

Liz Cunnison

Today is Friday, January 20th, 2012 and we are interviewing Liz Cunnison. In the room is Judith Auth asking questions, and Cherstin Lyon doing recording.

Judith: Thank you Liz for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the Inland Empire Women's Environmental Oral History Project. I'm going to ask you questions. You're free to interpret them your own way, or turn them around, or even refuse to answer.

I'd like to start with some questions about your growing up. Please share any early childhood and family experiences that may have shaped your environmental involvement.

Liz: I was born in Bishop, California, which is a foothill town of the High Sierras, and was very much aware of the outdoors. My father hunted and fished. He was also a manager at the time of California Electric Power Company, so we went up into the mountains and looked at the reservoirs where they were creating hydroelectric power, and I was well aware of the fact that in Bishop the town ended simply because Los Angeles had all the water rights, and there was no development. And so even at an early age living up there I loved the outdoors. I loved to fish myself. In the elementary schools they would take you up and teach you to ski in a group. We were very tiny. Anyway, I think that was the beginning of my love of nature.

I moved to Riverside though in mid-elementary years.

Judith: Is there anything in your family traditions that shaped your involvement? You mentioned going up into the mountains to look at the reservoirs.

Liz: You mean my involvement in water?

Judith: Uh-hmm.

Liz: Really not necessarily. I have always loved the outdoors and my husband and I hike and cross-country ski, and all of our vacations, you know, involve that kind of thing. I garden extensively. We've had two sons who have been very active. We have always, each summer, chartered a boat in the San Juan Islands ... a bare boat charter ... and the four of us would take off and, you know, crab and fish and swim, and that kind of thing. And sail and stay in little harbors at night, and that kind of thing. I mean, I've loved the water.

Judith: Do you see a relationship between your political values and your views on the environment?

Liz: Oh, most definitely. Uh-hmm. Yes.

Judith: Can you give us some examples?

Liz: Yes. My husband and I ... currently we are not, but for many years were members of the Sierra Club, and donated to projects, and we donate to Nature Conservancy. And for Steve's mother, who just passed away, one of her pet projects was to create more public lands. Yes, I feel very strongly about the protections that come with the Clean Water Act, and Saving the Santa Ana Sucker, and all kinds of

areas in that background.

Judith: Likewise, do you see a relationship between your spiritual values and your views on the environment?

Liz: Yes, I do. I, in the past, have been really kind of involved with an organized church. Currently I am not so much, but I feel very much a spirituality in my later years that has come, I think, from being out in nature, and enjoying the out of doors, and it's a very calming influence in a sometimes very busy world.

Judith: Do you have any favorite stories, or works of literature that you think shaped your views on the environment?

Liz: Uhmm, that's an interesting question. Let me think about that one.

Judith: And you mentioned trips to rent boats, and fishing. Do you have other favorite hobbies or leisure activities?

Liz: Yes. I'm involved with two book groups, and I love to read, and I spend a lot of time reading. And I have found that I cannot even walk around the house and do any kind of housework without little earplugs and listening to books on tape, and that way I can get through the ordinary work of the day. So reading, gardening ... I love to garden. I love to go to art galleries. I've taken a lot of art history courses, which was not my major, but I've just gone back over the years. Steve and I love to travel. And I love history. I love historical non-fiction. I just finished The River of Doubt, about Theodore Roosevelt finding a tributary of the Amazon that hadn't been discovered, and I couldn't put it down. I stayed up all night. So that's really basically how I spend my time.

Judith: What influences ... personal, cultural, or social have shaped your environmental outlook?

Liz: I think a lot of our travels have shaped my outlook. When we were first married, and this was in 1965, my husband finished law school in 1969, and we bought a Volkswagen Camper and decided just to take off. And we took off for almost six months and just traveled around the USSR and Greece, and parts of Europe. And I think then seeing the way in which they kind of put their cities together so you had a city life, and then right outside the city, it was just a wonderful countryside. I kind of liked that planning. And then to go back in later years and see how a lot of that has kind of been destroyed by mismanagement and not planning the way they should have. And I could see it here in the United States.

We have a little cottage that we go to. We go down the 91 and the 55, and every now and then I just kind of look around and I say ... you know, I just take this for granted, that this is really ugly. And it's kind of scary to me, and I don't want to leave that kind of future for my children. I think we all need to care for the earth. It's something that is very fragile, in my estimation.

Judith: You were talking about traveling throughout Europe in 1969.

Liz: Uh-hmm.

Judith: Do you have any particular role models?

Liz: For traveling?

Judith: For traveling. For thinking. For activism.

Liz: Well, during the time that I served on the Water Board I had a great not only affection, but admiration for a woman named Lois Krieger, who I don't know if you're going to interview, but she was the Metropolitan representative from Western in Los Angeles for many years. She served as President of that organization. She was the only woman on the Board. And at that time early on they had, I don't know, fifty some members, so you have this large group of men and Lois. And she really held her own. She was extremely knowledgeable. Did her homework and was unafraid to speak up. And I think in deference to her activism, they elected her President, which was quite an honor at the time.

Cherstin: What year was that?

Liz: Well, Lois came off the Board I believe in like 2000, and moved to Prescott, Arizona. But she went on the Board. Golly! I bet she served on the Board more than 20 years.

Cherstin: And can you specify which Board that is? For the record.

Liz: Yes. The Board is called The Board of the Metropolitan Water District, which is the water purveyor for all of Southern California, from maybe Ventura to San Diego. It is comprised of 26 member agencies, each of which in the past sent two representatives. Now the Board is smaller. There's one for most agencies.

Judith: Why did you get involved in caring about community well being?

Liz: Even in college I served on different boards that had philanthropies. I think part of it is I enjoyed the camaraderie of other women. And in doing so it was always very pleasant to become involved in a purpose, and a cause, and you know, the reason for attending meetings, and that kind of thing. When we moved to Riverside early on I joined an organization that had different projects. I really enjoyed that. On the ground floor I was involved in an organization that started tours of the courts here in Riverside, taking classes from the elementary school and taking them to a classroom setting in their own school, describing the court system, what they would see, and doing kind of a little mock trial in the room. Then they would go by bus to the courthouse and we would meet them and take them actually into a live trial. We'd scout the ones out that would be most interesting to the students. Then afterward the Judge would come out and talk to the students.

Then we were involved also with the mock trials at the high school level, which came much later, but have, I think, opened the eyes of many, many students to the possibilities of not only a career, but how our legal system works, and how it's really the foundation of our society.

Cherstin: Did you study law also?

Liz: No, I didn't. I was an English teacher, and a Special Education teacher. I taught at North High

School for my entire career here in Riverside.

Cherstin: And your interest in the law and the courts?

Liz: Oh, my husband is an attorney, and later became a Judge in the Superior Court, so I was involved, you know, just through him.

Judith: You mentioned the camaraderie of other women. Was there a situation, or a particular moment that provided an impetus for your getting involved with the environmental issues?

Liz: Yes. When I first joined the organization that had various projects in Riverside, they had taken on the peripheral canal in the Delta, and it was a big deal. And we really threw ourselves heart and soul into trying to convince Southern Californians to vote. And Northern Californians, and so forth, that that was the answer for the Delta. And of course it failed, but it really sparked my interest in not only politics, but (laughing) ... you know, you have to get involved, and that that was extremely important. Not only the water for Southern California, but it was an answer to saving the environmental issues that were facing the California Delta.

Well, then I live on a hill and there's a beautiful arroyo in back of my home, and all of a sudden a developer eyed it and decided that it would just be a lovely area for a big shopping center. Well, the Master Plan showed the shopping center about a mile-and-a-half away. So at the time I called Selina Bremenstuhl who was a neighbor of mine, who was active in the League of Women Voters, and practically single-handedly ... both of us big and pregnant, and went down before the City Council, you know, meeting after meeting.

We surveyed a mile radius of the arroyo. Knocked on every single door. Had a huge map of all the houses, and put a red house on the ones that didn't want a shopping center in the arroyo. The whole Council, we knew, were convinced. They were in the pocket of this developer. So we took them down into the arroyo. We set up a gorgeous picnic table, and had picnic lunches and wanted them to experience the arroyo. And we had two or three people down there and took them down three by three.

Anyway, we inched along with them ... the Council ... and then we had an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), so we critiqued that. But this process and this shopping center took thirty years to resolve. And we finally have the land. It was dedicated for a park, with the idea that the developer could go on a small parcel across the street, and build some apartment homes, which to his chagrin, we got involved in the design of those, and changed them radically. He confessed to us later ... we actually became friends with this developer ... that he didn't make a profit on it. But he didn't mind in the end. (Laughing) He was tired of fighting.

Judith: What was the time frame? You said thirty years.

Liz: Yeah. It was from 1971 to ... well, the park was put in in what ... 2003.

Cherstin: Can I ask you how you were able to convince the City Council?

Liz: Well, we were talking about many, many City Councils (laughing) over this period of time. It started out with the Environmental Impact Report. And because there is a dam there, and water comes

through and weaves through the Victoria Club, there could have been a possibility of flooding there. So we raised all kinds of issues. And mostly it was over this Environmental Impact Report.

Well, then we got to the owner of the land, a UCR Professor who had moved away, and tried to convince him it would be a wonderful donation. And then the City said well maybe they would kick in for part of the purchase, if he would donate a part of the purchase. And then the apartments could be built. So by that time the shopping center was dead. And the other one, a mile-and-a-half away, finally, you know, was built. And it's a beautiful shopping center. And that's where it should be.

But the succeeding years were marked by the fact that the City Council then decided, well, if they don't have the funds to build the park, they were gonna use it for all kinds of things. Like a pitch and putt golfing concession that would, you know, be a driving range. I mean all kinds of things that would tear up the integrity of the land.

Cherstin: So you mentioned inviting the Council members down to the arroyo, was that a turning point? Was that something that really, you thought, made a significant impact?

Liz: I think that was a real turning point, because it became very, very personal. You know, a face-to-face thing. And we also, of course, had our map with us down there, which kind of surrounded our little luncheon with red houses. I think that was very effective.

Cherstin: And how did you get them to agree to do that?

Liz: Oh, to come down and have lunch with us? I don't know (laughing) actually. But they seemed to be willing to do that. Selina, I think, by then was President of the League of Women Voters that may have, you know, convinced them. Because I think the League of Women Voters was held in great respect and was holding their little debates that they would have before they are elected. I don't know. We had a lot of people. Not only did we have the houses, we had the names, you know, on a petition, and there was a lot going on in the newspaper about it. So, anyway (laughing) ... that was kind of fun.

Judith: You mentioned that the Peripheral Canal did not pass. What was the biggest obstacle to its passage?

Liz: Well, obviously Northern California was just rabidly opposed. And I really don't know if Southern Californians really took it that seriously, or knew the consequences of the vote. And I'm sure not understanding it on the ballot, possibly many people left it blank. Or, I don't know. Because there was money connected with it, I don't know if it they felt it was too expensive a proposition, or what. Or, possibly the word didn't really get out at the time. You know, it's hard for me to remember back then.

Judith: What were your biggest obstacles in defeating the shopping center project?

Liz: The biggest obstacles were (sighing) a really driven developer ... a developer with a lot of money. A lot of influence, who was willing to go the extra ...stick with this. And a Council that really I think had made up their minds without any real consideration of a lot of things. And I think the Master Plan ... that was an obstacle for the developer, because the Master Plan didn't plan a shopping center in the arroyo. It clearly dictated a far better place for it. And of course there were no homes

built around the shopping center. That was just vacant land there, and homes and apartments and UCR housing, and so forth was all being built around this area.

And another obstacle was the developer wanted to do it right then when he had the support. So we did everything we could to, you know Each Council meeting ... you know, it was easy for them to please the developer by postponing it. We'll look at this, and look at that, and you know, we encouraged that. So, anyway, that's kind of how it all came about.

Judith: Well, describe some of your triumphant moments.

Liz: Triumphant moments?

Judith: Uh-hmm.

Liz: Ernie Webb, who was the engineer for the developer, and a well-known engineer in Riverside, came up to Selina and me after some of the Council meetings. Again, as I said, we were just about ready to give birth, and, "You know, he'd like to hire us. He thinks that he has a lot of cases that he has to come before the Council, and he would appreciate our help."

So we walked away thinking this was a supreme compliment. Yeah, that was I think, a real highlight. And, of course, the highlight was too when the professor from UCR ... the professor that owned all that land in the arroyo, decided that well, he too was an environmentalist, and initially he wanted it to become a nature park rather than a park of athletics, and you know ... green grasses and so forth. He thought it would be really nice to keep it natural. But that didn't happen.

Judith: What is the park? Which park is it?

Liz: This is Andulka Park, the newest park in Riverside, and the largest park besides Fairmont Park. And it really is. My husband and I walk down there every morning, and walk, and it has big trails around the edge. We see many, many people using it. It has volleyball courts. A tennis club. Tennis courts. The volleyball courts are all in sand. There are two ball diamonds. Soccer fields. We see people down there with their dogs. And there's a wonderful children's play area. So it gives me a good feeling to walk down that park and look around.

Judith: And the shopping center then is a mile-and-a-half away?

Liz: The shopping center is Canyon Crest Shopping Center, and it is quite a large shopping center, with many not only, you know, a big grocery store, but lots of periphery shops. And they used to have theaters. I think the theaters are coming back. Anyway, it's a destination for a lot of people. A lot of people are able to walk to the shopping center, which is really nice. And it's well used.

Judith: What were some of your down moments?

Liz: With the shopping center?

Judith: With working with the elected officials. Working with developers. Working with the community.

Liz: Ummm, I think the worst thing was the developer was kind of a relative of my husband. He became very, very upset that I kind of was in the lead of the charge. So the whole family kind of just shut down on that subject. And that was difficult, but I felt so strongly and I just felt it wasn't something that was so personal that I had to bow to the wishes of this person.

Judith: What's the bravest thing you did?

Liz: Uh, the bravest thing I did. Golly! Uhm, I wasn't a public speaker necessarily. I think the bravest thing I did was getting up in front of that Council, and when they would ask questions, some of them were rather hostile ... was... answering them in a way that was cool, calm and collected, because I was so involved in this that I could have lost (laughing) my cool pretty easily. And I think that was it.

My husband was very nice. He was coaching me saying I had a tendency to not realize when I'd won a point. And he would kind of signal to just stop talking. (Laughing) And that was very helpful.

Judith: Well, you mentioned several strategies that worked, and a couple that didn't work. The picnic. The personal touch. Knocking on doors. The map. Were there other strategies that you used that you could share with us?

Liz: Yes. I think at the time the Council ... it was kind of a respite for them with all the controversy ... we pushed an EIR, and we knew that there was the flood dam there, and there were a lot of sensitive issues of noise and all kinds of things. And lights. So, anyway, we pushed that and, of course the Council immediately went for that. And I think that was extremely helpful because it gave us an initial six months. And then that was another six months. And there were issues that were being debated among the experts that were doing the EIR. And then Selina and I got together and we wrote, I don't know ... it was a 56 page rebuttal to the EIR. And then they had to rebut that, and we rebutted that. And I don't know ... we kind of kept it brewing for quite some time. It gave us kind of a little bit of an advantage. Of course we also talked it up at different service clubs, and whatever.

Judith: Was there a strategy that didn't work?

Liz: Ummm, hmm. There must have been something that at the time we felt (pause) I'm just not quite sure. I think the most impressive thing was this map. The *Press-Enterprise* even picked it up, which is our daily newspaper. 'Cause it really was amazing. There weren't very many empty houses. The thing was, as far as your time is concerned, we had so many volunteers that were doing this, so it was a very time-consuming undertaking, but we were doing it solely by people living on that block. So each volunteer only had to go no more than maybe twenty homes. And we tried to keep it very personal. So they knew these people they were talking to, and it was an easy way to get the signatures, rather than just having some ... like a paid somebody in front of Von's Grocery Store, or something. I think that really worked. And I think the Council realized that people were really aware of this. And that the Master Plan was being wrenched.

And also Selina and I got involved in the extension of a street through the arroyo. The extension of Fairview, which also failed. And it was the same kind of thing.

So I think maybe all of that made me aware of protecting the area where I live. You know, if I'm not going to do it, I don't know who is.

Judith: What do you see as the pressing issues right now in our community?

Liz: In Riverside?

Judith: Uh-hmm. In the surrounding areas.

Liz: Oh, in the surrounding area too. I think air quality is extremely important. From my windows in the summer I look out and I know there's big mountains there, and the 'C' on the mountain from the University of California at Riverside, is all but obliterated. I cannot see any of that. And I know it's there.

Judith: The letter 'C'.

Liz: The letter 'C'. The mountains are gone. And I know the Indians said there was a haze here, but this is more than a haze. Air quality I think is extremely important and not only for people's health. And I think our water quality in Riverside. The fact that we are running out of water. (Laughing) That is a big problem. I think we need to respect the kinds of plants that grow here. And start a change in our gardening habits. And I think water quality, air quality. I would love it if people didn't have to commute. To me I think that's a problem not only with the fact that it takes so long on the road, clogs the freeways, but I think kids are losing out some time with their parents, with their help with their homework, with parents that return home late in the evening, and are tired naturally. And have to fix the dinner, and you know ... I think it would be nice if we had more opportunities to work locally so people don't have to ... for affordable housing to drive so far.

Let's see ... Oh, having taught at North High School all those years, we had wonderful programs in animal husbandry, and wood shop, and all different kinds of shops. We had architecture, drafting ... Anyway, all of that has just kind of gone by the wayside. So students who aren't necessarily totally academically inclined find it very difficult, and I think it's difficult for them to keep their self-esteem. Often they feel like dropping out. So I kind of liked the European models where you have apprenticeships, and where you learn skills if you're so inclined. I don't want anyone to be forced into it, but I think that would be really healthy. And it would make lots of skills that are unappreciated, maybe a little more appreciated.

Judith: You mentioned the changes in education. Are there other major changes that you have seen in recent years?

Liz: Ummm, well I think I've seen a growth in Riverside, particularly having lived here as long as I have ... having grown up here ... I mean, from elementary school forward ... when I was here there were two high schools, Ramona High School and Poly High School. We now have six high schools. We are the real growth center of Southern California.

Judith: Are there any particular issues that you're concerned about today with regard to environmental activism? You mentioned the clean air, the water issues. Are there issues that you think are being ignored?

Liz: Yes. I think Global Warming is being ignored. And that's very, very frightening to me. We were just in Alaska this summer and to see the ice melt, and to learn about what's going on ... I think we need to be ... not to stick our heads in the sand, and really have a very active part in trying to stem that tide. I visited the UCR labs where they were testing alternative fuels for automobiles, and so forth. To me, things like that are a very positive step and it just makes me very happy that the University is becoming very, very involved in that.

Judith: Do you have any contact with young women who are involved in environmental issues today?

Liz: No. And I think I would like that very much. Uh-hmm.

Judith: What still needs to be done?

Liz: I'm not quite sure what needs to be done. I think if there was a group like the Sierra Club ... I don't even know if they're still active in Riverside. I think they are. I think young people can join groups like that. I also think we need to be very aware of what our Legislature is doing in Sacramento, and the Congress in Washington. I think we need to write, speak up, try and elect people that we trust, that are of the same mind and wanting to protect the environment. I feel badly at this point that, you know, I've been active all these years and since my husband retired suddenly I'm not as active as I used to be.

Judith: But you were elected to the Water Board. What prompted that?

Liz: Well, you know ... I initially was not elected to the Water Board. There was one woman out of five on that Water Board, and she was like the first woman that I know of that was on that Water Board. It had been a male bastion for many, many years. Her husband retired and they were moving out of Riverside, so she came to me and said ... I was teaching at North High School ... and encouraged me to apply for an appointment to the Water Board.

And I said, "You know, I'm a teacher. I know nothing about water, or engineering, or that kind of thing."

She was wonderful. She said, "You don't know. You're not going to be building the dams. You're not going to be inspecting the pipes." She said, "You just need to make really good policy."

So she said: "I'm not going to retire for ... I don't know ... I think it was seven or eight months ... and so she said, "I want you to start attending the meetings, and just listening. You will realize that you are capable of doing this."

So I did. I started attending all the meetings, and at the time I was working part-time, and I was then down at the District Office, so I could adjust my schedule to once a week. Actually it was twice a week sometimes ... to go to these meetings. I was very religious about it. And I got to know the Board members, and I was fascinated by what was going on. So I did apply when they opened it up for appointments.

Well, you know, I kind of had my foot in the door with one vote at least, and having gotten to

know them all, and they invited me on field trips to the Seven Oaks Dam. And so I was selected. And in a way I felt kind of badly about it because in applying there were some real heavyweights that applied. They were all men. No other woman applied. And I kind of sat in the corner. I was interviewed, and (laughing) when they announced who they had selected, everyone just looked over like ... oh, my goodness! I was quite surprised ...

Judith: What year was this?

Liz: This was 1992.

Judith: And how long did you serve?

Liz: I served for three terms, which was twelve years. But I served out Frances's term, which was another two, so all in all, twelve years. Then my husband retired and so I also decided it was time to retire, and supported a man actually who I had had great differences with at the City of Riverside. But he kind of came around to our point of view, and so I supported him heavily. He had just retired as being head of the Riverside Public Utilities. A bright, bright man! A very dear friend now. And he not only won the election and took my place, he has represented the Board at Metropolitan, and has been a real asset in the rate increases that Metropolitan has been imposing, you know, during this drought, and the lack of water supplies from the Colorado. So it turned out really well, and I felt good about having a part in his selection, and you know, prompting him to run.

Judith: Was he the player when the City had a conflict with Western Municipal?

Liz: Yes.

Judith: Could you describe that situation?

Liz: Yes. It was really interesting. Western serves the public utilities customers that are within the City of Riverside ... kind of below Van Buren ... in the Woodcrest Area. It was basically all the old agricultural areas that have now, of course, turned into ... much housing. So there were a lot of customers. We have always given the utility tax that we collect on those accounts to the City of Riverside.

However, the City felt that ... well, actually not the City ... it was several Councilmen, and particularly the Councilmen in that particular area, wanted the Public Utilities Department to take over all of Western service area in that. It was about maybe a third of Western's retail customers, so it would have been a real problem for Western, and a problem for Riverside in a way, because all the piping and everything ... we couldn't divide the system. So to do it initially it would have cost the City of Riverside lots and lots of money. And it would have created a problem where the City of Riverside could end up buying water from Western at a higher price, and the transportation to get the water out there. The City of Riverside has very little pumping to get to the customers they we're talking about. They would have to do all this pumping, and our pumps were all in place. The cost to pump would be astronomical. So what would happen would be that the current City of Riverside customers' bills would all go up. And the way that Council was dealing with it was like it was an advantage to the City. And it really wasn't an advantage to the City.

So Western decided to fight this the best way we could. They started out just by researching and trying to present the information to the Councilmen. Well, the way in which our Water District presented the information was in charts and graphs, and you know, these booklets that were really thick. The Council wasn't really going to read it, I didn't think.

Anyway, it came down to innumerable Public Utilities meetings over this. And most of the Public Utilities Board had been convinced by the Council that this might be a good idea. So I knew that the Council was switching, and the Council that was seated there ... there were only three of them that were really pushing this ... and I felt that the other four would be willing to listen to some good presentation.

So myself and some other Water people met individually with each of these four Council members, and really laid it out, and talked to them. So they brought it up as something to be voted on. And we had different people come down and speak in all different areas. (Laughing) I kind of organized this. We had, you know, like a homeowner, and an educator, and a this, and a that ... go down to make the presentation. And in fact, I wrote many of the speeches because some of them didn't really have all the facts.

Anyway, talk about a high moment! And that's when I really got the high sign from my husband... when all these people had spoken, and I knew I had a majority. The Mayor asked if I would like to come down and speak too. I introduced the Board members from Western that were there, and said if they had any questions, I'd answer them. And this was my husband elbowing me before I went down, saying... "You won. Don't say anything, and sit down."

And I did. And we got the vote in, and the vote ended up to be one Councilman against, because I guess in the meantime the others realized this was not good, and voted with us.

Judith: But I think it's appropriate that you name the Councilman who was instigating this change. This was ...

Liz: Oh, okay. His name is Frank Schiavone. He was very adamant about doing this. And so our relationship with the City of Riverside ... and of course the head of the Public Utilities, Tom Evans, it was a very difficult position for him because he is hired and fired by the Council. But through all this we had many, many talks, and I grew to appreciate him a great deal. And so when I decided to retire, he was a wonderful asset that Western could have.

And then right after this vote, I took Tom Evans to lunch, and we talked about what had happened. And I said, "You know, our relationship with the Public Utilities Board has just really tanked! And they are a customer of Western. We represent them at Metropolitan. We have a lot of give and take. So I said, "How are we going to mend all this?"

So we started having meetings with just a group. It was a small group. It was the five top people in the Public Utilities Department, two Councilmen and two Directors from Western. And we met monthly for a couple of years.

And then Wayne Holcomb and I, who were representing the City of Riverside and Western, started attending the Public Utility Board meetings, and inviting some Public Utility Board members to

our meetings. And it all just ... over a period of time ... worked itself out, and the cooperation between the City and Western is absolutely tops. We have many joint projects now. And we are getting water ... re-useable water from the City. And they have helped us do non-potable water to the Riverside Cemetery. Everything has worked out. But it was not easy. Water gets (laughing) as they say ... pretty contentious sometimes.

Judith: Could you give us just a brief description of the various players? How Metropolitan Water District is made up of 26 independent water agencies?

Liz: Yes.

Judith: And then there's the City of Riverside's Public Utilities, which is a Municipal Utility ...

Liz: Yes.

Judith: And then there's the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, which is what took the water from the

Liz: Yes.

Judith: ... from the Bishop area.

Liz: It's called the California Aqueduct. I'm sorry. It's the Los Angeles Aqueduct.

Judith: So in Southern California we have these various players.

Liz: In Southern California you can maybe draw the line around Ventura, down to San Diego. Riverside is on the outskirts. San Bernardino is not part of Metropolitan, but some of the desert communities are. Anyway, there's a map of Metropolitan that's carved out into 26 different areas. Each one of those different areas has access to water from the Metropolitan Water District. They receive water from the State Water Project through Lake Silverwood, and the Colorado River that the reservoir is Diamond Valley Lake.

Some of those ... agencies they call them ... of Metropolitan ... the 26 agencies have their own groundwater, or they will have some groundwater, and then also receive water ... buy water ... from Metropolitan to supplement their ground water. Or their groundwater needs to be mixed ... to be really good water ... all kinds of different combinations there.

Each of those agencies then is broken down into ... well, you have the overall Met Agency, and then within that one of the 26 areas, you have sometimes different agencies. And maybe some of you have been reading in the newspaper about some of the agencies in Los Angeles that have been kind of facing a little bit of corruption charges. Those are agencies that are under the umbrella of the Met Agency. But their only relationship then to the Met Agency is the purchase of water. You know, the payment. Well, and all the help the Metropolitan gives in the form of rebates, and information, and policy, and rate setting, and all of that kind of thing.

For instance, in the Western Municipal Water District, we have different water agencies within

Western. We have our own retail customers, and then we also have the City of Riverside that is within our umbrella; Lake Elsinore Water District; The City of Corona; let's see ... Rancho California Water District which is the entire Temecula area. Let's see ... that's it really ... basically there's some little teeny Box Springs, you know ... a Water District and so forth. But that's basically what comprises Western.

Now, for instance, Pasadena was one of the original Metropolitan Water agencies. They are simply a city, they are an agency of Metropolitan, and they are their own water agency. They have not broken down into little agencies.

Eastern Municipal Water District, which is kind of the entire lower half of Riverside County also has many agencies under their umbrella. But Western and Eastern are the two largest agencies in Metropolitan Water District.

The representation at Metropolitan is based on assessed valuation. It's not based on acreage, or how much you buy. So it's assessed valuation of the property ... so there is some skewing of the power at Metropolitan, and there have been many a time during the time I was on the Board that agencies tried to address it, but it really never was addressed. It's still based on that.

For instance, San Diego, which also has many agencies under its umbrella, has far more representatives than Eastern and Western combined! And so they are a far more powerful agency in Metropolitan than our two agencies.

Let's see ... what was the end of that question?

Judith: Well, I was asking it to help us understand the relationships, and you've done that.

Liz: Oh, okay.

Judith: And I would like to go on and thank you for that, because it makes your statement about we're running out of water a little more understandable when there are so many agencies involved, so much population, so much acreage, and so few sources.

Liz: Right. There are so few sources, and some of our current sources are becoming ... we have to treat them very, very heavily. Western has started a program of desalters. The whole Chino Basin, where the former dairies and that kind of thing ... is so salty that it's unusable groundwater basically. So you have to desalt it, which is a fairly expensive process. And that's being done more and more. And we're reusing the water more and more as it goes down the Santa Ana. We're trying to move to potable, non-potable, but that's an expensive proposition we've discovered at Western.

It was interesting about halfway through my term, there was a lot of tracts going in and the orange groves were being removed in our Western service area. So we decided that developers ... and it's pretty cost-effective to do it at the time you are building put in the trenches to double-pipe and have purple pipe for non-potable, and a regular potable pipe. So that became part of their permitting process to get the water, which is very helpful. Unfortunately we don't have that water yet to use it, but when the time comes everything is in place to do it. Which I think was a step in the right direction.

Judith: I'd like to pick up where you mentioned that you were selected to fill the vacancy on the Board of Western Municipal Water District.

Liz: Yes.

Judith: Were there other achievements and awards that you received that had particular meaning to you?

Liz: That is really kind of a real highlight for me. Well, I have been active in school during my younger years, and I have always ... I have accepted the Presidency of different organizations, and that kind of thing.

Judith: Do you feel that you've made a difference in the community?

Liz: I do. Uh-hmm. I do. When I walk down through Andulka Park, I get a beat in my heart. (Laughing) Yeah, I do. I like it.

Judith: And I'd like to go back to that first question about the favorite books, or stories that have shaped your views of the environment.

Liz: Well, I just finished a book about Theodore Roosevelt. It was called A River of Doubt. In kind of a down period of his life after losing the race for President, he took on a real challenge and went down an unchartered river. A very dangerous river. And I like to read stories about men in nature, and facing adversity, and particularly a man like him who was using this adventure to come out of a funk from having been President, and then ran again, and lost, after a break. It was a wonderful book.

I loved ... oh, gosh ... The Olympic star who ... in the Japanese war camps ... I just finished that. I'm sure you all know it. Unbroken by the author of Seabiscuit, Laura Hillenbrand. I like stories of men in nature, women in nature.

Judith: Do you have any favorite stories about your experience in nature, and with these various communities that you'd like to share? Your trips to San Juan Island?

Liz: Yes. I have many stories. I think it's kind of hard to choose my favorites. I guess one of my favorites is ... we took a bare boat charter, which means there's no crew. There's four of us. Two young boys, my husband and myself. And we, all of a sudden ... there were all these crab pots on the boat, so when we would snug into a little harbor, there were different kinds of crab pots. I should have known maybe that one of them was illegal. But anyway, we put dead chicken legs and so forth in. We were bringing up a really quite a lot of ... oh, beautiful ... beautiful crabs. So I was flaking them on scrambled eggs. We were using them like tuna in sandwiches. We were having wine and cheese and crab ... (laughing)

So finally the Warden ... we were having a great time. I just can't tell you. ... and we stopped using the other trap because it wasn't attracting any. The Warden came over and said ... there was like a \$2,000 fine for what we were doing. He was very, very kind. But we had spent two weeks eating crabs ... morning, noon and night. So that was a wonderful story...(laughing) .. to tell later.

But anyway, we escaped the fine. We'll never do it again.

Cherstin: How did you do that? How did you escape the fine?

Liz: We pleaded so innocent, and we, I guess maybe cried ... I can't remember what happened. But he was kind and taught us which was which, and what the season was, and who was female or male. A very kind man. (Laughing) Probably looked at this young couple and: Wow! They could never pay this fine anyway! (Laughing)

Judith: If you were to give some advice to young women interested in becoming politically active, what would it be?

Liz: Oh, gosh! I think if you see something that you know in your heart is not quite right, to have the courage to even ... maybe it's not a popular pose. . . stick by your guns and make a difference, and work to change whatever you feel is not right. And I think you have to do that for things to become better. And you want to become part of everything being better. I would give up many, many things to fight for a cause I think was unjust. I'd go the lengths to try and convince someone that something wrong is going on.

Judith: And in your story you talk about the camaraderie of other women. That it wasn't you alone that went knocking on those doors.

Liz: Yes.

Judith: And then on the Western Municipal Water District Board there was a woman who mentored you.

Liz: Yes. I have always enjoyed the company of other women, and I think it's nice to have a purpose, you know, particularly when you meet together, or go out to lunch ... I think it's really very bonding. Like for instance with Selina. I didn't know her at all before. In fact, I think she called me because she was within 13 feet of this park. See, I would have not even known ... and it could have just slipped under the wire and gone through the Council. She called me. Having not known her at all, it was just such a wonderful friendship. Here we were ... we had so much in common. Our husbands had a lot in common, and they have remained friends. So throughout my life I have enjoyed being friends with other women and their husbands in this kind of thing. It's a nice way of meeting people. Meeting people that you have something in common with, and that share the commitments.

Judith: Well, it's really been a pleasure talking with you. I think you're very modest about your accomplishments. But the successes speak for themselves. The beautiful park. The preservation of the arroyo. The continuing operation of Western Municipal Water District in the Orange Crest area. Congratulations! Thank you.

Liz: Oh, well, thank you. I appreciate ... and I am so glad that you're going to try and inspire other young women.

Judith: Cherstin, do you have any questions?

Cherstin: Just one. We talked before the official interview started about how important ideas of feminism have been in opening doors for women to become involved politically, and you started to tell the story, and I was curious if you could remember what that was ... of how feminism has influenced your participation or activism.

Liz: Well, I guess I've always been a little bit of a feminist throughout my life. I never felt that women should be held back in any way as far as, you know, their studies, their grades, their jobs or anything. At first I think graduating from college in 1964, I was kind of upset. I didn't want to be a teacher, and I told my parents. They insisted that I get my teaching credential as kind of a safety net, you know, in some way that I needed it in the future, or whatever.

So reluctantly I did get my teaching credential, and ... 'cause I thought I'd much rather be a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer, or something else. Anyway, when I got out of school I needed to get a job, so I thought: Well, I'll teach, and I'll go back and I'll be a doctor or whatever.

(Laughing) Anyway, I found I really liked teaching. And I was at a bright school in Los Angeles. Hamilton High School. The kids ... I was writing recommendations for wonderful colleges all over the country. They were very, very stimulating. It was just a wonderful experience. So I never then felt like I could have felt ... that, you know, in 1963 every woman became a nurse or a teacher. So I just kind of forgot about that and enjoyed my teaching experience. I guess maybe that was it.

Cherstin: I think you were talking about getting in through the back door, and I'm not sure if that was your appointment to the Water Board.

Liz: Oh, yes. Oh, right! Yes, it was. Frances Nelson, who was the Board member ... she really paved the way for me here. No one else knew that she was moving out of Riverside. No one else knew that she ... you know, had really kind of invited me to come and listen to the Board meetings. And I think it was quite apparent to the other Board members that, you know, that she kind of was encouraging me to apply for that. But I feel that if Frances hadn't paved the way for me, that with the rest of the men on the Board, and the applicants that I saw that came, that I was facing. I mean, these were very substantial contributors in their profession in the community that had applied for the Board ... that were very politically forceful. And that's why I said ... I mean, they all turned ... this Special Education teacher (laughing) from North High School was being appointed. And there was some kind of an interesting look on the other applicants' faces.

Cherstin: During your time on the Board, what kind of a role did you play as the only woman on the Board?

Liz: That's a really good question. Good question. I kind of used my wiles, I guess, and tricks. I guess you'd say that ... unashamedly ... I wanted them to know they could trust me, so that I could be a part of any secret negotiation that was going on. Or so I could be aware of everything. I was extremely open and honest. I spoke up. But I also realized if it was something that I felt strongly about that I knew the Board didn't, that I would have to go the slow way as far as convincing them. And I kind of used a little bit of politics particularly in the Riverside arena, that my Board, I think, went along ... several of them with the City of Riverside. I can name a couple that I think would have ... and really didn't even want me to speak at the end ... and I did anyway. But they all came around

eventually. But I think if you have the right facts that can't be disputed, and approach them in a way that makes them think that it's their idea, sometimes that helps. (Laughing)