

Patrick Moore

Voices of the River

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By Anne Queenan

AQ: Tell me about your family heritage and how you came to Minnesota and got involved with the Minnesota River.

PM: All four of my grandparents were farmers and shopkeepers in Ireland. They traveled and immigrated to Chicago in the late 1880's and 90's. My mom and dad met there in the 20's and 30's and got married and, after the war -- which my dad was in, my mom and dad moved to Minnesota in the 1950's. My dad worked for the Veteran's Administration and he was headquartered right on Fort Snelling, which is right at the confluence of the Minnesota and the Mississippi River, and we actually lived in the officer's quarters, this house that was built for officers on Fort Snelling back in the 1820's. And the Minnesota River, where it meets the Mississippi, was my backyard, very literally. So I grew up with this incredible sense of history and excitement of this region. It was kind of right in between Minneapolis and St. Paul, so we got to know both cities equally well. We weren't parochial. Some people only know Minneapolis, some people only know St. Paul. We got to know a little bit of both. And we got to know the nature of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge that's there. So that's how our family came. We have a big family. I have nine brothers and two sisters and we were part of the Irish Catholic community of St. Paul. I always used to call the Irish Catholic ghetto of St. Paul. I went to Catholic schools and then discovered Western Minnesota when I was 17 and started coming to the University of Minnesota at Morris.

AQ: So, you (CURE), me and the Minnesota Historical Society, we are doing this oral history project. As you know, it's on the movement to clean up the Minnesota River which we think began in the late 1980s after the Minnesota River Assessment Project and the adjourning of the Citizens Advisory Committee which was convened by Lynn Kolze. Do you have any thoughts about when the movement began and how it began?

PM: Well like you, I'm a history major, and one of the first lines I learned when I was a college history student was "*history is the memory of things said and done.*" I'm sure there were people working on the Minnesota River for a long time, but when I became aware of it and when it started to coalesce into any kind of watershed-wide movement, was with that Minnesota River Assessment Project and Lynn Kolze doing the convening of citizens to study what the science was showing us and asking them what they thought

the recommendations should be. And CURE sent representatives to that. CURE was stated in 1992 and I think earlier than that was the Minnesota River Assessment Project had begun convening and Del Wehrspann and we sent Andrea Myhre and Butch Halterman there to represent CURE. And it was from those meetings and come back and what did you hear, what did you learn, what happened? And then reporting back to the people of the Montevideo area that we really started to coalesce and say, you know, hey, we're not the only ones that care about the river and here we've got a roadmap. Ten things we can work on and it was an exciting time.

AQ: Is there anything else you want to say when you first started thinking about the Minnesota River along these lines?

PM: Well as a boy I played along the river, I fished in the river, I swam in it, and I had a dream. I remember writing to my dad and he saved the letter for many years in his top drawer, of how I wanted to canoe up the Minnesota River. My brother had gotten as far as Shakopee, and I was just so fascinated with his adventure. And it made me want to do the same thing. So I had been thinking about the river for a while. And I really connected with it in '89, 1988-89. We went on a three-day trip, my wife and I, with two good friends, we floated down the river. This was before I knew I was going to move to Montevideo. My friend wanted to go do something and he wanted to go to the Boundary Waters instead. I said, "No, let's go to the Minnesota River, let's go there. Let's do that." And he was like okay, and we camped out along sandbars and we had fires on the sandbars and we had a marvelous time. I've always loved to canoe, I've always loved nature, I've always loved birds and trees, I've loved the feeling of being on water and letting the current carry you. I love to watch the pelicans fly overhead in formation. So it was those things that really gave me connection to the river, plus the history. I'm a history major and I love history. And so when I was in Fort Snelling as a kid I would run along these wood paths, probably little rabbit trails, and I'd say, "Well maybe there was a Native American that was on this path and I'm the only human being since then." I would imagine what it was like. I'd love to imagine what it was like back then. And I would imagine myself being, I'm walking in the same place that these Native Americans did or these things. So my strong imagination, I would have to say it was really influenced by spending time alone in nature in the woods of the Minnesota River Valley. And so that connection is strong and ever present to this day.

AQ: Let's go to the heart of the matter now for you, and tell us why it's at the heart of the issue for you when it comes to all these efforts to restore the river.

PM: To me it's about community, it's about collaboration and it's about love really, that's really what it is. Love is a powerful force and it kills me to read about the hatred and the violence and the destruction, the misuse of the land and of people. So you have to do something somewhere, and the river is a great connecting force, the river is a great sense, a place of solace and a great place of wisdom. And so to me, it's about

encouraging people to get out in nature, listen to the wind, feel what the current does to you when it carries your boat, consider the life that the river supports, the fish and the beaver and the raccoons. Feel that you're a part of something much bigger, that we are a part of this planet and this river is like one of the arteries of the planet, and it's *alive*. So to me it's really about getting people, helping people to connect and inspire and be who they truly are in this relationship with nature.

AQ: What are you most proud of when you think back about your work to help restore the Minnesota River?

PM: I am proud to have been a part of the formation of the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance. I'll never forget when Scott Sparlin and Lori Nelson and I met in Hutchinson and we said, "You know, it's time to reconvene; it's time to do what we originally said back in 1992 and '93." We were going to create this basin-wide citizen alliance, and it was going to have the tribes, it was going to have citizens, it was going to have government, and we advanced this legislation to create this basin wide citizen board that would help implement the ten recommendations of the Minnesota River Citizens Advisory Committee. And that ended up getting diluted and not taken the way we wanted it to go and ended up creating the Minnesota River Board, which is a great organization, county commissioners, but the citizens, the people who were passionate, loved the river, were really not given a seat at the table. And so the Minnesota River Board, at the time was saying, "Maybe we should dissolve." There was not a lot of passion to keep it going. And it was in that context that Scott said "Okay, you guys you don't want to, we'll create the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance, and we're going to create it in a way that gets the citizens back at the table and helping to drive things forward. So what was so great about that was the meetings that we had, we had like 80 people would come and we always said, "Let's have them at night, when regular people can come, don't do it during the day. Let's have food and drink and let's ask people what's important, and let's try to organize around a new type of organization, one that's horizontal not vertical, not top down, not with Executive Director and staff and all that, but just says what's the platform we can create for interaction, that's collaborative and that's coordinated and that's strategic, but that really allows for what needs to emerge to come forward." And so I'm really proud of the work that we did on creating the document that essentially established the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance. And it talked about how we were to meet, how we were to vote. It was kind of like creating a constitution. It was like, we called it the Declaration of Watershed Interdependence and we signed it like Declaration of Independence after we came up with our process of how we should vote and how we should make decisions and how we were going to stay together. And so that has grown and changed and we've had many ups and downs, but if it wasn't for the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance, we never would have done the Friendship Tour, the Upstream-Downstream Friendship Tours, and that, again, the Minnesota River Board became apart of the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance, and so

did the agencies and so did the citizens and it's the only time when everybody gets together as equals. It says, I'm from the government and you're citizen, and I'm a farmer and you're a business and you're a recreationalist and you're an educator, and we all care about the river and so what can we do together?

And we're not trying to compete with each other, get grants so that we get the money and you don't. It's just a completely volunteer and it just works. And I remember very clearly Richard Smith, he would come. He was an academic. He was doing a research paper, doing a doctoral thesis and we were trying to struggle with this whole idea of non-organization organization, how do you organize yourselves in a way that's loose and yet effective and not hierarchical, and not dictatorial, that doesn't rely on forcing or imposing will or is about egos. We were trying to create a group that could function without those forces and that would allow the everyday passion of people who are in touch and in contact with the river to be harnessed towards some greater good. And so he said, "You know, you gotta think about these systems that are emerging, go to the Silicon Valley and study how Google works and some of these high tech companies. They do the system thinking and the systems theory." And what if earth is a living system? That's the hypothesis, James Lovelock put forward. Native Americans always knew that, but part of our society said well the earth is just dead, it just is. We happen to live on it. But now science is saying wait a minute, what if the earth is a self-regulating organism with consciousness? And he says to this group of people, and it was a wild thought, believe me, 80 people in the room and this guy says, "What if it's not about us helping heal the river, what if the river is calling us, because it's part of the system to help heal itself, and we're being called by this larger system, this living system to collaborate towards health? " And it's not about us coming up with the solutions, it's more about us aligning this living system and listening to it and collaborating in that way.

It was kind of a revolutionary thought for me and really started to change the way I looked at things as a community organizer, where we're always trying to rub raw the sores of discontent, have a common enemy that you organize around and you kind of organize around resentment and anger. And I started looking, well maybe this is not really the right approach and maybe we're part of the system and everybody's got a role and a purpose to play and maybe we're being called by the river to work together and collaborate rather than to dominate or strategically do some one upmanship on each other. So it really changed the way that I looked at it and the way our board looked at it and we started to do things differently. And that's what gave rise to the idea of doing the Upstream-Downstream Friendship, which I really think is helping to continue, that process is really helping to continue to shift things in a positive direction.

AQ: What has been your biggest frustration?

PM: I try not to harbor the notion and the emotion of frustration. I work on that. It's like a quote by Anthony de Mello, he's a priest who's an Indian and he's part Buddhist and he said, "Say to yourself the next time you get upset, the only reason I'm upset, is because I don't like the way things are." And the idea is things are the way they are and it's really important to not get upset with the way they are and better to align with how they are and observe how they are and realize that things change and we're part of a larger system. Frustration is not a helpful emotion. Frustration prevents joy and really what I'm after, at least 60, 70 percent joy is what I'm after. And so when I do get frustrated, and I do, I think it comes down to this idea that there isn't enough. And people really somehow act in a way that says there isn't enough, therefore, I must hoard. There isn't enough, therefore, I must take more for myself. That's a frustrating thing to witness.

Another thing is when people are unconscious and asleep and they take their mattresses and throw them next to the river, like I just saw this morning. I thought we were beyond that; I thought we were beyond treating the river like a dumping ground here at this landing here, and I just saw two mattresses thrown there and I just think, what are you thinking? What is your thought process when you do an act like that? So those are frustrations for me.

AQ: The Minnesota River TMDL process, Total Maximum Daily Load, the water quality standards being developed by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency - what's your thought about them? What are your attitudes and beliefs?

PM: Well, I think the TMDL process needs to evolve.

I think that the way that the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, bless their souls, has decided to implement and address this, basically they're trying to carry out the will of the people as expressed through the Clean Water Act, and the Clean Water Act said first you've got to measure and see what the problems are, and then you've got to set goals to reduce those problems. And that makes sense.

But again, I think it's more in this reductionist way that science can sometimes operate, they reduce everything and then split it apart and then just think they can work on that one piece without considering all the other pieces.

And so I see that's what's happened with the TMDL. We've got a whole cadre of scientists who studied and parsed and dissected and divided the problems facing the river into numerical equations and formulas and they've really left out the fact that this is a people problem.

This is a people issue, that the river is a reflection of the way we grow food and we chose to grow food as a society, the way we subsidize the food production, the way we choose to grow energy and produce energy. The problems in the river reflect those issues, and they reflect relationships. In order to really address problems you have to

get to the heart of the matter and stop worrying about who's truth is right. Because that's really what happens is we've created this dynamic where "the science has the truth about what's wrong with the river," and that truth is offensive or threatening to other people who have a different truth about how they see things.

And so we've created this conflict then around arguing over facts when we really need to spend time talking about what our common values are and how we can work on that together. And again, align with each other, communicate with each other in a way that inspires people to act and think differently.

And so there's all sorts of people in the world, and I've learned that the people that are working at implementing these TMDLs really do care and they really are good people and are trying to do the best they can. And yet, I've also seen that it's an inadequate process, and it needs to evolve and it needs to have a taking into account of what people who live and work on the land and and people who live and use the river know. And some of that stuff isn't quantifiable.

And there has to be a more of a collective process of deciding what needs to be done first. That's what I loved about Minnesota River Assessment Project, is that it was kind of simple. It wasn't really specific; it was strategic directions. "Here's ten strategic directions we should take if we're going to restore the health of the water."

And you know, people can only keep about three strategic directions in their mind at one time, that's what I find, you know. We're not that good at keeping a lot of information straight, but we can keep one or two or three ideas. And so I'd like to get the TMDL process that helps us all think about three ideas. What if all of us said "We're going to work over the next ten years to slow the water down and it's okay to drain, but at some point along that way, we need to let that water filter out its sediment load before it hits the river"?

And you know, we used to do that with wetland restoration and maybe that's not going to work, so maybe we need sediment storage basins, I don't know. We've got a lot of different solutions... you know, saturated buffer strips, we can do any number of things, but we need basically to slow the water down as it's running off the land, and we need to allow it to settle out its nutrients and sediment before it hits the river.

That could be just a simple goal and we just say, "Everybody across the basin, that's what we're going to work on."

Yeah, we're going to grow food, yeah, we're going to feed the world, if that's what it is, but we gotta take care of this and we gotta treat it. We have a responsibility to seeing that the water leaves the land in a slow way, not a fast way. I met this one farmer who said, "*My job is to make the water **walk**, not run, across the land.*" If we had *that* kind of strong ethic. So how does that relate to TMDLs, do TMDLs get us there, to those

culturally held ethics like we had after the Dust Bowl? After the Dust Bowl, there was a lot of people who said, "Holy moly, that's scary. Seeing our lifeblood, our soil, blowing, that's not something we want to repeat again." And so there were a lot of people who went about creating terraces and buffer strips and systems that held the water on the land.

AQ: What did you think when Governor Arne Carlson announced the river should be cleaned up in ten years? Made to be fishable and swimmable in 1992? Were you around and did you hear it?

PM: We were around, and we heard it. I mean, hah -- there hasn't been a politician since of that stature that really got this issue. And so it was great. It was great to have a governor coming to rural Minnesota and saying, "This is important." Yeah, I knew that it was an audacious goal, but that's what you need. You need something like that and it felt good to have that top level support and that visionary leadership. So more power to Governor Arne Carlson. We wish he was still around or people like him, courageous leaders for the environment.

Republican, courageous leaders for the environment -- what a great notion -- that cleaning up the environment is **good** for economic growth and development. It is, and that's what we believe and we have many Republican friends and colleagues and board members and members at CURE, along with the tree-hugging liberals who all can agree, cleaning up this river is important. And it's important for our future, for our children, it's important for us now. So let's work together and let's put, you know, philosophical differences aside.

And yes, let's make it something that is led and promoted by and benefits the private sector. More power to it, we're all for that.

It's not an either-or, it's a **both-and**. And I think Governor Arne Carlson got that. He understood that.

AQ: Tell us about the projects you've been involved in and CURE, Clean Up the River Environment, and how does that relate to this movement to clean up the Minnesota River?

PM: Well CURE was started in 1992, and we saw ourselves largely as a regional organization for the Upper Minnesota River Watershed, working in collaboration with the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River and the Friends of the Minnesota River down in Bloomington.

But in 2008, we became aware of a new group that was forming called the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance. And when I heard about them, I thought, aha, we have to get to know who those people are. We have to let them know what we're doing. We have to reach

out and connect with them. They need to know that there are citizens, like them, who study the science and who meet and talk about what can be done.

I went to the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance meetings and I said, "Let's make our project for the year to reach out to the people from Lake Pepin." And it didn't win. I wasn't persuasive enough apparently, at the time. And so I had to hold onto it for another year and then I came back in 2009, lobbied for it again, and again, it did not get the overwhelming support that we were looking for, but the grudging and more awareness that this might be the strategic thing to do. By 2010 it was basically given the blessing. And I started reaching out to Mike McKay and talking to him about what we were doing – he's with the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance.

And then at the same time that that was happening, there was this new organization called the Minnesota Ag Water Resources Coalition, MAWRC, and it was the Farm Bureau, and the Farmers Union and Corn Growers and the Soybean Growers, and the Turkey Growers, and the hog producers, everybody, all these ag groups chipping in money to speak for the voice of agriculture. And I was going, "oh this is interesting!". And then they started putting newspaper articles and saying "We're coming to Yellow Medicine County to Canby to talk about how farmers should get involved in the TMDL process," that was going on with the Pollution Control Agency. "Farmers needed to get involved in water quality discussions."

So I figured well heck, coming into our territory, our backyard, I'm going to go. And I was really just hoping that I could be a fly on the wall and sit and watch this big meeting of all these farmers talking about water quality and TMDLs and I was going to listen to what they were going to say and I thought I could be relatively anonymous.

But that was not to be. There was only about ten people in the room and my presence was noted right away and we ended up sitting down and had this talk. And it was the most surprising talk that I can remember. It was like well, we agree with that, we agree with that, and yeah, we believe that farmers need to get involved, you bet we do. We've been hoping to get involved for a long time. And yeah, we believe in local leadership, and local determination of what the priorities should be. We believe it should be farmer led. So it was like we didn't have anything to disagree with what the message was of the board of the Minnesota Ag Water Resources Coalition.

So I was driving back from that meeting and I was going, wow, we need to talk with Warren (Formo) about getting involved in this effort to connect the Minnesota River Watershed Alliance with the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance and kind of exchange, citizen to citizen.

And then it was almost as if by divine providence that Lindsey Weber moved into our office, like a few days later and said, "I'm from Yellow Medicine County and I'm a student at the University of Minnesota Morris, and I'm looking for an internship this

summer.” And I said, “Woa. She’s got farm background, she’s taking environmental science, she’s confident, she’s got good speaking skills, she knows the issues, we could make use of her skills”. And of course we didn’t have any money to hire her, as usually is the case. Ha. But we were very lucky to get the West Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership , Dorothy Rosemeier, came through with the money to hire Lindsey for the summer.

And then we set about setting up, we talked on the phone, and we came up with this idea. Again what we do when we do a project, especially with young people, we say, “Lindsey, you’re going to go interview everybody, you’re going to meet Mike McKay, you’re going to meet Warren Formo, you’re going to meet the agencies, you’re going to meet your own farmers in your own neighborhood, and you’re going to meet wild-eyed, tree-hugging environmentalists like me and my colleagues and you’re going to listen to them and ask questions. “ And it was based on those interviews that we basically determined we could hold a meeting in August when the crops were well on their way and there wasn’t a lot of cultivating or weeding to do, kind of waiting for the harvest to come. So August was a good time. And Mike McKay said, “Well we can invite the farmers down to the St. James Hotel and we can show them what’s happening here in Lake Pepin as a result of pollution from the Minnesota River.”

And also through the interviews that Lindsey had done, we discovered, and it’s not like we didn’t know this, but there was just a tremendous resistance on the part of farmers and agriculture, to have media coverage. They felt like they were getting beat up in the media all the time.

And then they also kind of felt a little bit victimized by the government agencies, like they’re out to get us. And so part of the way we structured it was we’d say “no government agencies, and no media, it’s just going to be citizen to citizen exchange. We’ll just talk about the issues and get to know each other, in a person-to-person way, because we’re all Minnesotans and we’re all good people. We really do care and we can figure this out, but we need to talk to each other in a person-to-person way, over food and drink and conversation and with no expectations, no huge agenda that had to be covered”.

It was more like let’s build relationships and see what comes from that relationship formation. And that’s really a philosophy that Clean Up the River Environment has enacted. It’s the build the road by walking, serve what seeks to emerge philosophy, that good things will come if you get people in the room talking, trusting, laughing, thinking together, that ideas pop in those situations, that you can work with and you can put legs under. And so that was the idea.

We got help from the Minnesota River Board, Susie Carlin came through with some money for a bus and it was just a magical in the sense that we pulled it off. We pulled it off because Lindsey was able to get the trust of these farmers to come.

And it wasn't me. If I had been asking and recruiting, it wouldn't have worked. We had that young person doing the asking, she was the messenger, she got it together. We pulled it off and it was very great. Doug Albin was there. He was emotional. He was saying, "This is the conversation I've been waiting to have for a long time. This is good, let's do this again." And it was kind of what we'd hoped, but we didn't want to hold out too much hope. But people said yeah, alright, now it's time for people from Lake Pepin to come and visit and see the situations that we work in and what they're doing upstream to reduce pollution.

And so we had the return trip in September. And it was just great. Again, another dialogue over wine, food, conversation, field trips, relaxed conversations where people were able to talk one on one, and really kind of banter back and forth about commonly held myths that we had about each other - upstreamers say, downstreamers respond - that kind of stuff.

And it was a breakthrough experience for me and I think for Warren Formo and Mike McKay and several of the farmers and the other people on the trip. It's been really kind of continuing ever since, and essentially helped break standoff stalemate positions that people had and we're continuing it on in many different forms.

We've done upstream-downstream county commissioner exchanges that Mike McKay said, "I want the county commissioners to meet." And so that was his idea, based on this, and we've done many versions of this. And so it's a great effort, it's bearing fruit. It led to, in a very direct way, to Doug Albin's Field Day, where he was demonstrating the saturated buffer and the toehold structures and the bioreactors and him saying, "This is what I decided after seeing the situation down there at Lake Pepin, this is my response, what I wanted to do."

And of course, gradually over time we did bring in the agencies and we have brought in the media and so it's not such a contentious, untrusting situation. I mean we've got a long way to go, believe me, but I think we've got a path, and a methodology that we can use in going forward.

AQ: Can you tell us when it comes to the movement to clean up the Minnesota River, and CURE's, your organization's involvement in it.

PM: Well, I was the managing director of the Land Stewardship Project (LSP) and was living in the Cities. I was doing a lot of paperwork hiring, personnel, policy development, grant writing, and I really wanted a change in my job. And I had helped raise the money and hired Audrey Arner and Anita Zelenka to start a Western Minnesota office of the Land

Stewardship Project. And eventually what happened was I ended up asking LSP is if could move to Western Minnesota, work half time, and kind of get out of the city. We had a young daughter at the time and another one on the way and we didn't want to live in the city and have to pay the prices for the homes and have the daycare. And we could buy a really cheap home here in Montevideo. So the Land Stewardship Project agreed and I turned my job over to George Boody and moved out here and started working with Audrey and Anita in the newly formed Western Minnesota office of the Land Stewardship, which again, I had helped raise the money for to make happen. And now I was focusing on grant writing and this guy kept coming into the office.

One of the things we always said was if we're going to have an office, we've got to have an advisory committee for the office, not necessarily a board, but a committee of local people who help inform us and keep us real, sure we're on the right track when we're doing something. Well one of them was Del Wehrspann. And so he would come in and he just like to talk; he liked to talk about the river. And he kept saying, "Patrick, Audrey, Anita, I know you're working with farmers on the Sustainable Farming Association," -- 'cause that was really the purpose of the office was to help create a chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association. Farmer-to-farmer learning around, transitioning away from, chemical intensive methods of raising food to that, and so Audrey and Anita were working on that.

And so he said, "If you want to focus on what's going on in agriculture, look at the river. The river will tell you everything you need to know." And I had moved to town, loved Montevideo, loved the school system, loved the people I'd met, loved the parks, loved the river, and here I saw an article in the paper that said, "Montevideo fined for dumping 30,000 gallons of raw human waste into the Minnesota River." And I was going what's that about? So I wrote a letter to the editor. I was from the Cities, I just thought that's what you do when you have an issue, you write a letter and express your opinion. And I said, "What gives, I moved here to this town, it's a great town in every respect, but what gives with our sewage treatment plant? It's an embarrassment." And Del came in and he said, "God, thank you for writing that letter. I've been after that sewage treatment plant for years. They've been polluting for years and they don't have an ethic of stewardship and it's a big problem."

Well then, at the same time that was happening, Scott Sparlin was organizing down in New Ulm and he was coming and going, as he said, to anyone who would listen and speaking about the Minnesota River. So we had him come to the American Legion, and he spoke there and we had a good crowd there and he kind of whipped up the troops and said, "I'm going to have a big event in the fall for the Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River. It's going to be in New Ulm and everybody can come, and get your people and come." So Del and I ended up driving down there and we took part in the very first Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River, now they call it the River Blast, but I can't remember what it was called at the time. It was big; he had a gymnasium rented

and people with booths and Land Stewardship had a booth there. And it was great and I met people. I met Scott. I remember on the way home, I said, "Next year, Del, we have to organize more people to come, more people from Montevideo to come to New Ulm for this event." So I said, "Give me the names of all the people you know that would possibly be in an organization to help clean the river. And we can start our own chapter for a Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River or something else just to get people organized." 'Cause that's what I am, I am an organizer, you know. So I remember Del came in the next day with a Big Chief tablet with all these names of people that knew. He literally got out the phone book and Anita and Audrey and I created a database of these names of Del's friends and associates and people who cared about the river, 'cause I was new in town; I didn't know anybody.

(microphone interference; repeat of part of above)

PM: So the next day, Del comes in with a tablet of paper with all these names scribbled on it of all the people he knew, and so Anita and Audrey and I set out with a phone book, and we collected the names and put them into a database and then we wrote a press release and we created a flyer that said, "Anyone interested in coming to an organizational meeting to clean up the Minnesota River, please come." And it was held in the library, it was in 1991. And shoot, sixty people came to that first meeting and it was full of energy. We've been meeting ever since, every month.

And I was so excited because I was going to try out some of these new theories of organizing that I had been learning about and studying about through Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, and small groups and circle, all these things. We would start every meeting in a circle and we'd go around and say who are you and where are you from and tell us what you like most about the river. And then we would break into small groups and we would discuss issues and analyze problems and we'd report back. And then we would make decisions based on who was in the room, (skip) what we could do. Not about who we needed from somewhere else, just who was here. And the energy was just so cool because it just grew and grew, people kept coming, it was exciting, we came up with the word CURE after two or three meetings, came up with a logo, and we came up with the idea of having music and festival and we came up with the idea of going on river trips and doing cleanups and it just all emerged very organically.

And we were in concert with Scott, and we were basically taking Del's lead. It was a great coalition right away of people who love to fish and hunt and people who like to bird watch and people who like to paddle and who liked music. And artists were there from the beginning. So that was the origin of CURE.

David Minge was a lawyer in town, and he came to the meetings and he said he would donate his time to write the Articles of Incorporation and file those with the Secretary of State. And then he ended up running for office and getting elected to Congress, which

was very fortuitous when it came to creating the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). David was the champion of that legislation and it was his experience and being involved with the early days of CURE that led him to that.

So I just like to tell that story because it always goes back to people with a passion, people with curiosity, people with a desire to do something, not to sit and be an armchair quarterback or to be a critic or to sit back and say well we can't do it, we're not powerful enough, it will never work.

We always have found people to say "yes", "yes we can", or "yes, let's", or "wouldn't it be fun if, " and that is how we built the movement in this part of the state.

AQ: What do you see things going? What do you think the next 25 or 30 years will hold for the Minnesota River?

PM : I don't know. I don't know where it's going. I think it could go in a number of different directions. It really comes down to, again, people who care stepping up and connecting with each other and asking each other, "What is it we should do?"

There's a great book called, "From Good to Great and What Corporations Need to Do to Succeed," and they say you need to get the right people on the bus and then you say where do you want to go?

And I think we're getting the right people on the bus. We've got people from Bloomington, we've got people from Belle Plaine, we've got people from Mankato and New Ulm and Redwood Falls and Montevideo and Clarkfield, Ortonville, Milan, all meeting. We have a real clear understanding of what the issues are and the need for citizen engagement, a new revolution in citizen engagement. And leadership by farmers. So we have those things together.

I think we're going to see how valuable water is. We're going to see it if we continue in these droughts. The folly of draining everything and not being able to recharge our groundwater is going to become apparent to everyone.

And so the idea of storage and treatment of water and saving water where it lands and treating it before it enters the river, I think is going to eventually take on more understanding, because people will come to value it more as it becomes scarcer. If we are moving towards global warming and a drier climate, we are going to have to really look at that and I do believe we have the capability and the intelligence to adapt and we will. And we have to realize there's enough for everyone and we don't need to take it all; we have to save it for the people to come. And I have a lot of faith in the younger generation. They have a lot of integrity; they understand these issues, and their integrity will shine forth and help teach us all.

End.