

Interview with Alyssa Wood about her involvement in the Urban Pond Procession and the role of students and young people in the movement to save Mashapaug

Interviewer: Lily Benedict

Date: March 14, 2013 at Alyssa Wood's house

Lily Benedict: OK, this is Lily Benedict, I'm interviewing Alyssa Wood on March 14th, 2013. Um, so first of all, can you just kind of introduce who you are and your connection to Mashapaug?

Alyssa Wood: Sure. My name again is Alyssa Wood and I'm a science teacher at Sophia Academy in Providence, Rhode Island, and I have been connected to Mashapaug Pond through Holly Ewald pretty much since she started with her efforts with the pond.

LB: And I'm curious, was Holly the one who first told you about Mashapaug, or . . .

AW: Oh yes, I had never heard of it, never knew it was there, didn't really know much about it. So pretty much from the moment that she was, you know, asked to kind of build awareness through the arts for the pond was when I first found out about it. And it seemed like, that, you know, it was pretty new to her, I don't really know, you might ask her, but it seemed like it was a new thing for her as well, like she didn't really realize the issues surrounding the pond until the project started, so it was kind of a new and exciting thing for both of us and I was certainly happy to hear more about it and get involved.

LB: Let's see, and then, so how did you, what was your, what was your initial involvement and then how did that turn into using the pond in your curriculum at Sophia Academy?

AW: (1:26) So early on right when Holly got started, you know I think that it pretty, my involvement pretty much started when she came up with the idea for the procession. She said, you know, how are we going to raise awareness, you know, we gotta do something with the signs, and she was starting to work with, you know, creating different designs and something that was more eye-catching, and so she had that happening. The part where I came into it was when she was asking for assistance for, we just called them the fish costume workshops. So she had this, kind of, one part going with this idea with the signs, and she asked me, Alyssa would you get involved with this part of it which was the costumes, like the cardboard fish costumes. So, you know, I was happy to take part, it sounded like a fun thing, a fun way to volunteer. So what we did, was she basically told me about, you know, when the workshops were happening and if I could come and help out. And, you know, she was at the workshops, and we had them at the Buddhist temple on . . . (2:36) can't remember the street. Cranston street maybe? I can't remember, and, yeah so pretty much it started from there where she was just basically like finding anyone who wanted to take part in it, whether it was, mostly children, you know, but I think if there were other people she certainly welcomed them too, and so we would meet on I believe the Saturdays and you know, we'd gather . . . she said, Alyssa just find any paint you can find, you know, any old paint from your basement, or anything left over from painting a wall, or, you know, we could get real scrappy and gather stuff, she'd say we need to find some, you know she'd talk about where she'd found the cardboard because you need big amounts of cardboard. And so she'd gather all these things and we'd meet at the temple, and then we'd just hope that some kids would come. And they did, which was great. So we'd have usually it was, uh, sometimes it was kids who knew about it, and who maybe got a flyer from Holly, or it was neighborhood kids who were just looking a little bored and needed something to do, and we'd encourage them to come on over. (3:40) And, yeah, and then we'd kind of have this little workshop session where we'd get together and she'd talk to them about the issues of the pond, and I was certainly learning about it at that point too. And we said this is what we're going to do, we're going to make these costumes and we're going to make ourselves known, and we're going to have this kind of parade

type thing, at that time she did explain to me how it couldn't be a parade because you had to pay for that, but it could be a procession, so, you know, I started using the word 'procession' more than I ever thought I would once this project started. Um, so she talked about the procession and how it'd be important, how we needed people to be involved and so that the kids would know that, yeah that means you, this is a way for you to learn about this issue and be involved and be seen and be heard. And it started there. (4:26) And then the next year, she asked if I could help out again, so I helped, you know, take flyers to Cityarts and to different schools and to any places I could think of, just dropping them off at counters and saying, can you pass these out, or can you tell people about this opportunity and we would meet . . . that year we also met, that was like the second year I did it, we also met at the Buddhist temple and the attendance was a little bit harder that year, so Holly had this great idea to go over to the JT Owens ball field and so we basically like had this workshop over at the Buddhist temple and then that ended so we said, we gotta go find some kids, so they're not coming to us, we gotta go to them. (5:11) So, we would, packed up all our stuff and all our big pieces of cardboard, and all our paints and everything and we went to JT Owens where there was like, there had to have been like four games going on at the same time and kids running everywhere and so once, you know, little kids would see paints and brushes and color they'd get real excited and they'd come over to us and we'd talk to them about the pond and we'd say, you know, let your mom know where you are if you're gonna come hang out over under this tree and paint some cool stuff and the kids would get really involved and that was a way to, you know, give them some information about what was happening to the pond and what was great about that was you could actually see the pond a little bit from JT Owens, you know, you could see through the trees, or, some kids didn't ever realize it, you'd say, 'yeah, if you were to go over there there's some water back there, and I'm gonna tell you about that water'. So that was a really interesting 'aha' moment I think for Holly with, you know, really accessing people at JT Owens and finding another way to raise awareness. But I also remember that second year of really helping more with gathering paints and supplies and Holly said, well you know there's, I think she told me what day you could go to the dumpster (6:25) at

the art store on Wickenden and so I think it was like Tuesdays, and so everybody, every RISD kid and every Brown kid, everybody knew what day to go, so I would go on that day and I would dig out like all the cardboard I could find, and also I'd go to the resource recovery place where the teachers in Rhode Island are allowed to go and I'd get these big, you know, huge pieces of cardboard and we would use the jigsaw machine and we would cut out these big fish shapes, and um, so it was just a pretty crazy time with that, and really needing to rely on a staple gun to keep these things together (7:02) because they were really great, but to make it through a procession they did have a lot of wear and tear, a lot of repairing needed. Yeah, so my involvement really started on, started out with those workshops, and then when I started at Sophia Academy, it was pretty much just like this known thing that, 'oh wow, we've got Alyssa over as a science teacher at this great school, so we're gonna find ways to be involved there', so I was certainly all about finding ways to incorporate Urban Pond Procession into the culture of my school. And so, you know, pretty much any time there was an opportunity with UPP, I would tell my students, I would offer extra credit which is a big motivator for middle schoolers and it certainly worked which I was happy to have happen (7:49) and it's funny because my students would maybe go to the procession or go to some workshop where they got to make something for the procession or a save the date magnet and they'd say 'you know what, I mean I'm glad that I got the extra credit but actually that was really fun, I'm glad I did that' and that was kind of the whole point to get that, yes there was a motivating factor of extra credit but it was more about, 'I got to be involved, I got to meet some fun people who feel really passionate about this thing, I got to learn about it too, so that was great'. So I certainly incorporate just any opportunity where students are, you know, an opportunity is made for them to take part in and try to bring that opportunity to the students and advertise it, and you know this is my fourth year at Sophia so it certainly is a culture now of 'Oh did you go to the procession, did you go last year, I got into the calendar this year, there I am', you know, and anytime they see footage they talk about 'oh I was there' and you know, you'll see other teachers from Sophia (8:40) in some of the footage, you'll see Miss Ana, our secretary, you'll see, you'll see just, so it's great to look back at that old

footage and see the years that I've been at Sophia and the different grades and how the kids have grown, if they went as a fifth grader and then they went back as a sixth and seventh and eighth grader, which is real exciting. So there's definitely a culture there. And then last year, there was a big push for education workshops around you know how to get the pond more incorporated into curriculum and a couple people, volunteers from the group created these lovely cards that were used kind of like a timeline, and so Holly had asked me, you know, how do you think we can incorporate this and I actually recommended making them into cards that could be, you know it was a lovely timeline and I was like, well you gotta make this more tangible and make the print a little bit bigger and make the pictures a little bit bigger and so, you can have elementary school kids look at them, maybe you can laminate them, maybe create, you know give a teacher a couple sets of them so they can use them in small group work, they could be used to not only to bring attention to the history of the pond but also teach, like, you know, things that happened in chronology, you know, what happened when and why did that make sense, so I certainly gave ideas around doing that. And, last year when these cards came out and I got a set of my own, I would plan, I planned about a month, maybe a little bit over, there was about 30 cards and we would just try to do one card a day, and so my students said ok, this is the next piece of history we're gonna talk about at Mashapaug Pond and whether it was a piece of history about the Gorham silver factory or I think there was an earlier card about the burning of the Gaspee, it was kind of, like they did kind of a reenactment of it, or there was the racing on the pond when the pond was frozen with the horses, and so, you got all these little snippets of memories and just, you know, events that happened at the pond where, you know, if you go there today you might not be aware at all, there's no plaque acknowledging that or, there's no one hanging out saying, oh, I was here when I was a kid, you know, there might be but I don't think my students have had those interactions so it was nice to intentionally bring it in using those cards to bring attention to what actually happened at the pond. So and now my hope is that when they go to the pond they think back to those cards and I think, wow, they had horses out on this water, or they might, say, if they look at an aerial shot of the pond and they'll know

where Gorham was and know there's a high school there now and the current issues surrounding that and, you know, what kind of remediation might happen (11:23) so if they ever go to the park that's planned for the area next to the high school like ok, they'll know more of the history of it and why, you know, it's significant that the remediation did happen there and why, so again, building context around something that's easily overlooked, especially for a good number of my students live near the pond, so I think it's really important that they know about it and that they carry on the message to their siblings and their relatives, that they know about the story about the pond. And in addition, I would say more for the curriculum piece, we teach, we teach, it's just a great way to incorporate, you know, learning about the watershed and runoff and all those kinds of things and any kinds of factors that go into polluting bodies of water (12:15). My students, they're wonderful stewards of the environment and they love Save the Bay and they get to go to Save the Bay camp, but they know that, you know, the water that comes to the bay is coming from the other bodies of water that lead into the bay and that Mashapaug is part of that and that the lakes and pond at Roger Williams Park is also part of that, you know, so I think there is being tied all together, and I think that, I think it just really brings it home to them to know that, ok this is all connected, and if I love the bay, I gotta make sure I take care of what's happening, you know, in Mashapaug Pond and in Roger Williams park. So I think it's a pretty significant thing to have them, you know, if they love one thing, well it's probably connected to another thing, and so they do have, I think, a real, I think because they feel so informed about Mashapaug Pond and they think that many would be excited to get, you know, I can talk about this place and I know what its needs are and I know its history, and also the science behind it. You know, what's happening with the runoff and (13:26), you know, we did, actually I organized a storm drain event last year with a couple other members from the group, and I had students come out to that for extra credit and we marked different drains around the pond and some of the neighborhoods, and also how that linked into it too. So this year we'll be doing a land and water unit and we're going to have stream tables in the classroom, so that's going to align pretty perfectly with the pond, with the urban pond procession and I'm really excited how this year how

Holly said how the route is going to be like around the pond and I think that's going to be great because if anything it's kind of ironic that we're focusing so much on the pond but my students really haven't spent that much time at the pond, nor have I, so I think it's going to be great to have the procession going the way it is this year. Also it's important to note that Sophia Academy is actually, we've just purchased a new building and hopefully we will start our, actually midway through our year next year be into that building, and that building is right next to Reservoir Triangle so we're going to be part of, you know, the neighborhoods around Mashapaug Pond, and so being so close, I'm real excited to incorporate it more, spend more time there myself, have my students spend more time there and be even more informed about it. Because we're kind of, we're up 95 a little bit (14:54) on Branch Avenue so it's been a bit of a stretch, but, so I think taking the culture that we've built around being these, you know, you know, activists if you will, I think it's going to be great to be closer now and to take advantage of being there and being part of the community, so it's going to be real excited to be even more incorporated.

LB: Did you find that students or kids that you worked with in the UPP came in with any particular conceptions or feelings about the pond, or were they aware of it? And then, you know, how did that change in the course of getting involved with it?

AW: Usually I would say that they were not aware of it, just the way that I wasn't aware of it. You know, I was new to Providence about 10 years ago and it's not something that is on your radar. I mean, it's also very hidden as you know, so it's like, it's kind of set up for not being on anyone's radar and not being something that's getting attention drawn to it, so I would say just like my experience before Holly filled me in, that's what my students have been, they've been unaware of it, and also any students back at the Buddhist temple, that they just, you really kind of had to explain it, you had to get out a map, so you know a lot of what we do very introductory is we get an aerial map and we say, what, you know, as Holly does, as I do, what looks familiar, and the pond's on there, but it's really great, actually it's really magical when the kids start to pick out like 'ok, wait a minute, there's

Reservoir Avenue, ok there's my street, ok there's my house, I see my house, I live there and then they'd say ok,' and we'd start to say, 'ok, what else sticks out to you on this map?', and the biggest thing on there is Mashapaug Pond and they realize how close they live. And then, we usually have them place and we say, 'ok, well, you know where Job Lot is', and they say, 'oh yeah, we know where Job Lot is', and Cisco's pizza, and you start naming all these places and they know exactly what you're talking about, and they, its like they didn't know that they knew it, and once they realize that they already knew where it was, kind of, like they knew it but they didn't know it, (17:00) and they get real excited, and then once they get real excited, they realize, you know, I do have a connection to this place, but I didn't even know it. So it's nice as educators to help them build that connection. And once they have that connection and they find themselves in the picture, that's really a recipe for starting to care more about something. So it's been, yeah, its pretty magical, they start to light up, they realize, you know, this is information that I need to know 'cause its in my neighborhood and I care about the people in my neighborhood and I want to make sure I live in a safe place, just like if you go to someone else's town or someone else's neighborhood, you know, if the water is safe there, it should be safe in my neighborhood too and why isn't it, and then also the information about Gorham and the information about what's going into the drains and you know, coming from other ponds and lakes, you know, that's all starting to really build a picture for them that's really important, and so I think by the time we get to the procession at the end of basically the school year, it has this whole new meaning to them, and they're marching along and they're carrying a sign or they're carrying, you know, they're wearing a fish costume that hopefully isn't falling apart, or playing an instrument, or walking along someone from one of the marching bands who's playing an instrument, or participating in a cheer that you know, they feel, like, ok, I know why I'm doing this. You know? And they want to be heard, and its just a really wonderful moment when it all comes together like that. (18:27)

LB: So, I was asking about the students' reactions to learning about the environmental issues that the pond has.

AW: I would say they certainly are interested and you know, it's building that, around that idea of stewardship, like they start to build that connection through all the awareness that we're giving them, and then when they, you know, learn more about the environmental issues, they, yeah, they certainly care about it, and we talk about, you know, just their connection to where they live and the connection to nature, which, you know, in that particular area where Mashapaug is located there, you know I think they realize that it's a really special place, its like the largest freshwater pond in Providence so they've realized, wait, that this is something that's really special and we've gotta take care of it and it's not doing ok right now and I need to figure out how I can help it (19:26), so I think, you know, to be informed is really powerful, so I think that they feel really good that they're spending their time in school and then you know, doing these other opportunities outside of school to be informed, and I think it feels good to be informed, and I think they get excited to be informed, and you know, its going to help to build them as these, you know, concerned citizens, which I think is what a lot of people want. You know, I think parents want it for their children, I think teachers and educators want that for the young people that they hopefully inspire and educate and, you know, I can't imagine people not wanting that for a young person to be more aware and to build connections to where they live, both like, you know, the built environment and the natural environment, so I think it's an extremely important thing for them, you know, to get all the information to learn about the issues.

LB: (20:25) Are there instances where students have passed that information along maybe to their parents or to other people in their community?

AW: Oh definitely, certainly. Yeah you do hear about that, we certainly give the students over the years you give them, you know, whatever kind of current flyer or information packet is out there and we encourage them to go home and share it, and you know, they bring their family members to the processions, and last year, you know I remember some family members coming to Reservoir of Memories, you

know, and the students are learning but also sharing what they know about the pond to, you know, their moms and dads and siblings, so it certainly it does reach out beyond just, you know, our students in the classroom. They're going out and they're sharing what they're finding out about it, and you know, they're also using the information when they go out to camp at Save the Bay and they're starting to make connections there as well, so just to other people that they meet, you know, I think its coming up because again its something that they're involved and they have a connection to, so I think, again, its just kind of the right kind of recipe for a kid to feel good about, you know, being educated and passing along their knowledge.

LB: (21:36) So yeah, the question was, what was the question, I think about particular moments in teaching . . .

AW: Ok, so a couple memories come to mind. One would be last year when the focus for UPP was really on the industrial history of the pond, and so Holly wrote a grant for the 8th grade to be involved with the Steelyard to work on a sculpture kind of looking at the history of, you know, the legacy of Gorham but also like, kind of the lasting damages of the industries at the pond. So we had in my classroom we were in a chemistry unit, so I worked with Holly after looking at many different documents and kind of piecing together what we knew and what our questions were, we said we want to bring kind of the chemistry of what happened to our 8th graders. So in meetings with Holly, we kind of talked about (22:40) what was really important and I came up with some documents and different worksheets and, you know, we, it was very technical, I learned a lot myself about kind of the electroplating process and how you know, things that were washed and the different Gorham materials you know, what was used when and you know, what was maybe dumped into the pond, or how the water was used in the whole process of creating what they made there, so I thought the class went pretty smoothly in the way I designed the worksheets and Holly certainly liked it which was great and after I actually made the worksheets I think we were even able to further edit them to make sure they were more correct because we were kind of coming from a place of, this is a lot of overwhelming

information and how can we bring it down to maybe an introductory chemistry level, so there was that, and then I found out that when Holly did a (23:37) post-assessment with the 8th graders after their steelyard project they actually brought up the class with me where Holly was present and we did the chemistry kind of lesson behind Mashapaug and they said that was actually one of their lasting moments. So it was very touching as an educator that, you know I felt that I had done a good job, but I didn't know that it had really stuck in their minds, but I think the natural questions that Holly and I had were also questions that the 8th graders had and that we really helped to bring that information to them to bring some more sense around you know, here we are studying the periodic table of elements but like why is that important, you know and so we were talking about these different elements were used in the processes at Gorham and they find different things in the pond now that were used at the Gorham site and so I think that it was really meaningful for them to connect what they were learning in introductory chemistry to specifically this place that they were learning all about, so that was pretty, that was a really wonderful experience for me. And then also (24:39) just in terms of memorable things would just be, just seeing my students at the procession, I mean they know I'm going to be there, they know that some of their teachers are going to be there, but you know, they're having a blast, they're having a good time, they're representing themselves and their school and they're with their friends and they're with their family, and, you know, it's usually good weather, and they're just enjoying what they're doing and they're kind of, they know they have some purpose around being there, they know they didn't just show up to show up to show up at something, they know that I think they feel important for being part of the procession so just to watch that happen, and then usually the Monday back at school is like, (25:19) 'ah I saw you there and I saw you there and it was so great' and it's almost like it was a big dream because there's so much build up around it, and you know, we make our save the date magnets and you know, and we say it in our announcements every day like 'oh the procession' we always say the date so I think its just like rounding out it's the end of the year, so its just a wonderful time to just celebrate everything we've learned about and have their participation really mean

something. So, I would say that just happens every year and that's just always a joy for me that we have this, you know, this thing, this urban pond procession for them to do, to be involved in, and the fact that it's happening every year and they can build upon their experiences and have these shared experiences is a wonderful thing.

LB: (26:05) Now I'm just really curious about that chemistry thing that you talked about, can you just tell me a little bit more about the things you discovered about the . . .

AW: Sure, I'm not, I can't remember, I was thinking I should be more specific but I could probably find you that document and give you a copy if you want it, but Holly would have a more updated one. I remember we looked into electroplating was a big deal and that whole process and I think we talked about like arsenic, how that was involved and just some of the other elements and how like, you know, you had a lot of, Holly talks about this a lot, but I'm forgetting, again it's all in that worksheet. Basically when they would bring kind of the, 'cause they had to basically extract like what they needed, like if they needed silver they had to get it out of these big hunks of earth that was brought in on, I think there was in one picture in one of the slides from that archivist, you know who I'm talking about, the archivist who, from Gorham, (27:13) he came to speak at our school last year, you might want to ask Holly, and anyway he showed one of the really old films from Gorham about like the processes and it actually shows like all the molds and stuff I guess so I think there might have been one part of that where they actually showed like how the train comes in and drops off the basically all this earth and they have to extract out what they need and they have to use different processes to basically deal with melting points to basically melt out like what silver they need, and I doubt it would be gold, but just like the different, like copper, they had to get out, extract the copper and so I there were just, not very good chemicals that were used, or different elements, the different combinations of that were really just not healthy to be around. So and also just you know, once the different items were made, just like the cleaning of them, the polishing of them, and even in that video, have you seen the video (LB: mm

hmm) where the one woman doesn't even have gloves on and she's washing this thing and you're like, oh this doesn't look healthy just being exposed to like the different elements that were really not healthy for people. So I can certainly get you that document if you want it.

LB: Sure

AW: Ok

LB: (28:25) So what would you like ideally to see the pond become, like what would be an ideal future for it?

AW: Yeah, this is an exciting question and usually when we think about, you know, at Sophia academy, my school, we usually ask our girls, you know, 'what are your hopes and dreams, and what do you want, like, you know, if the world is your oyster, which it is, you know, what do you want for your life and your use of your time?' And so when I think of that question in the context of the pond it becomes a really exciting question. So personally, I would love to have ways to build more of a connection with the pond, which I'm excited to do when my school moves over to the area where the pond is located, but to have more opportunities there, where it's a place to enjoy and feel like you know you can go there and there are things to do and you feel welcomed and that its not just - 'cause right now I just feel like it has this feeling around it where, you know, if you look at the built environment around it you just, you know, everybody, it's almost like if buildings were people like everyone's back is turned to it (29:39). You know, and its just like, and then you have like, its funny when I have to tell my students usually if the procession starts at the boathouse at the pond, I have to say like, 'ok, well you've gotta get to the job lot and then you've gotta look for this kind of gap in the buildings and then you're going to see some trees and then you're going to see a sketchy road and then you're gonna see a sign and you've gotta go back there. And then you're going to see a house and then you're going to see another building and then you're going to see the pond.'

And its just like, its so hard to get to and its just seems like its so hidden and its not supposed to be celebrated so I think to just almost give it a facelift in terms of, you know, lets honor this place and try to turn things around so we feel like I don't know, the area around it is looking at the pond rather than turning its back on it. And so what would that look like? (30:27) I think for me it would be providing opportunities at the pond, whether it's like workshops or summer camps or just you know, opportunities to be there and again I don't know, it's a very interesting situation at the pond because you know, you think of it as a place that is sick and that needs help and so like well you don't really - you know I've been out on a duck boat out on the pond but you're always worried like, well I don't want that water to get on me so it's like how can I honor this place but also this place isn't a safe place necessarily, so if I think about my hopes and dreams for the pond its that it becomes a safe place and you know that the area is remediated to the point where people are attracted to that space just like they are to India Point Park or Blackstone Boulevard or any other number of wonderful places in Rhode Island that, you know, why not Mashapaug Pond, I mean, it's like why not? You know, you have kind of the people that I heard from at the Reservoir of Memories, just like people who loved the pond (31:38) and it was part of their childhoods and their own neighborhood history and they have a love for it, and I just feel like now its like we have UPP trying to bring attention to it, but, you know, its almost like, you know, it'd be nice to have, to see additional opportunities to enjoy it year-round and just to make it feel like a welcoming place and I know that it is happening to an extent with UPP but I just feel like what needs to happen to make it an even more celebrated place, you know, whether it's, you know, building a new structure there or almost like a community center where its next to the pond and you're honoring what's going on there, kind of like how Save the Bay will have like locations next to the bay and then you can go to the bay or you can go to the information place and learn about the bay, so like that. Or another place that I think about when I think about my hopes and dreams for Mashapuag is Mono Lake in California, which I teach my students about (32:40) in one of our - actually a couple of our units that we study and you know, it was a place that was not doing very well and a lot of citizens got involved and helped to

basically, a lot of water was being redirected to Los Angeles so they went through the political process of actually getting the water to be redirected back to Mono Lake and so it saved the lake and so they have like basically a welcoming center and they have workshops happening there and I'm on their email list and they have a calendar – well UPP does have a calendar which is awesome – but you just have this whole culture of this is a place that needs to be saved and continues to be cared for and I just, I think that, you know, Mashapaug has a bit, you know the awareness around it continued to grow, and you know, it has to, you know, this effort that has started, it just needs to continue so that we get to a place where, you know, it's a place where ideally people can go and enjoy and want to be there and it's a neat place to go. It's neat if you kind of know the story behind it, but I think like, what if someone who's just you know, new here and wants to go see a neat place, like why not Mashapaug Pond, you know? And part of that again is kind of like the infrastructure around the pond, like what can make it an inviting place? I think the planning can happen to make it an inviting place and that needs to come from the people who care about it and then make it an inviting place and then create inviting programming (34:15) that can happen there that hopefully could be very affordable or even free to whoever wants to go so, you know, definitely for the people who live in that neighborhood and also for the people that don't. You know, why not be attracted to Mashapaug Pond just like people might be attracted to go visit Bristol or Barrington, it's like, why not, you know? So I think when I think about my hopes and dreams for the pond, it's just real exciting that I hope that we get there some day, and I think what UPP is doing is helping that to happen, because without them I don't think, you know everybody's back would continue to be turned from it. And I think of probably the hundreds of times that without knowing initially from Holly that it was there, like, I think like if this whole thing didn't happen then I still wouldn't know it's there, and I would probably drive, you know, on the highway that's next to it and drive on Reservoir and maybe go into that Job Lot and just never know it was there, and so, but there have been over the years like hundreds of times that I have driven by it and then I think about the stories and I think about my students' involvement and I just, you know, I hope that it's not such a hidden thing,

that people acknowledge it just like they would Narragansett Bay or any of the other natural wonders of Rhode Island. (35:32)

LB: What do you see as your role in sort of getting Mashapaug to where you want it to be?

AW: Yeah, I think as an educator it's just, you know I see myself as just being that person who's making a bridge accessible to my students. So you know, they're these open minded, spirited, lovely young people who are ready to absorb information and care about things and so I'm helping to build this bridge and give them a direction with all that energy and ability to do something with it. So I think that, you know, I think very easily in education you can, you know you're so responsible for what direction you're going to lead discussions into, and that kind of thing, so I think the fact that as an educator I intentionally say we're going to, yes we can talk about Mono Lake and yes we can talk about Narragansett Bay but yes we're also going to talk about, you know, Mashapaug Pond, so why not right, its really close to where a lot of us live, it needs our assistance to help get it noticed and help get it, you know the help that it needs and the funding that we need to make it better and so I think that I'm just really glad that I'm in a role where I can help, you know, say that 'yes, there is room for this in our curriculum, yes this is important', so yeah my role is to help build that bridge and make a path for my students to follow and just I'm very thankful that, you know, when they find out they are interested in that and that they are taking up the opportunities and they are getting involved and it is happening. So I just feel that, yeah, that's my role is to help them be aware of it and help to educate them so they can take it on and be stewards of the environment and of very specifically places where they live and where hopefully they will spend time. (37:41)

LB: Are there sort of specific steps that you can tell students they can take to help improve the pond?

AW: Usually, yeah, its pretty much on the level of awareness right now and I think that that's what UPP has just done so well about you know, get yourself involved and these are the ways to do it, so certainly its, you know, we had organizing for Holly Ewald to come to our classes and you know, share, she does like an introductory, like this is what its all about and this is why we're doing this, and certainly making that information available to them and then definitely encouraging them about the procession and about the storm drain events that, you know, I helped organize last year and I'm going to help do another one this year in May and any other, you know we have, any other opportunities, like we'll have Lisa Melmed come, I haven't talked to her yet but I will about coming to do like little save the date magnets, you know we'll have her, hopefully she come to school and kids will stay after and make those things and put them on their refrigerators and we can send them to people and send them to our board members and, you know, distribute them to visitors who come to our school, so um, yeah. (38:57)

LB: Can you explain more what the storm drain events are?

AW: Yeah, so I started them, I guess we've only done one, it was last fall, actually two falls ago, and I learned about creating a storm drain event actually when I was an Americorps member with City Year Rhode Island where I was involved in an event that another corps member planned, so I learned actually that you could get, you know with help from different organizations you could get the special, like you know, big sticker seals for placing next to drains and you have a special kind of adhesive that looks like black toothpaste and it's really nasty stuff but it really works. And so I learned like you know, this is going back 8 or 9 years that oh, wait a minute, like there are people you can approach to get these materials and you can organize your own event. So I always held onto that and then (39:56) I really, you know, being involved with UPP I said you know I really want to do one of these, so I told Holly like, I'm going to plan it and I had this idea for how many drains that we want to mark and we want to find out which drains actually lead into the pond and, you know, where is the watershed and you know, where is the runoff coming from

and, so I planned it and then I had to talk to uh, emails from Cranston and emails from Providence about you know, what kind of regulations we need and you know, Save the Bay actually provided all the materials which was wonderful and I opened it up to, I worked with Lisa Melmed and Kathleen, um Scarff, Scarff, Sharff, I can't say her last name, anyway, and we, the three of us we planned this event and we said you know we have an idea for you know a certain amount of students to get involved, so it was students from my school and they could bring siblings if they wanted and we basically we found an adult, like we found basically, I think we had 5 groups go out and we gave them each a map and we said find the drains along these routes and we gave them a quick little 5 minute, you know, lesson about how to apply these big, you know these drain markers, and they went out and they, you know, we said go out, do the ones you feel that you can or that need it and then we all came back together and kind of celebrated and they also picked up trash along the way because Save the Bay gave us some gloves to use and some trash bags and so we came back having you know, done a little bit of clean up which is also a big City Year thing, so tied that in as well, and yeah. So that was great, and so not all the drains got marked that we wanted, so Holly asked can you plan it again and I said sure and there's stuff and plenty of extra materials to do that so they've been in the boathouse for a little over a year now so we're going to get those out of storage and mark some more drains and make sure the ones that are definitely going into the pond get marked and so that also involves talking with Cranston about that because they have certain regulations you need to do if you're doing anything in Cranston, which is different from the Providence people, so its also talking to the right people to make sure we're allowed to do it.

LB: And what's the benefit of marking the drains? (42:15)

AW: So pretty much it just says like, no dumping, so people know that this drain is you know, connected to something more than just like a black hole, and again its just another way and another method of sharing information to people. And it certainly is very sensitive around Mashapaug Pond. And so its just a little information on

there, there's some different, Save the Bay has a couple of different ones, and the ones that we used basically say, you know, say 'no dumping' and I don't know if maybe it says 'Narragansett Bay Commission' on it or something, I can't remember right now cause there's a couple different ones, but yeah it's just not good to dump your paints and your oils and you know, your oil from your car down these places 'cause people do do that and my students have talked, you know, they, I think have also acknowledged that they might know people who do that and that's not a good thing to do anymore, they thought it was good and it's actually not and here's why, so it's also, that's a big piece of, you know, educating our students to go on and educate their family members and their relatives and just people they know so they know it's not safe and good to do.

LB: So I'm curious if you ever had any educational experiences like this, was there anything from your childhood where you learned about an environmental issue or yeah, anything like that?

AW: Um, I really can't, like, at the ages of like my students even, like, let's see, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eight, I'd say, no. I'm from Ohio and probably the most important thing around Ohio is the Ohio River and it was, it's really sad, it's really never been celebrated, I mean Cincinnati is on the river and my elementary school, you could probably see the river a little bit, like a teeny bit, from where my high school – from where my elementary school was located. And you know, it was never like maybe you'd talk about its significance in Ohio studies in 7th grade but never about like the current state of what's happening at the river. My really only interaction with the river is growing up we'd have soccer practice at a place called Turkey Ridge and that was short for 'Turkey River Ridge Run' and it was really close by the river and every now and then there's almost like this kind of like very like a declined driveway into the river, and so people would, basically like a boat launch but I didn't know it at the time. And sometimes our soccer balls would kind of like go over there and kind of roll into the water a little bit, and we were always kind of like 'ewwww, gross' like kind of joking (45:12) like, 'oh there's gonna be like a three-eyed frog here' and so

but it was never anything to celebrate and to really know about the ecology of the place, that never really, that never came up. But I will say that, its not necessarily related to environmental issues but I will say probably a very early memory that has influenced kind of my interest in, you know, doing things that are citizen activist oriented, um, when I was very very very young, I think like maybe 4, I can't really remember, my mother was involved, and I didn't really understand it at the time, but it was such like, such a wonderful memory that it's always stuck with me, is that my mother had a long piece of white paper and I didn't know but it was going to be a banner, like really really long, and it had to go from kind of where our breakfast room was through the doorway, through the hallway, all the way to our front door, which was like a very long piece of paper, and um (46:17), and then she had red paint and she was writing something on this very long piece of paper, and I remember that I was barefoot and my, you know, I'm one of 4 kids so I think we all were barefoot just walking around the house, and she'd say 'no no no, when you walk over here you've gotta tippy toe around the paint, the paint's wet', and I think probably we got our toes in it, and what she was doing was she was painting a sign because she was part of a group that was protesting a fast food restaurant coming into our neighborhood, that, it was actually a Wendy's. Wendy's wanted to move into what was called the Esquire theater, and the Esquire theater was a place that had been a movie theater, was not a theater when I was, you know, at the time it didn't play movies, it was just a space that was closed down and was all boarded up, and I like remember passing it sometimes and my mom saying like 'Yeah I used to go see movies there in high school', and she didn't live in the neighborhood where eventually we ended up living, she was from another area of Cincinnati, but she would come over to Clifton (47:19) and she would talk about going to movies there and I was like 'Really there's a movie theater in there?' because it was like a smaller, you know, independently run kind of thing, not like a big movieplex, so she said that she wanted to help save it, like they didn't want a Wendy's to move in. And so, and we said 'Yeah yeah no Wendy's', so we never had Wendy's growing up and I never really knew why, but it was because Wendy's was going to moving into the Esquire and that wasn't going to be ok, like we didn't want a Wendy's there. This was kind of

like the main street of the Clifton neighborhood, which is right by the University of Cincinnati. So she was part of a group that that long banner was used to basically raise awareness around, you know, community members around our neighborhood did not want this fast food neighborhood moving in, so that was used, and lo and behold, the money was raised, and the business backing was there and basically when I was probably in junior high, which out here is called, you know, middle school, the Esquire opened, it opened as a theater, and I always was so proud because inside was a plaque and it had my mom's name on it with all the other people who were involved to help save it, and they saved it. They said, you know, we brought this thing back from the dead, we said we're not going to let this fast food restaurant come in here and take over this historic building, we're going to save it, we want it to become something for the community, something for people to do and it's this living thriving thing right now. And I love going home back over the holidays back to Ohio and I can go to the Esquire and I can go to a movie, and you know the bright lights outside that are attracting you in to go see a movie, you've got, you know, the popcorn machine in there and the refreshments, you know it's just a wonderful thing, so I, the reason I explain it in such detail, is that I saw it happen, I saw someone who cared about it, who had a relationship, who got involved, who got involved in some way to help out and brought something back kind of from this, what felt like at the time like a point of no return. And so I feel like it can happen. So you hear about the story with like the health of Narragansett Bay and how Save the Bay is really involved and had been very much involved with, you know, bringing back the health of the water there and the ecosystem there (49:48) and so like I know it can happen and so, again like, why not, why not turn, you know, right now, it just feels like so many people's backs are to Mashapaug Pond, why not turn towards it, you know, so I feel like it can happen. It's just, it's going to come from people building relationships, caring about it, putting time and energy into it, and it's going to happen. So I'd say on the environmental scope that I didn't really, nothing early on, but definitely like the kind of issue around Esquire theater was huge for me. And so I think that that's why I, like it's such an important thing to involve young people in this process, cause you know, hopefully it carries on with them. (50:34)

LB: I feel like you've covered most of the sort of questions that I had, but you know, is there anything else that you feel is important that you want to share?

AW: I feel like I've covered a lot too. Let's see . . .

LB: I mean, I think you've already sort of, you did phrase this in some ways, but kind of, what the overall message that you want to give to your students about the pond and about their involvement in it, could you sort of sum that up?

AW: Sure. Just their involvement does matter. And urban pond procession is, you know, UPP is recruiting them on purpose. Like they want young people to be involved and they want young people to be informed. And I think that's a really powerful message 'cause I feel like there's so many things where I think maybe as a young person, an elementary school student or a middle schooler or a high schooler, that they're like, well I just have to wait 'til I get older, or I have to wait 'til I'm an adult to help, you know, start getting involved in things and to make decisions and I just think what's great about this is it's a vehicle for them to just start. Like you can, you know if you want to invest your time and your questions, you can get involved, nobody's stopping you. And so I'm just thankful that UPP has created just opportunities for them and again you know when we get closer to the pond, when we move over to Elmwood Avenue, it's just going to be awesome, I think we're going to get way more involved than we already are and just feel like even more connected to the pond 'cause it's going to be part of our new community at Sophia Academy, so I think it's going to be real exciting and I'm glad that we're going to be, like we're hitting the ground running (52:13), like we know the issues of what's in our new neighborhood as a school, and they are already going to be really informed and they're going to be, I'm going to be so excited that we're so close to the pond and I know that's going to carry over to them and I think it's just a real exciting time to be involved and to be in a position to involve young people, so yeah, I think that, you know, they get the importance of it, and I think they know that, you know, they're,

that they have some work to do too to keep the issues being known and to have their own hopes and dreams around the pond too. (52:51)

[End of interview]