

**Interviewee: Bob Vanderslice**

**Interviewer: Keally Cieslik**

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**Duration: 50:56**

KC: But maybe you could just start, and I guess I have to hold this really close to get the best sound, um, maybe you can start by telling us your name and who you work for and your connection to the pond.

BV: Okay, I'm Bob Vanderslice. I work for the Rhode Island Department of Health. Connected to the pond because of Holly Ewald and her work. There's a lot of residents around the pond who were concerned about the quality of the fish, the quality of the water. And, on a professional basis I had to be involved in the clean up of the Gorham site. Many different types of involvement.

KC: And, you mentioned this story when we met at the church a few weeks ago, but, could you tell the story of first hearing about the pond, and the funny email story? If you're willing to tell it?

BV: Sure. Sure. So, actually, it was the second dealing with the pond. A long time ago I was involved and I'm trying to remember why, but Groundworks Providence had a canoe program there and they were concerned about the water quality and I was working with them. But, years later, I was confronted with residents who were concerned about the fish and was asked about putting up signs. I wanted nothing to do with signs. Signs are just a pain because you have to maintain them and people rip them down, and we didn't have the ability to make signs, we didn't have staff to erect signs. We didn't own the property. So, I would just tell people, to go to the city. The city makes signs. They erect signs. And everybody said the same thing. You know the city is not gonna do anything. So one day I get an email, and I've done this myself. If you respond to a forwarded email, it doesn't necessarily go to the person you think it did. And so I got an email referring to the fact that I wasn't even aware that there was a sign there, at the property that had the Health Department's name on it. And, um, it was from Steve Fischback who is at Rhode Island Legal Services. And he said, something like, 'arggggh, I can't believe this guy, and he calls himself a scientist!' and I forget exactly what the terms he used were, but they weren't particularly complimentary. And so, I thought aw, this isn't good. And I'm gonna have to work with Steve for the next couple of decades, so I called him up. And said, I guess he called me clueless, and I said 'you're absolutely right. I am clueless, but what about this sign? Tell me more about it.' And it actually started a

great program. So he inspired me to get a grant to get some money to make signs for the pond, to warn people about the hazards there.

KC: I just love the email part of that story. I think it's funny. So, um, could you describe, broadly the public health situation at the pond, and the various environmental health and public health issues that, for people who've never been told about them, what would you sort of characterize?

BV: Alright. Well, there's so many issues and they're all intertwined. When Gorham was active. There were certainly exposures to the community. But those are really hard to understand and track down. So, people have mentioned, 'you know there were emissions coming from that, what about the people living near Gorham? Were they impacted?' And although we can look at old statistics, or cancer statistics, those are such hard questions to answer. So it's always in the back of my mind. 'What about residents who used to live there when Gorham was active?' And I don't have a good answer for what those impacts are. But then we know that the site is contaminated. So certainly, there's vapors, organic solvents that were used, and those are being kept out of the school by a whole system of, um, um, filters and devices that suck the gas out of the soil and vent it some place else. But these vapors can travel across the street, get in people's basements. So, certainly, that's of concern as well. Those situations are being monitored and sometimes you have to install systems to keep the vapors out of the homes. The pond itself is contaminated. Not only with what Gorham has put in, but with what, a whole variety of other industrial pollution, we can find, levels of dioxin in fish that are scary. PCBs, maybe those came from Gorham, maybe they came from somewhere else.

[4:57]

Maybe they just came from runoff, I'm not sure. But what it means is if you eat the fish, you're being exposed to a whole lot more nasty organic compounds than I'd like you to be exposed to. However, um, even if Gorham spends millions and millions of dollars, or Tecton, now, who owns the site, to clean up all the contamination they can find, those fish will *still* be contaminated and there's other sources of pollution that are every bit as important and those just come from stormwater. So, after a rain, you will find outrageous levels of bacteria in the summertime, in that pond. Levels that could make people sick, give them ear infections or respiratory infections or GI problems so, that's pretty nasty. So you don't want people swimming in that pond, especially after a rainfall. And um, there's now algae blooms. So there's cyanobacteria or blue-green algae that can produce toxins. So we worry about pets that go in, pets aren't really adverse to swimming in stinky water, so somebody's dog could die. And we don't know of a case that happened at *this* pond, but I know in other places where that's happened, so. If the dog gets sick, certainly if kids were playing in that water, they could get sick as well. So there's a whole host of problems around that pond. And the other problem is, that it's a beautiful pond, and it's a resource and we should be using that pond. And just the fact that we can't is a problem.

[6:33]

KC: yeah, um, I'm gonna steal this other table to rest my elbow on...[laughs]...so that I can get better audio....

BV: Yeah, you want me to hold it or?

KC: No, this, as long as, I think if I can put my elbow here it will be fine.

BV: Okay [laughs] good.

KC: Um, so, okay, so this is a question, that I've been wondering....so basically it sounds like you're saying there isn't data that can, that we can link, um, like historic toxicity at Gorham to, specific health outcomes? Specific like, maybe, I don't know, cancer outcomes or anything like that? There's not really, or is there a link that can be made?

BV: Um, with respect to what illness that is currently going on in the community, or what has gone on in the past, and linking that to a specific exposure, that's so hard to do. And I don't know of a single case of disease or illness where I can track it back and say, 'aha, that is due to Gorham.' But at the same time, you don't need to know that to know that that site is contaminated and dangerous and know that we need to um, do what we can to clean up that site, in order for it to be safe for people to recreate there. So, that is, that's always the problem. If you could, it's not like a jet liner crashing where you have a hundred bodies and you say, 'aw this some tragedy, we need to do something and make sure this never happens again.' It's a situation where it's chemical testing, evaluation of the environment, we know it's contaminated. We know those contaminants *can cause* impacts in people. We wanna prevent those impacts from happening.

[8:18]

KC: Yeah, so, this kind of leads into your work at the Department of Health, because that's sort of what um, that's sort of that role of that agency, I guess in some ways. Um, what is your day-to-day work at the Department of Health like?

BV: Wow. Everyday is different and I'm never bored. In fact, if you took away all my work, within two weeks I'd have too much to do. Because there is always so much to do. The major programs that I work with are lead, radon, asbestos and occupational health. We have daily activities and I've got a great staff that takes care of all those problems, for me. And I get involved when I need to. We just got a big climate change grant, so we're now looking at the impacts of climate change on health. And until I get staff to work with me on that, then that's my job as well. But I think, one of my, the real important job is that is to make sure that environmental health gets considered in every program at the health department. Whether you're working on

HIV AIDs, whether you're working on diabetes, heart disease, breast cancer, stroke, arthritis, asthma, there's, everyone of those programs have an environmental component. And if, people are living in good safe healthy environments that support their health, then these problems are diminished and the chances are they're gonna manage their health better, greatly increase. And that's a challenge. I'm not sure how to do that, but it involves going to a lot of meetings with people that have a completely different set of jargon as I do, and trying to support their work and get them to think a little more broadly about how the environment can impact what they're doing.

[10:36]

KC: So in all those different things that you do, what are some moments that you've found particularly inspiring over the course of your career and what are some moments that you found particularly frustrating or upsetting, or particularly challenging over the course of your career?

BV: Mmhm. Well, because we've talking about Mashapaug Pond, that's what's on my mind, and so, the, um, some of the amazing successes that we've had there, have to do with, I think it was after the first or second Urban Pond Procession, when a ten year old boy, I think his name was Anthony, came to the forefront of this big group of people, and spoke about stormwater with more eloquence than I've ever heard a scientist speak about it, and just talking about all the bad things that after a rain, and all the pollution that washes into this pond, and how we needed to do something. And that was such an important statement. Then Mayor Cicilinne was there, and it's the city that's gonna have to pay for all that. It's not gonna be Textron. And so, to have him hear this message from a ten year old, that was right on target was really inspiring. I think that I've been really impressed by the work of Holly Ewald in getting that neighborhood together to do something about these problems. Textron was required because that's considered an environmental justice area, to do a lot more meetings, to have a lot of community engagement activities, to put signs, to take out ads, to do this, but nobody would come to some of those meetings, who wants to hear a bunch of scientists talk about how what's going on, in terms that are, over your head, and where residents didn't feel respected? And then you, add someone like Holly to the equation who talks about the reason we should be proud of this neighborhood, and the lives of the people that work there, the artisans that were involved in Gorham, and all of a sudden I'm looking at this site as a site to revere. This was a place, where amazing things happened. And, if she hadn't brought those elements in it, it would just be, well this is a Brownfield and we oughta it up. And without that connection to the history, it wouldn't have been there.

[13:33]

I think it was the first urban pond procession too, it started at the Buddhist Temple at Hanover Street. And, I'm with the health department, so we're giving the health lecture: 'alright kids, we're gonna be walking along the sidewalks. We're gonna stop

at the corner, we're gonna make sure it's safe, and then we'll all cross together.' And within about a block, all the kids are there, slumpin' 'aw, we're tired, when are we gonna get there?' And a woman takes off and she's running around, having the kids weave in and out of parked cars. They're all laughing singing, running, now they were all energized, and our plans for a nice, safe little procession, went right down the tubes. But it's just what, people were coming out of their houses, to the music, see the costumes. It was very inspiring. And that's exactly what needs to happen to clean up a site, cause if nobody cares, then nothing is gonna happen.

[14:32]

Um, frustrations...um, [long pause] any bureaucracy is going to cause a fair amount of frustration because a tremendous importance is put on paperwork and doing the right, doing um, oh, you know eight forms before you can travel to a conference and all that stuff. And it just, makes you regret the fact that you have to waste all this time on things that don't matter to you that are so important to somebody that has no connection to your program. And, um, they don't, you just feel like they don't understand what's being lost by you having to spend all this time and activity to justify some very inconsequential travel, and so, I guess, the bureaucratic system is always a source of frustration, whether you're at Brown or the health department or wherever you are. Well, for someone like me.

KC: I've always heard tell though, that you can wax a little bit poetic about what it means to be a public bureaucrat, and sort of, that you identify something maybe sacred, or important about that role, in some way?

BV: hmm..?

KC: Or maybe sacred is the wrong word, that there's, if you were to think about sort of the significance of the role of the public bureaucrat, and what they *may*, what they have the opportunity to contribute...

BV: oh, hm. Well, I mean, as far as my own situation, yeah, I *really* do appreciate what I get to do. I get to work on problems that impact human lives, and I get to do something interesting everyday. I think public health, one of the great things about public health is you'll never succeed unless you engage the people you're trying to assist. They have as many answers as you do. And so, that's where, being a bureaucrat isn't so bad. Where you get to be humble, and approach people and talk about their lives, and what's important to their lives, and how you can use government to make their lives a little better. That, government *does* do good things for people, and whether it's lead poisoning, or radon abatement, or removing asbestos hazards, or working at Mashapaug pond, these people have a connection to their community and the environment of their community and they feel like their voices haven't been heard and we get to listen and try to respond to them. So, that is, a privilege.

KC: Um, do you have any, or maybe over the years, you do, but when you first moved to Providence? Did you live near the pond? Is that, or did you, find out about it through your work? And, at this point, do you have many friends or any family who live near the pond?

BV: Um, so, when I moved to Providence we actually moved to the Edgewood section of Cranston, and rented a house. And, can I, go off on a diversion for a minute? Yeah? So, um, it was interesting because my wife is an environmental scientist, and I'm working at the health department, and we had at that time, three kids, and we were using cloth diapers and we noticed one day that there was a pipe right out into Pawtuxet cove, and it was carrying the water from the toilets and the washing machine. And it's like , *you've gotta*, we came from North Carolina, I mean, and it never it occurred to us that in the industrialized northeast that there would still be places like that. So that was a real education. We only stayed in that place a year. We rented until we found a place to live, but um, that was quite a shock. So, by the time we left, they had installed sewers along that street, but it was pretty amazing.

[19:38]

Um, but at that point, I barely know Mashapaug Pond existed. I'd been to the restaurant and the strip mall, the four seasons, but didn't know there was a pond back there, until groundworks, um, approached me to, because they were concerned about the kids, they heard the pond was contaminated, and then, you know, I was trying to help them, um, manage the situation to put in some means so kids with muddy feet wouldn't track mud back into their cars or homes, and they'd have a place to wash their hands, and then there was an algae bloom and people got really upset about the potential toxicity, and they just abandoned that great little boating shed there, and that program. So, that was my first exposure to Mashapaug pond. It wasn't until years later that I got involved with um, the Gorham site and as part of my job I have to support the efforts of DEM, they're trying to get the site cleaned up but they wanna make sure they're addressing all the human health hazards in an appropriate way. So they invite me to come , especially in an area like Mashapuaug, which it fits their definition of an environmental justice area, places where residents voices often aren't heard very well.

[21:10]

KC: Um, are there any important steps that families who use the pond, or live near the pond that, any key things that you would recommend to families? Or residents, in general?

BV: Right now, the Urban Ponds Procession and the eJL are looking at ways so that every time it rains, we don't just pour a whole new set of pollutants into the pond. So while Gorham is doing their work, to try and clean up the historical industrial contaminants, there has to be some mindfulness of the fact that every we're putting

more and more pollutants into that pond, and we need to stop doing that. And everybody who lives around the pond, or uses the pond, can probably identify areas that don't look right. They can see water sheeting down a street or pouring into the pond, or coming off the roof of an industry and going right into a pond, and those things need to change. And they're not gonna change unless people care. And, right now, there's a fair number of people that are showing they care. and it's having a response, of the industries on the other side of the pond are doing something,. The kids at the school need to be involved. Somehow they need to show their concern, not only with the vapors underneath their building, but also with what's happening in the pond, and along the banks of the pond. So, I would say, just by loving the pond, and getting involved in the pond, they're gonna find ways that they can make that pond a better place, a safe place to recreate.

KC: Um, and do you have a favorite season at the pond?

BV: Oh, Fall. I love fall at the pond. Oh I just think it's gorgeous.

[23:07]

To see those trees reflected in the water. Um it's funny, on a cloudy day, it's even more vibrant. So, on a bright sunny day, it's very pretty, it's a wonderful place, but the colors sorta get washed out. If it's a day where it's a little over cast and you see those reds of the maples, or the sorta purples of the oaks, and um, reflected in the water, it's, just very special. And when you hear about the people that have been at the pond, or hear about the folks from the indian council talking about the history of the pond when Native Americans were there. It all becomes believable when you see it in the fall. So.

KC: So, I, I, kind of have, this is sort of a two part question, but the first part is, what motivates you to be involved in the Mashapaug pond work? And I, I, don't, I think I understand this is a really beautiful community, there's a lot of, it's an incredible resource, but, so really the reason it's a two part question is cause my bigger question, is, what motivates you to, be, on the side of the good? [laughs] if that makes sense? I mean, sometimes I feel like, the world can be broken down in overly simply ways into people who work on the side of the good, or not.

BV: Hmm..

KC: you know, like, you have, lots of trainings and skills that you could have worked in maybe in the private sector, and earned a lot more money, or maybe just worked for a firm, that was doing some kind of work, but not doing public service work, so yeah. That's my question, what motivates you to work in the public sector?

BV: So what was the first part of the question?

[25:00]

KC: Well, what motivates you to work particularly with the pond? What motivated you to show up on Saturday? To the church? At the Mashapaug Commons?

BV: Well all decisions one makes, have an emotional component. So, we aren't completely rationale human beings, and in fact, if we let the rationale side of our brains take over and make decisions for us, our decisions are often very flawed. And that, allowing that emotional part, to become part of your decision making, 'what am I gonna devote my time to? I only have so many things I can work on. What is going to be the issue that I'm going to spend trying to work on today?' And, so, part of it is emotional, part of it is rational, these are contaminated sites, I think stormwater is a very big issue. I think it's gonna be a bigger issue when we see bigger and more severe storms associated with climate change and so rationally, I need to look at where competent responses to storm water control are being conducted, and try to support those. So that's a rational why I would work at Mashapaug, because they're doing as much there, as they're doing anywhere in the state, and that makes sense. And then there's just, oh, it's, I just love that idea that, we are going to inspire people to love history, love art, and make that part of our response to controlling storm water. And, I got to play around with art a little bit, about ten years ago, and really enjoyed it, and it's really neat to just sit there and color kites and make wind socks and do all the other things that Holly is getting us to do. And that's part of it, as well. It's um, it's why you'd come out on a Saturday to do something, because it's fun. And, work should be fun.

KC: What was the art you were involved in ten years ago?

BV: SO, ten years ago, oh! Well, here's a frustration! So you asked me about what's the most frustrating thing, that's happened. And I guess *that was* the most frustrating thing. It was that we could not, even begin to at the health department, make definitive statements, even on some pretty simple things. Everytime it rained there were a couple of neighborhoods that would get flooded out. And it was sewage, it was bad. And it's like, we need to do something about this. And I started every meeting, with, you know what? 'We need to do something about these couple of neighborhoods in the state that are getting flooded out every time there's a rain storm. And I, you know, if you can't do something about sewage in the 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> century, I mean, what *are we gonna be able to accomplish?* And I just got so frustrated, and I got a call one day from an old colleague who said, 'oh we've got this position in Washington could you come help us? It was down at HUD. And I thought, you know, I need a change. And so I did a sabbatical, and so for nine months, went down to Washington and I'd fly down on a Tuesday morning, and fly back on a Thursday afternoon, which gave me Tuesday and Wednesday evenings free, for the first time, I had free time, in twenty years. And so, I took some art classes. And I had a ball.

KC: Where? Did you take them at the steel yard?

BV: Oh no, I was flying down to Washington, so I was living here, and I was working from home, Monday and Friday, but I had to Washington everyweek, so I'd fly to Washington. And there's a place called the Torpedo factory, down in Alexandria, and they just do, um, so it's very similar to the steel yard, in a lot of respects. The Torpedo factory , *was* an old torpedo factory and it was made into art studios. And I took pastels which I really liked, and oil painting, which I ws not very good at, and drawing, and just had a great time doing it.

KC: That's really cool. I guess we have some choir in the background. I guess, we, we are almost finished. Um, it's I know, it's been a long day for you. But, what would be your dream for the Mashapaug Pond, and for the community and neigobhorhoods that live around the pond, if you had all the resources and had um, yeah, what are like features you would imagine, sort of just thinking creatively about all that the pond and the community could be or could do.

[30:14]

BV: Oh I mean, my dream for the pond, is very simple, and I just want to swim in it. And that's enough. It's a great place right now. So, I'm sure other people have dreams of doing other things there, but, you know, as a kid, I used to play in creeks a lot. And, we'd catch crayfish and we'd make dams and you know every time it rained we'd make dams in the gutter and watch the water pile up, and have, skip stoens and just do silly things. And I think that's what I'd want Mashapaug to be, a place just to do those things. You go around with somebody who actually knows stuff, about botanty for example, and they'll point out how some of the plans are native species that have special qualities. And you go, 'oh that's really great' but those things tend to not stick in my mind very much. So right after that walk and talk I woulda said, oh my dream is to you know, 'take out the invasives and replant with native species and do all this and that' um, but then three weeks later I woulda forgotten what those species were, and now I'm back to, just , 'oh I'd love to just div in and go swim around the pond.'

[31: 43]

KC: I actually feel that really strongly as well. You know, I did a bay swim, um, the Buzzards Bay, I did that swim, even though then after that I found that Buzzards Bay isn't ver clean, but I guess clean enough to swim. It would be so cool if there was someday some, 'Save the pond' I mean you couldn't really do , 'save the pond' cause it would already have to have been saved, I guess, for you to swim in it...

BV: Well the other thing, so a lot of the contamination that we're worried about at the pond, is contamination that's in the sediment, it's in the fish, um, and uh, it occurs because of storm water inputs. But, during a period, a dry spell in the summer, those bacteria levels go to zero just about, so, you *could* envision with enough monitoring and some other things, that, that, *this* could happen in my life time. Um, I don't know that we're gonna be eating the fish outta that pond. But it is

not inconcievable to me that the water quality in the pond could meet standarads for swimming. You're gonna need a palce to dive off from that's safe, and clean and you're gonna not wanna be mucking around in the sediments at the bottom, but you know, I don't think that it's an unreasonable dream at all.

KC: Um, maybe this will be the last question, but you mentioned earlier the issue of neighborhoods flooding, and I wanted to come back to that, because, has anyone ever looked to see if , the neighborhoods that flood, regularly, I guess I only know about Providence, but there are other places in like Warwick, I think, and other places where there's big flooding, to see if there's other places where those overlap with where there used to be other ponds in the city?

[33:41]

BV: hm..

KC: cause I've heard stories about drained ponds throughout south Providence.

BV: gee, I just don't know. That would be fun to look at. I don't know the history, the natural history of Providence, very well.

KC: I just wonder if it overlaps, because if parts of south providence were swampy, and then, filled, and then the ponds were filled in, then the places that flood are obviously, low points, where there was previously some place for water to be stored. Um, well, I think, is there anything else that you want to say about your work with the pond? Or your thoughts about the neighborhood?

BV: hmm...

KC: and you know we can always schedule another interview, or, so, no pressure

[33:27]

BV: Well, I think, part of the magic of this, of my involvement recently involved working with the Rhode Island state council for the Arts and they hooked me up with Holly Ewald and said, this is a fantastic person. She's gonna be able to help you. She's doing just the kind of thing you wanted. What happened was, I realized we really did need to help put up signs, and that I wanted nothing to do with it, but since I was going to have to do something to do with it, we were going to try to do it right. And in order to have some signs that people didn't just graffiti over, they had to be *their* signs. They had to be able to take ownership of this. And so I was hoping that Holly could create some beautiful pieces of art that people would not want to deface. And so, I meet Holly and we talk, and Holly starts working with kdis at the elementary school and people at the Buddhist temple, which is important because they're the southeast Asians that were actually fishing. Um and, going to all sorts of places and found that, most people in the community didn't even know the pond

was there, let alone, it wasn't *causing them a problem*, they didn't they were not appreciative of this pond. It wasn't a hazard to them. And that if we were gonna actually clean up this pond and do something reasonable, that we needed to build up a constituency. So, a year later, we have *no signs, no designs, no nothing*, what do we have? We have a parade. Through south providence with Big Nazo puppets, Brass Bands, nothing to do with what I asked Holly, at all. And so she gave me exactly what I wanted and needed, and nothing of what I asked for. And um, isn't that a wonderful thing. And so it wasn't until six months later, that after we had a constituency, after we had an appreciation of the pond, that there was some sort of artistic expression of what people shouldn't do at this pond, and why. And those signs are wonderful signs and um, with the help of the folks of DE, Department of environmental management, they went over to the Department of Transportation to make signs. Well, people at Dept. Of transportation signs, were *graphic artists*, as it turns out. And they're there, 'what do you want?' And Holly explained, and it's like, 'let us show you our color palletes!' you know, they were so excited. Can you imagine an artist that's just making road signs, and no speeding signs, and no parking signs, suddenly being able to do artwork on signs ?? Oh, it was terrific, and so as a result we have beautiful signs around the pond that explain that this isn't a place to be wading and swimming and fishing, yet. And uh, I hope that we get to make new signs that talk about celebrating this pond someday. But, um, you know that's, I mean you asked me before about being a bureaucrat, well, those are the moments where you know you got to participate in something that was so much bigger than anything you ever imagined. So, I was just thinking that we'd have you know, a couple community members, that fish there, make a sign, and instead, it was something so much bigger and better and more wonderful and *more* public health and anybody at the public health agency here would ever had thought about.

[38:37]

KC: that's great. Um, I did, ah, some archive research, I went to the state archive actually, and I wanted to show you, just cause I think it's interesting. We can be done with the interview, but I found, stuff going back...did you know like the only index for the ProjO archive is at the downtown library ? and it's the only index? So, starting in like 86, there's ProjO articles on the internet. But before that you have to go to micro film and to find anything in the microfilm, you have to look in the index, on key words, and there's only one index with all those key words.

BV: So what about the readers guide to periodic literature?

KC: I don't know what that is.

BV: yeah, see.....So when I was in school, you know, we had no computers. There was the readers guide to periodic literature. It was all key words

KC: ohhh...yeah...

BV: yeah.....so, these things don't even exist any more, probably.

KC: no, I don't think so, but I just think it's funny, or surprising that in Rhode Island, there's only one archive for the PROJO. But anyway, this is the coolest thing I found: Groundwater conditions in the vicinity of Mashapaug Pond, Providence, RI , 1948 ,or 47.

BV: Wow.

KC: It's pretty technical, but, I also found, .... Um....a story from 1973 about undetermined sources of oil slicks on the Mashapuag Pond,

BV: hm...

KC: something from the 50s: City wants states to acquire ponds, asks it to consider taking over Mashapaug, Spectacle to end pollution.

BV: wow

KC: Um, and then, something where they moved the brook under, because of the concerns about standing water related to mosquitos. Which doesn't really make sense cause it's a brook, but this is 1924!

BV: hm

KC: "observaitons have determined the feasibility of lowering the mashapaug brook culvert under the new haven railroad tracks for the purpose of eliminating the summer breeding place of mosquitos in stagnant portions of the stream.

BV: So, what happens with mosquitos is, if you have, um, water that supports fish, you don't have bad mosquitos, because they eat them, I mean, you get a few, but you don't have ....

KC: yeah.....

BV: but if you had stagnant water, um, if you have water that fish can't get to, so, um,

KC: super shallow?

BV: ..it grows mosquitos like crazy, so that's um, that's why.

KC: it's 1924, it's pretty impressive

[interruption: security guard- room is reserved]

BV: I get to use my sign language.

KC: Do you speak sign ?

BV: I did, thirty years ago and I just um, met someone who um, applied for a job and she had taken time off because her son is deaf, and so she's learning sign and I just got back online to try and brush up on my sign language again. And it was really funny because, I'm horrible at foreign languages. So I went to Chile cause my daughter was there, and I um, really really studied. My wife said she never saw me work so hard in my life. And I gained enough Spanish to get by, in Chile and then within two months, I had lost it all. But, the signs after 30 years, were coming back to me. ....

[conversation about sign language, signing the release forms.]

[44:46]

BV: so, you know, one thing as a public official, I mean, you need to be honest, but everything is on the record. I don't say things off the record. It's like, duh. Either I'm not sure about it and I don't want to talk about it, or I'll talk about it. But,

KC: I really just have been thinking about, you know, so both my parents, also, both my parents, my dad is a civil engineer and worked like in the private sector for many years just doing like landfill design and remediation and ground water stuff. And my mom studied water resources management and now works for the Wisconsin dept. of natural resources. And my dad works for a public municipality. And they're both like so, 'keally, don't, like, we don't think working in the public sector is good....the public sector is becoming a constrained place...I mean Obviously state budgets are tight' but, I don't know, maybe, I think it's also the difference between Wisconsin and rhode island, in that, wisconsin has a lot of really depressing public leaders and I think rhode island has a lot of really great, public leaders. OR, I don't even know about leaders, but people in, like, for example, I study health policy, so like, the people doing health reform in rhode island, are very passionate, committed, people I think, I don't know.

[46:29]

BV: So you did ask me a question about the side of good and the side of evil. And, it isn't how I view the world. So when I went to work for e, I left a PhD research to go to environmental protection agency. And what did the people at the research institute think? Aw, I'd gone to the dark side, right? Oh, this promising young researcher and he's gonna work for government, uh. And, the first day, I was there, a, one of the older employees took me under his wing and said, you realize of course,

you need to shout, 'unclean! Unclean!' as you walk the streets. You work for the government now. And he was kidding, of course, but he wasn't. I mean, that, you don't take a job in government to earn respect. It's not a highly esteemed occupation, right? So. You have to do it for other reasons. And, you know for me those, that's great. I love being able to do what I do. But, It's not that I'm better, or I'm working on the source of good, public health is a little bit humble, but it's a little self-righteous, you know...you know, ... "we know what's good for you, you should do what we tell you, this is what's good." And guess what? We're wrong half the time. So, when I first came to the health department I'd get calls from people, often a pregnant woman, who'd say, "oh, we found termites in the house and I'm pregnant, you know I'm really worried about spraying." And I'd say well, wouldn't you worry about spraying if you had a new baby in the house? And I'd do some research and I'd say, well, you know there's only three registered pesticides for termites, and I think this is the best one to use, but still, just to be on the safe side, is there some place you could live for two or three days, after the house is sprayed?

[48:37]

Have somebody go in and clean, and clean all flat surfaces, and um, sure enough five years later, the pesticides I was telling people to use, were banned. And I'm there, like, 'wow I'm glad I told em to stay away and to clean up afterwards.' And um, but, you know, so a lot of what we do is wrong. You know we're well meaning, and it's sometimes we're arrogant and self righteous and so it's hard to feel like, I'm doing good, and you're doing bad. It's, we're doing the best we can and we're approaching it from different view points. Very few people I've met say, you know, "I wanna do some really nasty things, you know? I don't care about people." Even the people that just really want to make money – truly believe they're providing a service, or giving people what they want. I'm giving entertainment, or this or that or the other thing. Um, and unless, they're callous or negligent, and there are a few of those people in the world, and, we do have mechanisms to get them to see the light, and take them to court, or do this or that or the other thing. But, even the people we've taken to court- we had a big suit against the lead paint industry, there were a lot of people that believed they were doing good things. And, that they were providing a good quality product that everybody needed. And, it's just hard to say, 'oh those are the bad guys, we're the good guys' Um, because we're not always the good guys. And things like, Tuskegee, oh ,,you might say-'oh that would never happen here.' And yet some things that were disturbingly close in , in what kind of research we allow and what kind of medicine we allow to be practiced, um, it's just a little to close and it keeps you thinking.... 'am I doing the right thing? Am I really helping this situation or am I contributing to the problems people are railing against?' so.