mold, we were going to be the brave new world.

And so we didn't decide to--I think that looking back now, it wasn't until my thirtieth birthday started looming--the whole, sort of your biological clock ticking and so forth, and "If we're ever going to do this, maybe we'd better think about it now." So we were married nine years before we decided to have Annie. And then we decided to just have one, so I suppose that's still a remnant of that rebellion.

Lage: Sounds as if you love her a great deal.

Morrow: Oh, absolutely, yes. She's terrific.

Lage: Okay. I'm glad we picked up on the family.

Executive Director Douglas Wheeler

Lage: Now, when we ended last time, you had gone on the board, and Doug Wheeler had come in as executive director. And your education in management was to begin.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Shall we talk a little bit about what you saw happen when Doug Wheeler was here, and what your reaction was?

Morrow: Right. Well--and I was brand new on the board, so I didn't have the kind of day-to-day contact with Doug Wheeler that a president would have.

Lage: Who was president during that time?

Morrow: The president was Michele Perrault. But there began to be sort of little rumbles of the fact that things weren't going too well with Doug Wheeler. There were stresses and strains between him and his senior staff.

Just as a funny little symbolic thing that happened that sort of characterized the fact that Doug Wheeler possibly wasn't the best fit for the organization was that without telling anybody, without involving anybody in the decision, he changed the club logo. Do you remember that?

Lage: I do remember that. [laughter]

Morrow: All of a sudden, we started to get envelopes with this sort of spruced-up, cleaned-up, much more twentieth-century logo on it.

Lage: The tree, and clean lines?

Morrow: Yes, yes. And everybody went berserk. I don't think he had any idea the depth of people's feelings about the logo. So his sense of the history of the organization was clearly lacking.

But also, it became apparent that he hadn't involved anybody in that decision. That was something--

Lage: Even his own staff you don't think were--?

Morrow: I don't know if he involved the staff. But clearly, he was out there all by himself on the logo, and it did suggest that he didn't have a real sense of not only the club's history, but how in order to do something of that magnitude, you have to have a lot of fingerprints on that decision. And there were no--only his fingerprints were on that decision. And people sort of came unglued about it.

Lage: So from what I understand, he did have significant problems with his own staff.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: And at the same time, was he having significant problems with his board?

Morrow: Well, again, I was one of the most junior members on the board and I didn't notice the stresses and strains. But it was apparent that he was not tied in the way--he wasn't closely connected with the volunteers, and then it was apparent that he wasn't closely connected with the staff, too.

It all came to a head in the late summer of--which must have been--

Lage: Would be '87?

Morrow: No, a little bit before that, let me think. Maybe it was the summer of '86, I'm not sure. Around that. That the staff had major problems with his--he was dictatorial and unresponsive and was not working collegially with his staff.

And I think what really kicked off that unraveling of his executive directorship was that the staff pretty much revolted. They sort of said, "We can't work for this man." And the board sort of rallied with the staff--or actually the board, as you may--other presidents may have talked about this--

Lage: No, because we haven't interviewed that group of them.

Morrow: Oh, that's right. And Larry Downing would be the one that knows this story in great detail. But as I say, there was this sort of insurrection among the staff, and the board was--we all scurried to San Francisco to see what we could do to put this back together. The board was divided, really badly divided, on whether to try to patch up and prop up this executive directorship, or whether it was time to pull the plug.

And ultimately, the decision to pull the plug was an eight-to-seven decision, which is a--

Lage: Very divided.

Morrow: Very divided.

Lage: Which side were you on?

Morrow: I was on the eight--as a matter of fact, it happened that the day that it all came to a head and a vote was taken whether to ask for his resignation, I had another obligation and came late to the meeting, and came as they were going around the room and each

speaking of where they stood. I got to weigh-in and discovered that I was ultimately the eighth--it would have been a tie vote--

Lage: Swing vote.

Merrow: Yes, I guess.

Lage: Had you made up your mind?

Merrow: Yes, I had.

Lage: And what was the basis for your thinking?

Merrow: Well, I guess it was just my sense that there was no--that all the king's horses and all the king's men were never going to put this back together again, that his leadership was fatally flawed and couldn't be fixed.

Lage: Because of the staff being so opposed, the senior staff?

Merrow: Yes. And also, I guess my gut feeling that we had not done the work to judge the kind of fit that we had with him, that his leadership style and--

Lage: That's what I was wondering, if this raised questions about the hiring process, and about the orientation process. It was the first executive director who was hired from without?

Merrow: Yes. Yes, I think that the hiring process that hired Michael Fischer was much more elaborate and involved a lot more director input, and was a reaction to that other experience. And in the hiring of Michael Fischer, the word--I think if there was any word that was used more than any other, it was the word "collegial," collegial, we have to have somebody who's collegial.

And actually, in the world of executive director hirings, the pendulum then swung from the less collegial to--and ultimately Michael I think has been criticized for being too collegial, too easygoing, too able to be--too indecisive. So the board does this pendulum thing where they react to somebody who's dictatorial and they want somebody who's collegial, and then they think, "No, we have to have somebody who can make decisions." And they do this sort of pendulum effect.

Lage: In your judgment, is the board itself part of the problem?

Merrow: Oh, absolutely. [laughter] No, we sure are. The board has never I don't think--God love them--they haven't ever decided exactly what our role is. I mean, exactly how, when we say that the board

is in charge, exactly what does that mean? There's sort of four kinds of leadership: you can direct, you can support, you can coach, and you can delegate.

You have to do different things at different times, but the board has never really fundamentally agreed on our relationship with the executive director: do we direct that person, do we support them, do we coach them, or do we delegate? And at any given time, you probably wouldn't get a lot of agreement on exactly what our role should be.

Lage: No, and the board we talk about as a unit, but it's a collection of people.

Morrow: Oh, yes. It sure is.

Lage: And I guess they must be divided on that issue?

Morrow: Yes. You know, I think that we--and it's hard to--it's helpful to have a specific issue or an example, and I don't have one at the tip of my tongue, but the president and executive--the volunteers and the staff at the senior level are sort of back and forth, on each other's turf. The turf lines between volunteers and staff, the board has never really agreed among itself when it's appropriate for directors to muck about on the senior staff's turf, and vice versa. And that's a constant tension.

Lage: And even where the turf line is, perhaps.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: I hope we can, as we go through some of your presidency, think of an issue, because it's always easier to talk about these things when they're not as abstract.

Selection of Michael Fischer as Executive Director

Lage: Now, I understand--actually Michael Fischer I think told me this--that when he was hired, it was also an eight-to-seven vote.

Morrow: You know, I don't remember that. I don't remember that it was that close, and maybe I--I know I voted to hire Michael, but I don't remember that it was--I would have said maybe a ten to five vote. I don't remember it being that much divided.

Lage: Was it an issue-based division, or was there another individual they thought would be better? Or were these styles?

Morrow: There was another individual who was much more--for lack of a better word--dictatorial, whose leadership style was--the word that was used with this other guy was Rambo. [laughter] I remember it was sort of between collegial and Rambo, or whatever.

Lage: So you had either five or seven people who wanted a Rambo.

Morrow: Yes. I can't remember now whether there were other issues at the same time that divided the board. I think there were people who were worried about whether Michael had the depth of management skills and so forth. But Larry will know exactly what the questions were.

Lage: He was, I guess, the head of the search committee?

Morrow: Yes. Well, he was president at the time. So I don't remember that that hiring was that divided. And actually, having come off of a situation where the board had gone through this trauma of the resignation of Doug Wheeler on an eight-to-seven vote, there was some thought that this board would be so badly fractured that we could never work together. But those divisions didn't--the board always finds something to be divided about, but it never divided again on exactly those lines. I mean, there was a sense that--

Lage: I see. The eight-to-seven is then not a constant division on all the issues.

Morrow: Right, absolutely. There was a sense that the eight-to-seven was like--we'd become like the majority party and the minority party, but those coalitions dissolved and regrouped along other lines.

Lage: It's a fascinating institutional study.

Morrow: It really is.

Lage: When you get back to your graduate school experience, maybe in your old age, you can do a great dissertation--

Morrow: Really.

Serving as Fifth Officer: The Volunteer Development Office

Lage: Okay. Where are we now? If there are things in your directorship before you became president that we should mention, I think this would be the time.

Marrow: Well, I guess the first year that I was a director, I was just a rank-and-file director. The second year I was a director, I ran for fifth officer, which ostensibly is the person that breaks ties on the excom, but they have to find a role for this person, so the fifth officer had traditionally been the person who was the board's liaison to the volunteer entities, liaison to the council and was in touch with grassroots stuff, and training--

Lage: That seems like a good role for you.

Marrow: It was perfect. It was a very comfortable role. As a matter of fact, it was so comfortable that I did it for three years. And then--

Lage: Are you really a representative of those concerns from the grassroots, then?

Marrow: Yes. And I would go to council meetings, and during that time, one of the things that we worked on very hard was the creation of the Volunteer Development Office, which was a new department, the notion being that the club ought to be spending some attention not only on members as donors but members as volunteers, and how to encourage and nurture volunteerism.

And that helped create the volunteer development office, and we hired the first staff person, who was Rich Hayes, who left us about a year ago, but set about to figure out what could be done at the national level to enhance volunteerism at all levels of the club and strengthen and enforce the volunteerism and the grassroot structure of the club. So I worked on that.

Lage: And is that something that has worked out the way you had hoped?

Marrow: No. [laughs] Unfortunately, it fell on hard times. When budget constraints--push came to shove, that department, being sort of like the last hired, was the first fired. They were trimmed back and trimmed back and trimmed back so that it's just a shadow of itself. It has not fulfilled its promise, which is a disappointment.

Lage: The promise, would that be to sort of support the kinds of things you were doing in grassroots effectiveness training?

Morrow: Yes. Unfortunately, now that department is--their office is down at the end of the hallway here. Gene Coan has inherited that job, but their resources have been cut back, and their staffing level has been cut back. So all that they can really do at this point is provide administrative services to volunteer entities like the board. And of course, the board has a way of absorbing as much attention--a lot of attention, demanding a lot of support services.

So the whole effort to have a professional staff person who spent time really thinking and strategizing about how to support volunteerism, or who, when major club decisions are made, and people discuss what the effect of that will be on the club, a voice there that says, "Well, this is what the effect of that will be on the volunteer sector." And there just isn't the time for it.

Lage: Yes. I'd wondered, because I knew that the board office was moved over to the volunteer development office, so that made me wonder if it was as you describe, where they spend a lot of time supporting the board.

Morrow: I believe that that's become a larger and larger part of--as their resources diminish and the board demands more of their support, then there hasn't been time and energy to go out and do the kinds of things that we hoped that they would do. But the department still exists; it's still a line in the budget. So it's something to build on.

Lage: Right, if you have more money in the future. Okay, so that was one of your thrusts, and the state entities support.

Morrow: Yes. Now, that came along, I was fifth officer for three years. And I was happy there; that was a comfortable spot for me. And then when I was going to my--this would be then my fifth year on the board, I was just a non-officer the first year, and then three years as fifth officer, and then was getting ready to run again for fifth officer, and it was--you know, when you want to be an officer on the board, you call around.

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Morrow: I started a poll of my fellow directors about whether they would support me for fifth officer, and--I'm trying to think of how this went. Sally Reid was on the board at the time, and Sally said that no, she was going to support somebody else for fifth officer because she thought I had done it long enough, and that I should be going on to do something else. There were other people who should have a chance to do this, and I should move aside and let

somebody else do it, and I really should figure out something else I wanted to do and not sort of hog this position.

The Vice Presidency: Chairing the Coordinating Committee for Conservation

Morrow: And she happened to be a candidate for vice president. So I said, "Well, Sally, the only other thing I could possibly ever want to be would be vice president!" [laughter] And she said, "Well! Then I think you should do that!"

So I did.

Lage: So you ran for vice president?

Morrow: Yes, I did. So with that as a spurring--

Lage: Was this done with good humor and fellowship or--

Morrow: Sally and I are great friends, and enjoy each other's company to this day, but I challenged her for vice president and beat her. And then became vice president in my fifth year on the board.

Lage: Was the vice president at that time in charge of conservation?

Morrow: Yes. So it was a little bit of a stretch, because I had to pitch myself--previously, I was the process person, and I now had to pitch myself as the issues person and convince people that I could head up the conservation--the vice president is also usually known as the vice president for conservation and chairs the conservation coordinating committee and so forth.

So I had to convince my fellow directors that I was a serious issues person, which I always knew I was. So that was a big change.

Lage: But you hadn't been in that end of the club, administratively--

Morrow: Right, they hadn't seen it--right. But once I made up my mind to run for vice president, that pretty much forced me to confront the fact that the following year, if I was ever going to be president, that would be the time to do it.

And I can't say that I had clearly planned out my life. Mostly what's happened is I've come along, and then there would be a little vacuum that sort of calls out to me, and then I let

myself sort of be drawn into that vacuum. And then we go along a while, and then there's another vacuum, and you say, "Oh, well, we'll try that."

I have to confess that it hasn't been a product of careful planning or a checklist of my agenda that I have--

Lage: And nevertheless, you always reach for more and more responsibility.

Morrow: Yes. And in the same way ultimately that I ran for public office, I got through being president, and was thinking, "Well, what will I do next to get my résumé together?" A person that lives in my town came to me and said, "You know, there's an open seat here to run for public office," that my predecessor was not running again. And "Have you ever given it a thought?" And I said, "Well, that's kind of mildly intriguing."

And he said, "Well, just come down and talk to the nominating committee." And I just sort of let myself be drawn in. I didn't resist too hard, but it wasn't that I had carefully set out--

Lage: You weren't a Bill Clinton. You didn't think about it when you were attending college.

Morrow: Right. Exactly right. So I'm embarrassed to say that this is not really a product of a lot of careful planning.

Lage: Well, I wonder how many of the club presidents do plan it well in advance. Do you get the sense that there is a real drive?

Morrow: Yes, I think so. You know, I think that Richard Cellarius was more of a driven person. He wanted to be president. He knew that his whole life and always knew that he would. And up until I ran for vice president, I would have been completely comfortable being fifth officer forever. But I was nudged out of my complacency by Sally Reid.

Lage: [laughs] To her regret, probably!

Morrow: Yes, probably.

Lage: Now, how did it work out being head of the coordinating committee for conservation?

Morrow: I thought it worked out well. I had a--

Lage: What is your committee made up of? Representatives?

Morrow: Well, yes. There was the head of the regional vice presidents forum, which is called the--now, what's her title? The RVP forum chair, is sort of the head of the RCC [regional conservation committees] system. And then who else was on that? A representative of the political committee, and then various sort of--oh, a representative of the issue committee caucus, and then a couple of conservation graybeards--you know, people who know the policy process in the club.

And it turns out that my process skills were very helpful. You don't have to be an expert on every one of those issues to run a committee well, to get people involved and give them a sense of ownership and get them moving off in a direction. It happened that the conservation chief staff person at that time was Doug Scott. We got to be great friends.

Lage: So he was your staff--?

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: How would you describe that relationship, with staff and volunteer at that level?

Morrow: I thought it worked--I worked real well with Doug Scott. He does, or did, have a reputation for sometimes running--I don't know, maybe roughshod is too strong a word, but being sort of cavalier toward the volunteers. But we got along real well. I tend to overcommunicate; we were on the phone a lot and talked a lot, and he dealt me in, I dealt him in. I think it worked--

Lage: Were there turf battles there that you were aware of?

Morrow: I don't think so. I don't sense that there was any major tug-of-war. The people on the committee at that time--Bob Howard, Ed Wayburn, Kathy Gregg, Shirley Taylor, Jim Dodson--are people who are real savvy.

Lage: What would have been the thrust of the committee's work?

Morrow: Well, basically the purpose of that committee is to--there are three or four major conservation entities in the club, and it's to make sure that they're all dealing with one another--that the political people know what the regional vice presidents think, and the regional vice presidents know what the issue committees are thinking, and finding ways to keep the herd all roughly headed in the same direction.

Lage: Do you establish the priorities, or is that a separate--I know that's a real involved process.

Morrow: Actually, it did happen that the conservation coordinating committee became the group that shepherded the priority-setting process, and the whole process by which the people at the group and chapter level were canvassed for their feelings about what the priorities should be, and bring it along up--came through that committee ultimately to the board. So that that was one role for the committee.

Lage: I remember a very elaborate memo from Doug Scott about setting priorities. I wonder if it was at that time? The process was all laid out, how we would--

Morrow: It might have been, because he was the chief conservation staff person.

Lage: Were there people on the board who were not sympathetic to that kind of elaborate polling of the grassroots, and--is that a tension on the board, "Let's just move ahead," versus "Let's bring everybody along"?

Morrow: No, I think it would be heresy not to at least pay homage--we have to pay homage all the time to the grassroots. We all have to do that, and nobody would dare disparage the grassroots feeling. The clever thing is to watch my fellow directors figure out how to take a little bit of public opinion and figure out how to support their pet issue, which we all do. None of us got this far without being blatant partisans or parochial--figuring out how to get some attention to your issue, or how to--

Lage: Everybody has their favorite issue.

Morrow: Yes. And there are directors on the board--Ed Wayburn, it's, "We've got to figure out how to get Alaska in there," and for Michele, it's "Got to have international in there." Everybody's got their thing.

Lage: So the trick is to fit the grassroots polling together with the interests of the powers that be.

Morrow: Yes. [laughter] And really, the grassroots polling is only one aspect of picking the club's priorities. If for some reason the grassroots brought along an issue that had absolutely no legislative handle, then it would be silly to make it a legislative priority in a year when it was not going to go anywhere.

So it's a snapshot of what the people at the fundamental levels of the club are willing to invest their time and energy in,

but it's not the only determining factor on what the club's priorities are.

Lage: So that would have been part of your job in the coordinating committee, to sort of fit together the legislative handles?

Morrow: Yes.

State Lobbying Program

Lage: Sounds very interesting. Anything else from those years before you were president that you want to talk about? I know that the state tasks--

Morrow: Yes. I guess what started me talking about the vice presidency for conservation was that it was during that year that I was vice president that the whole state lobbying effort came along, and we got a little grant to put on a state colloquium to bring state lobbyists together. And then all through the spring of that year, worked on a proposal to come through the budget process.

This is where old lobbying skills are helpful, to figure out who has the power to get done what you want, and what the right buttons to push are, and where the--

Lage: So the lobbying--

Morrow: Lobbying within the Sierra Club tests all of your skills as a lobbyist, to figure out--make sure the right people have their fingerprints on this, and it's moving the right way. So we brought along that proposal through that year, and it ultimately was voted on in the board meeting of May of 1990 when I had been elected president. Then the proposal came along at that time to be voted on that that was the time for it to be blessed by the board in order to be included in the following year's budget.

Lage: I see. And what was the vote actually for?

Morrow: The vote was to support the notion that we would have a state lobbying program that involved a staff person and a series of grants to chapters, grants for special projects for lobbyists, for state lobbying, and also--there were two kinds of grants. What were called strategic grants, which were for special state lobbying projects, and then incentive grants where any chapter that had a state lobbying program could apply and would receive

money at the rate of a certain amount per capita to support that effort.

Lage: Do you know the impetus behind this move to give greater support to the state lobbying?

Morrow: Yes. It just began to make more and more sense to people, that if you were going to pursue an issue, you had to pursue it wherever it took you. And sometimes, the issue would take you to the courts, and sometimes it would take you to Washington, and sometimes it would take you to the state houses.

And our state lobbying effort in the Sierra Club had grown completely--it had grown up all by itself, thank you very much. Every state had its own--some of them had great lobbying programs, and some of them didn't. You couldn't count on every state having a state lobbying program.

Lage: There's certainly a strong one in California.

Morrow: Right. So the notion was that we ought to be able to be what we call vertically integrated, so that state lobbying was as much a tool as political action and litigation, and federal level lobbying, that it was another tool, but also what we called horizontally integrated, where there are ways to, if you take an issue and play it out in five or six key state legislatures, you can raise the floor under the federal government. If when the northeastern governors voted to support California tailpipe standards, then all of a sudden, the federal government wakes up. Or if half a dozen states pass legislation concerning packaging as a solid waste issue, then it starts to push the federal government. So that there were ways to either push the federal government or go around the federal government by playing issues out in state legislatures.

Lage: So some of the effort would be to coordinate issues in different states.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Instead of having each state go in its own direction.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Are the chapters happy with this initiative, or do they feel too much direction?

Morrow: No. It requires a great deal of tact, because you want to--you can't push them around. You have to give them resources and hope

that they recognize that it's in their self-interest to help other chapters or collaborate with other chapters. And the program unfortunately got off to a start just before the great recession, so for one year we had funding for the grants, and then the following year, the grant funding was scaled way, way back. The goal is hopefully in this budget coming along right now that that program will start to come back to life. There is a staff person for the state effort, Paula Carrell--

Lage: Who came out of the Sacramento office.

Morrow: Yes. And she has survived the slings and arrows of the recession, and hopefully will--

Lage: Does she have that kind of tact that you're looking for?

Morrow: Yes, she does. She really does.

Lage: She understands it.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Was this partly a sense of despair with the Bush and Reagan administrations that focused your efforts closer to home, or does that not connect?

Morrow: Well, I suppose it was probably a program that could grow best in an administration that was inimical to our programs. But eventually it was going to happen, because as I say, we've got fifty-seven chapters that were out there doing great stuff at the state level, and without any help and without any support, and without any resources. They're just doing--

Lage: That would be one of the more amazing parts of the Sierra Club.

Morrow: Really.

Reflections on Sierra Club Chapters and Volunteers

Lage: As you traveled around as president to the various chapters, did you find the character of the chapters highly individual? The type of people, the level of activity, did you notice?

Morrow: No, I guess that there are more similarities than differences. When you go to different chapters, it's like when you go to somebody's house and you know that if you stand at the kitchen

sink, that probably up on this side are the glasses, and probably over here is the silverware. Chapters struggle with very similar issues--the biggest one that they struggle with is how to involve more people, how to get new people involved, and how to keep them active and how to bring them along, and how to replace themselves as volunteers. That's the biggest issue that they struggle with.

Some chapters have much more aggressive programs. Some of them are much more contentious. Some of them are much more contentious with the national organization and so forth. But generally, they seem to have similar --

Lage: Do you recognize Sierra Club in each one? Is there some stamp that says, "Sierra Club," among these people, or the organizations?

Morrow: Well, you can go and feel at home. Three weeks ago, I was the annual dinner speaker at the Iowa Chapter. You feel right at home. The people have slightly different regional accents, but they are very similar people with similar earnestness. You would feel at home any place, as would John Muir if he came back today.

Lage: That's a very nice picture. I wonder if that's true[about John Muir].

Morrow: It would be fun.

Lage: Are they similar in educational level?

Morrow: I think so. There are a fair amount of professional people and a lot of teachers. I know that there are studies of the demography of the Sierra Club that say that our average age is forty-seven, and it gets a year older every year, which is not good, because we're--

Lage: I notice the recruiting effort for students.

Morrow: Yes, which is very promising. And upper-middle-class, tend to have a college education, and then a lot of advanced degrees. Upper-middle-income people.

Problems with the Atlantic Chapter

Lage: Why would you say some chapters are more contentious than others?

Morrow: Well, I'm not sure I know why, but as you know, during the year that I was president, we had a major flap with the Atlantic Chapter. That one may be more a function of the size of the chapter. This was a chapter of--gosh, was it 25,000 people?--but within the chapter, there was one regional group, the New York City group, which had 12,000 members.

New York City people are a special breed unto themselves. In other organizations that I have known of, their New York City group affiliate was often difficult people, or people who are not--shall we say--laid back and easy to get along with. There developed some real divisions between the New York City group and the rest of the chapter, people in upstate New York.

Lage: So the chapter encompasses the whole state of New York?

Morrow: Yes. And it's probably just too big an area with too many people to hold together. To balance the interests of the people from the agricultural counties of upstate New York with the urban interests of New York City all in one organization is probably--it was always too much.

Lage: Was there thought given to dividing it?

Morrow: There has been thought given to dividing it, and what we bump up against is the notion that there's been sort of an unwritten prohibition in the Sierra Club against a chapter being any smaller than a state, because somehow the state that--everybody in the state that speaks in the name of the Sierra Club has to figure out how to speak with one voice at the state capital.

Lage: That's right. But we have that in California, we have lots of chapters.

Morrow: We do, yes. And that's caused people to--when we get to the point where the growth of the club produced this Atlantic Chapter with all of this diversity of issues and this division, that maybe it was time to rethink this, and think about--actually, it's sort of died down now. I think that those people seem to be working better together.

Lage: At one time, didn't you suspend the board of governors of the chapter?

Morrow: We did put them sort of on hold for a while and take over for a bit. But then the year that I was off the board, they resumed regular operations, and they seem to be functioning, although it's probably only a matter of time before there's some other eruption there. Which is too bad.

Lage: And as I understood, some of the issues were not just internal in the chapter, but also they took stands on national issues that were in opposition to club policy, or--?

Morrow: There were a group of people in the New York City group who did-- for instance, they took stands on issues like the Montana Wilderness Bill that were contrary to the policies of the people of Montana, the Montana Chapter.

Lage: That presents problems.

Morrow: It does, an act of major Sierra Club tactlessness to do that.

And I lost touch with it a little bit when I was off the board that year. I was busy being first selectman. But I just talked to somebody last night who is from the Atlantic Chapter who said that--he sort of rolled his eyes when we spoke about the old days. He said, "Well, you know, I think things have calmed down, but it's bound to erupt again."

Lage: So there's a chapter that has its own distinct personality.

Morrow: It sure does.

Lage: I wonder if the others do as much, but just don't make as much noise.

IV SIERRA CLUB PRESIDENCY, MAY 1990-MAY 1991

Running for President

Lage: We've already begun to discuss your presidency. But we haven't talked about it too thoroughly. Is there more to say about how you happened to run, and how you lobbied your board members? I think that's an interesting thing to an outsider, the way that you lobby in order to become president. Do you have to make promises?

Morrow: Sure. It's just like any campaign. You have to say what you stand for, and in saying what you stand for you make promises. But when I ran for vice president, I think part of my campaign for vice president was to say that I would be available, should the board so desire, to be president the year after. So I planted the idea.

Lage: That would make you a one-year president.

Morrow: Yes. I planted that idea in their minds. But then, as the year as vice president progressed, I had that year to be thinking about it and talking to people, and people began to think of me as a major contender for president. And for a while, I thought I was going to be unopposed. But then I had a challenger, who was Freeman Allen.

Lage: What would have been the differences between you?

Morrow: Well, I'm not sure that looking back, you could make a lot of the differences. I had more experience on the board. Freeman was newer on the board. He had been on the board one year, and then I believe he was on one year and then challenge--

Lage: Was he an issues person?

Morrow: Yes, issues committees as a matter of fact: clean air, and biodiversity, biotechnology. And so I felt like I had more depth. I ran on the fact that I had more depth of experience; having been

fifth officer and knowing all the different aspects of the club, and having been vice president for a year put me in that spot, in the right spot.

But you go around and you talk to people individually, and people make a commitment to you. For instance, Sandy Tepfer told me that he was Freeman's friend, and he'd made a commitment to Freeman.

Lage: On the basis of friendship, this was presented?

Morrow: Right. And I think there was some concern about whether--I think I was perceived as being a softie and a nice person, and could this person be hard-boiled enough to do this.

Lage: Now, why do you have to be hard-boiled? Was this just running the meeting, or other aspects of it?

Morrow: Well, to be able to make tough decisions, and to be able to stick to your guns and to be able to be, I guess, decisive. I think that in that election, I'm looking back, but I think I won either nine to six or ten to five, I can't remember. But it's funny: I've forgotten now, at that time I could have told you, because I would have known exactly who voted for me and exactly who didn't. But you forget real quickly. Once the election is over, everybody goes back to work and the divisions are gone.

Leadership Style

Lage: Now, what's the feeling on the board between people? I've read references to it being so contentious that it's an unpleasant experience to be on the board.

Morrow: Well, I think that one of the things that I felt good about was that during the year that I was president, there was a lot less contentiousness on the board.

Lage: Is that because of your style, do you think?

Morrow: I think so. You know, I took a lot of time and talked to people and listened, and communicated a lot, and talked to people regularly. Also a little bit is in your personal style. I'm not a contentious person, and the meetings were pretty civilized. I didn't let people get out of hand.

Lage: So you did show some strength in not letting people get out of hand.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Was that something consciously that you had to do?

Morrow: Well, no. I think it's almost more by personal example than by--I didn't ever have to pound on the table. I don't remember that I did. I think it's more by your own personal example. But people speak of that year as being a year when the tensions on the board subsided. And some of it I think is just plain good communication. People feel like they've been dealt in, and understand the issues, and have had a chance to have their say.

Lage: Let's talk in more specifics about what some of those issues were during the year, or some of the tough decisions you had to make. Can you remember specifics?

Morrow: Well, I suppose one of the most interesting things that happened during that year was the Gulf War. There was the difficulty of knowing what was the proper position for the Sierra Club to take, whether we should--Greenpeace was out there organizing people against the war, sort of in the anti-war mode, but the popular support for that war was very great, and where should we be and how should we--

E-Mail and the Board of Directors##

Morrow: That war, as you may remember, developed so quickly that major things would happen in between board meetings. So there was some talk at board meetings, but a lot of it was over the E-mail and over the phone afterward about what would be the proper position of the board. I used electronic mail a lot, and all the directors were hooked on to electronic mail--

Lage: At their own homes?

Morrow: Yes. So there was a lot of electronic dialogue. As a matter of fact, that's one of the regrets I have now, that we used to be on the cutting edge of electronic communication. John McComb--you remember John McComb?

Lage: Yes.

Merrow: --really was a pioneer in getting up and running on electronic mail. And it was a way for directors to communicate and have dialogue directly. And it's fallen apart a little bit, because my successor and his successor--neither Phil Berry nor Tony Ruckel use it. So there's no point in logging on to E-mail if you're not going to get something from the horse's mouth.

So the directors aren't really--you can sort of tune in and get updated on issues, but there's not the dialogue going on.

Lage: Now, how does the E-mail work? How does it function differently from a telephone conversation.

Merrow: Well, what would happen is I would sit down at my home computer and tell my computer to call up the central computer and see if there were any messages in my mailbox there. And if there were, I could read them and download them into my computer, and then manipulate them and respond to them.

For instance, I might get a message from somebody, and it would say at the end of the message, would come written over the screen at the end of the message, it would say, "Disposition," and I could say, "Reply." I want to reply. And then I would type something and send it, and it would go back. Or, I could say, "Reply, and copy to these five people," or "Reply, and blind copy this one and copy to this one." It's just like a mailbox, only it's all electronic.

Lage: And how private is it? It only goes to the people that you ask for it to go to?

Merrow: Yes. And you have a password, so nobody can read your mail except you. And somebody could send me a document which I could then download into my computer, and I could manipulate it, word process it, change it, and then I could upload it and send it back out. It's just like mail, only it's instantaneous.

Lage: Did your directors respond? Were they all on line with you then?

Merrow: Yes. They all were hooked in, so you could get the word out fast. People could feel closely in touch. I believe that's fallen apart quite a bit, to my regret.

Lage: When did Tony Ruckel come on the board? Was he on the board during your--?

Merrow: He was my secretary.

Lage: He and Phil, did they participate in it from their end during your presidency?

Morrow: Phil Berry, I believe, was off the board during the year that I was president. Then he came back and was my successor, I think. Now, wait a minute: I have to go back and get that straight. [Berry returned to the board May 1990.] Well, at any rate, he doesn't use E-mail, but Michele [wife of Berry and also a director] does. So he would get his messages through Michele. Michele has never been wild about it, but she can do it.

Lage: It could be very time-consuming, I would think.

Morrow: It is. It's like when you first get an answering machine. It's easier not to have it at all, but it does help you communicate.

Lage: And what happens to all this E-mail? Just thinking of it from the archivist's point of view. Sounds like a lot of important things go on, a lot of decisions are made.

Morrow: It is. As a matter of fact, the year that I was president, I archived all of my E-mail.

Lage: Oh, great.

Morrow: I downloaded it onto my home computer and printed out a little index to it, and it's still on my hard disk. I should--

Lage: It really should go to the Bancroft.

Morrow: It should.

Lage: Because that would just be a fascinating study.

Morrow: You know, it would be very easy to transfer all of that over to a disk, and save--it would be all the electronic communication I got during that year.

Lage: And is it also what you sent?

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: That would be a fascinating study. The Bancroft may not be equipped yet to use this disk. They will be at some point.

Morrow: Yes. And it was the backbone of getting ready to write my book, because I had all of this archived.

The Persian Gulf War and Bush's Energy Policy

Lage: What were the different points of view about the Gulf War? Was this an issue where people were divided, or was it mainly thinking of the public relations aspect?

Marrow: There was some division over how aggressive we should be against the war, whether we should speak out against it or whether the tide of public support--and even among the people on the board, there was a tide of support for wiping out Saddam Hussein and other--. It brought out sort of the bloodlust even in the directors.

But it was real hard to find a proper--and things were happening fast--it was hard to find a proper stance for the Sierra Club. And we ended up in retrospect taking sort of a wimpy stance. Looking back now, we could have been much more bold, I think, and said, "Let's really identify the real causes of this war, and let's make sure we understand why we're doing this and what role oil and energy has to play in it, and do you really think that this is worth killing all these people over?" and so forth. But at the time, the tide of public support was just overwhelmingly in favor, and we really--

Lage: It's hard to realize it now, even, looking back. It was a very strong tide of public support.

Marrow: And I think we did take sort of a wimpy stance, looking back. But it was just hard to know what to do. I don't think we really knew--now, we have a much clearer picture of what was going on then, and perhaps the sanctions would have worked, and so forth.

And then, of course, the other interesting thing was that right at the end of the war, just as the war ended, the Bush administration came out with their energy policy, which was just a travesty. Here we had just gone through this war, where all of this--the expense and the lives lost and the trauma, and the energy policy didn't even give a nod to fuel efficiency, and didn't even mention automobile fuel efficiency or alternative energy. It also tried to ease the way for nuclear power, and so forth. So it was just an insult to the intelligence of the American public, I think.

That was where all of our pent-up--once the energy policy hit, the Sierra Club just went ballistic. We really did.
[laughter]

Lage: And part of that was frustration about the war, you think?

Morrow: I'm sure it was. And then at last, there was something that we could do and get our teeth into. You may remember that the Bush energy policy was written up in something called the Johnston-Wallop bill, which bubbled along all through the spring of '91. And then we could really focus on something. The Sierra Club really organized itself to fight the Johnston-Wallop bill, and fight for the Bryan bill and for automobile fuel efficiency, and fight to save the Arctic. We were then I think in our full glory, and full battle dress. It's a grand sight to behold.

The spring of the year that I was president, I spent a lot of time working on those energy issues, and going--

Lage: Now, how did you work on them, as president? What is the president's role?

Morrow: Well--oh, gosh. I would get asked to come to Washington and lobby, and then go to Washington. I remember in April of 1991-- which was the last month that I was president--I spent three days in Washington and made like twenty-one congressional visits. It was some sort of record, for the number of different congressional visits in the shortest amount of time, or something like that. I appeared at press conferences with Barbara Boxer, as a matter of fact, in Washington, and made speeches, and tried to rally the troops. Basically I was more or less played as what they call a face card, I suppose. But they were issues that fascinated me, so I tried to involve myself, mostly in Washington.

Lage: You weren't involved in, it sounds like, policy, deciding when to compromise or what kind of--?

Morrow: At that point in the battle, it wasn't time to compromise. We were just sort of out there getting our points down, our issues out there.

Lage: Does the president get into the last-minute decisions that can't be sent through all the structure of the club, but a decision that has to be made, should we support this amendment or not? Does the president get pulled in on that?

Morrow: Yes. And on my electronic mail, I would every day get updates on what was happening in the Johnston-Wallop bill. The D.C. staff really dealt me in to all of that stuff. They would want me to know--have some input in a decision, because then ultimately I would have to defend it. But that was a fun time.

And of course, the bill didn't come to a vote until after I was out of the office, and as a matter of fact, I think I wrote it--it's in the book--about how I was out campaigning for selectman, out going door-knocking with my running mate. We were driving down--in my town, the houses are so far apart, you have to drive to ring the doors.

It came over the radio that the Johnston-Wallop bill had been defeated. I just let out a whoop. But it took until the following November for it all.

And thinking about all the individual press conferences, all the--this was the Sierra Club's dispersed lobbying effort at its finest. The whole grassroots--thousands of individual bits of action at the grassroots level, thousands of individual phone calls to congressmen and senators had brought that issue to fruition. I don't think any other organization could do that.

Lage: That's what I was going to ask you: is there a comparable organization to the Sierra Club?

Morrow: No. There is nothing quite like it. During the Johnston-Wallop bill, and then later during this last presidential campaign, we had like twenty-five press conferences all at the same time, or for the Clinton endorsement, we had fifty press conferences on the day that the Sierra Club announced their endorsement. Fifty press conferences!

Lage: So you're getting the local news.

Morrow: Around the country--which all depend on local people doing that work. I can't think of any other organization that could do that, or could sustain it, and week after week after week have phone calls going in to congressmen, and get people down to Washington to lobby.

Lage: How did the congressmen greet you, as president?

Morrow: With great deference. We were well treated and clearly respected. It was really just a fascinating time. It was really the funnest part. I loved the Washington stuff, and particularly the energy issues.

Lage: And had you been involved in any energy issues on the local level, or as you came up through the club?

Morrow: No, not so much, although energy--of course, under the big umbrella of energy at that time is global warming, and land use.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and all the implications of energy on land use.

Lage: You really do see the interconnectedness of it all.

Morrow: Yes, right.

Executive Director Michael Fischer

Lage: Let's talk a little bit about you and the executive director, how you worked together or didn't work together, or how you saw the relationship.

Morrow: Well, within the first month after I was elected, Michael and I went to a workshop together put on by the American Association of--I can't remember exactly what it was called--American Association of Association Executives, something like that. It sounds like something out of the "Prairie Home Companion," when you have these--

Lage: [laughs] It does, doesn't it? No more so than the committee on committees.

Morrow: Right.

Lage: Which I think came from the UC faculty senate. They have a committee on committees.

Morrow: Oh, no!

We went to this workshop that was specifically designed for chief staff officers and the chief elected officer of organizations similar to the club, which have a staff structure and a volunteer board structure.

Lage: Now, who else would have been there? What other kinds of organizations, do you remember?

Morrow: Oh, Campfire Girls, and health care organizations, and other nonprofits.

Lage: Was the League of Women Voters there?

Morrow: I don't remember that they were there, but they certainly could have been.

But the premise of this workshop was that the chief staff officer and the chief elected officer together are the chief executive officer. That Michael and I were together the CEO, and that my responsibility was to communicate with him, rally and relate to the volunteer structure, and his responsibility was to communicate and rally the staff structure, but that we were partners.

And we really lived that, throughout that year. We talked a lot. I was here a lot. I dealt him in to whatever I knew, he dealt me in to whatever he knew.

We worked on something together that year that was very helpful. We had what we called the Big Projects List. It started out to be--Michael started keeping a list of all the big things that he was working on, and it evolved into what we called the Big Projects List, which ended up with like twenty-five items on it that had a description of a Sierra Club internal issue, and then it would have who was responsible, what's the next step, and when we expect to hear back again what's going on.

Before every board meeting, we would get together and go over the Big Projects List, and figure out what was going on, and then put it out so that people knew where all those issues were. And we worked together on that, which was a very helpful management tool to keep track of a whole bunch of different issues.

Lage: Did you find that Michael did have the collegial style?

Marrow: He certainly did with me. I think we got along well. I occasionally worried that--there has been some concern that Michael was Mr. Nice Guy, and I think there was some concern that I was Ms. Nice Guy too, so the combination of two nice guys here would--but you know, I think that it--

Lage: But what's the fear? If you have nice guys, what's going to happen?

Marrow: Well, I suppose that people will just roll over you, or that you will just not be able to say no, or that you won't be able to--but there's a whole body of thought about women's leadership styles. I don't know if you've read any of the stuff about how women are what they call transformational leaders, where men tend to think of their power, they think in terms of pecking orders and getting stuff done by exerting their influence or whatever. And women get things done through other people, get power by giving it away.

And it certainly worked for me. My executive committee, I delegated a lot to them and trusted them, and we had frequent phone calls. We worked real well together as a team.

Lage: Very communicative.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Now, who was your executive committee?

Morrow: Well, my vice president was Freeman Allen. And he and I got along very well. I worked hard to deal him in, give him responsibility. The secretary was Tony Ruckel. The treasurer was Dick Fiddler, and my fifth officer was Ann Pogue.

Lage: Who later became treasurer.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: So that worked for you.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Did Freeman Allen kind of hope to become president the next year? Do you know?

Morrow: Now, let me think. How did this work? It's amazing how quickly these details--. Freeman Allen hoped to become president the next year, but then he was not reelected to the board.

Lage: Oh, is that what happened? You never understand that, either.

Morrow: No, it's crazy.

V MORE NATIONAL CLUB MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Club Elections

Lage: That's something I don't think people have studied, how people get elected to the board.

Morrow: Really.

Lage: It's too big an organization to do the lobbying for votes.

Morrow: Really, nobody--there are some 60,000 or 70,000 people who vote, and they can't possibly know you personally. So they depend on that ballot with your statement and your picture.

Lage: Is that a process that you think needs reforming at all?

Morrow: Well, I think it could be improved. In subtle ways, it has been improved. You now can have a longer ballot statement. I think the ideal improvement would be if the voters had a chance to actually see people in action. I envision some sort of--and someday, we'll have--the League of Women Voters will conduct debates that will be on video, and we'll send those around [laughter] so that people can actually--it does seem as though people make this decision based on some pretty flimsy information.

Lage: And may not even understand what the issues in the club or at the top of the management are.

Morrow: And it's important for people to see that your stand on a particular issue is not nearly as important as your ability to work with other people. So people do go through and vote--people told me that the first time I ran, I mentioned something about pesticides in one of my statements or whatever. And they voted for me because I mentioned pesticides.

Well, whether or not I mentioned the word pesticides is not as important as how this person works with other people. There's

no easy way to have people see that, or have any feel for that. So it seems like in order for the system to work well, people have to get a much better picture of this person as an individual and how they relate to other people.

But the other tricky thing is to figure out how to do this in a way that doesn't [base elections on wealth]. It's like campaign finance issues. If you have people spend money to promote their own candidacy, does it favor certain people of means over other people?

Lage: You mean, if campaigning were allowed.

Morrow: Yes. And actually, campaigning is allowed. I mean, there are-- Richard Cellarius knows all these rules, but you can spend money to--

Lage: You can send out campaign literature?

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Well, they certainly did that in the 1969 election. But I thought maybe they made an exception that year.

How about old-timers on the board? Is that a division, the old-timers and the new-timers?

Morrow: I don't think so. You don't have to be on the board too long before you don't feel like a new-timer any more.

Well, let me back up a minute. There was a spell in the late eighties where there was a lot of thought given that the board was just a bunch of grey-bearded old incumbents that keep coming back, and that there needed to be more new blood. There was an effort of several nominating committees to not automatically renominate incumbents, to really favor new blood, and to promote new blood.

As a matter of fact, I think Ed Wayburn went off the board for a year and was not renominated and ran by petition. I think Michele ran by petition, because the nominating committee had an informal policy where they did not automatically renominate.

Lage: And Phil Berry has run by petition several times.

Morrow: Yes. And that was an effort to give new people a chance to come on. So there have been quite a spate of new people on the board now--Duncan Stewart, Jean Packard--you know, Jean Packard had never been to a national board meeting, I don't believe, before

she was elected. Kathy Fletcher had no significant Sierra Club experience.

Lage: And they were nominated by the nominating committee?

Morrow: Yes. And there's been a little bit of a back--

Lage: That certainly must affect the character of the board.

Morrow: It does. And the pendulum again has swung the other way. Last year, when I decided to run again, there was this notion that we really needed more experienced people back on the board, that there were going to be such big challenges that we needed some people who'd been through some of the hard times before and knew where the bodies were buried.

Lage: Is that something you agree with?

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Now that you're returning! Did you think twice before you did run again?

Morrow: I didn't think--I should have thought three times. [laughter]

Lage: I mean, here you are, first selectwoman--

Morrow: Right. It was not a totally rational act. It was right after I was elected. I was elected in early November of '91, and I was approached to run again--or I had been approached right before that, and I said, "Well, let me wait and see if I get elected," and then I got elected and I sort of felt bionic, like I could do anything. And I didn't really fully grasp how demanding my new job would be.

Lage: Is your new job a paid job?

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: It's like a mayor.

Morrow: Yes. Exactly right. I really should have sat out another year.

Lage: You don't have a city manager.

Morrow: I'm it. I'm it. And looking back, for the sake of my own stress level, I should have sat out another year. But I am like an old firehorse. When the bell rings, when Joe Fontaine and Richard Cellarius and others were going to run, and they said, "Oh, Sue,

we really need you, you've got to come back and help us out," or whatever, and I respond to that sort of stuff. They ring the bell and--. All somebody has to say to me is, "Sue, we really need you, we can't do this, we need your help," and I am very susceptible.

Lage: And how does your husband feel about that?

Morrow: Well, when I was thinking about running, he kept saying, "Honey, this is not a good idea." And then I got elected, and he said, "This was not a good idea." And there have been occasions over this past year when I have said, "Maybe this wasn't such a hot idea," and he's said, "I tried to tell you!" [laughter]

Lage: The voice of reason in your life.

Morrow: Really.

Staff-Volunteer Interactions

Lage: We talked about you and the executive director. But that staff-volunteer relationship goes all the way down. You talked about the executive director as being head of the staff, and you communicate with the volunteers. Well, what about all this crossing over between staff and volunteers all the way down the organizational staff? How does that kind of interrupt that nice ideal structure?

Morrow: Well, it's got to happen. I mean, when I was president, I spent a lot of time here, and I was in and out of Washington. I felt that I had an ability to deal with the other senior staff. I didn't have to go directly through Michael, because we each knew where our turf was and where it began and ended, and what our responsibilities were. So maybe I just have a convenient memory, but I don't remember any of the big staff versus volunteer turf things going on that year.

Clearly, we had a serious mission, which was to get particularly the energy stuff, and the general Bush-Quayle stuff. So we--

Lage: You think that that overcomes all the internal--?

Morrow: Well, in a certain sense, when you have a sense of teamwork and you have important work to do, you don't have time for backbiting

or worrying about your turf. You just get in there and get the job done.

Lage: When you gave--was it in January '91 that would have been--you gave that very nice president's report talking about how we have to put the larger picture-- [see appendix]

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Now, were there things that were dismaying you about the club itself, contentiousness or whatever, that made you come forth with that sort of inspirational talk?

Morrow: Well, no, I think it was really possibly more a function of the fact that here it was January of my presidency, and I thought, "My gosh, what am I going to--I want to get something accomplished," and feeling almost in the same way that I had felt back in 1970 of the sense of Earth Day. Here we are with these huge energy problems and global warming problems, these staggering problems, and the staggering inability of the Bush administration to deal with them. I guess, looking back, that was the time of a whole lot of--some of those internal problems, like the Atlantic chapter, but I just had a strong sense that we're going to go down the tubes here as a planet if we don't get on with this and put whatever petty differences we may have behind us, and get out there and start swinging.

Lage: Was this the time the club was starting to experience recessionary problems? It seems like it was. That must have added to the tensions a great deal.

Morrow: It did, although it was just starting. Things were starting to--I was president at the most opportune time. I think I was gone when the real economic realities--that next year was really a tough year, and my heart ached for Phil Berry who was dealing not only with the recession, but you may remember, he had a terrible accident in a fire.

Lage: Yes.

Morrow: And dealing with all of that, it must have been just awful.

Centennial Campaign##

Lage: We haven't talked at all about the Centennial Campaign, and that seems to have been a very energy-consuming process. How did you perceive that during the presidential year?

- Merrow: Well, during my presidential year, I think the toughest issue we dealt with was the fact that we didn't have a very good fit with our Centennial Campaign director, Marianne Briscoe. That was a problem that--
- Lage: What would have been the problems of fit?
- Merrow: Well, again, I suppose similar to Doug Wheeler, she wasn't getting along with her senior staff. She wasn't getting along with the other senior staff. In the Sierra Club we must have our own very special way of doing things, because not everybody was born to fit into this crazy structure of being able to deal with volunteers. Volunteers march to different drummers than other people. It was apparent that it wasn't working very well.
- Lage: How was she doing on the fundraising?
- Merrow: Well, actually, she was a very effective fundraiser. But the staff was very unhappy, and lots of stresses there. So when I look back at that year, that consumed a lot of energy.
- Lage: Now, what would have been your role there? That's very much a staff issue. How did you fit in there?
- Merrow: The Centennial Campaign has a volunteer committee that works with it called the Centennial Campaign Planning Committee, the CCPC. I was on the CCPC. So I didn't have a direct sort of line relationship to it. The Centennial Campaign floats sort of above the club. It's been likened to one of those balloons in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade with all the guywires, and it kind of has its own timetable and its own reporting structure. So I guess there were a series of senior volunteers who were trying to help guide this and I was one of them.
- Lage: On the CCPC.
- Merrow: Right.
- Lage: So that had members from--the president of the club and the president of the foundation were involved?
- Merrow: Yes.
- Lage: And how large a committee is it?
- Merrow: Oh, it's about five or six people.

- Lage: So it's small. I like the balloon description. Was there criticism of the campaign for sort of being outside the club--not outside the club, but outside the traditional structure?
- Morrow: No, people seemed to accept that that was the way it had to be, although there are obvious stresses and strains in that relationship, because until the campaign machinery is geared up and producing money, it's just taking money away from other things while they're ramping up.
- Lage: Did you have a hard time bringing support along for the effort, given it was a drain on the resources?
- Morrow: Yes. I think there was a lot of examination and looking and questioning whether this is really the best way to spend our money. Although it really seems like most of our energy was spent toward trying to get the campaign directed and working, working along--
- Lage: You didn't have to deal with people who said, "Why are we involved in this?"
- Morrow: No. We had been working to set up this campaign since 1987 or '86. It seems like the first time I checked in on it was a board retreat that was held in North Carolina, which must have been '87, summer of '87. So we'd had lots of time to get those questions worked out in our minds.

David Brower, Member of the Board

- Lage: You served during the time that David Brower was a director, didn't you, and at the time when he resigned?
- Morrow: Yes.
- Lage: Now, what kind of viewpoint did he bring? How did you view his membership?
- Morrow: I don't think I was president when he resigned. Richard was president when he resigned. And David is David. He always pushes us to be bolder and to be bigger, and to be less practical and more visionary. That's his role. We need to hear from him now and then, but then by the same token, if we ran the Sierra Club according to the David Brower school of organizational management, you know, we wouldn't be around too long.

He is definitely a voice we need to hear now and then, and then it needs to be balanced by the practical people and the bean-counters. We need to keep being challenged by him.

Lage: The reason you wouldn't be around too long, is that fiscal?

Morrow: Fiscal. I think he is--I don't think that he's a manager. I think he's a visionary.

Lage: And he complains that the Sierra Club is too interested in the budget and the mechanics.

Morrow: His favorite quote--I love his sound bites, but one of them was, "We should measure our progress not in the black or in the red but in the green." And that's true, but you can't--you know. You can't survive too long if you don't worry about whether you're in the black or in the red.

Lage: Did he object to the Centennial Campaign, to the energy in that direction?

Morrow: Well, he didn't object to it, but he raised important questions about the fact that the Centennial Campaign was going to take us into areas of restricted money. It was going to start to affect us. When we ran ourselves completely on mostly small donations of unrestricted money that was not tax-deductible, we were very nimble. We could do whatever we wanted.

But when people start giving you money that has strings attached to it--

Lage: You mean, for particular programs?

Morrow: Right. And also money that's tax-deductible, that can't be used for just anything--

Lage: Is the Centennial Campaign all tax-deductible?

Morrow: No, it's not, but some is, and if you're going to go after the big bucks, that's where they are. What was it, that famous bank robber that says, "Why do you rob banks?" "Because that's where the money is." Well, the money is--people who have the money usually want a tax deduction for it, and they want to earmark it for some specific cause.

So he would remind us that this was not just pie in the sky, that it was going to affect how our programs run, and indeed it is. We're starting to try to figure out how to integrate this money and still keep our eye on the ball.

Lage: How to use this money and still keep your lobbying efforts going, or--?

Morrow: Well, a little bit. I suppose it's more along the lines of, people will give money for something that maybe we weren't going to do otherwise, and do we take that money? Or suppose they offer you money to do something that wasn't one of your priorities, but you really need that money; there are shaping influences like that.

Corporate Sponsorship

Lage: And then the questions about corporate sponsorship seem to be pretty heated, when I looked over the minutes. Was that something you were concerned about?

Morrow: Yes, actually it was. It was more the year that I was vice president, I think, that the whole notion of whether we would--it actually started, sort of swirled around the issue of whether we should take a three-quarters of a million-dollar grant from McDonald's. [laughs] And this will actually be remembered in the annals of Sierra Club fundraising as big deal, a big flap.

We were offered three-quarters of a million dollars to produce a booklet, an Earth Day booklet for children, to get ready for Earth Day of 1990. We know we should do more with environmental education, and there was three-quarters of a million dollars just dangling in front of us.

It came before the executive committee, and four out of five of the executive committee voted to accept it, and I voted not to.

Lage: And what was your thinking?

Morrow: Well, my thinking was that we should be very careful of who we take money from, the corporate sponsors, because they're not in this--they didn't get where they are today by being philanthropists. They want something for that money, and what they want is our good name to legitimize what they do. In the Northeast where I live, solid waste and fast food and the role of packaging in solid waste was a real issue. I didn't want to be a party to them sprucing up their image by buying a little piece of our hundred-year reputation. It just stuck in my craw.

So I voted no. And then when the rest of the board got wind that the executive committee had voted, then they went ballistic, actually.

Lage: Did you do any lobbying?

Morrow: No, I actually didn't. I went home and sort of scratched my head a little bit. Then it was Michele Perrault who came unglued and eventually got the board to reverse that and not accept the grant.

Lage: So it wasn't accepted in the end.

Morrow: No, it wasn't.

And that kicked off a discussion about other areas of corporate giving, wonderful analogies about if a bad person comes to church and puts money in the collection plate, shouldn't the church take the money, and there's nobody that's pure, and we can't demand purity from corporate donors, and so forth and so on.

Lage: Well, in this case, though, as I recall, the club's logo and McDonald's name were going to be closely allied on this environmental education brochure. So it's not just like taking money.

Morrow: Yes. They definitely wanted something for it, and to me, it was too high a price to pay.

Lage: How did the public affairs department feel about it? I'm assuming they would have been the ones to administer that grant.

Morrow: They were disappointed. They were angry, I think, that the board reversed it. The debate evolved into, in the Centennial Campaign, what are we going to do about corporate gifts. And actually, I think it ended up in a healthy way.

The Centennial Campaign has what's called a gift acceptance committee, and the gift acceptance committee had to come up with some way to decide which corporate gifts we would take and which we wouldn't. And it is possible to screen. Some people said, "Well, you can't possibly screen these, everybody can't be--."

Well, there are a lot of different indices of social responsibility, and lots of different groups that are looking at it. And it is possible to come up with a list of people that we would automatically accept a gift from. We would automatically accept a gift from REI, or Ben & Jerry's, or whatever.

And then a set of people that we just simply do not want our name allied with. And then a group of people that there's some question about, that we have to find out or think about a little more. And it has actually evolved that way.

Lage: And does the mechanism work all right?

Morrow: Yes, it seems to work fine.

Lage: Because you still have--I mean, the executive committee approved the McDonald's deal, so I could foresee the gift acceptance committee approving something and having repercussions from it.

Morrow: But there's a policy, there's--

Lage: Now there's a guideline.

Morrow: Yes, there are guidelines and there's a process, and it may not be perfect, but at least we make an effort to not sell our souls. I wanted a defensible process.

Lage: There's where process comes in.

Morrow: Yes. It's not going to be perfect, but we make an effort not to corrupt ourselves. Ultimately, your name is used to legitimize people's activities, and you want to be real careful how that goes. I think we have a responsibility to the whole environmental movement to make sure that we're not allowing ourselves to be used.

But it's hard. Then there's the other people who say-- there's that old expression, "The only trouble with tainted money is it tain't enough." [laughter]

Lage: Or if you can reform McDonald's in the process. There are places where they've stopped using styrofoam.

Morrow: Yes.

Marketing Survey: Public Perceptions of the Sierra Club

Lage: Okay, any other issues that you think are central to your presidency that we haven't talked about? Or have we illustrated how it all works well enough?

Morrow: Gosh. I guess I can't think of anything specific. I'm sure I'll think of something later, but--. We did spend, and you may remember this in the book, we worked on an effort to figure out

how to market the Sierra Club better, and used marketing expertise, and got marketing people together. That was another interesting project that we worked on.

Lage: Would this be to get more members?

Morrow: Yes. To figure out what sells the Sierra Club and how to capitalize on that.

Lage: Were there any surprises in the marketing research?

Morrow: This process ended up in focus groups. We got somebody to volunteer to do focus groups. I guess it was sort of surprising that the public perception of the Sierra Club is elitist. I don't think of us as elitist. And the public perception of us as somewhat stodgy. Things that we have to work on.

Lage: And some people see the club as extremist.

Morrow: Yes. Some of it's geographical. I know in the Northeast, we're considered stodgy. On the West Coast maybe we're considered stodgy. Certainly in Utah we're considered extremists. [laughter] So some of it is where you live.

Lage: Who your competitors are.

Morrow: Sure.

The Departure of Michael Fischer

Lage: Just before we took our break, I had asked you if you had some sense of what went wrong, particularly I guess with the relationship with the executive director, during the year you were off the board. Were you in the loop enough to have a comment on that? Or did you see it coming during your presidency?

Morrow: No. I guess I didn't see it coming. I know that there were people who felt that Michael should be more decisive or should be stronger.

Lage: Stronger with his staff, or stronger with the board?

Morrow: Yes, I think stronger with his staff. A little bit vague, I guess. And the year that I was off the board, I think a lot of-- and this is really, these are questions that really when you do Phil Berry, he's the one that will be able to speak to this.

But another problematic senior staff person was Andrea Bonnette, who was a director of finance and administration. The relationship between Andrea and Michael, and the sort of power struggle there, was a source of concern to me when I was president, and it didn't get any better. Andrea was a very strong personality, and she made it very plain that she didn't have a lot of respect for Michael.

He was criticized by some people for allowing her to treat him this way and so forth, but ultimately he fired her, or he let her go, or he gave her the gate, or got her to resign or whatever--negotiated a resignation, shall we say. And ultimately issues surrounding that, I think, were what caused his separation from the club.

And I wasn't there enough to know exactly whether people felt that he didn't handle it right, or--evidently there was dissatisfaction on the board with the way he handled Andrea's resignation.

Lage: Even though people had been somewhat unhappy with her?

Morrow: Right. And I think that they mutually agreed that it was time for him to move on. I had some regret about it. I thought that with all the tumult going on in the club right now, the last thing we needed was to be searching for a new executive director.

Lage: Not the best time.

Morrow: Really. So I felt badly. And also, it happens that I worked well with Michael, so I felt badly that it might be that his leave-taking here--that it would have a little cloud over it, or that he wouldn't look back on his time happily.

Lage: Well, I would guess that Phil Berry has a different management style from you, in terms of how he ran the presidency.

Morrow: Yes. I think so.

Lage: And maybe that didn't fit as well.

Club Headquarters. Club Social Concerns

Lage: Let me ask you another thing, because I thought of it as I was looking out the window: where the club is set, the sirens we hear, the street noise, and then of course all the homeless people

you encounter as you walk through the Tenderloin, to get to club headquarters. Where does the club fit in this--not physically--but how is it positioned in relation to the other social issues that are so pressing, it seems?

Merrow: Well, it's interesting that you connected that up with the fact of where our office is. Because when we moved the office here, it was before I was on the board but right around that time, there was a sense that our old address, as you know, was getting much more tony than we were. We were sort of getting gentrified out of that neighborhood, or whatever. We couldn't really afford to stay there.

And it did at that time seem like it was much more of a grassroots organization to be in a real neighborhood with real people, and there was this optimistic sense that we would pull up this whole neighborhood, that we would be the cornerstone of improving the neighborhood.

And some of that did happen a little bit. There's a couple of big developments around here. But the economy worked against us, and not only the fact that the neighborhood has continued to deteriorate, or hasn't improved, but the fact that there is a glut of office space on the market now means that not only sociologically but economically, fiscally, this turned out not to fulfill its promise in this neighborhood. Which is too bad.

We're paying a lot per square foot to be in this crummy neighborhood where people feel a little bit frightened to come to work, and where it's of concern that we have volunteers, people from "America's heartland," wandering around in the streets here, in danger. So I feel bad about that.

But it's interesting that you should connect that up with the whole notion of the Sierra Club as not being separate--when everything is hitched to everything else, we are hitched not only environmentally but socially to a lot of issues. It's occurred to me over the last year or so, actually the year that I was president, I began to think about the fact that we're going to have to find a way to deal with larger social issues. We're not going to solve these environmental problems unless some of the issues of social justice are resolved. The poorest people live in the most polluted areas, and those issues are never going to go away unless those people are empowered. We have something to offer them, we know how to work the system. We know how to make democracy work for people, we know how to empower people. So we've got to figure out how to talk to them, and--

Lage: But because the club is such a middle-class and basically white group, it must be hard to make those connections.

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Have there been real attempts made?

Morrow: There are some remarkable attempts being made, particularly around the Great Lakes, where a lot of the issues of the Great Lakes are toxics issues. The people working on air toxics in the Great Lakes are coalescing with all kinds of different groups, and ethnically diverse groups, African Americans and Native Americans and poor people, civil rights groups and so forth, working on those issues. I think mostly it is around the issues of toxics where we're finding common ground and finding ways to work together.

Lage: I guess this is one of Michael Fischer's concerns.

Morrow: Yes. And he should be, I hope, remembered and would want to be remembered that he raised this issue several years ago, before the leadership of the club was ready to talk about it, and sort of pushed it when a lot of people were not listening.

Lage: Did he help you understand it, do you think?

Morrow: Yes.

Lage: Or are there other things?

Morrow: He did, and also I went to a conference on air toxics in the Great Lakes, which Jane Elder--

Lage: Is Jane a staff or volunteer?

Morrow: Staff. She was Midwest field rep for many years, and now she's working on a consultant basis with the Centennial Campaign. But in your list of people whose brains should be picked about the history of the Sierra Club, she's one of them. Is there oral history with other people than presidents?

Lage: Oh, yes. That just happens to be a focus at the moment. I think we have to get the presidents, but that's just one aspect, which is why I try to make your interview as broad as we can.

Morrow: Sure.

Lage: We don't want to just get into all the internal machinations of the club.

Sierra Club Social Life

Lage: We haven't gotten the fun side, and I think it doesn't come out too often in the record. The club seems very serious and also contentious.

Morrow: Sure. As a matter of fact, when I was running the second time for the board--you have two three-year terms--the second time I ran I put in my résumé that it was a little-known fact that it was during the Morrow administration of the council that the Follies was born.

And it was born--I had been to a workshop someplace in New Hampshire where the Saturday night entertainment was all these silly songs, people spoofing one another. It was how we started out. It was like our own homemade fun, and it's gone on to every year be a treat of the November board meeting that Jane Elder takes a musical and rewrites it for the Sierra Club. And they've actually all been published now, all these wonderful songs.

Lage: Oh, great! Now, where have they been published?

Morrow: Well, she published them in a collection of Follies musicals, and wonderfully creative lyrics of old show tunes. The year that I was president, it was the twenty-fifth anniversary of The Sound of Music, and so we did The Sound of Music. The theme song, "Save every mountain, clean every stream, make the club a rainbow until you find your dream, a dream that will take all the love you can give, fifty weekends a year for as long as you live." [laughter]

And these just wonderfully creative--you know the song about the, "High on the hill is a lonely goatherd," well, it was, "Out in the states is a lonely state chair, lady gotta lobby with a lot to do," and these just--Jane is wonderfully creative.

Lage: And she does this all herself?

Morrow: Yes. You should get ahold of her collection of musicals. And there are a lot of frustrated song-and-dance people. Doug Scott just loved to do this. There was one year we did--I forget what musical it was where the song is, "They Can't Take That Away from Me," but he had a top hat and a cane, and it was during some Alaska fight. It was "The little caribou, the shining Beaufort Sea, the memory of all that, they can't take that away from me. We may never meet again on this bumpy Arctic plain, but I always want to keep it just the same." Just wonderfully inventive.

Tonight, we will do Brigadoon, and if you can be there, it's at the church--I forget what time it is. Last year, they decided they were going to cut it out for budget reasons, so this year you have to--they used to give people pizza and beer, and then this year I think they charge \$5 for the pizza and beer, but it's worth it. You really have got to see this.

This one this year is Brigadoon, and the premise being that every hundred years, that there's this group of people who find themselves in Hetch Hetchy Valley. They're frozen in time, and then every hundred years they wake up to test the political winds to see if this is a good time to save Hetch Hetchy Valley. And of course it is, because of this new administration. It's going to be very, very funny.

Lage: It doesn't sound like it gets into personalities, from what you've said.

Morrow: No. There are a few little barbs. I mentioned earlier, there will be a little line in the musical tonight about a glass ceiling at the Sierra Club, and raises for staff, and whatever. There's always some little good-natured joke in. We have a lobbyist in Washington name Dan Weiss, and in The Sound of Music, instead of "Edelweiss," it was--he lobbied on clean air--"Hey, Dan Weiss, hey, Dan Weiss, Henry Waxman would greet you--" just delightfully creative lyrics.

Really, such fun. And then as far as other fun--I mean, this is a group of people that really knows how to work hard and then party hard. They work at their meetings all day and then go out at night and party and enjoy one another.

Lage: So they know how to have fun. It's not--

Morrow: Oh, they really do. And square dancing. I wish I had a nickel for every mile that we've square danced for the Sierra Club, in service of the Sierra Club.

Lage: Now, where would the square dancing take place?

Morrow: Well, any time they have a chapter retreat weekend, any time there's a chapter meeting at a camp or something, they always, every Saturday night there's square dancing. And really a lot of camaraderie.

Lage: And is this some of the glue that holds the club together, do you think?

Morrow: Oh, I think so.

Lage: Do you think there are a lot of people like you for whom it's become part of--almost a family?

Morrow: Oh, yes. Everybody here this weekend is a serious Sierra Club junkie. [laughter]

Lage: That's a good way of looking at it.

##

Morrow: Most of your regular friends--I was going to say most of your straight friends. Most of your non-Sierra Club friends have lost patience with you a long time ago. You're away a lot on the weekends, and you have other interests.

So the Sierra Club becomes your social life and your extended family. If you asked my daughter which people that she feels closest to in sort of a family way, I'm sure if she named her ten people, eight of them would be Sierra Club people. She adores Marty Fluharty, she thinks the world of Michael Fischer. She feels like this is an extended and interesting family of exciting intellectual people that--

Lage: It's really broadened her horizons as a child, I would think.

Morrow: Oh, absolutely. Sure has. She got to travel a bit; we went to Japan, as you know, and to Costa Rica. She didn't go to Costa Rica, but we went to Japan together, which was--

Lage: How old is she now?

Morrow: She is now fifteen; she'll be sixteen in May.

Lage: You've done a good job balancing, it sounds like--with Arthur's help.

Morrow: Bless his heart. As a matter of fact, Arthur is--I spoke of him so often as Arthur, bless his heart, that people now call him Arthur Bless-his-heart. [laughter] Somebody thought I was married to an American Indian named Arthur Bless-his-heart.

Lage: Are you serious! [laughing]

Morrow: Yes. People in the Sierra Club refer to him as Arthur Bless-his-heart.

Lage: That's wonderful. Does he like that role?

Morrow: Oh, yes. Well, he's a homebody. He really likes to be home. He loves--he's often said that it would almost be worth it to him to commit some major crime where the sentence would be to be confined to his own yard, because he'd like that. He really likes to be home, and he likes where he lives.

Lage: He likes the farm.

Morrow: He likes the farm, and he likes--he enjoys my escapades. They are things that he would never want to do himself, but it's a little glimpse into that world for him. He's very patient about it.

Lage: You're lucky. Makes it worth it.

Morrow: Really.

Closing Comments

Lage: Okay, well, I feel like we've finished, unless there's something else you want to say.

Morrow: How, now, as far as this history, will it be wrapped with a big elastic band around this book,¹ so that people will know that it only makes sense if you read the book?

Lage: Oh, it will have references in it to the book. And we can be sure there's a copy of the book in the Bancroft Library. But I don't think it will be wrapped with a rubber band! But we'll definitely have the references, and the interview history will tell that the design of this is based on the fact you've written the book. But you've been very informative. If the readers haven't read the book, they are still going to get a very good picture of the Sierra Club from this interview.

Morrow: It just amazes me, just tickles me to think that ages hence someone will pick this up and read this oral history.

Lage: And you don't know what they'll be going after. That's why I try to make it as broad as I can. I'm sure I've forgotten things, but they may not care about the Sierra Club. They may care about the

¹ Morrow, Susan D. and Wanda A. Rickerby, One for the Earth: Journal of a Sierra Club President (Champaign, Illinois: Sagamore Publishing Co., 1992.)

Tenderloin. People might come to it for different reasons. So it's nice to think of that, too.

Morrow: Yes. Or the role of women in the environmental movement.

Lage: Definitely the role of women.

Morrow: Wonderful.

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

SUSAN D. MERROW

JANUARY 12, 1991

This morning I am going to let others--Michael, Mike, Dick--report on the facts and figures that usually add up to a picture of the status of the Sierra Club. I want to use my time to say a few things about the status of our hearts and minds.

There are probably few things more irritating than someone who has just read a terrific article, seen something troubling in the newspaper, or been to a stirring movie. Well--lookout! Because over the recent holidays, I did all three. Together they caused me to think a good deal about what I think the Sierra Club needs to do as an institution, and what I know I must do as its President.

The article was called "The End of Nature," written by Bill McKibben. It explains patiently and eloquently the evidence in support of global warming, and it relates it to history, religion, and politics. It makes a convincing case that not only have we altered the climate of our world, but that--unless we act fast--"nature" as we know it -- pure and unadulterated and all the things we've pledged to explore, enjoy, preserve, and protect--will never again exist on our planet. Most of all, the article was a call to action.

"Should we choose, we could exercise our reason to do what no other animal can do: we could limit ourselves voluntarily, choose to remain God's creatures instead of making ourselves gods. What a towering achievement that would be, so much more impressive than the largest dam--beavers can build dams--because so much harder. Such restraint--not genetic engineering or planetary management--is the real challenge. If we now, today, began to limit our numbers and our desires and our ambitions, perhaps nature could someday resume its independent working. Perhaps the temperature could someday adjust itself down to its own setting, and the rain fall of its own accord." (New Yorker Magazine, September, 1990)

If you feel your sense of urgency slipping, if the skeptics have gotten to you, I hope you'll read this article.

The newspaper article was on the front page of the Hartford Courant. It said that inspite of all the common sense reasons to the contrary, the Bush administration had succeeded in purging any and all serious conservation options from its upcoming energy plan. My friends--admittedly all enviros--spoke for days of their anger and frustration. They said, "What are you going to do, Sue? What's the Sierra Club going to do?"

The movie was the clincher, though. During the holidays, I found myself at the Science Museum in Boston in their Omni Theater. The screen surrounds the audience overhead and on all sides, and the movies are so realistic that the management gives instructions on how to deal with motion sickness. The movie was called "The Blue Planet." It featured those pictures of the earth from outer space that we've all become familiar with, only this time interspersed with close up shots of environmental degradation. We saw pictures from outer space of rainforests on fire, then--upclose--pictures of the Mississippi Delta and its plume of eroded sediment interspersed with pictures of agriculture and the chemical industries that contribute to its problems. Most movingly, it showed the silhouette of the earth against the backdrop of the rest of the universe. It was easy to pick out the fragile, pale blue shell of our atmosphere. It's only four or five miles thick--the distance from my house to the post office in Colchester. And within it and depending upon it is all life--everything we love and hold dear. The message was clear. The pictures, words, and music conspired to be a deeply stirring call to act, to make a start, to put things right with this blue planet before it is too late.

As the lights came up and the two or three hundred other people in the room began to file out, I wanted to say, "There! Go out and do something. Get mad. Get involved. Get up on your hind legs." As they filed by they seemed unmoved by my silent exhortation, and I realized all at once that the chances were very good that no one in that room had been given the gifts and the resources that I had at my command to do something, to get mad, to get involved, and to make a difference.

I thought about the resources that I have as your President: this microphone and a whole room full of the smartest, most committed people I know listening to me; the bully pulpit; 99 years of credibility; even some discretionery money; and people return my calls.

I thought about what I need do to get ready to be worthy of this title, and to lead like a person with a mission. I've begun to start each day--and I commend this to you--by saying into the mirror, "The Sierra Club is a means, not an end." Now, I love the Sierra Club a lot. It's my work, my religion, my family. It's Annie's sibling. But it's a means, not an end, and I want to start behaving as if I believe that and more like someone on a mission. Someday, when my grandchildren ask, "what did you do in the moral equivalent of war, Grandma?" I don't want to say that I wanted to help, but I was too busy working on the budget or worrying about the number of FTEs. If we believe that the Club is a means, then we must believe that not only can we save this planet but that there is no more important thing we need to do everyday. It's so easy to become like Edward Abbey's "Men with their hearts in a safe deposit box and their eyes hypnotized by desk calculators."

I believe that when we are people on a mission, a lot of other things fall into place. I keep coming up with an image of people furiously filling sandbags and building a dike to protect a place they love. They have a singleness of purpose. They know what they need to do, and their conviction draws people and resources to help. They take chances. They're bold. There's no time for bickering. Their case statement and needs lists practically write themselves. I'd like for us to behave more like those people, more like we have just as urgent a mission and it lies outside of the Sierra Club.

I believe that our mission has to be to save the planet from the intertwined issues of global climate change and the horrendous lack of leadership from Washington on a rational energy policy. And these are all tied up with the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, automobile fuel efficiency, rainforests, and population. We can make a difference, because we have to. And as your leader, I'm going to act like I believe that. That doesn't mean that I'll work any less hard on the Centennial or on the Board's agenda. I just mean to put them in a different perspective. I believe that if I do, the perpetuation of the Sierra Club will begin to take care of itself.

We have daunting goals, but we know how goals work. You break them down into pieces, into something quantifiable. Just for instance, 20% by 2000--that's the commitment to reduction in CO2 that this country ought to make. We're the only nation among the seven leading industrialized nations of the world that hasn't made such commitment!; 45 by 2000--that's the CAFE standard in miles per gallon that would be the single biggest step we could make to control global warming; 0 by forever--that's drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Add your own numbers to the list. Think about them every day.

I recently heard a review on the radio of a just published autobiography. I don't remember who's life it was, but the reviewer remarked that the writer had had the arrogance to write, "If only I had been a better writer, I could have stopped World War II." Now I didn't think it was arrogant, because I had actually had a similar thought. If only I were a better speaker or more of a poet, I could slow down global warming. I could stir people like you to act. Well, I'll soon hit the road to try my hand, and I appreciate the chance to practice my speaking skills on you. The poetry will take a little longer, though. It will be a long time before I don't have to borrow the words of others. I'd like to leave you with the words of a poet:

The planet you're standing on
 looking out at the stars
 is the earth, the third planet from the sun,

and the mildest
 and softest
 of the nine...

If you can stop, and let yourself look,
 let your eyes do
 what they do best.

stop
 and let yourself see and see
 that everything is doing things
 to you
 as you do things to everything.

Then you know
 that although it is only a little planet,
 it is hugely beautiful
 and surely the finest place in the world
 to be.

So watch it, look at it,
 see what it's like
 to walk around on it.

It's small but it's beautiful.
 it's small but it's fine,
 like a rainbow,

like a bubble.

(Only a Little Planet
 by Lawrence Collins)

Thank you for your attention.

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Sally Reid, board member from Angeles Chapter.

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