

Interviewer: Emily McDaniel

Narrator: David Stephens

This interview contains information from the experiences of David Stephens related to his childhood in and current project about Mashapaug Pond and its surrounding community. Discussed in the interview is the West End Community Center, childhood recreation around the pond, the significance of being a member of the community, changes in demographics, crime, break dancing, and animals in the area.

This interview was held in the Sciences Library, 201 Thayer Street, Providence, RI 02912, on March 14, 2013 at 11:30am.

Emily McDaniel: So, this is March 14th. My name is Emily McDaniel and I am interviewing David Stephens in the Scili. So, just to start, how are you connected to Mashapaug?

David Stephens: I grew up in the West End, in the West End of Providence, you know Bellevue Avenue, which is like, the pond is like was a place that has kids. We all went there as groups of kids – kids from the neighborhood. Pick a day, and just say, let's go to Mashapaug Pond today. If it was hot outside, we all went to the pond. - it was kind of just being in the community is really how I'm connected, I guess.

MCDANIEL: What are you doing with the Pond now? Are you still involved with it?

STEPHENS: Now, I'm beginning to be involved now, with the Urban Pond Procession you know, and with doing the film project with students who are at Alvarez High School, who you know [1:00] their high school is on a site where Gorham, the factory, was where a lot the contaminants that have contributed to the Pond right now came from that factory. So I'm kind of involved in that aspect of getting some awareness out and helping the young people as far as an artistic support to create their video and to tell their story because they are right there in it, in the thick of it right now.

MCDANIEL: So what kind of information are they giving you?

STEPHENS: As far as...?

MCDANIEL: Like, how is their perspective different from...

STEPHENS: The young...?

MCDANIEL: Yes

STEPHENS: Different from...?

MCDANIEL: What you would collect from anyone else. I mean, just considering that they're still there for a limited time, and, whereas other residents would have more experience, probably.

STEPHENS: Well I think that, um, for them specifically they – this film that they are going to put together is a piece of a part of change that they'll make for future generations and that's actually a piece – a part of the conversation talking about [2:00] whoa – we're going to make this film, we're going to get everyone aware, and then we're going to be gone. Because part of the idea of when they do the cleanup of the area is that they'll put in athletic fields, they'll have a walking park and things like that. So these are things that some of the young people feel like they are going to miss out on. But then at the same time, they know that future generations will benefit from the project. So I think from their perspective, it's like we're in this high school now, we know this school gets tested for toxins and the air quality and things like that. And they didn't know, I think,

they didn't about it until it was brought to the light that –wow – we're going to school in a place that's on a toxic - basically a toxic waste site. Well not to that extent, but it's contaminated. So for them, I think it's an interesting perspective because, like I said, they're in it. I think all the students working on this project are going to graduate this year, so they'll be in it and then they'll out of it. So we're going to talk about who knows what this project is going to be like 5 years down the line, [3:00] 10 years down the line, what the kids in the neighborhood are going to be like. Hey.

MCDANIEL: They were unaware and I'm assuming their parents were unaware?

STEPHENS: Well I would assume that – as an assumption - I think that some parents probably are not still aware of some of the things that are happening with the school. Some of the ideas with this film is who is the audience? Who does this film matter to? And so they talked about possibly playing it for people in the community. There's a few community centers in that area. One is the West End Community Center. I had a conversation with Holly about I grew up going to that community center, Bucklin Park the Community Center and then we had the pond. It was always [inaudible] all the kids in the area. So we talked about awareness and how some people, I'm pretty sure that there still kids that go to the pond. People that can still get there around where there are not signs that say toxic waste or don't enter. I'm pretty sure there are still people that go there. Because as kids we kind of did a little creeping to get in and get around things [4:00] and I'm pretty sure it's still the same case for young kids. But the idea is to play that in the community; let people in the community see what it is. Because I'm pretty sure they don't - they have no idea this body of water is right around the corner or they probably have no idea about what their futures plans are as far as what's going to happen after the cleanup and what - how they're going to beautify the area and how it's going to be useful after the fact.

MCDANIEL: Definitely. So what's Bucklin Park?

STEPHENS: Bucklin Park is, you know communities have athletic fields? Like you know the baseball diamonds, the footballs fields, and the playground the community pool and Bucklin Park has basketball courts it's just a big, wide open field. They have the neighborhood team. My brother played for the West End Intruders. That was their home field –Bucklin Park was their home field. They had basketball tournaments in the summertime [5:00]. Like I said, you have the public pools. Some of the summertime programs, kids get their free lunches and things like that at the pool and go swimming. Stuff like that. Kids get summer jobs working at the pool or working at the park. The West End Community Center is all one kind of a small, little campus if you want to call it. You have the football field here, you have the community center up in the upper, right-hand corner, down further to the right you have the basketball court, and in-between that you have the pool in-between the basketball park and the football field. It's like a hangout spot.

MCDANIEL: How far was that from Mashapaug?

STEPHENS: It's... I mean, walking it'll take about 3 or 4 minutes. It's literally right down the road. Mashapaug is – Bucklin Park is the midpoint from where in the neighborhood I grew up in where we lived at, most of us lived within a 3 or 4 block area. Bucklin Park's in the middle and Mashapaug was just after that, in a straight line literally [6:00]. So if you go straight down Bucklin or Dexter Street the Park is technically Bucklin on top of the Park and then Dexter below the Park. If you go straight down Dexter Street you'll literally fall right into the Pond if you keep going straight.

MCDANIEL: Interesting – so - I'm guessing that a lot of people that used Bucklin Park were from that area.

STEPHENS: Yes, from the West End. Yes, pretty much.

MCDANIEL: How did you get involved at all with the film project?

STEPHENS: Well, Amelia Rose from the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island had contacted me because my daughter goes to school in Pawtucket, which, there's a site – a tidewater site – just behind it and it had me curious about some of the things we were seeing over and we started doing research and stumbled upon a few things and I was like, wow. So I told my wife about it and told the school about it [7:00] and we had questions about what are these kids being exposed to and what's going on. Because sometimes we'd have these foul smells in the air when we picked our kids up from school and dropped them off in the morning. It kind of it started from that. I did a film – a couple of other film projects for different organizations and I did one for my daughter's school, actually. And so, it kind of came up in conversation and Amelia had helped out with some of the advocating for the cleanup and getting information out to the public about the tidewater site. So she knew of my film-making abilities so she contacted me and I submitted a proposal along with a couple of other artists. That's how I got involved.

MCDANIEL: What kinds of things did you find out about your daughter's school?

STEPHENS: Well, with the tidewater site, the fact that, um, it's kind of similar to what's happening with the Mashapaug Pond site – the Gorham factory. But at the tidewater site, [8:00] it's an old and they had these big canisters which contained all this waste or whatever you want to call it and there was a process about how they had to break it down. But they were supposed to let people know. There had actually been - a few years back, they had actually been a law - class action suit that was going on against them, but then I guess it got settled. I guess there was an uproar in the community about this site but all of a sudden it died down because people were paid off or whatever and then it changed hands. So then, the owner now – I think - is National Grid but they didn't own it before so there's all these funny things like we're not responsible for this and disclosing that and disclosing this because we didn't own it before but now we own it now so now we're only responsible for this here it was just this awkward thing was like - this doesn't make sense. And all of that is how the environmental Justice League got involved because there were so many stacks and stacks of paperwork and of information and Oh, here's the information, take a look at it and it was like - if you didn't know it's like you'd read

through these stacks and stacks of papers and be like, I still don't know [9:00] what's going on so I don't know how to change it. Or to advocate for any change. We just knew there was something going on that was not right.

MCDANIEL: Who was providing this information and who was paying off people?

STEPHENS: I have no idea. I mean, I don't have the specific information but there was a lawsuit there was a parent that my daughter had went to school with previously in her pre-school who knew of this suit – she lived in the area actually, she knew about it and said oh yes, that's old news. Oh, wow. So, yes.

MCDANIEL: Oh, ok. So why did you decide to focus on Alvarez High? Is there - I know that you're working with a class of AP students, and I don't know if there's something special about those kids or how they're connected, especially.

STEPHENS: Well, I'm mainly – I'm mainly in it – I'm mainly into the aspect of [10:00] film, whether it be video editing or writing scripts or whatever. I'm just into - as a young person who grew up in the community that they're going to school in, I imagine a lot of them probably live in the same community and I've spent a lot of years – 12+ years – working with the term “at-risk youth” out here in the community and in the city of Providence. So for me, Alvarez High School was a place that I had – a place where I had I work with, had went to that school. So there was that piece of saying that a lot of people with the technology we have now are into – and also the lack of arts that are involved with schools is kind of a passion that I have. So I'm at URI finishing up so I can be able to go in and bring some of that back into the schools or bring it into afterschool programs in a way. But my angle is that I always wanted to get involved with the young people through the arts [11:00] and through the media, specifically. And so it just happened to be an opportunity that I think it worked out for them where what Holly's doing, what the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island is doing, I think it just – it's kind of like a pilot, if you want to call it – to see what comes out of it. But they are pushing to try to get some media programs in the school, and so that's kind of my drive and my passion for this kind of work with young people and let them know you they don't have to wait to go to college to find out how to do these things. And if you know how to do these things well while you're young, then you can actually go into business for yourself or take care of yourself.

MCDANIEL: So what does film do for a project like this?

STEPHENS: Um, I mean, like in what context?

MCDANIEL: I mean, as opposed to, I mean, just doing like transcriptions or I don't know, just an audio recording.

STEPHENS: I think that - for example, this was maybe two, nah, actually it was a couple of years ago, [12:00] maybe in 2010, I was at a workshop at Brown, you know, right around the corner. They had people from NPR, they had people from PBS, and a

couple of other organizations there and they were speaking on – at the time, I was working at a non-profit. So I had to do a lot of pre-test and post-test kind of measurement and tools on what these kids were getting out of this program and things like that, so, um, I'm sorry, I just lost my train of thought. What was the question again?

MCDANIEL: Video and how it makes the project special in any way.

STEPHENS: Yes, the workshop. So at the workshop, I had just stumbled into film. Because when I was originally going to college it was for – to get a degree in human services to sustain that but the arts was more of my passion. So, with the - at the workshop, they were talking about fundraising specifically for non-profits and how there's a big shift in how people are raising funds [13:00] and it had to do with technology. The fact that we have everyone either pull out a phone, look at a video, go online, and do all these crazy things that are happening now where there's - We're not communicating the same way. A big part of the discussion was about how people are reporting for grants and different writing to get grants and requesting for funds. And so it was talking about how you have a lot of creative writers and people who can just word it a way which is like wow. But then what was more impactful they found was that a person who was served by a program – like carried from the horse's mouth - A person saying that when I first came into this program, I was down and out. Now I'm up and in. You know, just being able to hear that will have more impact and it made funders want to say that I want to put my money behind that program that helped that person. So I think video – and to be honest, my opinion is that a lot of people don't read as much as [14:00] they used to so I think that the idea that – here, read through this informational pamphlet or booklet or whatever is an old idea because people are used to like, rapid media, like in your face kind of media. So I think that film in that aspect is more current with the trend in how people communicate because you have YouTube, you have the Vimeo and have all these different social medias and that a film would have more impact than someone scrolling through pages and pages and pages of information.

MCDANIEL: How much progress have you guys made with this film project?

STEPHENS: Well, we just – we only went through 3 workshops so far. The first workshop was the introduction, and then we – and it is trial and error because there's not been any film projects at the school. I don't think - I don't know if Holly's doing one or if the Environmental Justice League is doing one but I mean, it's just [15:00] kind of like a beginning. We're storyboarding now. We've been doing two weeks of doing storyboards because we're trying to have the youth be the leaders of how this comes out and us acting more as supports to make sure they have accurate information to go into the film and to make sure they have the know-how on how to operate the cameras or editing footage to get it to where they want it to be. Right now, we're going to wrap up the storyboard and start looking at training the young people to use the cameras and getting them to actually write a script based on this storyboard.

MCDANIEL: Cool. Okay. So I think I'd like to dig back more into your experience, personally, with the pond. Just to start, what are some words you would use to describe the pond itself, from either past or present experiences?

STEPHENS: It was murky. I remember as kids it was - it was murky. [16:00] It was summertime - during the summertime, we spent a lot of time at - no beaches right around our neighborhood. A lot of our families didn't necessarily have the cars to get in the car to drive out to the beaches. So that was close, when we didn't have a way to get anywhere we could go as ourselves as kids. So the water was murky. I can say that because we'd fish in the water. We'd make our own little fishing poles or if we had some we'd take them but we'd fish and you couldn't really see kind of beneath the surface but then every now and then you'd look for the bubbles on top of the water and things like that so I could say, there was always that. And there was, um.

MCDANIEL: So you would say just murky. Around what time was that?

STEPHENS: Whenever we went. I don't ever recall going to the pond and thinking, wow look at that water, that's like... I want to go in that. We went in the water as kids and we'd go in the water [17:00] and we'd look down and try to see how deep can you see your foot under there? Things like that.

MCDANIEL: And could you?

STEPHENS: Sometimes you could. There was always something drifting in the water. It was more like - I'm thinking more like algae or whatever you want to call it. There was always something, like a mist or something in the water. But on occasion it had smells to it. Foul smells. There were times when we'd leave the park - we'd leave the pond because it would have a particular smell to it on a certain day but like I said we'd fish there and we'd build little rafts and there were like, small spots. We'd call them islands as kids plot of land, That's an island. Because on one side you were looking over so we'd make little rafts and try to...um...

MCDANIEL: How would you make a raft?

STEPHENS: We would just take stiffened boards [18:00] and tie them together - tie them, tie them, tie them in a row.

MCDANIEL: So just things you'd find around the neighborhood.

STEPHENS: Well, a lot of stuff we found right around the pond, right around that area. And like I said, we'd have some of our own things too and figured, oh let's make a raft. It might not have been something that just happened one day where we just saw the materials. It might've been something like we had an idea and we'd go back. We definitely built a couple of small rafts and we'd put the kid that weighed the least amount, we'd put him on top of the raft to see how far it could go, and can this thing really float.

Because we'd get it floating on the water and ok, now somebody's gotta get on it. So, a lot of crazy stuff.

MCDANIEL: Oh, ok. Um... And how would you describe the surrounding houses?

STEPHENS: I mean, um, the neighborhood - it was not really an affluent neighborhood. There wasn't really an affluent neighborhood back then. You always had [19:00] the factories and it was almost like an industrial park and we'd cut through some of that to get into the pond. So, it was, you know, you had that industrial piece to it. You had the houses where they were three-story houses with three families living in that house and low-income, pretty much. But way back then, it was a lot different than now. It was more community. You knew this person or that person and everyone more - took care of each other to some extent. We were all in the same situation, we all had the same struggle. So there was not as much animosity as there is now. You probably have, in the same neighborhood, people probably don't know some of their neighbors or don't really interact with some of their neighbors. Back then, it was more - we could be far away and if we're acting up as kids, someone else's parents could [20:00] check us. And by the time that we get home our parents would know that you kids were out there acting up. So it was... inner-city, you know...

MCDANIEL: Do you think that's a result of demographics, times, the pond, or other...?

STEPHENS: Well, it's hard to say. Demographically it's a lot different now than what it was. Because we're going back 30 years plus. There was not a big Asian community that there is now. There was not a big Hispanic community. There is now. And there were always bits and pieces and pockets of almost every nationality. It was always a melting pot but it was more - it's more diverse now. And actually some of the area is rundown. [21:00] If I go to the West End of the neighborhood for one of the film projects I did, on fathers and fatherless-ness in the inner-city and how a lot of people grew up without a father and becoming a father but then you don't have this toolbox to pick from. So - I went to my own neighborhood just to - I drive by there every now and then just to say, this is the West End, this is where I grew up - just to reminisce for a little bit and nostalgia. But on every street for about 4 or 5 blocks, on every street you can say there's about 6-7, and that's on the low end - of abandoned houses. They're doing a lot renovation now, but from when I did this short video, I used the abandoned houses for a metaphor for the fact that a lot of these houses are abandoned because they don't have a father in the house. You know, and it's a lot of things to do with just the climate and certain systemic things where you have these laws where you have public housing in this inner-city area. But if you go to prison [22:00] for a felony, you can't live in public housing. So you have to come home and you have these kids and this woman that you have these kids with, but you can't live with them. So it's kind of a lot of scattered things like that.

MCDANIEL: Interesting...How would you describe... I know there was the boathouse there and the carriage house for a while. Was the factory there at all?

STEPHENS: See, I don't really recall the boathouse or the carriage house, to be honest. Going there as kids, like I said - there were - we fished there, but there were other people fished there, people who brought their own little boats so there might have been a boathouse, but as a kid I just wasn't really aware. As a kid I probably just wasn't paying attention to it because we had our own agenda going there [23:00]. [inaudible]

MCDANIEL: And what else were you guys doing in the neighborhood? Was it usually just Bucklin Park and the Pond?

STEPHENS: Well, I mean yes we traveled as kids we all got together and we were like – adventurers. So we – nowadays there's a lot of territorial things in Providence. And we talk about the inner city and how there's a lot of gangs if you want to call it. And they're some things that aren't really gangs. But just crews because they all live in the same neighborhood. As kids, we didn't have that. We could pretty much go to the East-side, go to the South side. We kind of like – in our neighborhood, those were our things. We had Buck- everyone knew that we can go play football, we could play basketball, we could go swimming, go to the monkey bars, we can do whatever. Other than that we'd play manhunt. [24:00] Because our streets, like I said we used about a 5-block radius because we were all like one big family. But we played hide-and-seek or manhunt, going through the blocks. And we never had to go out. Like I said, we have Dexter Street on one end, go now you go up to Cranston Street. So if you go Bucklin, then Dexter, then go to Cranston Street. So we don't have to go from Cranston Street – we don't have to go up Cranston Street or go down to Dexter Street to go through all 5 blocks. So we knew there were shortcuts in the middle of the block here, we can just bob and weave. So we'd play games that kept us within that block of the neighborhood. I could say the manhunt game [inaudible] how to play that, but you had your teams and you have everyone, and a base, and everyone has to try to get back to the base. So we did that. Bikes, skateboarding, break-dancing, and all that. That was the hay-day of... [25:00]

MCDANIEL: Break dancing?

STEPHENS: Yes, we would have battles or exhibitions or whatever. It was like, late 70s/early 80s and it was like hip-hop night. You didn't have the exposure now so everything's more like 1st hand knowledge, 2nd hand knowledge on what this is about or the culture of it. So we were really into that culture. So that was – in our neighborhood- that was big. Where we'd have – we did it on cement, spinning on cement burning our shoulders up, so we did everything that went with that. Some of the older people, my older brother, would do graffiti. So they would put these big murals on the wall, late at night. And all the things that kids do. You get in trouble [26:00], you know.

MCDANIEL: Definitely. So it was a pretty safe area, you'd say?

STEPHENS: I wouldn't say it was safe. If you were in an area – if you lived in a neighborhood, you were safe in that neighborhood because everyone in that neighborhood knew everyone in that neighborhood. If you weren't from that neighborhood or if you were against people in that neighborhood for one reason or

another or if you came into the neighborhood to cause trouble. If you were in the neighborhood, you probably could cause trouble because if you were in that neighborhood and someone could stop or cut it out. But if you weren't from that neighborhood it would be like, what are you doing over here, causing trouble. So it was – it had its safety and it had its threats.

MCDANIEL: Did anything bad ever happen?

STEPHENS: In the neighborhood?

MCDANIEL: Yes.

STEPHENS: Yes, I mean... It wasn't really taboo as kids in the neighborhood as far as the drugs. [27:00] Especially when the crack and all that crazy stuff came around. As kids, there wasn't really the big older guys who were all smart and could sit back to think it through. We were kids who didn't really think about the risks involved with it. There was a lot of that. So obviously there were people selling drugs and you get people using drugs. There were times when kids would be outside of the liquor stores, giving people money to go inside and buy something and would bring it right outside. It wasn't people hiding things. They didn't come out and around the corners saying I'll give you a bottle of liquor and hand a bottle to a kid and the kid would just walk away. I think young, we were exposed to a lot of things that I don't think we should have been exposed to but there was no way to avoid being exposed to it. So even if your parents did try to shelter you, try to hide it from you, you have the world of school. So on your way to school, at school, on your way home from school you're going to see some of this. And I guess there was poverty [28:00]... and there was... crime. Things that we saw and some things we were involved in was just – it was life.

MCDANIEL: Mostly minor stuff?

STEPHENS: There were people who would overdose on drugs, but we didn't understand the whole context of it as kids. We were like, wow, that's what happens when you use too much drugs. There weren't that many – there were homicides, but not rampant. Not like, you better watch out or you're going to - No. There was none of that. But there was violence, there were fights, things like that.

MCDANIEL: Ok. So I actually have a few pictures and was just wondering if any of them resonate especially. Of if... This one's Holly's Urban Pond Procession. And I know there was some [29:00] kind of festival before that.

STEPHENS: Well I mean, if I look at this, this piece here, it just makes me think of – like I said we used to fish – we caught – I caught a snapping turtle in that water, another kind of turtle on that water, we'd catch snakes and things like that, but a lot of times we'd be right near the edge. And we'd be right on the edge, looking for the bubbles in the water. Is there bubbles? Oh, I think there's a turtle over there. And it was probably a lot of false alarms for turtles. I think as kids we probably were really excited about that, now

that I think about it, in the moment. Like wow, look at that turtle! Oh, that's a stick, that a twig sticking out of the water, that's not a turtle's head. That reminds me of that and even fishing. There were a lot of times we'd sit there and the lines would be in the water for who knows how long. But we'd be talking and doing whatever, not even thinking about - it wasn't even about the fishing sometimes. It was about being [30:00] out there, hanging with our friends.

MCDANIEL: And this is the carriage house. It was supposed to be a firefighters' museum at some point, but it burned down.

STEPHENS: The only thing I think about –when I do think about – I don't remember too much of the structures. I don't think it wasn't very significant as kids, what these big buildings were. We just knew they were factories. But I do remember – where we lived wasn't... if you walked from our house to Bucklin in 3 or 4 minutes and from there we were at the pond in 10 minutes. We were just kids moseying along. And I remember there were quite a few times my grandfather – he retired from Gorham – there were times when we might need some money to get some food in the house or whatever. There were times I would remember [31:00] going to my grandfather's, going to my grandfather's job and tell him I need... Sometimes I would just go to the factory, We need to see Mr. [inaudible] But that's the only thing I think about as a far as when I think about going to the factories or going around there the cut-throughs to go to see my grandfather, to get some money, to tell him something, a message from my mother.

MCDANIEL: Were you actually there a lot?

STEPHENS: Kind of in passing. Just in and out.

MCDANIEL: What did your grandfather do?

STEPHENS: I'm not sure what my grandfather would did, to be honest. He was a silver manufacturer, so something to do with the process.

MCDANIEL: I don't know if that looks familiar at all.

STEPHENS: No [32:00]. If I look at the whole landscape, when I look at all this, it reminds me of, just as kids. Imagine we – there were muskrats I guess if you want to call them. Sometimes I thought they were beavers, I don't know otters, whatever they were. We say muskrats. We'd kind of creep. This reminds me of something, some vantage point –I don't know if it's the exact vantage point I'm thinking of, but when we'd come in - enter the pond was always to the left, over there. So you come in, obviously the grass was not level like that. It was high; it wasn't maintained. People didn't go over there and say let me keep this nice and neat and whack these weeds or whatever. It was pretty much a lot of high grass. When we – I thought I saw something, I thought I heard something. Did you hear this? You see that? As kids, I think being in any kind of big space is exciting and that [33:00] makes me - it reminds me of that , reminds me of the entrance, and what was going through my mind of things to do.

MCDANIEL: What other kinds of things did you guys run into?

STEPHENS: In the pond?

MCDANIEL: Animals and things-

STEPHENS: In our neighborhood, there were always stray dogs. So you kind of knew what streets the strays were on. Occasionally, you get someplace like the pond and might find a few stray dogs running around the pond, like a pack of dogs. That would happen a lot as kids. There would be, you know, maybe a female dog in heat. And you'd see about 5 or 7 dogs running behind her and she's running down the street. And as kids you're like, let's follow the dogs, sometimes. But sometimes you might – like literally a lot of stray dogs. There's nothing like that now. There's no – everyone's rescuing dogs now, taking them to the shelter [34:00] or bringing them home, adopting them. Back then, it was like – these dogs were surviving. They were like wild dogs in their neighborhood. But they had almost a home, but not really, but it was like no one's dog but everyone's dog.

MCDANIEL: So you weren't worried about them at all.

STEPHENS: Some of them you would worry about, but you knew. After you go down a certain street a certain amount of times. Well, the dog is halfway down the street so I'll cross to the other side because it's always over there, near the porch or whatever. So as kids sometimes we'd rock walk with rocks in our pockets, pocketful of rocks in case because you were going down that street and usually a couple of the rocks would scare the dogs enough for me to go the opposite way if I need to.

MCDANIEL: Anything else? I heard snakes, turtles, dogs...

STEPHENS: Let's see, snakes, turtles, dogs, muskrats, obviously the fish, which – funny story. I brought some fish home one time [35:00] thinking okay, I've got some pet fish. So I got the tank and staying in the neighborhood you pick up anything and take it home because you don't have that much. But I remember I had a tank. I washed it and put all this effort into keeping it nice and clean, glass nice and clear. Filled it up with water, put the fish in it. And was feeding him bread. It didn't have a filter in it, I didn't really know much about taking care of fish, but it was like, I caught some fish, so these are my pets now. So, I'd drop a couple of pieces of bread in there. A couple of days later say it was like – wow all the fish floating on top of their tank. Ah, So that's what happens when you don't have a filter. But there were snakes, turtles, there were frogs, there was a lot of stuff around the pond. But the main thing that we would catch would be the turtles and the snakes, and run from some of the dogs depending on what they looked like. There would be trash. There was trash around. It wasn't just the stuff from the factory. There was trash around [36:00] I remember people were just throwing their trash, but there was trash around.

MCDANIEL: And I don't know if this might more useful for you perhaps in your project, but that's a shot from 1895 on and that's more recent.

STEPHENS: Let me try to see if I can actually show you. We would come in from more over here, into the pond. Somewhere over here would be one of the streets there would be Dexter. All this neighborhood over here is all West End. When you go [37:00] over here, this is more South Providence, they called it the south side. This is where you get towards where the school is at now. This is the Reservoir Triangle and they called it Reservoir Triangle because Reservoir and Elmwood Avenue would meet there in a triangle.

MCDANIEL: Did they always have that name?

STEPHENS: Reservoir Triangle?

MCDANIEL: Yes.

STEPHENS: I don't remember it not being the Reservoir Triangle. I think it was, just like I said, the meeting point, because you have the same meeting point for Broad Street and Elmwood Avenue and they have the same [inaudible] where they meet, where the main roads would split off. Yes these maps are so... when you're on the ground walking towards it, looking at it, as a kid, you don't – an aerial shot is – what is that? You have no idea of the geography you are just going through the process of going through the experience and knowing that that's [38:00] water and the neighborhood. And I'm thinking one of my friends, my friends James was in the water and he couldn't swim too good. We're walking, tip-toeing in the water. And there are a couple of points in the water when you're in the water and you can walk and stand and you can maybe be up to your waist and one step further and you go way down. And so, there were a couple of times when we went in the water, particularly my friend James one time when he was doing that and we were like watch out because you kind of knew if you go in the water, don't go over there because that part has got a ledge and you'll go way down. But over there, that part is okay. So there were times when you'd have someone step over and the next thing they're kicking for their life and you're trying to hold a stick out, Grab a stick, grab a stick, We'll pull you in. And the rest of us weren't really trying to jump in the water. We weren't lifesavers or nothing like that but [39:00] it's kind of crazy when you think about it.

MCDANIEL: Do you know how deep the pond is?

STEPHENS: I don't. I know with the raft thing, one time, we were pushing ourselves with the raft. So it wasn't - I don't recall it being that deep because we had a long enough stick that we could push the raft, we could put the stick and hit the bottom of the pond, I believe we were hitting the bottom of the pond and then push ourselves along. It felt like we were digging in some mud or whatever you want to call it. So I imagine it probably wasn't that deep. As a kid, anything that gets close to your neck, close to your shoulder or whatever you think you're going to drown or whatever, but I don't recall it being that deep. 10feet, something like that. [inaudible]

MCDANIEL: Were there younger kids that used the pond? I'm guessing you're talking probably around 12?

STEPHENS: Yes. We were probably, earlier than that because [40:00] let's see. I left Rhode Island when I was like 15. And we were young. And this is all the kids in my neighborhood. I have older brothers, older siblings and all the kids in my neighborhood. So it's like the older generations are turning younger generations onto the pond. So it was almost like everyone almost knew about the pond. So it wasn't like you have to be this old to go to the pond. Everyone went. If you knew it was there, you went. So there would be some young stragglers but there were some older kids. The older kids would go and do their own thing, something totally different than what the younger kids were doing. We were all from the neighborhood. We're going to the pond. People are like, we're going to the beach! Oh! Let me get my towel! Let me get my shorts and everything. So it was kind of like, if we knew there was a trip to the pond, literally, kids would kind of posse up and gather up and, what are you going to do? We need to get this, [41:00] we need to get that, we need to go fishing, what are we going to do? And make sure you have something to go out on the water.

MCDANIEL: We've had actually had a bit of trouble trying finding women at all using pond. We haven't had many interviews with them, just being able to provide experiential or memory with the pond. Can you think of any reason for that? I don't know if they just weren't there?

STEPHENS: I can't say they weren't there because there were girls in my neighborhood, so it wasn't always just a group of guys that went there but more often than not it was a group of boys. You know the girls that went in our neighborhood went and were hanging out with boys. We weren't necessarily like we, for us it was like, we knew about the fishing. We knew about - we wanted to go catch some snakes and there were times when, say we're going to go catch some snakes and that's why we we're going to the pond. Because we knew if you turn over a rock, there's a snake coiled up. So as I recall, [42:00] a lot of times there were girls going there but not necessarily for the same reasons. It was more for the companionship of well, puppy-love or we'd play seven minutes in heaven or these other little games we'd play as kids. Say, tag and if you tag her, then whatever. So it wasn't like it was exclusive, only boys going. But I think that it was different. In my experience, it was different take when there were the girls going too. So I don't know about older generations or other people who might've went because when the Southeast Asian community started to grow, I think natively from where they came from, I'm just assuming, that they fished in the bodies of water and things like that. So more people started to come to the pond. Sometimes there would be families at the pond and things like that. But, for us in my experience, it was more of the boys [43:00] and the boys who went to the pond.

MCDANIEL: And at different times of day, were there different kinds of people that would go – like in the morning versus afternoon, nighttime. Is there anyone that would go there around midnight?

STEPHENS: I don't know about that late, but there were times when we'd be there and it'd be dark and we'd go on purpose when it was dark because the idea of the – I keep saying muskrats – I remember saying muskrats and there's a muskrat! Or Watch out for

that! I think we went for the adventure at night. We weren't going to catch any fish at night. We weren't going to really be looking for snakes and turtles. So we'd go just to be hanging out and just, I think the thrill of we're at the pond – a creepy place. There's a train track that's not too far from there. So we'd actually go and put rocks on the train tracks. We'd go put [44:00] rocks on the rails and say we'll see what would happen when a train ran over a rock or when we'd see a spark or whatever when the train runs over the rock. And that was some – we probably did that sometimes at night, too. I remember kids, I remember running. We gotta hurry up and get across the tracks, get across the tracks before the trains come. Not like the train was actually going to hit us. But it wasn't just daytime. But I think night time was more about something exciting or whatever.

MCDANIEL: And just generally now, I'm thinking in a few years what would you like to see for the area?

STEPHENS: It's funny. I didn't know about the Urban Pond Procession until I got involved with the film project. But I like the ideas that they're moving towards of the athletic fields. The school doesn't [45:00] have – I've been to a few schools where they don't have athletic programs because they don't have facilities. I think that that's a really good piece not just for the school but I think for the people in their neighborhood. But I think the fact that they're going to have this walk, like a walk-in park that you can walk through. I think it beautifies the area somewhat. It'll make people want to go in and appreciate what's there. And just in general, like what I said with the abandoned houses there, how they're doing some renovations. I think that you can do so much with the cosmetics. You can go in and you can fix up all the houses and you can do this and do that. But need to fix up the people to some extent. But you're asking for some more of the same. So I think that it's great to have the cleanup to have the renovation of the site and the whole area [46:00] to beautify it. But I think that this film I think is a good piece, because people don't know about it. So that brings about awareness but I think that having the community involved or having the community's input in things like that is important. I don't know at what level that is now but I think that that's important. And not just aesthetically a makeover, but also internally for the people, the social capital, the people that are in the neighborhoods. I think that's another makeover in itself.

MCDANIEL: And is it your film is targeted just for the people who live around the pond or is it reaching out farther?

STEPHENS: Just by nature, I think that a lot of schools that are going through this same dilemma. I think there are a lot of communities that are going through the same [47:00] issue. Because you have – it's almost like a trend where you have, you know, that building, that big building. It used to be a factory. What are we going to do with it? It'll cost a lot to knock it down? It'll cost - oh, let's make it a school. I think the idea with the young people doing what they're doing and speaking up about what they're actually experiencing is actually having correlations throughout the city. So it's not just a film that, if you live in the West End and you knew Mashapaug Pond, it matters to you. Because it matters to a lot of people - where you go to school at, where you live at, where do your children play at? I think those decisions are important to a lot of people. I think that if the

film can have that kind of impact, I think it's not just a film for our community but for all other communities that have some beautifying to be done, inside and out.

MCDANIEL: Well, I [48:00] actually don't have any more questions for you but do you think you have anything else that would be really important for this project?

STEPHENS: I don't know. Um, I guess I think that last piece is probably the most important thing. I think that a lot of times you have in my experience, my learning experience, a lot of times you have people that come from outside of something, outside of a problem or an issue and they come and look at it from an objective point saying, oh, well I think we'll do this and we'll do that and this and we'll do that and then the problem will be solved. I just feel that in contrast to that that sometimes when you – well, a lot of times when you go to a person with the issue or the people with the problems and say what do you need? Sometimes you get, you find out [49:00] that they are thinking about the problem and solutions and ways around the issues but they're never asked about it. Because I think when you have resources, you have access to resources, you don't think too much about the problems. You just act on the solution. When you don't have resources or you don't know what your resources are, then you're stuck in the problem or in the issue. So, I think that's an important piece. I mean, down the line because this whole thing can be motivation for people to say, Wow, somebody cares. By the way, did you know this too? Who knows what will snowball when that happens.

MCDANIEL: Do you feel like this project at all in the process has possibly been misinterpreted by this class, the Urban Justice League?

STEPHENS: What do you mean?

MCDANIEL: Is their approach counter to what seems would work?

STEPHENS: [50:00] That's hard to say. Because I don't know specifically – I don't think so. I think that anyone that's actually advocating to have some kind of change is worthy and should be involved with the project. And I think that sometimes people who don't know or don't have the resources – their hands are tied. And if you're not having the conversation around what do you think the problem is and what do you think can be done, then you'll never know. They might even have some resources but not think about gathering them because the conversation is not happening. So I think this is something that has started quite a few conversations already. So I think it's healthy to have it as a topic, to have something on the table to discuss and something that's actually moving forward. Not just an idea, but something that's actually happening. So I think that that's [51:00] important and I don't think that's something you would look at as detrimental in any way to the project. It wouldn't be without the project.

MCDANIEL: Cool. Well, I think that's pretty much it [51:15]

MCDANIEL: [53:37] Where'd you move to after you left?

STEPHENS: Ohio

MCDANIEL: Huh

STEPHENS: Which is – culture shock.

MCDANIEL: I would imagine. I'm from Cranston actually.

STEPHENS: Oh yes, so if you're born and raised in Rhode Island and you go to some place like Ohio. Not just Ohio – Dayton, Ohio. It's like okay. Where I grew up, Cape Verdean, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Mulatto, you know I can go on and on and on and on and on. When I got to Ohio it was like, I remember in High school I remember someone saying, Hey, do you know Jackie? And I was like, no. She's in your math class. No. You know, that Chinese girl. And I was like, what do you mean? And there's only one Chinese girl. And I was like, oh! When I think about it, it was like, are you serious? There really - In the whole school, there's only one. That was unusual to me. Or to constantly correct people about Rhode Island. People were saying, Oh Long Island! Say, no, Rhode Island. Where's that, in New York? So it got to a point where me and my siblings were – our nicknames were New York. So if they didn't know our names, Hey New York! Hey New York! And [55:00] We just fell in line with whatever. People can't remember this. Or the idea of going to the corner store. In the West End, there was a corner store on the bottom of our street, two corner stores at the top of our street. And I was like, oh let's go to the store. Alright, what kind of store is it? A corner store. Oh cool, alright, we're getting back into our element. We start walking and then you know, we did have some animosity coming from this environment and it was a little more lax out there. Where's the corner store? At the end of the street. So we're walking and walking a couple of blocks. Okay – are you, what are you trying to do, are you trying to set me up? Where are you bringing me to? Because the corner store at home was on the corner. And I had already walked by 4 or 5 corners thinking I don't see a store. So it was a big culture shock. [55:50]

[End of Interview]