

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Denny Shaffer

**SIERRA CLUB OFFICER AND LEADER, 1970 TO 1997:
FOCUS ON MEMBERSHIP, FINANCES, AND MANAGEMENT**

With an Introduction by
Lawrence Downing

An Interview Conducted by
Ann Lage
in 1993-1997

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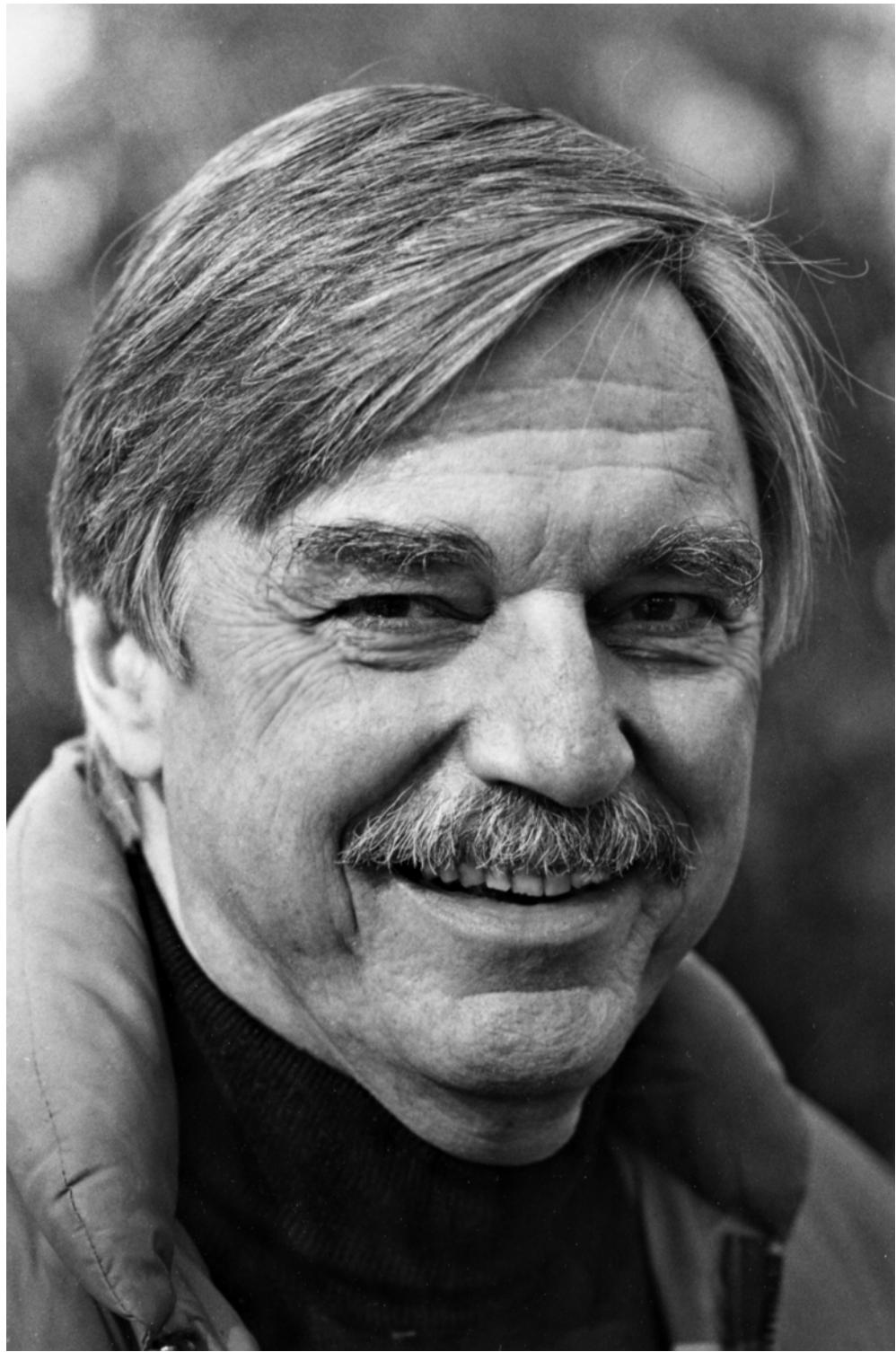
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Denny Shaffer

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PREFACE--Sierra Club Oral History Program to 1978

In fall 1969 and spring 1970 a self-appointed committee of Sierra Clubbers met several times to consider two vexing and related problems. The rapid membership growth of the club and its involvement in environmental issues on a national scale left neither time nor resources to document the club's internal and external history. Club records were stored in a number of locations and were inaccessible for research. Further, we were failing to take advantage of the relatively new technique of oral history by which the reminiscences of club leaders and members of long standing could be preserved.

The ad hoc committee's recommendation that a standing History Committee be established was approved by the Sierra Club Board of Directors in May 1970. That September the board designated The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley as the official repository of the club's archives. The large collection of records, photographs, and other memorabilia known as the "Sierra Club Papers" is thus permanently protected, and the Bancroft is preparing a catalog of these holdings which will be invaluable to students of the conservation movement.

The History Committee then focused its energies on how to develop a significant oral history program. A six-page questionnaire was mailed to members who had joined the club prior to 1931. More than half responded, enabling the committee to identify numerous older members as likely prospects for oral interviews. (Some had hiked with John Muir!) Other interviewees were selected from the ranks of club leadership over the past six decades.

Those committee members who volunteered as interviewers were trained in this discipline by Willa Baum, head of the Bancroft's Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) and a nationally recognized authority in this field. Further interviews have been completed in cooperation with university oral history classes at California State University, Fullerton; Columbia University, New York; and the University of California, Berkeley. Extensive interviews with major club leaders are most often conducted on a professional basis through the Regional Oral History Office.

Copies of the Sierra Club oral interviews are placed at The Bancroft Library, in the Department of Special Collections at UCLA, and at the club's Colby Library, and may be purchased at cost by club regional offices, chapters, and groups, as well as by other libraries, institutions, and interested individuals.

Our heartfelt gratitude for their help in making the Sierra Club Oral History Project a success goes to each interviewee and interviewer; to everyone who has written an introduction to an oral history; to the Sierra Club Board of Directors for its recognition of the long-term importance of this effort; to the Trustees of the Sierra Club Foundation for generously providing the necessary funding; to club and foundation staff, especially to Michael McCloskey, Denny Wilcher, Colburn Wilbur, and Nicholas Clinch; to Willa

Baum and Susan Schrepfer of the Regional Oral History Office; and last but far from least, to the members of the History Committee, and particularly to Ann Lage, who has coordinated the oral history effort since 1974.

You are cordially invited to read and enjoy any or all of the oral histories in the Sierra Club series. By so doing you will learn much of the club's history which is available nowhere else, and of the fascinating careers and accomplishments of many outstanding club leaders and members.

Marshall H. Kuhn
Chairman, History Committee
1970-1978

May 1, 1977
San Francisco
(revised March, 1992, A.L.)

The Sierra Club Oral History Program since 1978

Inspired by the vision of its founder and first chairman, Marshall Kuhn, the Sierra Club History Committee continued to expand its oral history program following his death in 1978. In 1980, with five ROHO interviews completed or underway and thirty-five volunteer-conducted interviews available for research, the History Committee sought and received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a major project focusing on the Sierra Club of the 1960s and 1970s. In a four-year period, NEH and matching Sierra Club funds made possible the completion of an additional seventeen major oral histories conducted by the Regional Oral History Office and forty-four volunteer-conducted interviews. Oral histories produced during and following the NEH grant period have documented the leadership, programs, strategies, and ideals of the national Sierra Club as well as the club grassroots at the regional and chapter levels over the past thirty years. The work of the club is seen in all its variety--from education to litigation to legislative lobbying; from energy policy to urban issues to wilderness preservation; from California to the Carolinas to Alaska, and on the international scene. The Sierra Club oral history program, together with the extensive Sierra Club papers and photographic collection in The Bancroft Library--a collection of 1325 linear feet of archival records, more than 34,000 photographs, films, tapes, and publications, all recently processed and catalogued--help celebrate the Sierra Club centennial in 1992 by making accessible to researchers one hundred years of Sierra Club history.

Special thanks for the oral history project's later phase are due Maxine McCloskey, chair of the Sierra Club History Committee 1988-1992; Ray Lage, co-chair, History Committee, 1978-1986; Susan Schrepfer, codirector of the NEH Sierra Club Documentation Project; members of the History Committee; and most importantly, the interviewees and interviewers for their unfailing cooperation. The Sierra Club and the Sierra Club Foundation, as well as special donors to individual interviews, have generously provided funding to continue the oral history project.

Ann Lage, Director
Sierra Club Oral History Project

Berkeley, California
November 2005

January 2006

SIERRA CLUB ORAL HISTORY SERIES

Interviews conducted by the Regional Oral History Office,
University of California, Berkeley.

Single-Interview Volumes

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Berry, Phillip S. Sierra Club Leader, 1960s-1980s: A Broadened Agenda, A Bold Approach. 1988, 149 pp.

Berry, Phillip S. Sierra Club President, 1991-1992: The Club, the Legal Defense Fund, and Leadership Issues, 1984-1993. 1997, 126 pp.

Brower, David R. Environmental Activist, Publicist, and Prophet. 1980, 320 pp.

Cellarius, Doris. Sierra Club Volunteer Leader: Grassroots Activist and Organizer on Hazardous Waste Issues. 2005, 111 pp.

Cellarius, Richard. National Leader in the Sierra Club and the Sierra Club Foundation, 1970-2002, Sierra Club President, 1988-1990. 2005, 213 pp.

Colby, William E. Reminiscences. 1954, 145 pp. (An interview with Sierra Club secretary and director, 1900-1946.)

Fischer, Michael L. Sierra Club Executive Director, 1987-1992. 1997, 192 pp.

Leonard, Richard M. Mountaineer, Lawyer, Environmentalist. 1975, 482 pp.

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McCloskey, J. Michael. Sierra Club Executive Director and Chairman, 1980s-1990s: A Perspective on Transitions in the Club and the Environmental Movement. 1999, 281 pp.

Merrow, Susan D. Sierra Club President and Council Chair: Effective Volunteer Leadership, 1980s-1990s. 1994, 89 pp.

Shaffer, Denny. Sierra Club Officer and Leader, 1970 to 1997: Focus on Membership, Finances, and Management. 2006, 205 pp.

Siri, William E. Reflections on the Sierra Club, the Environment, and Mountaineering, 1950s-1970s. 1979, 296 pp.

Stegner, Wallace. The Artist as Environmental Advocate. 1983, 49 pp.

Torre, Gary. Labor and Tax Attorney, 1949-1982; Sierra Club Foundation Trustee, 1968-1981, 1994-1998. 1999, 301 pp.

Wayburn, Edgar. Sierra Club Statesman and Leader of the Parks and Wilderness Movement: Gaining Protection for Alaska, the Redwoods, and Golden Gate Parklands. 1985, 525 pp.

Wayburn, Edgar. Global Activist and Elder Statesman of the Sierra Club: Alaska, International Conservation, National Parks and Protected Areas, 1980-1992. 1996, 277 pp.

Wayburn, Peggy. Author and Environmental Advocate. 1992, 193 pp.

Zierold, John. Environmental Lobbyist in California's Capital, 1965-1984. 1988, 202 pp.

In Process: David Brower, update; J. Robert Cox, former club president; Laurence I. Moss, former club president; Michele Perrault, former club president; Douglas Scott, wilderness advocate and former Sierra Club staff member.

Multi-Interview Volumes

Building the Sierra Club's National Lobbying Program, 1967-1981. 1985, 374 pp.

Evans, Brock. "Environmental Campaigner: From the Northwest Forests to the Halls of Congress."

Tupling, W. Lloyd. "Sierra Club Washington Representative."

Pacific Northwest Conservationists. 1986, 281 pp.

Dyer, Polly. "Preserving Washington Parklands and Wilderness."

Goldsworthy, Patrick D. "Protecting the North Cascades, 1954-1983."

Sierra Club Leaders I, 1950s-1970s. 1982, 433 pp.

Hildebrand, Alexander. "Sierra Club Leader and Critic: Perspective on Club Growth, Scope, and Tactics, 1950s-1970s."

Litton, Martin. "Sierra Club Director and Uncompromising Preservationist, 1950s-1970s."

Sherwin, Raymond J. "Conservationist, Judge, and Sierra Club President, 1960s-1970s."

Snyder, Theodore A., Jr. "Southeast Conservation Leader and Sierra Club President, 1960s-1970s."

Sierra Club Leaders II, 1960s-1970s. 1985, 296 pp.

Futrell, J. William. "'Love for the Land and Justice for Its People:' Sierra Club National and Southern Leader, 1968-1982."

Sive, David. "Pioneering Environmental Lawyer, Atlantic Chapter Leader, 1961-1982."

SIERRA CLUB HISTORY COMMITTEE ORAL HISTORY SERIES

Interviews conducted by volunteers for the Sierra Club History Committee.

Single-Interview Volumes

Clark, Nathan. Sierra Club Leader, Outdoorsman, and Engineer. 1977,
147 pp.

Moorman, James. Attorney for the Environment, 1966-1981: Center for Law
and Social Policy, Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, Department of Justice Division of Lands and
Natural Resources. 1994, 168 pp.

Robinson, Gordon. Forestry Consultant to the Sierra Club. 1979, 277 pp.

Multi-Interview Volumes

The Sierra Club Nationwide I. 1983, 257 pp.

Forsyth, Alfred. "The Sierra Club in New York and New Mexico."
McConnell, Grant. "Conservation and Politics in the North Cascades."
Ogilvy, Stewart M. "Sierra Club Expansion and Evolution: The Atlantic
Chapter, 1957-1969."
Van Tyne, Anne. "Sierra Club Stalwart: Conservationist, Hiker, Chapter
and Council Leader."

The Sierra Club Nationwide II. 1984, 253 pp.

Amodio, John. "Lobbyist for Redwood National Park Expansion."
Jones, Kathleen Goddard. "Defender of California's Nipomo Dunes,
Steadfast Sierra Club Volunteer."
Leopold, A. Starker. "Wildlife Biologist."
Miller, Susan, "Staff Support for Sierra Club Growth and Organization,
1964-1977."
Turner, Tom. "A Perspective on David Brower and the Sierra Club, 1968-1969."

The Sierra Club Nationwide III. 1989, 310 pp.

- Alderson, George. "Environmental Campaigner in Washington, D.C., 1960s-1970s."
- Duveneck, Frank. "Loma Prieta Chapter Founder, Protector of Environmental and Human Rights."
- Steele, Dwight. "Controversies over the San Francisco Bay and Waterfront, 1960s-1970s."
- Walker, Diane. "The Sierra Club in New Jersey: Focus on Toxic Waste Management."

The Sierra Club Nationwide IV. 1996, 207 pp.

- Avery, Abigail. "Nurturing the Earth: North Cascades, Alaska, New England, and Issues of War and Peace."
- Ives, Robin and Lori. "Conservation, Mountaineering, and Angeles Chapter Leadership, 1958-1984."
- Reid, Leslie. "Angeles Chapter and National Sierra Club Leader, 1960s-1990s: Focus on Labor and the Environment."
- Reid, Sally. "Serving the Angeles Chapter and the National Sierra Club, 1960s-1990s: Focus on Wilderness Issues in California and Alaska."

Sierra Club Reminiscences I, 1900s-1960s. 1974, 212 pp.

- Farquhar, Francis. "Sierra Club Mountaineer and Editor."
- Hildebrand, Joel. "Sierra Club Leader and Ski Mountaineer."
- Robinson, Bestor. "Thoughts on Conservation and the Sierra Club."
- Rother, James E. "The Sierra Club in the Early 1900s."

Sierra Club Reminiscences II, 1900s-1960s. 1975, 177 pp.

- Bernays, Philip S. "Founding the Southern California Chapter."
- Bradley, Harold C. "Furthering the Sierra Club Tradition."
- Crowe, Harold E. "Sierra Club Physician, Baron, and President."
- Dawson, Glen. "Pioneer Rock Climber and Ski Mountaineer."
- Hackett, C. Nelson. "Lasting Impressions of the Early Sierra Club."

Sierra Club Reminiscences III, 1920s-1970s. 1984, 264 pp.

- Clark, Lewis. "Perdurable and Peripatetic Sierran: Club Officer and Outings Leader, 1928-1984."
- Eichorn, Jules. "Mountaineering and Music: Ansel Adams, Norman Clyde, and Pioneering Sierra Club Climbing."
- Eloesser, Nina. "Tales of High Trips in the Twenties."
- Kimball, H. Stewart. "New Routes For Sierra Club Outings, 1930s-1970s."

LeConte, Joseph. "Recalling LeConte Family Pack Trips and the Early Sierra Club, 1912-1926."

The Sierra Club and the Urban Environment I: San Francisco Bay Chapter Inner City Outings and Sierra Club Outreach to Women. 1980, 186 pp.

Burke, Helen. "Women's Issues in the Environmental Movement."

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LaBoyteaux, Duff. "Towards a National Sierra Club Program."

Sarnat, Marlene. "Laying the Foundations for ICO."

Zuni, George. "From the Inner City Out."

The Sierra Club and the Urban Environment II: Labor and the Environment in the San Francisco Bay Area. 1983, 167 pp.

Jenkins, David. "Environmental Controversies and the Labor Movement in the Bay Area."

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Steele, Dwight C. "Environmentalist and Labor Ally."

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Evans, Nora. "Sixty Years with the Sierra Club."

Praeger, Ruth E. "Remembering the High Trips."

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Farquhar, Marjory Bridge. "Pioneer Woman Rock Climber and Sierra Club Director."

LeConte, Helen. "Reminiscences of LeConte Family Outings, the Sierra Club, and Ansel Adams."

Sierra Club Women III. 1983, 173 pp.

Christy, Cicely M. "Contributions to the Sierra Club and the San Francisco Bay Chapter, 1938-1970s."

Goody, Wanda B. "A Hiker's View of the Early Sierra Club."

Horsfall, Ethel Rose Taylor. "On the Trail with the Sierra Club, 1920s-1960s."

Parsons, Harriet T. "A Half-Century of Sierra Club Involvement."

Southern Sierrans I. 1976, 178 pp.

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- Jones, E. Stanley. "Sierra Club Officer and Angeles Chapter Leader, 1931-1975."
- Jones, Marion. "Reminiscences of the Southern California Sierra Club, 1927-1975."
- Pepper, Dorothy. "High Trip High Jinks."
- Searle, Richard. "Grassroots Sierra Club Leader."

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- Amneus, Thomas. "New Directions for the Angeles Chapter."
- Charnock, Irene. "Portrait of a Sierra Club Volunteer."
- Johnson, Arthur B. "Climbing and Conservation in the Sierra."
- Marshall, Robert R. "Angeles Chapter Leader and Wilderness Spokesman, 1960s."

Southern Sierrans III. 1980, 250 pp.

- Bear, Robert. "Desert Conservation and Exploration with the Sierra Club."
- Johnson, Arthur B. "Climbing and Conservation in the Sierra."
- Poland, Roscoe and Wilma. "Desert Conservation: Voices from the Sierra Club's San Diego Chapter."

Volunteer Leadership in the National Sierra Club, 1970s-1980s. 1995, 181 pp.

- Fontaine, Joe. "Conservation Activist, Consensus Builder, and Sierra Club President, 1980-1982."
- Gill, Kent. "Making the Political Process Work: Chapter Activist, Council Chair, and Club and Foundation President."
- Southern Sierran interviews conducted by students in the California State University, Fullerton, Oral History Program.

INTRODUCTION—by Lawrence Downing

In the very early 1970s, a middle-aged North Carolina businessman with a wonderfully smooth drawl asked to be put on the agenda of a regular Circus meeting of the Board of Directors of the Sierra Club in San Francisco. This was only the second meeting of the Sierra Club directors he had ever attended in his life. This man asked to be put on the agenda because he had a document to show those directors, and a proposal for the use of it and similar documents by the club in the future.

In hindsight the document seems so obvious to us all, but at the time its somewhat reluctant adoption and use would represent a dramatic new departure from the way the Sierra Club of those days “did business”—a departure that I submit ultimately took the largely California-focused environmental organization to a new dimension of membership size, financial stability, environmental power, and political influence.

Who was that man? Why had he come to the meeting? And what was that document that forever altered the Sierra Club as it then existed?

I am privileged to be afforded the opportunity to write the introduction to the oral history of that North Carolina businessman, a clever and personable volunteer leader and problem solver who went on to serve the Sierra Club as its president for two terms in 1982 to 1984, and, perhaps even more importantly, who served the Sierra Club as its treasurer for a total of eight transformative terms!

That man, Denny Shaffer, has been my environmental colleague and my close personal friend for over a quarter of a century. In my observation he had a more profound impact on the growth and stability of the Sierra Club during the last quarter century than any other single individual.

Denny came to the Sierra Club, as did so many of the effective club leaders during that period, as a Council delegate from his home chapter, the LeConte Chapter. Certainly there were other individuals with business backgrounds that had served on the Sierra Club Board of Directors prior to Denny’s arrival in San Francisco in the early seventies, but no one had brought better financial management and problem-solving skills. It was a propitious meeting of skills, needs, and opportunities. And the club was the fortunate organization upon which he chose to focus.

At his first meeting, he observed three main areas where he saw an opportunity for him to apply his talents to try to improve and strengthen the venerable organization to which we all have devoted so much of our lives: (1) membership, (2) management, and (3) fundraising. In characteristic fashion, he returned to San Francisco for his second meeting prepared to address the first of those problems—and the document in his hand was a colorful membership brochure whose headline said, “A bunch of crazy people want you to join them,” and a plan for its effective distribution! In those days, about the only place that one could find a membership application was printed on the book jacket of a Sierra Club book, and it required you to cut up the jacket! Moreover, it required you also to find two club members who would recommend you for membership—or to get the club to waive that requirement, as I did.

Denny's thought was, "How can you have a church without an evangelist or an army without a recruiting department? How could you have a Sierra Club with nobody charged with the responsibility of getting more members?" He reasoned that if this organization can have come this far based upon people's willingness "to go to the library and find out where the devil you are and write to you and say, 'Can I join?', just imagine what would happen if you did it the other way around, if you found these people and asked them to join? Imagine what would happen if you really got serious about getting members in this organization."

And so the "long dance" began. The persuasive gentlemen from North Carolina began with the assistance of other like-minded leaders to woo volunteer leadership and staff into things like a full-time Membership Department, direct mail prospecting for new members, computerized and therefore searchable membership and leader lists, life membership campaigns and installment payment of life memberships, endowment funds from life membership receipts, fund-raising by the club for the Sierra Club Foundation, a Development Department, the first international assembly, balanced budgets developed by the staff and approved by the directors, budgeted surpluses, greater funding for priority campaigns, executive staff hiring and accountability, financial management staff, an Office of Volunteer Development, increased chapter and group funding and support, membership contests, donor and fund sharing by national and local entities, executive director and club officer evaluations, statistical analysis of renewal rates, membership surveys, long-range strategic planning, the Centennial Capital Campaign, constructive agenda management, e-mail communications for leaders and staff, and telephone fund-raising solicitation (well, nobody's perfect), and efforts to preserve the Sierra Club as a volunteer-driven environmental organization. The list goes on and on.

When I identified the attempted takeover of the Sierra Club by outsiders in the Board of Directors' election of 2004, I immediately asked Denny to draft a letter to motivate the directors to sound the alarm and spur the staff and volunteer leadership into action. And, as was dependably the case, he did it exceedingly well.

Whenever the need for persuasion or funds became great, Denny's southern drawl became more pronounced, and your hand went instinctively to protect your wallet.

Of course, there were Sierra Club problems that he could not help us solve, but we learned to address them in a more logical and thoughtful way that was mindful of the feelings of the individuals directly affected.

A couple of facts from his personal life speak volumes about this man and his principles. He was the first businessman in North Carolina to permit blacks to handle cash from customers. Can we even imagine that this occurred within our adult lifetimes? His family was threatened by the Ku Klux Klan for his progressive actions following his election to the Fayetteville City Council.

He set up medical clinics for pregnant women too poor to be able to afford competent maternity care. And when Denny finally retired from his dry-cleaning business, he had three employees who had worked for him for over thirty years, and he was voluntarily serving as guardian for another elderly former employee who had no family and was suffering from Alzheimer's Disease.

The Sierra Club has been fortunate to have had the benefit of this man's time, treasure, and talents. And I was privileged to have been there.

Lawrence Downing
President of the Sierra Club, 1986-88
President of the Sierra Club Foundation, 1990-92

December 27, 2004

INTERVIEW HISTORY—Denny Shaffer

Denny Shaffer was invited to participate in the Sierra Club oral history series in January 1993, as part of an effort to record oral histories with all living past presidents of the club. The oral history series on the Sierra Club was launched in 1970 by the Sierra Club History Committee, in partnership with the Regional Oral History Office. Interviewees in the series include both volunteer leaders and staff members—those who have had a major impact on the national organization and its environmental agenda, along with those who have worked at the grassroots level and participated in outings and other club activities.

Denny Shaffer agreed to be interviewed, but somewhat reluctantly, noting that he preferred looking ahead to the future and that he regarded his presidency, ten years prior, as “ancient history.” In that same conversation, he characterized himself as an “enabler,” rather than a “carrier of the flag.” These were modest words for someone who appears prominently in almost every oral history of club leaders since the 1970s, often described as a wielder of great power within the organization. A key question of this oral history, then, is how Denny Shaffer, as one of scores of active volunteer leaders of this large and complex environmental organization, came to exercise so much power and to what end.

Shaffer joined the club in 1968 or 1969 as a resident of Fayetteville, North Carolina, and participated as activist and outing leader in the growing LeConte Chapter in the Carolinas. Soon he was the delegate to the council of club chapters in San Francisco, applying his considerable management and marketing skills—developed in his dry-cleaning business—to the work of the national Sierra Club. In 1977 he became a member of the board of directors, a position he held with only a one-year break until 1991. In 1994, during the course of our interviews, he was again elected to the board, serving what was for him a troubling three-year final term, which concluded shortly before our last set of interviews in 1997.

Our first two interviews were recorded in June and November of 1993 in Denny and Kim Shaffer’s San Francisco apartment, where they stayed while in town on club business. He looked back to his family influences, youth and education, first marriage and young family, and his involvement in civil rights issues in Fayetteville as city councilman and businessman in the 1960s. He recalled his introduction to the Sierra Club in 1968, his participation in outings and environmental campaigns, and his growing involvement locally and nationally. When he first took part in a national club “circus” meeting probably in 1970, he brought a newcomer’s fresh perspective and a three-prong focus that would define the following decades of his leadership in the club. “My perspective was clearly so much different from somebody’s perspective who had been here for twenty years. I walked in the door and looked at it, and said . . . ‘Wow, that’s great. How could it be better?’” Noting that most club leaders, both volunteer and staff, lacked experience and interest in management, he turned his attention to three areas—membership development, fund-raising, and management—introducing a direct-mail program, building endowment through life memberships, fostering major-donor fund-raising, and instituting new budgetary and priority-setting procedures.

Our third and fourth interview sessions took place in November 1997, when he was in a reflective mood, having left the board for a final time after completing his three-year term. He discussed club management issues, his role as treasurer, which he describes as the most powerful position in the club, and his concerns as club president. He reflected on his relationship with four executive directors, numerous volunteer leaders, and fellow trustees of the Sierra Club Foundation. And he explained his consternation about what he viewed, during his final term as director, as a diminishment of the volunteer's role within the club. His oral history provides a unique insider's perspective on the complex cultural institution that is the modern-day Sierra Club, as well as a detailed overview of the accomplishments of the personable and sometimes controversial "newcomer" from North Carolina.

Denny Shaffer was sent the oral history transcript, lightly edited by Carl Wilmsen, for review in June 1998, but his attention was elsewhere, with his wife Kim and adored young daughter, Francesca. During the following years he traveled with friends and family, faced a series of health problems, sold his dry-cleaning business, and pursued interests in many areas, from environmental concerns to the welfare of elderly blues musicians. But the oral history was on his mind, and he finally returned the reviewed transcript in August 2003. He had corrected dates and names and made a few additions to elaborate or clarify his oral account. He included illustrative materials, which appear in the appendices.

Many of Denny Shaffer's papers relating to his work with the Sierra Club from 1978 to 1987 are part of the Sierra Club Records and Members Papers in the Bancroft Library (finding aid on line at <http://www.oac.cdlib.org>). A document relating to his 1980 Fund Raising Plan for the club is deposited as supplementary materials to the oral history. He has indicated that he will place his later papers at the Bancroft as well. The tapes of the oral history sessions are available for listening in The Bancroft Library.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Richard Cándida Smith, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, the James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, at the University of California, Berkeley.

Ann Lage, Interviewer
Director, Sierra Club Oral History Project

January 14, 2005
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW WITH DENNY SHAFFER

**I PERSONAL BACKGROUND: FAMILY, YOUTH, EDUCATION, BUSINESS,
AND CIVIL RIGHTS**

[Interview 1: June 9, 1993] ##¹

Family's Grocery Business, Early Love of the Outdoors, and Father's Influence

Lage: Today is June 9, 1993, and this is our first interview with Denny Shaffer for the Sierra Club history program. Today we want to start with background, what molded you and molded the interests you've displayed in the Sierra Club. Let's begin as we usually do with family, and where you were born and raised.

Shaffer: Yes, I'm an only son of an only son so it covers family fairly quickly up to that point. In Pennsylvania, I was born in Altoona, which was then a town of about a hundred thousand people. In World War II, we moved to where my dad worked, which was seven whole miles away, in a town called Tyrone, and I stayed there and graduated from high school. I went to school at the University of Pittsburgh after that, and in '52 graduated and really left that part of the world.

Lage: When were you born?

Shaffer: 1931, February the 13th, a Friday.

Lage: What kind of work did your father do?

Shaffer: My family was in the grocery business. They had a chain of about sixty-two or three corner grocery stores that were started when they made deliveries with horse and wagon. And the premise they built them on was that they were corner grocery stores, they had a

1. ## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

delivery service, and they gave you credit. It was Shaffer Stores Company, and they were painted bright yellow, with yellow awnings. It was very successful; they had their own bakery, had their own meat packing plant, and their own brands.

My father was in the meat packing part of the business, which was located in Tyrone, seven miles away from the headquarters, which were in Altoona. We lived in an apartment above a Shaffer store, grocery store number two of the sixty-some stores, and this was a building that my grandfather owned, my father's father, and so we lived there when I was a child.

My interest, I think, in natural things came about that time, which would have been my early school days, elementary school days. My parents were faced with the decision of whether they should try to get their own house, build their own house, or whether they should try to get a place out in the country. Well, these were tough times, these were the thirties, and there was not a lot of money, and so they ended up deciding to go out into the country and buy a little bit of land and build a cottage on it, which they did, and we spent summers there, in a place called Spruce Creek. President Carter, when he finished the presidency, the first thing he wrote after he was president of the United States was an article for *Sports Illustrated* about fly-fishing in Spruce Creek, which was the creek that I played in as a child and where I grew up. A very pleasant, natural setting. From that early time, I spent a lot of time walking the mountains. My parents were amazingly permissive of that sort of thing.

Lage: Was it their own pleasure as well?

Shaffer: Well, it wasn't. My father had muscular dystrophy, and so he couldn't do those things. His interests in it were--we would take drives every Sunday afternoon, year-round, we'd take an automobile drive, and always out through the most remote places we could find, frequently unpaved roads. I remember more than one time ending up in a farmer's field somewhere so that you had to open up his gate that kept his cattle in to get out of his property, to get back to something that resembled a road.

And we would talk at that time. He loved wildflowers and he loved--he was more curious than anybody I've ever known, I suppose, about everything. A most brilliant man, a little bitter about having this disease that kept him from being able to do so much he wanted to do, but very curious. When you went to visit him, he would ask you a few things about where you came from, and what you did, and that would become the conversation. If you were a historian, he would talk to you about things in that field, or whatever. He had a unique talent to do that, but his basic background was as an accountant, as a number cruncher--

Lage: Which you don't think of as having the broad interests, often.

Shaffer: No, that's right, that's right. And so I grew up with, I suppose, two or three things from my father and my family. One was a tremendous curiosity, which I think I still have, "What makes that work? How do you solve that problem? How do you take something that isn't working and fix it?" I mean, Dad used to love to tear a clock apart that didn't work and make it work, put it back together again.

Lage: Did you learn from him by example, or did he actually undertake to teach you?

Shaffer: No, I think just by my observing his curiosity, I developed a great curiosity, but it was not very much of him saying, "Denny, come here, let me show you how a clock works." I don't think he ever did that. My folks were German, German background, Pennsylvania Dutch, I mean, in this country for, I don't know, more generations than I've been able to check back on, but not very emotional people, sort of ordered.

Lage: All the things you think of when you talk about Pennsylvania Dutch?

Shaffer: Yes, but a real love of nature, and real valuing of it. His father had a great love of wildflowers, as well as--I mean, he also grew wonderful other flowers, too, but he probably would have been the one who introduced me, by their first names, to flowers, knew what they were, helped me know what I was looking at. But he, too, was physically handicapped, and so he couldn't get out, either.

Lage: Did he have muscular dystrophy as well?

Shaffer: Well, at that time, they really hadn't figured out much what muscular dystrophy was. And all the people will now tell you that fathers and sons don't have muscular dystrophy; it comes through the female side. But both my grandfather and his son, my father, had a crippling disease, and my father's was finally diagnosed as muscular dystrophy. It was sort of the slow kind; my dad died when he was sixty-one. He had to quit work when he was probably fifty-one, and I don't remember him when he was able to get around without great difficulty.

Lage: Did that give you a special role in kind of being an enabler for him?

[long pause]

Shaffer: You know, it's hard for me to know, because certainly this influenced my life, but I don't--I think it probably made me more sensitive to the fact that not all folks are created equal, that the folks who are not created equal probably didn't vote for it--they didn't say, "This is what I'd like to have or be."

I think that, probably, it opened my awareness to the fact that if you got something, you're lucky, and that if there's some way to--if somebody's physically handicapped and they can't go some place, that your going to that place and bringing it back to them in words or pictures or whatever is better than your not doing it, or better than your doing it and not bringing anything back. And it obviously applies far beyond all that. I suppose that sort of feeling got me in the civil rights movement, the idea of people who are being treated in a less than equal way because of something which they had no control over, in that case, their race.

So [I received from my father] a curiosity about all that, and, of course, also what ultimately became useful to me: my dad's love of the way numbers worked. I remember, early on, my father would ask me, you know, "What's sixteen percent of forty-three," or something like that, driving along in the car, as sort of a means of communication. When the conversation would die, he would start asking me questions like that, which are not the normal father-son questions. But I ultimately got to the point where I had the answers.

And my parents could not wait until I got old enough to make the third hand in card games, and I was playing three-handed pinochle probably by the time I was seven, or something like that, and bridge by the time I was ten, and I was fairly good at it, and always kept score. So those skills came out of that background, I suspect.

A Nurturing Mother, Religion, and Caring for Others

Lage: How about your mother? What was she like?

Shaffer: My mother was one of seven children, a rural family; she grew up on a farm. She quit school before she graduated from high school to help take care of her brothers and sisters. Her mother died when Mom's youngest sister was less than a year old.

She was a nurturer; she liked people. She cared about people and got a great deal of satisfaction out of expressing it. She really did enjoy cooking wonderful meals for people, entertaining people. She spent a long time taking care of my dad, and the last probably ten years of his life, he never slept more than an hour or so at a time, and then would need to be turned, and she would do all that. She was an example to me that you do what there is there to do, and that somehow, the strength comes. How she did all that I do not know.

She then lived a lot longer; she died just a couple of years ago at eighty-eight. Extremely active life in-between times. She died in a hospital where there is a plaque beside the elevator as you go up that has her name on it, saying that she'd contributed over a thousand hours as a volunteer working in that hospital. And she did that. I have wonderful stories of her reaching out to people that needed help, women who were sick and by themselves, and she'd just go take care of them. Take her clothes with her and go and stay for two days and two nights and take care of them.

Lage: Was she a nurse?

Shaffer: No, no, no, no. An extremely bright woman, good sense of humor. Both of my parents had a very strong moral background, which came out of the church, which was the base of--

Lage: What was the church?

Shaffer: Well, the Christian church, a variety of branches. Mother was originally a Lutheran. I was baptized a Lutheran. Dad was a Methodist, and I was one of those for a while. And then, ultimately, we ended up being Presbyterians, because when we moved to Tyrone, we went around and looked at the churches, determined which had the least steps and which could be easier to get into, so my father could get in it. And the Presbyterians won; they had the least steps, so I've been a Presbyterian ever since.

I don't believe, frankly, that the difference between those denominations are particularly important, particularly the middle grouping of the Methodists and Lutherans and Presbyterians, and so on, are all pretty much the same. They might not think that, but--. But my parents came out of that background, and I remember, as a child, the idea of caring for other people.

Lage: Was their caring rooted in the Christian faith?

Shaffer: Yes, I mean, I remember them packing up food to take to folks in the family who didn't have much during the latter days of the Depression. And my dad would read in the newspaper of somebody's having a hard time, and he would send them money by the mail. And not much--a dollar, which was probably twenty dollars now, or something like that--put it in an envelope, no return address, and mail it to them.

My mother, when she died, and I looked through her checkbook, I think it was six out of the last ten checks she had written were to charities, and they weren't big amounts--they were twenty dollar amounts--but it was always this feeling of charity, of sharing, that if you were given something, that A, if you have got good sense, you'll enjoy it; and B, if you have a good value system, you'll share it. And whether the something is a place, like our cottage, which was always filled with people on the weekends, or whether it's a talent, or whatever it is, enjoy it, and share it, and if you share it, you'll enjoy it.

Lage: That's a good--I'm sure there's a lot more to say, but that is a very nice picture of your early life and influences.

Family Interest in Politics, Father's Conservatism, and Other Interests

Lage: How about politics? Was that a topic of discussion in your family?

Shaffer: Oh, always. My father was a very conservative Republican of business orientation.

Lage: What did he think of Roosevelt?

Shaffer: Well, my mother and dad had a standing joke, because my father fussed about Roosevelt over all the years he was in office, and my mother reminded him that she didn't vote for him; he did. He voted for Roosevelt the first time. He never did that again, I can assure you, but he did do that and--

Lage: We had that same joke in my family. [laughter]

Shaffer: She wouldn't stop enjoying that, because he fussed about it all the way through.

Lage: So he must have been disturbed about the economy when Roosevelt ran the first time, disturbed enough to break from his Republicanism.

Shaffer: That's right, that's exactly right.

Lage: So your parents were actively interested in politics, and it got discussed around the table?

Shaffer: Oh, not just politics, but a wide interest in everything. One of the things my dad did was collect stamps. In fact, he dealt in stamps, had a dealership for a while, as a sort of a side venture that he'd carry on in the evenings and weekends, and he could tell you, you know, every country, and things about the country and the politics of the country, when ninety percent of the folks who would come visit him never had heard of the country.

He also was interested in stocks, and he probably--I know he did--he made more money investing in stocks than he ever made any other way. Because of the limitations that his physical disability put upon him, he could never really advance in business very much, because it was great effort for him to get up and get to work in the morning and get back home in the evening, and any more than that was really--. He went as a director to the board of director's meetings of the Shaffer Stores Company, which were held, you know, every two or three months, and that was an immense effort. But it made a difference.

But the business of investing in stocks: I mean, he could sit down and talk to you about corporations you had never heard of and what products they made. So there was always this broad, endless amount of choice of things to think about. It was an intellectually stimulating background on a rather simple basis, on a practical basis, on a basis of things which affected, in some way, daily life. They weren't thinking in terms of, I suppose, the ultimate intellectual kinds of discussions, but--

Lage: They weren't talking theory.

Shaffer: --but it sure as Dickens wasn't boring, either.

Wanting to Be a Boss, and Parental Emphasis on Education

Lage: Now what kind of goals did your parents present for you, as an only child?

Shaffer: Well, they came out of the Depression and what they saw for me was that I would get an education, because if you got an education, that meant you'd always be financially secure, and Dad never really was, because he was scared--he never knew how long he'd be able to work, and--

Lage: Was he college educated?

Shaffer: No. He graduated from high school and he took correspondence courses, back when you did that sort of thing, through the mail. He took accounting, and he took business courses, and all that sort of thing, but his formal education was limited to high school.

Lage: Did they think of a business career for you, or Shaffer Stores as a career?

Shaffer: Well, no, because it was a family business, and, as in all families, there were advantages and disadvantages, and for my father that side of it was always very difficult. No, I never thought I would do that. I certainly thought I would be in some business. When I was little boy and somebody asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up, I said I wanted to be a boss, [laughter] and I did. It struck me that being a boss was better than not being the boss, and that's what I wanted to be, so that's in some way thinking in terms of business.

But my parents saw for me, clearly they saw for me, "Get an education. That means you'll be secure financially, you'll be able to get a job, get married, have two kids, live the American dream, and life will be good." And so that's what I did, until I got to that point and found out that it was a little more complicated than that, but--

Lage: Were there any particular molding influences in your primary and high school education, or was it mainly family that helped you along?

Shaffer: Yes, I think so. I found out that I could excel, I found out that getting recognition was kind of a nice idea. I mean, in seventh grade, I was captain of the Patrol Boys, which was the ultimate honor for the boy in the class, because he was thought to be the best citizen, to have the best grades. It also got you in several fights, which they didn't tell you about beforehand, like having to defend your honor, or somebody's honor. You never knew what the fights were about, of course, but--

Lage: Now did you get in those fights?

Shaffer: Oh yes. I mean, what choice do you have? I mean, somebody comes upon you, what do you do? Yes. One of the advantages, I guess, of being a boy.

In College: Active in Politics; Organizing and Managing Religious Program

Shaffer: It was in college that the whole political stuff came. I was very active in college politics.

Lage: Now, you graduated in '52.

Shaffer: I graduated from college in '52, yes. Graduated from high school in '48.

Lage: You were in college in the postwar years, which are not thought of as a particularly political time for colleges.

Shaffer: I'm talking about school politics--who decides whatever silly things you were deciding, but they were terribly important at the time.

Lage: So this was student government.

Shaffer: Student government, yes. I learned so much about how to organize people and manage things. We had something called the Religion and Life Program at the University of Pittsburgh, where we put a religious, quote-unquote, speaker in every classroom and every organization during a period of one week, everywhere.

Lage: Now who's "we"? The student government?

Shaffer: Well, this was a sort of university idea, but it was run by students, and I was in charge of it that year. And we brought in religious leaders from around the world, and we had a budget, some of which we raised from businesses and interested people, and some--I don't know at the moment. People would contribute and the university put up some money.

It was clearly interdenominational. I mean, it was not a matter of promoting any religion; it was a matter of saying to people, "There is something out there called religion that seems to affect people's lives and you maybe ought to touch it, see what it's like." And so these people would come in. A wonderful fellow, I remember, was an air force chaplain. [There were] others from around the world. But anyhow, putting it together--

Lage: Good organization skills.

Shaffer: Yes, big school, a lot of speakers. Had to have housing for them, some of them got an honorarium and some didn't, and you had to negotiate with these folks, and it was good, a lot of fun.

Lage: Sounds in some ways like the Sierra Club.

Shaffer: It was. The university also had a spring carnival every year in which we took the lawn and there were big circus tents for shows and booths for games. I was the business manager for it for two years, and it was a business. It was a non-profit business, but it was a business, and I learned a lot.

Lage: Was the University of Pittsburgh a private school?

Shaffer: No, public.

Lage: And no one objected to the religious influence there?

Shaffer: No, that was still back in the days where people prayed in classrooms. I mean, it was not unusual to do that, and not in a university setting, of course, but in other settings. But it was approached as an educational thing. It was not an evangelical kind of thing. It was sort of, "You know, this stuff's out there. This is part of what life's about. There's a lot of people spending a lot of time thinking about all this. Might be something of interest here that you can learn."

Lage: And was there the feeling that the university wasn't teaching that aspect of life, or--

Shaffer: Well, I think it was a feeling at that time--. You could go to college and graduate and never really get into a lot of areas of what was happening in the world. I mean, you'd never be exposed to a lot of areas, and religion just happens to be one of them. I was a business administration student, and you could graduate in business administration and never touch anything in the arts or philosophy or anything. I mean, you could strictly take math, science, accounting, and business law, et cetera, and graduate and be a rather uneducated person, probably. And I think it was an attempt to deal with that.

Lage: To kind of broaden people's perspective.

Shaffer: Yes. But anyhow, it was broadening. Out of that kind of thing I learned that I could do that, that it was fun, and that it made some sense. You got all done with it, and you'd say, "Well, you know, we did something here that was useful, served some purpose."

Lage: That's an interesting relation, because it does sound a lot like Sierra Club activities.

The Korean War: the Air Force, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Lage: So, you were a bus ad major and graduated in '52, and then what happened?

Shaffer: By that time it was the Korean War, and I had used up more deferments than Bill Clinton ever thought of to get through. I had a different deferment every year, because I was concerned that if I didn't finish college, I might not finish college. And, I suppose, looking back on it, I preferred being in college to being in Korea, but that really wasn't the primary, the primary thought. It was assumed I was going to go in the service. I mean, there was no doubt I would do that, because that's what was happening then.

I suppose, had I lived in a different time, maybe I would have been a conscientious objector. I have no enthusiasm for killing; it's not something I particularly want to do. Don't own a gun, don't have a gun, because I don't want to use a gun, still don't want to do that. But that wasn't one of the options, so I went directly from, almost directly from, college into the air force.

Lage: Talk a little bit more about the Korean War, because it really hasn't come up that often in our oral histories. Was there any questioning of it on the campus?

Shaffer: It is the one that nobody remembers that we were in.

Lage: Yes, and you grew up as a young man with the Second World War affecting everybody's lives. And then here comes this Korean War. Do you remember any particular questioning of it, or--

Shaffer: Oh yes. Well, I went through questioning on a certain level. I could have come out of college and got an instant commission to be a lieutenant in the marines, immediately, just like that.

Lage: Because that's what one could do if you were a college graduate?

Shaffer: If you had a college education, at that point, you could get a commission in the marines. They would send you off for a few weeks' training, and you were on your way to Korea to run over a hill or through the jungles, saying, "Charge!" with people hopefully behind you, preferably not shooting at you. And, you know, it was one of my options. I said, "No, I don't think that's what I want to do." So it was somewhere between objecting to doing it, and being selective in how you were going to go about doing it, and I selected the idea of being a pilot, so I went in pilot training. Turned out to be one of our government's more complete failures, not a big failure, but a complete one, because I had serious motion sickness problems, and I went up twenty-one or twenty-two times and got sick twenty-one or twenty-two times, and that was that.

I spent the rest of my time in the air force doing work in the judge advocate's department, which was interesting. I enjoyed doing that, and it was also broadening and gave me a perspective of the law I had never had. I worked in court martials and claims against the government and actually conducted--I was the special appointed defense attorney for court martials requested by different people, and I would do that. So it was an interesting background. I got married then.

Lage: One more question. Was the student deferment in the Korean War an accepted thing? Did most of the students get deferments, or did some of them rush to join up as they did during World War II?

Shaffer: No, no. There was very little of "It is my duty, I can't wait to go" sort of thing, at least among the people I was with, college students. There may have been somewhere in the world, you know, people who were still having that sort of "It's my country, I want to go help defend it" reaction, but not around me. It was more a matter of how to go about this in an orderly way, and you could get a deferment if you were--I think in your freshman year, you had to be in the upper twenty-five percent of your class, and by the time you were a senior, I think, if you were in the upper seventy-five percent of your class, they let you finish.

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Shaffer: Well the way people felt, in my recollection of the people I was around, was something between the way people felt about the Vietnam War and the way they felt about World War II. World War II, it was--I remember the rationing and how everybody really got into rationing and, you know, if you had more than one spare tire for your car, you turned it in. And I remember how patriotic people felt because they had a spare tire that they could turn in to the government that was somehow going to help win the war. And people went off and fought with that sort of enthusiasm for a sort of black and white, pure thing, that you were going to do the right thing and this was it. Vietnam, we all remember what that was like. Korea was something in between those two.

There was beginning to become some real suspicion that it wasn't as black and white as people thought it was. I don't remember what World War II was, World War I was the "War to End All Wars," World War II must have been something different from that. But people were beginning to get a feeling, with Korea, that there just might be a lot of this, that it might go on all over the place for a long period of time, and it might not make a lot of sense, that when you won you might not know what winning would look like, and so it was that kind of an environment.

Lage: So you remember that kind of questioning at some levels.

Shaffer: Yes, oh yes. We'd sit around, talk about it. But you didn't talk about going to Canada. You talked about how could you do it and not get killed, as opposed to, "How could I do it and best serve my country?" It became a little more personal and a little less black and white.

Lage: Is there more to say about your Korean War experience? You served at your--

Shaffer: Well, there was, I suppose, some relevance to my later Sierra Club work. I ended up spending twenty-one months of my twenty-four months in the air force at McGhee Tyson Air Force Base in Alcoa, Tennessee, which was very close to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and I spent an inordinate amount of time hiking, and walking, and so on, in those mountains.

I ended up working in the judge advocate's office, which was sort of an eight-to-five, five day a week job, primarily, and so, although I did organize and run an officers' club. They did not have an officers' club there at that place (it was a relatively new base) and I heard some officers talking about it, and they were wondering where they could find somebody who could put one together and run it and so on, and I said, "I can do that. I've done that sort of thing in the past," which was a slight exaggeration, but I did that. Made some money doing that, which was of interest to me.

I did other things. Coached basketball there, which was fun. I still had a lot of fun.

Lage: And it was the first time you lived in the South?

Shaffer: Yes, I had spent a little time in North Carolina. I spent a few months, after I graduated from high school, in North Carolina with relatives, so I had some idea what the South was like. But, of course, this was very different. I had never been in the southern mountains, and they were wonderful, great mountains. It rained a lot. But I loved it.

Marriage to Betty, and Dry Cleaning Partnership with Uncle in North Carolina

Lage: You married while you were in the Air Force?

Shaffer: Married my childhood sweetheart. Betty and I had our first date when we were in seventh grade, and we got married while I was in the service, and stayed married until she died. We had two children. She died in '72. Had two sons. When she died, they were then twelve and fourteen.

Lage: Now, how did you get to North Carolina?

Shaffer: Well, the fellow I had visited with before I went in the service, very wonderful man, also no background in education, but a real great business mind. It was at that time one-hour dry cleaning had just started. One-Hour Martinizing was the company that had started it. It was a brand new idea, and he was there when the idea was started and jumped into it and called me up and said, "Denny, this is a good thing. There's money to be made here. I can see a lot of dry cleaning plants being opened and this could be a lot of fun."

I, in the meantime, had applied, sent resumes to--you know how you do when you're looking for jobs--the twenty-seven Fortune 500 companies, or something like that. But I really wanted to be in small business. I really liked what my family had done. The idea of being in a business where you were close enough to it that you could hands-on make some difference, but still big enough that you didn't have to be there to open the door every morning and close it every night. But you could know your employees, and you could know your customers. I liked all of that part of it, so this was--

Lage: And you actually thought of these things, as you decided about the business?

Shaffer: Oh yes. I like people, in small numbers. I'm not great with cocktail parties. I'd rather sit down, have two couples over for dinner. I mean, that's a good evening. But anyhow--

Lage: Did you go to North Carolina right after the service?

Shaffer: Yes, he got in touch with me, and I went and talked to him, and went to work for him. And at that point, I guess, he had two dry cleaning plants, and within no time at all, we had a bunch of them, and we were all over the place, and we were franchising plants. If you wanted to buy a franchise--we had the franchising for all the Southeast, for Martinizing.

Lage: Now this was Martinizing. But here on your resume I see Koretizing.

Discontent with the Great American Dream

Shaffer: Well, at some place along the line, when Martinizing got bought out by American Laundry and Machinery Company, and then it got bought out by McGraw-Edison, and when McGraw-Edison got into the picture, it became considerably less personal and we got out of that business and we franchised plants under our own name, which was One-Hour Koretizing, for a while. But I didn't have any real enthusiasm, by then, for that. I had discovered by then that the Great American Dream was more complicated than my parents had suggested to me. I had, by then, been married, had two children, and made some money. And the bells had not yet rung, and I said to myself, "O-ho, there must be something else one has to do to make the bells ring," and so I--

Lage: Now when you say the bells hadn't rung, was this a big feeling of dissatisfaction, or just a sense that there must be more to life?

Shaffer: You know the old song, "Is this all there is?" It was that sort of thing. It was that--those were wonderful things. I mean, I liked being married, I liked having children, I liked having money. I didn't have any before--I mean I really didn't. When I got out of the service, we hardly had maybe a thousand dollars between us, my wife and I, so it was nice to get to the point where you made some money.

Lage: Had the challenge of the business operation dropped for you? Because you seemed to really enjoy that kind of a challenge.

Shaffer: Yes, it wore off. I think ten or fifteen years of that and I said to myself, "Well, this is all very interesting, but there's got to be something more important in life than making money and running a business." I mean, there's got to be more important things than that, and there clearly was, and so I just sort of shifted into doing different kinds of things. And I got out of franchising, because franchising very much controls you; if somebody wants to buy a unit or two or five or six, then, I mean, you're gone. You've got to go deal with that. So I got out of that. I was in business with this man for twelve years, and then we got a business divorce, split up.

Lage: Now he was a relative?

Shaffer: He was a relative. He was married to one of my mother's sisters, so he was an uncle by marriage, and a wonderful, wild, crazy man who really had an instinct for how you made money. Very good; I learned a lot from him.

Role Models: Learning from Other's Failures and Recognizing Good Ideas

Shaffer: You asked me [in the interview outline] about role models, you asked me in two contexts, I believe, and I thought a lot about that, and I suppose that what I have really done in life is look at people and figure out what I could learn from them more than looking at people and saying, "oh, that's what I want to be like."

Lage: You take the part of the person--

Shaffer: Yes. I feel like you can learn a lot by watching somebody who has failed at something. I think it's sort of a common thought that you learn more from your failures than you do from your successes, but I believe you can do that just as well observing other people. "There's a man who is very bright, very capable, very competent, went about doing something that made good sense, and it didn't work. What happened?" And if you can figure that out and avoid doing that yourself, then you're better off. And so, less than role models, whether it was in business, or whether it was in my personal life, or whether it's in the Sierra Club, I think what I've tried to do is learn by saying, "There's a good idea." I jokingly have said that I'm not sure I've ever had an original idea in my life, but I think I recognize good ideas.

Lage: You're a analytical observer.

Shaffer: Well, I hope so, because there's an abundance--so many good ideas out there. I mean, you know, you could look at a David Brower and you could learn so much from him. You don't necessarily want to learn from him how to balance a budget. But boy, to look at David Brower and say, "Well, he doesn't balance budgets very well. He's not going to be my role model"--what a waste.

Lage: So role model's not a good word.

Shaffer: Not for me it isn't, because I sure have learned a lot from David Brower, I hope. I hope I have.

Lage: This came up in talking about the uncle that you had the business divorce with.

Shaffer: The business guy, yes, his name was Weller, I. C. Weller.

Lage: You learned things from him also, I guess, but rejected others.

Shaffer: Yes. He had different feelings about certain things than I did. His standards on some levels were different than mine, but he sure taught me a lot. And he enabled me, he helped me become successful faster than I would have otherwise. And then, somewhere along that line, I started getting interested, then, in other things.

Lage: Now how did that develop? Let's pursue that a little. What were the other things?

Interest in Civil Rights, and Community Reaction

Shaffer: Well, it was the civil rights movement, I guess, first. I got into this thing. I backed into it. You know, I remember going to North Carolina in 1954 and operating a business and I had a black tailor in my business. And my black tailor, when he waited on customers, would find out what they wanted done, he would write up the garment to be tailored or whatever needed to be done, but he never handled any money. And I said, "This is crazy. Why doesn't he collect money?" "Well, he's black."

And so I realized that that's the way the system was. If you went to the gas station, a black man came out, pumped your gas, washed your windows; a white man came out and took your money. I said, "This is nuts. This makes no sense to me," and I called my employee, Henry Fritz over, and I said, "Henry, this makes no sense to me. Why don't you handle the money?" He said, "Going to cause trouble." I said, "Well, makes no sense to me the way it is." He said, "Well, it doesn't make any sense to me either, but if we change it, it's going to cause trouble."

Lage: This is the black man himself.

Shaffer: Yes, and I said, "Well, are you game?" He said, "Sure." I said, "Well, so am I." So we just started doing it. And then--little things.

Lage: Did it cause trouble?

Shaffer: Well, of course it caused some trouble. I mean, there were people who wouldn't hand him the money. Of course, there were people then who would come into the lobby of the business and if you waited--if there were three people to be waited on and the last one in was a white person and the other two were black, it was assumed that you would wait on the third person who came in who was white and let the two black people wait. Well I didn't do that.

Lage: You weren't from the South.

Shaffer: And we got in some trouble. But this sort of opened my eyes to what just--I mean, I just didn't feel very comfortable with all this.

[Added during interviewee review: Looking back, I don't know if I really understood what I was getting into. The 1954 Supreme Court separate but equal decision caused a great revival of the Klan. North Carolina Governor Hodges did nothing to discourage that, in fact the opposite. Bombings and shootings, violence and the threat of violence were daily affairs for the second half of the fifties, in our area. For the first time, some of the guns were in black hands with the leadership of a fellow named Robert Williams, perhaps the first advocate of black power, in nearby Monroe--home, by the way, of Jesse Helms.]

I don't think I worried at all about personal danger. Young, I guess.

Lage: Had there been minorities in your community in Pennsylvania?

Shaffer: Yes, there was, but it was--I had a buddy I walked to school with all the time, was black, but there were, you know, five black families in Tyrone and there were ten thousand people, and they had their own church and they sort of lived in their own neighborhood, and I was sort of oblivious to the whole thing. I was on athletic teams with them, I walked to school with this one guy, and other than that, I never thought about it. It never was a factor in my life. And then I went down to North Carolina, and I got into this.

Then, I guess, a couple of years later, I remodeled a business, and I ran into the State of North Carolina that told me that I must have restrooms for each race and each sex. At that time I had black men, black women, white men, white women, and an Indian woman working for me, so by this law of the state, I had to have five restrooms for twenty people. I said, "This is crazy," so I called my twenty people together and I said, "Look, do you folks have any problem if I put in two bathrooms?" They said, "No, makes sense to me," so I told the state that that's what I was going to do. Well, the state of North Carolina literally blackmailed me. They were going to take me to court. They decided to back off from that and--

Lage: Were they Public Health--?

Shaffer: No, it was the State Labor Department. And I remember them telling me that, "Well, when people find out that you're doing this, your business is going to suffer." And I said, "You mean to tell me the state of North Carolina is threatening to spread rumors about this with the intent of hurting my business, so that you can perpetuate the number of restrooms you put in buildings?" Well, of course, he was not comfortable saying, "Yes," but that's exactly what was going on, and so I just sort of slid further and further into it until I found myself really actively involved in all of this.

Lage: Did you get involved in an organization?

Shaffer: No, because the organizations were all black that were doing anything. The white people who were involved in being useful were either outsiders that came in and did a sort of hit-and-run thing, or they were people like myself who were willing to sit down in meetings and plot and figure out where the weak spots were, where you could make progress, what you could change, how you could change it, how could you organize people, how could you get favorable publicity, how could you keep people from getting killed. And, frankly, willing to take some risks.

Lage: What time are we talking about? Are we moving into the sixties now?

Shaffer: From about 1965 through the sixties.

Lage: Were you still perceived as an outsider, as a northerner, or had you kind of put down your roots pretty well.

Shaffer: No, I was perceived, probably, as a northerner. Fayetteville is less conservative than a lot of southern towns because it's a military town, but in some ways, that makes part of the town more conservative, because you have a group--the old timers--that really want to be separate, and they have more to be separate from in a military town.

Lage: How large a town?

Shaffer: Fayetteville now is about seventy-five or eighty thousand, but the military base is about the same size and it's really about a 225,000-250,000 metropolitan area.

Lage: So you had (let's get back to the sixties) this integrated military base.

Shaffer: Yes. I think overlaying this, of course, was the Vietnam stuff. I mean, Jane Fonda came to Fayetteville and did her number, but I was not involved in the Vietnam protest because I had my hands full with what I was doing. And it got nasty. I came home from a city council meeting one evening to find my son, who must have been at that time maybe ten years old, on the phone, clearly upset, my wife in the corner in a chair in tears just scared to death, and my ten-year-old on the phone, and what is this? I take the phone from him and it's the Ku Klux Klan on the line, and they have just threatened my wife's life and his life and his brother's life and my life and was giving him a lot of the kind of stuff you would expect to get, I suppose, from the Ku Klux Klan. I recognized the guy.

Lage: You recognized his voice.

Shaffer: I recognized his voice. His name was Matthews. He was a painter, a house painter, and I remember telling him, I took the phone, and I said, "I know who you are and if you want to talk to me do it in person. You know where I live, get out from under your robe and come here. Be a man. Stop picking on women and kids." He didn't come, for which I was later thankful, because he surely would have never have come alone. It was an insane time in many ways. Values that you think you have down just came unraveled.

Lage: Values of--?

Shaffer: Life was less--well, I mean, there was this scale; some people's lives were valuable and some weren't. The law was clearly on one side. And one of the most controversial things I ever did in my life was when on the city council, I went to the chief of police and sat down with him and I said, "You know and I know the jail is on the third floor, the booking room is in the basement, and the standard procedure, when you pick up black people, particularly drunks, is you put handcuffs on them, you stop between floors, you beat the daylights out of them, and then you put them in the jail cell, and it has stopped as of today, and I want you to know that. It's stopped. There will be no more. Since I'm on the city council, there'll be no more, because I will bring suit against the city of Fayetteville, as a city councilman, and against you." Well, he thought--you can't imagine at this time how controversial that was from my point of view. What I was doing was controversial. What he was doing was not controversial.

Lage: This was 1967, when you were first elected to the council.

Shaffer: This was 1967, yes.

Lage: And did it stop?

Shaffer: Sure. You bet. And I had enough friends, I had lawyer friends, who knew what was happening, and others who were--I mean, this was not something I was doing by myself; there were some other white people that felt the same way. But the majority opinion was not where I was.

Elected to the City Council, 1967, and More on Civil Rights

Lage: What is the story of how you happened to run for the council and what kind of support you had? Was it part of a group effort?

Shaffer: Before I was involved in the civil rights stuff, I was involved in the church, and I was involved with the church working with young people. I taught senior high Sunday school, had the senior high fellowship in the evening.

Lage: What church was it?

Shaffer: Highland Presbyterian Church. And I did that for several years. One of the more rewarding things I've ever done in my life. I still run into those kids--of course, not kids now, they're adults with children that are that age now--but we spent a lot of time together, those young people and myself, examining what in life made sense. And they asked good questions, and they challenged a lot, and they really made me aware of the fact that while I was questioning a lot of things that I still was not necessarily quite ready to put my body on the line, and I guess they challenged me to do it. It wasn't their idea, I mean, they never suggested it to me, but I think the discussions that were held with them--

Lage: About race relations?

Shaffer: About race, and about inhumanity to humans, what we used to call inhumanity to man, but that's sort of sexist. But the fact that, just what I said, that, how can you have a different value system for people based strictly on race, or whatever? How can society operate that way, how can a community operate that way?

There was the story about separate but equal schools. Well, they were not equal. They were certainly separate, but they were not equal. And when you integrated the schools, the tragedy of the integration was to realize just how different the quality was, and so Southern schools are still trying to catch back up again from the integration of the schools, and it's many, many years later.

Shaffer: But those kids kind of challenged me, and so I said, "All right, I'll run for public office," and I did. Ran twice, got elected twice. Ran for mayor, and didn't get elected, didn't carry a white precinct, got beat by a John Birch Society fellow, the first Republican mayor that had been elected in my town since Reconstruction, a member of my church.

Lage: And when was this? Was this in 1971?

Shaffer: This was in '71.

Lage: Did you have a political support group when you ran, or was this kind of an individual effort?

Shaffer: No, I had people in every precinct and I had, you know, a campaign manager and fund raisers and all the whole nine yards.

Lage: Had you become a Democrat by this time?

Shaffer: Oh yes, well, I had never been anything but a Democrat.

Lage: Oh, I see, well we talked about your family and--

Shaffer: Yes, my family was Republican. No, I never--I voted for Goldwater, I will acknowledge that. I didn't like the choices at the moment, but that's who I voted for.

Lage: But you'd been a Democrat.

Shaffer: Well, I've never been a registered Republican. It was a nonpartisan election, but everybody knew I was a Democrat. I mean, it's just not--

Lage: Of course, in the South, most of the people at that time were Democrats.

Shaffer: Well, that's right. But this was the time at which the Republican Party moved into being a different kind of creature. It became the haven of scoundrels. It was where the Ku Klux Klan went. The hate mongers moved into the Republican Party, much to the chagrin of a lot of good, moderate people who were Republicans in the South at that time, who had moved there from New York or some place and were trying to get a two-party system started, and then this thing happened.

This fellow who beat me was one of the real--he was a piece of work. And I never knew what hit me. I mean, there were rumors. It was typical of the kind of hate stuff: lies, rumors. And the campaign was over, the election was over, before I found out half the stories that were being circulated about what I had done or was going to do, or whatever, none of which had an ounce of truth in them. But it didn't matter, the election was over, he won, and it was probably the best thing that ever happened to me in my life, because I don't particularly want to be mayor of anything anyhow. I mean, that was a limited opportunity, and if I had done that, I probably never would have gotten as active in the Sierra Club, or not as quickly, because then I moved--I took six months to regroup and then I got more active in the club and then moved into that.

At the same time, it seemed to me that there was a loss of a common agenda in the civil rights activity in Fayetteville.

Lage: Can you define the common agenda?

Shaffer: Well, the common agenda was equality under the law.

Lage: And integration.

Shaffer: Yes, integration, which was equality under the law. I mean, if you want to drink out of a water fountain, and it's a public water fountain, you can drink out of the water fountain. You're not going to get arrested. And more to the point, you're not going to get arrested and put in the elevator and get beaten up on the way to the cell because you drank out of the wrong water fountain. Human beings are going to be treated like human beings. And that was the common agenda. Justice was the common agenda.

We have in Fayetteville a black college. It was the first state teachers' college for blacks, a normal school, in the South. Totally black, black faculty, black everything, and about that

time--and much of the energy for the civil rights movement in our area came from the students there. The sit-ins at the lunchroom counters came out of Fayetteville State University students, and I was there. I was not sitting at the counter, but I was there, because it would have been inappropriate for me to be sitting at the counter; that was their thing.

But the point came when a lot of those folks, who were my friends and working with me, and I'd been working with them, realized that if you really had integration that institution would change. You would possibly have Black professors, you might even have a--the dean or the president of the college might be White, maybe you would move towards having mostly White students, and they said, "Oh my, we don't want to do this." That was the basic issue on which I finally bailed out. Everybody was comfortable with me bailing out, I mean they--

Lage: The issue of whether that school should be integrated, or whether it should remain a Black college.

Shaffer: Yes, well, whether it should--really, both, yes. I mean, what should happen to it? Should it stay Black, or should it become part of the greater University of North Carolina system and be like the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill?

Lage: And was that more your feeling, that it should be?

Shaffer: Oh, I guess my approach was probably a little simplistic, but I thought you should admit people there without respect to race. I mean, that's what I thought. And you ought to do it the same way at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and you ought to do it the same way in Asheville. They're public schools, and why the devil would you have to even put your race down when you apply? So we disagreed on that, and I moved on. Then at the same time I sort of got out of politics in Fayetteville, sort of by unanimous consent, and so I moved on to something else.

Wife's Illness

Shaffer: Of course, shortly thereafter, my wife--her situation continued to deteriorate.

Lage: Did she have a long-term illness?

Shaffer: Yes, she had had illness for a long time, and she had a variety of things that were complications of complications.

Lage: This sounds like a hard time in your life right there.

Shaffer: It was sobering. Losing the mayoral race was the first thing I ever lost that I ever wanted to do, and that's sobering. And I probably would have been better off had I had that experience at a younger age. It's good to have that early on, I think. Maybe it isn't, I don't know. Then Betty's death, it was difficult for me. And for my sons Rob and David.

II THE SIERRA CLUB IN NORTH CAROLINA AND INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL CLUB

Outraged Over Logging in a Northwestern National Forest, and Joining the Sierra Club

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Lage: So at this particular point in your life, which was a difficult one, you became involved or more involved in the Sierra Club.

Shaffer: Well, I joined the club. I insist I joined in '68. Now the official records say I joined in '69, but I know how we kept records then, so I still think I'm right. And I guess a word or two about how I joined and why--

Lage: Yes, I think that's important.

Shaffer: My family, my wife and children, and I suppose I might as well admit it, my mother and my mother-in-law, took a trip in 1968 and we drove 11,759 miles and saw the wonders of this country, and touched into Mexico and touched into Canada.

Lage: Now when was that again?

Shaffer: In '68, summer of '68. And we had great fun doing this. I wrote off to everybody, all the national parks, all the chambers of commerce, all the state travel bureaus, everybody. Printed up postcards, sent them out, "Going to be there on a vacation in August. Send information." And I did this a year in advance, and we put up on the wall in our kitchen a map of the United States, and after dinner every evening we'd read some of these things and we each had our colored pen and we'd mark on the map if we found something we wanted to see. Of course, we ended up with a map that had more color on it than roads, and it became my task, eventually to make it into some order.

And we had a big Ford station wagon and we loaded into that and took off and did all these wondrous things. And it was an exposure to some things I had dreamed about seeing. It was the first time I saw the Grand Canyon, and it was the first time I saw

Yosemite, and it was the first time I saw the Southwest and all of its grandeur, and Olympic National Park, and on and on.

Lage: Did you focus on the natural areas, the parks?

Shaffer: Yes, we did, absolutely. We spent a little time in cities, but by far the majority of it was the natural wonders of the country. It's what I wanted to see, it's what my family wanted to see. It was a grand, grand, grand trip, one of the highlights of my life.

Going through the Northwest, we saw a national forest that looked to me like it had been bombed. I have never seen such a mess. And it made me mad. I said, "This is horrible to do this to land, a forest. This is awful." I was just outraged. Checked into a motel that night, read the local paper, and it said the Sierra Club had brought suit against the Forest Service for logging practices in this area, and I don't remember much more than that, but I said, "I don't know who the Sierra Club is, but they're right." And I went home and got the address of the Sierra Club from a Sierra Club book from the library and wrote to them and said, "What do you have to do to become a member?" and they sent me a--

Lage: Was that the first exposure to--

Shaffer: Yes, I didn't know who the Sierra Club was, had no idea. I may have had some vague notion of the books. I think my wife knew about Sierra Club books; she was a school teacher. I think that probably she's the one that knew about the books. She suggested this and got the address, and of course, that's still when you had to have somebody's signature [to become a member]. Well, for heaven's sakes, I didn't know anybody who was in the Sierra Club at all, and so I just sent it back with the assumption that they'd take my money, and they did. And I did it just like, sort of like my dad used to do I guess, and it was a good idea, "I'll send them a dollar," or, in that case, it was probably ten dollars, or whatever it was. Certainly, it was never in any intent I would ever go to a meeting.

Lage: You had no sense of the club as a bunch of local groups.

Shaffer: There wasn't any sense of that. At that point, I became a member of the Atlantic Chapter, which, of course, held its meetings in New York, which were not convenient to North Carolina. But I didn't want to go anyhow, so it didn't matter. I did get something from the Atlantic Chapter maybe once or twice a year that would sort of tell me that something was happening, but it was irrelevant to me. So that's how I joined.

LeConte (Carolina) Chapter, Forming a Group in Fayetteville, Becoming a Council Delegate, 1970

Shaffer: And then, to move through this quickly, of course, the LeConte Chapter, North and South Carolina, was formed in 1968 and 1969, and we started forming local groups, including one in Fayetteville, but I had not been involved at first.

Lage: So there were other people in the area who were--

Shaffer: Yes, by that time, the time we got ready to look at a local group in Fayetteville, I think there were fifteen people in Fayetteville that belonged to the Sierra Club, and the guy who pulled it together was in the army. He was a doctor, David Bingham was his name, a very interesting family, but I won't digress quite that far.

Lage: Was he a northerner?

Shaffer: He was from Connecticut. And you remember there was a lawyer out here--we don't need to put this in my oral history--

Lage: Stephen Bingham [young lawyer in the Bay Area who was involved in radical political action in the seventies]?

Shaffer: Yes, this was a brother of his, and another cousin or somebody was congressman from up there. Anyhow, very political, very active, very bright, wonderful fellow, and he wrote in and got the mailing list (there were like fifteen of us). He got us together first, but I was involved in helping get the local group started.

Then somewhere about that time, it was certainly before Betty died, I went to a chapter meeting, representing my local group, and they were talking about the need to have a council delegate that would really make a commitment to do this. We apparently sent a different delegate each time (the chapter wasn't that old), but they came out and came back home, and hadn't figured out why they were here [in San Francisco, at Sierra Club headquarters] yet, when they were going back home, and it was clear to everybody that what we were doing was not working. So they were looking for somebody, and somebody asked me if I'd do it and I said, "Yes, I can do that," and did, and so that was the beginning of that. That got me out here and that was the entree to all this that's followed out here.

Lage: So that was maybe 1970?

Shaffer: That would have been '70, I suppose, yes.

Lage: That was soon after you joined.

Shaffer: Yes. I think there were three council meetings [in San Francisco] before Betty died and I came to two of them, as I recall. I think that's right. And then, in the meantime, on the other end of the country, I guess I became group chair probably pretty quickly and I also started leading outings and going on outings.

Family Backpacking After Wife's Death, and Leading Club Outings

Shaffer: And my boys, by that time, were of an age when they really loved to backpack. They'd take a couple of buddies and we'd go backpacking. Some of this was I wanted to lead trips because "there's nobody going where I want to go, so let's do that," and so I did

that. And then when Betty died, frankly, the backpacking was a mechanism for the boys and I to be together in a very healing kind of way. It was something we could do together that we all wanted to do. I'd pick them up after school on Friday with two buddies and the five of us would head for the mountains. I'd have their packs and everybody's junk in the back of the station wagon and ride back into Fayetteville Sunday evening with four kids that were sound asleep and me trying to stay awake. But it was wonderful, and it was one of the things we could do together. I found very quickly that being a single parent, you think, "I'm going to really dedicate a lot of time to this," but you spend a lot of time by yourself, because they've got their mind on other things.

Lage: Were they teenagers?

Shaffer: Well, they were twelve and fourteen when their mom died, so, yes. So then I got to know a lot more Sierra Club people, and I got active on the chapter level there as things opened up, and I got interested and did some lobbying on the Eastern Wilderness Bill.

Lage: One thing certainly led to another. Did many people backpack?

Shaffer: Oh yes.

Lage: That wasn't unusual, the backpacking.

Shaffer: No. We had a good system in the chapter then. The groups would have outings, listed them in the chapter newsletter, so on any given weekend you had a choice of three or four different hikes to go on. You quickly got to know who you really wanted to hike with; not so much their personality, but their style of hiking. I mean, there's some who like to suffer. I like to--I'm a--. Ed Easton and I used to talk about having a Ridge Walker and Valley Amblers' Section. I think if we had had one, that's what I would have belonged to. I like to go out and experience wilderness; I didn't want to challenge it.

Lage: When you hiked with the boys, were they on club trips, or were these--

Shaffer: Oh yes. The only times we went hiking that weren't on club trips was when we'd go on scouting trips. And we'd go out and scout some things and then we'd run the trips. And they got to the point where, you know, I'd give them some responsibilities. I'd be the trip leader and they'd have some responsibilities, and they felt good about that, and they'd bring their buddies along, and it was a good experience. And it got me much more involved with the club.

Chapter Leaders: Ed Easton, Ann Taylor, Ted Snyder

Lage: Now who were the chapter leaders at that time? You mentioned Ed Easton.

Shaffer: Well, yes. The people who were--again, role models is probably the wrong word--but the initial people who helped me see what--

Lage: Mentors is really the word to use, I think.

Shaffer: Mentors is the word to use. Ted Snyder, obviously. Ted was the first chapter chair. Ted and I weren't close in the sense that we were buddies, but I sure learned a whole lot from Ted. Then you have Easton. And Ann Taylor, who is a wonderful woman who was chapter chair. I learned from her how you get things done without running over people, how you get things done without bruising people a lot.

Lage: Now what if I ask you how you do that? Are you going to--

Shaffer: Well, I hope I'm better at that than I used to be. I mean, it used to be that I was--you know, if I saw something that needed to be done and I wanted to do it and people thought it was a good idea, I went about doing it. And occasionally, you'd bump a few people out of the way getting there.

Lage: And how did Ann Taylor do it? What did you learn from her?

Shaffer: Well, more conversations, more talking to people, more building a consensus, more building a constituency, more developing an idea and letting it become other people's ideas and then letting them say, "Gee, why don't we do this?" And I looked at that, and I said, "Now that's a good idea," and it really is a good idea. It works much better if you have a really good idea and you somehow arrange for a group of people to reach the point where they think it's their really good idea and that they really want to do something about it. Then you maybe just kind of go along with them, or maybe kind of help it, getting over the rough spots, or not missing a bend in the trail, but you play a role that is not out front.

Opposing an Oil Refinery in Wilmington, 1979-1980

Shaffer: I can tell you the refinery story in North Carolina at an appropriate point, and that was certainly a case in point of doing that.

Lage: What date was that?

Shaffer: I don't know. I really don't know. I could find out.

Lage: But you don't know the decade even?

Shaffer: Well, yes, it would have been in the--wait a minute. Well, maybe I don't know the decade. It would have been about '80, I would suppose, 1979 and 1980.

[Added during interviewee review: A large oil refinery was proposed for the Wilmington area, at the mouth of the Cape Fear River as it meets the ocean there. The chapter was opposed, and they asked me if I could go and make a statement at the public hearing that was going to be held. It was on Good Friday, and there was a every heavy rain all evening.]

I spoke first, then each of the twenty-five or so other folks got up and each said about the same thing. I'm opposed to this, it is a very bad idea, and they would give some reasons and say, "But I know it is going to happen." After everyone spoke I asked the hearing officer for one more minute. I turned to the audience and said, "You each have said this is going to happen as bad as it is. Well, it isn't because there is going to be an organization formed right here in Wilmington that will stop it, and our first meeting is just outside that door in five minutes. We will get everyone's name and phone number and pick a date for our next meeting, which will be the beginning of the end for this refinery." So we met there in the hall, and got the list made up, and set a date. Certainly no one, especially me, had expected to do this, but it just seemed a good idea.

At the date set about fifty or sixty people showed up. They wanted me to be the chair, but I pointed out the person needed to be local. Well, I just kept telling them they could do it, and within a year they had two thousand members in a town where the Sierra Club group was maybe twenty-five. We purchased every billboard in the beach area for the next summer, with money raised locally, and put the message on them, "The refinery, the more you know about it, the less you are going to like it." That's all. And the tourists asked and asked. By the end of the summer even the Chamber of Commerce was against the refinery. The chair of the group, Nolen O'Neil, went on to be a county commissioner. All I did was make suggestions, encourage, help them find resources. And the lesson to me was clear. Those two thousand people did things that I never could have done, and did them better. And after that first public hearing, I never spoke publicly on the subject again, was never carrying the flag. It was a good lesson for me. There is no oil refinery on the North Carolina Coast.]

But the Sierra Club life went in two directions. One was the North Carolina life, and then the other was the national life, and I jumped into it with some enthusiasm, obviously. Do you want to talk about the North Carolina end first, or this end?

Lage: Yes, maybe North Carolina makes more sense, to kind of wrap that up, although I assume you've had some connection with them even as you got more involved nationally, or is that a wrong assumption?

Shaffer: Oh no. I still go to meetings. I missed for the first time my chapter annual meeting this year. So, yes, I still go to group meetings and chapter meetings. I've always been amused when I was a director and people were talking about the grassroots and what it's like and so on and so forth, because most years that I was a director, I went to more grassroots meetings than I went to national meetings.

That probably is the exception, but I did because A, I like it and I enjoy it; B, that's where I get my batteries charged. You don't charge batteries here very well in this [the national] level. And third is that--well, I don't pose a third. You get things done, it's fun, and you charge your batteries.

Lobbying for the Eastern Wilderness Bill

Shaffer: In North Carolina what I did, I guess, I moved into being conservation chair on the chapter level. I served on the chapter ExCom [executive committee] a number of years. I became the vice chair of the chapter. I did a good deal of lobbying while I was conservation chair. I had done lobbying before, through city government. I'd been to Washington, I knew where the buildings were, I knew how you found your way around, so I had a hand up on that, and--

Lage: What kind of issues were they? Were they issues that the conservation committee had decided were key to the Sierra Club to get--

Shaffer: Well, strip-mining was a big deal then, and the legislation was up, and so you lobbied for that.

The Eastern Wilderness Bill was the first big issue I worked on, and I'm not sure what year that was [1974], but it was early on in this, and I went to Washington to lobby for that. It was kind of an interesting experience for me and for the Sierra Club's introduction to me. I still have the letter that Brock [Evans] wrote after I was up there.

The situation was that there had been this ongoing discussion about what wilderness was, and our enemies wished to not put anything into wilderness areas that had ever been touched in any way by anybody, which meant most everything in the East was no longer eligible to be wilderness. And, of course, we were arguing if it looks like wilderness, smells like wilderness, feels like wilderness, has the characteristics of wilderness, it's obvious it is wilderness and it should be included. And that was the big philosophical issue, and then there was the usual issue of, well, which areas go inside and are included in the bill, and which aren't, and so on.

Lage: Was the conservation movement itself divided over this definition of wilderness?

Shaffer: No. We were like we are now. I mean, we wanted a broad definition of wilderness, but the folks who were desiring not to have things be--to use their expression, "locked up" as wilderness--included in the bill, made the argument that, "How can you put this in the wilderness bill? It's clearly not wilderness; there's been a sawmill right down the road here in this place a hundred years ago, but you can still see where it was." And we said, "Well, you know, in a hundred years you won't be able to see where it is. Just put it in the bill and wait a minute."

So I went up and the House Interim Committee's Subcommittee on Public Lands had decided, the week I went up there and the weekend before, to pass a bill out of the subcommittee but they had done it in a very disorderly manner. This had been ongoing for some time and it was right before Thanksgiving weekend and everybody was in a hurry to get out of town. There was only about a little better than half the committee there, and they sort of said to the staff, "Well, put this in and don't put that in," in a conversational way and they all left town and left it to the staff to write what was going to be the Eastern Wilderness Bill.

So I am up there the next week lobbying for this along with a group, a typical lobbying week thing that we were doing, but we didn't have a copy of the bill because nobody had a copy of the bill. Well, the third person I went to see was my congressman, Charlie Rose. Charlie and I have been friends since forever. Actually, he worked for me when I ran for city council, and he was a law student at that time.

So he was then my congressman and he said, "Well, Denny, how can you be up here lobbying for a bill when you don't have the bill?" And I said, "Well, it's not easy, but this is the problem." And he said, "Well, let me get somebody on the phone." So he went on the phone and called over there to the subcommittee staff and talked to a fellow whose name happened to be Shaffer, who was a staff man in charge of getting this bill out, and explained to him that I was a constituent, did not mention the Sierra Club, and that I had a great interest in this matter and that I was there and I wanted a copy of the bill. And the guy says, "Well, you know, we can't do that," and Charlie says to him, "Well, why can't you? I mean, you know, what's the secret here?"

Well, it ended up that I had an appointment to go talk to this fellow, and so I went into his office. It was about a third the size of this room, and behind his desk was a great big picture of the great huge strip-mining shovel that I think they called the Gem of Egypt, as I recall. Great, big, huge thing with three or four hundred people standing in the shovel and there's no doubt in my mind he was one of those people, and I thought, "Oh, Lord."

Lage: I thought you were going to say there was this beautiful Ansel Adams photograph.

Shaffer: No, wrong. And I said, "Oh Lord, I am in deep trouble." So I went in and I explained to him who I was and that I had this interest and that I would be interested in knowing what the bill was going to look like and what was in and what was out. He started to explain to me that, in fact, that he had just gotten the bill on his desk and they just finished typing it, but that it hadn't even been seen by the subcommittee yet, and that he clearly couldn't give it to me.

And at that point, the phone rings, and I sat there for five minutes while he talks on the phone. He hangs up, and we start talking again, get about four sentences out, the phone rings. And we wait five minutes and we start talking again, but by the time I get a question or two out, the phone rings. Well, about the fifth phone call, after about the third question, as he's talking on the phone, he's reading, and he sees something so he hands it over to me and says, "Here," sort of points to there as sort of the answer to one of my questions. So I get my pencil and paper out and I write that down, but then I keep sort of shuffling through it and writing down other things of interest and he's on the phone and he's going "No, no, no, you can't do that." But he's on the phone, so I keep doing it.

And so he finally hangs up, and he says, "What do you want this for?" I said, "Well, the truth of the matter is," I said, "I'm just very interested, and listen, I'm not going to be back up here and you're going to have this thing out in a week, or whatever, and I don't want to come back up and I just--." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a copy of it, if you're going to keep it to yourself." I said, "Fine."

Lage: Did he know you were Sierra Club?

Shaffer: No.

Lage: He knew you were a friend of Charlie Rose.

Shaffer: He just knew I was a constituent of Charlie Rose, who had sent me over. So he runs me off a copy of the Eastern Wilderness Bill. So I go back to the office, and I go in and it's typical of that office--it's still the same way, crazy, people all over the place.

Lage: Brock Evans' office in Washington.

Shaffer: Brock Evans is in charge. I had met Brock once or twice before, and I go in and I said, "I want to see Brock." "Well, he's busy." I said, "I don't care if he's busy, I want to see him. I got the Eastern Wilderness Bill." And they said, "No, you don't have the Eastern Wilderness Bill; it's not been released yet. It won't be out until next week." I said, "I got the Eastern Wilderness Bill, and I want to see Brock." "Well, he's tied up."

Well, finally they got me in to see him and I went through this conversation with Brock five times. "Brock, I've got the Eastern Wilderness Bill." "No, you don't have the Eastern Wilderness Bill. The staff's got it. It won't be out." Finally I just, in exasperation, laid it down in front of him and said, "Read the damn thing! The Eastern Wilderness Bill!" He looks at it and says, "My God! It's the Eastern Wilderness Bill!" I said, "Yes, Brock, it's the Eastern Wilderness Bill!"

And so, from there on in, of course, we had a different kind of approach to the thing because we now knew what was in and what was out, and what we were lobbying for, and what we should be working on, what we were defending, and what we were trying to add, and so on.

Lage: Did you find any surprises in it?

Shaffer: Yes, it had some but it was not violently surprising. I mean, it was more informative. There were, like it is always, there were those things you were confident were going to go in and those you thought probably wouldn't go in. And then there were the gray areas that you hoped would go in and might not, and those were the areas, really, that you got the education in to see which way they fell.

But it was a good experience and I enjoyed it and I, of course, saw all the congressmen from North and South Carolina while I was up there. Appointments had been made for me by members from each district. I found somebody in the district to call and make the appointment rather than doing it myself. So it was very interesting and of course Brock, after it was all over, Brock wrote this letter to Ed Easton, who was then chapter chair, which basically said, you know, "Now this is an unusual fellow you sent up here. He did a little bit more than what we expected to have happen," and it was a very nice letter which, as I said, I still somewhere have. So that was my introduction to all of that back there.

Lage: Lobbying at the federal level.

Shaffer: The lobbying and so on, and getting introduced to the people in the club and, frankly, some of those people getting introduced to me, figuring out who I was. And so I

piddled around with that kind of stuff for a good while, but basically my interests more and more drifted out here [to national headquarters in San Francisco].

First Impressions of the National Sierra Club: Problems with Membership Development, Management, and Fund-raising

- Shaffer: The first meeting I came to out here was, without a doubt, one of the most--I want to say I was shocked, maybe that's too strong a word. I was sure amazed that this powerful organization which was viewed as being so wise and old and right in its thinking and effective, in some levels was just really quite primitive. And the first time I was here, I realized that we didn't have any membership development staff.
- Lage: You realized that rather quickly.
- Shaffer: Yes, the first meeting I'm out here.
- Lage: Let's think when the first meeting would have been. Was this a board meeting or a council meeting?
- Shaffer: It was a circus meeting [a national meeting of the club board of directors, council, regional conservation committee caucus, and many issue committees].
- Lage: Circus meeting, and it was in '70.
- Shaffer: It was here, could have been in '70.
- Lage: So it was shortly after David Brower had left as executive director.
- Shaffer: Well, see, I don't know about that because he was gone.
- Lage: But that was '69, May '69, when he left.
- Shaffer: We were still--when did we move out of the old Mills Tower?
- Lage: I don't remember the date, '73 or '74 perhaps [1975].
- Shaffer: We were still in Mills Tower, so whenever that was.
- Lage: That's interesting that you thought about membership development right away.
- Shaffer: Well, I thought about three things. That was the first one. I mean, you cannot have a church without an evangelist, you cannot have an army without a recruiting department. How could you have a Sierra Club with nobody charged with the responsibility of getting members?
- Lage: Had you worked on that at the local level?

Shaffer: No.

Lage: It hadn't been something you'd been involved with, then, for your chapter.

Shaffer: No, but it just seemed so obvious to me. I mean, if you can get this power simply by people who are willing to go to the library and find out where the devil you are and write to you and say, "Can I join?" can you imagine what would happen if you did it the other way around, if you found these people and asked them to join?

I suppose it came out of several things. It came out of my business background. The way you get customers is you try to get customers. I mean, you can open up a store and wait until they bounce into your front door by mistake, but there are more effective ways of doing it. And it came out of the movement, the civil rights movement. I mean, the power comes from a mass of people who are like-minded, who share something, and work together, and move forward. And the bigger the mass, the more committed it is, the more power you have.

And it just amazed me that these people, who were clearly very effective and clearly very bright, didn't seem to be very much interested in that. If somebody happened to join, that was nice, but if they didn't, well, "We're doing very well, thank you." And I said to myself, "This is nuts," and I asked questions and there was, in the member services department, a fellow who spent maybe half of his time doing something on membership development. And they had one brochure at that time. It was that brown on brown, "Why the Sierra Club?"

Lage: Of course the club thought it was growing fast at the time.

Shaffer: My perspective was clearly so much different from somebody's perspective who had been here for twenty years. I walked in the door and looked at it, and said, "Well isn't this interesting?"

Now let me--I should have said this first--I was immensely impressed by what I saw that was positive. I was immensely impressed by the dedication, and the roots, the background, the fact that we had this history behind us, this credibility behind us, the competence, the dedication, all that tremendously impressing. But the way my mind works is I look at something and say, "Wow, that's great. How could it be better? I mean, if it's this good like this, imagine what would happen if--" And the first thing was, "Imagine what would happen if you really got serious about getting members in this organization."

Second thing was, it was clear to me there wasn't anybody around who wanted to be boss when they were a little boy or a little girl, that they were people who wanted to be an attorney when they grew up, or they wanted to be whatever, a doctor, when they grew up. But there was no one who really, I'll say this carefully, that really valued the skills of management like they valued the skills of surgery or like they valued the skills of litigation. They somehow didn't see, didn't understand, didn't care about that. In fact, probably, in some of the leaders, there were negative feelings about it. Some professors who looked at the administration as being sort of not understanding and if you let the professors run the college we wouldn't have all these problems, or doctors who said if

you'd get these hospital administrators out of here and let the doctors run the hospital, you wouldn't have any of these problems.

So some of them looked at people who had real management and administration skills as sort of a pain in the neck, as opposed--And I said to myself, "This is nuts! You cannot run this organization, and you cannot continue to grow it without somebody who knows how to solve these kinds of problems and wants to do it."

Now, there was Mike McCloskey. Mike McCloskey, clearly one of the most brilliant, fine human beings I've ever known, who found a way to learn management skills, even though that ain't what he wanted to do, it wasn't what his background was, it wasn't where his natural inclinations went. But he was there and the job needed to be done, and if there's ever been anybody who defines a good soldier, it's Mike, and so he figured out ways to do that. But it was always painful to him and difficult to him, and I just looked at him and said, "My God, why don't they go get somebody who's really good at this who is also sensitive and caring about what we do, but who really knows how to do it. Let them run the shop behind Mike."

Lage: Now, it sounds like you came here and had this instantaneous--

Shaffer: Well, I was here three days.

Lage: [laughs]

Shaffer: Well, it was.

Lage: It didn't take long for you to see this, it seems.

Shaffer: Well, it's obvious, and the third one--

Lage: But, to me, it's amazing that you would notice--I want you to go to the third one, but first--the club is so complex that for somebody to come in to their first--

Shaffer: Oh, but the issue's so big. I mean, this is sort of like walking in a store where they don't have any clerks. I mean, you say, "Well, this is a nice store. They've got good merchandise, they've got nice stock, it's a great location, ain't got nobody to wait on you." It was that sort of a feeling. I mean, here is this great big organization trying to change the value systems of the world, and they haven't got anybody charged with asking people to join? I mean, this is so fundamental. Here is a major corporation whose calling is management.

##[2B]

Shaffer: Well, the third one was fund-raising. I met Denny Wilcher. What a wonderful man! But it became clear to me in about three minutes that all of the fund-raising of the Sierra Club was in three by five cards in this guy's back pocket, if they're there at all. I mean, that would be the most you could hope for. If there were that kind of records you were lucky, but the truth of the matter is you suspected that there were probably a lot of important--well, there probably was a lot of important information on donors and prospective donors and so forth that was written down nowhere.

Lage: And apparently Denny Wilcher brought a new level of fund-raising to the club.

Shaffer: Oh, I think that's probably right. I think that's probably right.

So I looked at these three things and I said, "Okay"--I must say, I will say, it was a highly politicized fund-raising. There was a lot of playing issues against issues and organizations against organizations. I mean, here is a donor. Will this donor be a donor to the legal defense fund, or will this donor be a donor to the club, through the foundation, or whatever. And then you had--

Lage: You mean our own family organizations, foundations?

Shaffer: Oh yes, a lot of politicizing in that. I mean, there was a lot of--still is, for that matter--a lot of thought given to who's going to get to use the money for their issue.

But I went home, and I'm flying home, and I think about it, and I'm thinking about these three things, and if they ever got their fund-raising really put together in a real professional manner, and if they got some real management in here, and if they really got serious about asking people in an aggressive way to become members, this organization would be a lot more effective. The next thought that occurred to me was that I thought I knew how to do all those things, and that I probably could contribute a little bit of time to this organization and find it very rewarding, if the organization was interested in me doing it.

A Driven Person: Finding Time for Business and the Club

Lage: Now are you still running your business with one hand?

Shaffer: Yes.

Lage: Okay, I just wanted to make it clear because--

Shaffer: Maybe it is fair to say--you probably are beginning to get a clue to this: I'm a fairly driven person. I like to think that I'm much more relaxed now than I used to be, and I think I am, but I still--I value time. Time is such a wonderful gift, and I have a hard time not doing something with it.

One of the current officers of the club talked to me one time about some things I was scheduled to do and she said, "Denny, you can't do that," that one person can't do that. And, in exasperation, I tried to explain to her that some people can do more than other people can do, and it's for a variety of reasons, and certainly one of the reasons is the amount of time you spend doing it.

I spend long days, and enjoy doing that, and when I wanted to make money I did that, you see. It was five years before I took off a weekend. I'm not talking about vacation, I'm talking about a weekend. When I came out of college and went into business, it was five years before I took off a weekend. No vacation, didn't take off a weekend, because

this is what I wanted to do. And I was at work at seven in the morning and if I got home at eight in the evening, that was a normal day.

A lot of times when I was doing this other stuff I'd travel and be gone many times. We had plants in--I'm digressing, but just to give you some idea of my nature--I mean, we had businesses two hundred miles away in Charleston, South Carolina, and two hundred miles the other way in Lynchburg, Virginia. I'd get up in the morning and drive to Charleston, South Carolina, two hundred miles, work all day, and drive home. And then the next day I would work in Fayetteville, and the next day I'd get the car and drive to Lynchburg and work all day and drive back, you know, getting in at two o'clock in the morning and go to work at eight the next morning. So I can tune back from that a lot and still have a lot of productive time. Maybe that's helpful, maybe it isn't.

Lage: No, it is, because the way you have told the story, it's almost as if you'd dropped your business and went into the city council and then the Sierra Club. How much did you stay involved with your business?

Shaffer: What happened in my business world, and maybe I can deal with that in just a couple of sentences--. When Betty got really sick, I got rid of the business interests I had out of town and bought out my partners that were in town. That would have been in '66. So I owned what was local, totally, myself, and got rid of everything else, so that it was much simpler; I didn't have a lot of travelling to do. I then quickly got in some other businesses, but they were relatively close by; I got in the nursery business somewhere in there, for example, which I was in for seven years, a plant nursery, not children. That came out of this consulting stuff I was doing, and one thing led to another.

Lage: Was that the Shaffer Management Company?

Shaffer: Yes. That was basically set up to provide management services. Up until that time, I found I gave a lot of people advice. You know, they were in small business, they were in trouble, and they'd come to me, and I'd look at it and say, "Well, this is what's wrong." And it occurred to me that doing this in a more formal way is a good idea. I hate to say I did consulting work because consulting has such a bad name. There are so many people who list themselves as consultants because they don't have a job. I don't mean to step on people's toes, but it's true. But I did do that and--

Lage: You were used to doing with businesses what you thought maybe the Sierra Club could do.

Shaffer: Well, it was the same sort of thing. There was a chain of dry cleaning plants, they were on the American Exchange, publicly financed, they had a hundred dry cleaning plants from Miami to Pittsburgh, from the coast to the Mississippi River. They were doing very well, and all of the sudden, they started losing money. And they hired me and three other people to come in and figure out, "What's wrong? What can we do about this?" And so I did. It's that kind of background I bring into this sort of thing, and so it is just my nature to walk in and look at something like that.

Lage: I see. So that explains why in three days you could kind of take stock of the Sierra Club.

Shaffer: Yes. I mean, I remember going with Roger Craver, who is one of the great people in the world, and we'll, I'm sure, get into fund-raising and all of that later, but he and I were on vacation and we walked into the Flying Bear Candy Shop in Fort Bragg, California. And we looked at this wonderful operation, wonderful candy they were making, and it was clear to me that he and I were thinking the same thoughts, which was, "Boy, you could take what they've got here and merchandise this thing, and they could do millions and millions of dollars worth of business." And then, of course, we both realized that they really didn't want to do that and we would be doing them no favor, and besides, we didn't want to be in the candy business, but you just think that way. You know, you just think that way, and so, yes, I came out here and I looked at that and that's--so anyhow, that's that. Where does that have us?

Lage: Okay, it may be a good point to stop, because we've built a great background picture and we've shown three areas you thought the club needed, and to me, that starts to sound like the beginning of some big topics that maybe we shouldn't start on today, that we can start on next time.

Shaffer: Well, that's fine. And I can think about it.

Lage: Yes, yes. And this is the early seventies. We're going to see what you did with these topics through the council, I'm guessing, in part. When did you get on the board? Now let me look at our dates--'77 you went on the board.

Shaffer: Yes, and I'd try to write that down, because I have a terrible time with dates.

Lage: I have 1977 to May '91, with a year off, 1984-1985.

Shaffer: I was trying to remember who was president before Brant Calkin and Kent Gill. It was the guy who was in favor of nuclear energy.

Lage: Larry Moss [president, 1973-1974].

Shaffer: I came out here when Larry was president, but it was Brant Calkin who put me in charge of membership development. He gave me chairmanship of the membership committee. Well, we'll get into that later; we're getting ahead of the story.

Lage: Brant was just a one-year president. I can get those dates. It might have been '76-77.

Shaffer: All right, and when Brant resigned, I filled his seat. That's how I got on the board. When Brant resigned, the directors appointed me to the board.

It may be that I have got this a little off on--it's hard for me to remember. I'd have sworn I thought I came out here while Betty was still alive, but I may not have. I know I was coming out here when Kent [Gill] was president [1974-1976]. I know I was here when Larry Moss was, because I remember the debate over nuclear energy because that was the meeting at which I met David Brower. I had not met David before. That was memorable.

Lage: Do you remember Phil Berry being president? That was 1969-'71.

Shaffer: No. I think Ray Sherwin was president [1971-1973] during my first visit to San Francisco.

[End Interview]

III WORK ON MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

[Interview 2: November 23, 1993]##

Finding a Focus: State of the Club's Membership Development in the Mid-Seventies

Lage: Today is November 23, 1993, and this is the second interview with Denny Shaffer on the Sierra Club. We've just been talking about organization and how to proceed. Last time we finished, you gave a picture of having come to San Francisco for the first time and having the realization that the Sierra Club needed work.

Shaffer: [laughs]

Lage: In fund-raising, membership, and management, it seems to me.

Shaffer: I think that's right. It was clear to me that this was a dynamic organization doing wonderful things, that could do more dynamic things even more wonderfully if it got its act together in the areas that you mentioned. They were things which I had some knowledge of, and so it seemed to me that focusing on that, as opposed to deciding to head another campaign of some kind, that that was better focus for me, so that's what I chose to do.

Lage: So once you see an area of need in the club, how do you work your way into--or how did you--let's not talk in the abstract--work your way into becoming a presence?

Shaffer: I think that there's one thing very clear about the club, and that is if there's a vacuum, people can rush in and fill it, and at least initially, nobody objects to that, as long as it's not viewed as somebody else's turf or whatever. And believe me, this was nobody's turf. Membership development at that time was an area that was just almost being ignored. I couldn't believe it: here was a church without evangelists; here was an army without a recruiting department.

Lage: It just happened, people just joined?

Shaffer: It just happened. At that time, there was no person in the Sierra Club, no person on the staff, whose responsibility, total responsibility or focus was getting members for the Sierra Club. There was a man whose name was, as I recall, George Denise, who spent perhaps a third of his time doing that, and the other two-thirds as sort of taking care of records and that sort of thing. The only promotional material that we had was one brochure--"Why the Sierra Club?" it said on the front in blazing brown on beige, and it was an interesting document. It told of the history of the club and so on and so forth, but it was not much of a sales document. It was beautifully done, and I hope we've preserved it--I've got some; I hope they're preserved in other places. But there was no sense on the staff side of the club of really reaching out.

And on the volunteer side, there was a membership committee that had been chaired by Sandy Tepfer, and then it was being chaired by Bob Norman when I came along, both of whom are wonderful men who are still active in the club. Sandy went on to become a longtime director and so on--dedicated, knowledgeable people, but both professors. Bob's a math professor and Sandy was, I believe, biology, or in the sciences certainly. So they took their focus more internally, saw themselves as problem-solvers. If the mailing lists weren't right or the membership chairs didn't know what was going on or whatever, they provided some really good services of that type.

They occasionally tried outreach. They did a newspaper ad, for example, one time, which they tested in newspapers across the country, maybe four or five, that asked people to join the Sierra Club. And they did it themselves. I think in fairness, it would have not sold Coca-Cola to a thirsty man. I mean, it was--[laughs] that wasn't their strong suit. Instead of getting the expertise, they sort of did it themselves.

Well, it didn't work, and so then folks decided, well, advertising isn't going to work, so we can forget about that.

Lage: Now, Dave Brower, of course, had done some of this with a flair.

Shaffer: Well, yes. But Brower's flair was more to raise high the issues and to raise high the positions of the club, and to cry a battle cry. And that was a good idea, and it made the name of the Sierra Club something people understood. It's an awful lot easier to go out and, if you will excuse the commercial language, to sell a product, to sell a membership in an organization that somebody's heard of, and heard of in a way that's positive.

So David's dynamic work in that area had laid out there this potential for somebody to come along and say, "Okay, now let's act upon that to build the organization." That was so obvious to me, and I just knew it. It doesn't matter what we do; it's going to work. Now, some things are going to work better than others, and they're all going to have to be done rather well, but this is going to work.

Testing a New Approach

Lage: You didn't need a business plan to test it?

Shaffer: No, you didn't need to test this. How could you--no. Well, I'll give you an example. I think it was the second meeting of the board of directors that I attended, I asked to be on the agenda, with a membership development concept, project. I sat down with a friend of mine in Fayetteville, a guy named Bill Raue, who was my dear friend and who had an advertising agency in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and who happened to be one of the most brilliant people I've ever met in my life in the area of concepts and promotion, and is very sympathetic with social change and so on. So we were friends. He also had worked for me professionally in businesses I had, and he was good.

So I sat down and I talked with him and said, "Bill, this is nuts." So we sat down and we developed a point-of-sale brochure, with a mock-up in color and a counter display to hold the brochures and so on. He did the graphics and concepts. I wrote the copy. So I got on the agenda, and came out and made this presentation. I said, "This is what you need to do. This will work. It won't cost very much." I don't remember how much, but it was not very much, a little bit of money. And to do a printing of this.

It introduced several ideas which were revolutionary. One, it was in color, which my goodness, was revolution in itself. Secondly, it invoked humor. The brochure's headline said, "A bunch of crazy people want you to join them." So it was different than "Why the Sierra Club?", which was fine if somebody had asked the question. If somebody wanted to know, then they might open it up. But this was provocative, sitting on a counter, and people thought, "Well, this--who, what, why?" And so they opened it up, and there was something to catch you. And then it went in and talked about, crazy enough to think that clean air is for all of us, and so on, and then led into the fact that you could be part of this and make this kind of difference, too. [See appendix for copy of club brochures.]

Well, the board allocated a small amount of money to test it. I took that small amount of money and I went to half a dozen chapters on my own, with no authorization whatsoever, and said, "We're going to do this, and we'd like you to participate, and all you have to do is pay half the cost." And they agreed to do this, plus they agreed to be the ones to place these things and replenish the folders in the brochures in the stands.

Lage: What chapters did you pick?

Shaffer: Oh, good question. Well, of course North Carolina, which was then the Le Conte Chapter, which was North and South Carolina. Oh, Ann, I'm not sure I could remember. But they were scattered around. There was one from California and there was one from the Midwest, and there was one from the south, south meaning below South Carolina, down there somewhere. [laughs] And I think maybe four others.

So anyhow, by doing this, I accomplished two things. First of all, now I had twice as much money. So I printed three times as many brochures, because as you know with printing, the more you print, the cheaper they are per piece. So I ended up printing three times more than anybody had said I could print. But I figured, who's going to complain? This is not a bad idea, nobody's going to shoot me for this. And then I got the people out there to commit themselves to going to stores, talking to people, putting them out there.

Well, you can imagine that it worked. And it worked spectacularly well. I am confident we have never gotten as much return on the dollar in any membership project since then, just because there was nothing out there. It was new, it was attractive, you had members

out there on the ground, and it set a precedent that we have forgotten about a number of times since then, which is the best way to do this--membership, fund-raising, whatever--the best way to do it is to get people who are the best you can to put together the product. Get the volunteer, grassroots people involved and interested in it so that you can take delivery out there. You cannot make this stuff work from an office. You've got to have people out there. And we did that, and it worked dramatically.

Lage: Do you remember when this was? Was this shortly after your first trip to San Francisco?

Shaffer: I think it was the second meeting I came to.

Lage: Like '72 or '73?

Shaffer: Yes.

The Board's Reaction: Fear of Being Commercial, and Resistance to New Ideas

Lage: And there wasn't a lot of discussion about the content of the brochure--?

Shaffer: Yes, people were offended by it. They thought it was smart-alecky, which it was.

Lage: You mean people on the board?

Shaffer: People on the board. They were offended--well, they were offended by it being in color. They were offended by it being commercial. One of the strains that I have fought all the way through for twenty years is the objection to using commercial ideas to build the Sierra Club, and/or to win conservation battles. I've done it both ways. I've used commercial ways to go out there; I've used billboards to win conservation battles. [laughs]

Lage: So there's sort of an anti-commercial feeling throughout the leadership?

Shaffer: Oh, absolutely, yes. And so one of the things that I had to--well, I'll give you another example. About six months later, I had developed by then another idea. The club was looking for money, and I said, "Well, here's the way to make some money, and it's a good way to get the message out there. Why don't we do recordings of native music, if you will, folk music of an area?" So I set it up to do one with the music of Appalachia, and contacted--all the music is in the public domain, so you don't pay anything for the music to start with. The music's free.

So I went out and found the folk musicians who I had heard of, and they were all very sympathetic with the Sierra Club, if they'd heard of us, and if they hadn't, I explained it to them, and they kind of liked it, and so that was a good idea. And I cut a deal with them, "If I do this, will you be happy to do it and me not pay you, except that I will pay you so much per record we sell?" And little bits of money, but yes, they said that would be fine, they'd like to do that.

So then I found the guy out in Tennessee that pressed out records for a living, a small recording company, and priced out what it would cost to do. And of course, this was back in the days of the big records, you know--

Lage: Thirty-three LPs.

Shaffer: That's right, great big things. So I said, "Now, but it needs something else." So I contacted Annie Dillard, who was fresh off of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and said to her--I had never met her--but I got her on the phone, talked to her, lovely lady. And I explained to her what I was doing, and that I was wanting to know if she would write some stuff that we could put in the middle of this record album, sort of sew it in so that you would be buying not only this music, but you would be reading this message of the earth there, if you would. And then at the end, of course, we would have a punch line, which was, "This is the Sierra Club, this is what we care about, and you can be part of this," but it basically was a fund-raising idea.

So I brought it to the board and said, "This is--" and I had it all figured out--

Lage: You got it all worked out before you brought it to the board?

Shaffer: Oh, yes. I never asked anybody in San Francisco what they thought of this, because I figured, well, what's wrong with this? So I brought it out, [laughing] got on the agenda, and it was a little bit like I was speaking in a foreign language. They were not offended by the idea, but they could not think of any reason in God's earth why we'd want to do this. We did put out books, but we had decided to do that, and that was okay. But why records, and how would we sell them? And so I explained to them how we would sell them. And we only had to sell--

Lage: Were you thinking of working it into the book program?

Shaffer: Well, that was one of the ways, and that was one of the ideas of getting Annie Dillard in the middle, so that you could get reviews not only in the music columns, but you could get reviews in the literary column, so you've got two ways to go to the newspaper and get your--it all made sense to me. It was a good idea, was the reason it made sense to me. It was a good idea.

Well, after much debate, they decided that if I wanted to do this, that I should do it, and that I should share the profits with the Sierra Club. I said, "No, I'm not going to do that, because I'm going to make money. I don't want to come to the Sierra Club and make money out of this, because I know how to make money. That's not why I'm here. Why I'm here is to help the Sierra Club. If I come out here and start profiting personally, then I'm going to get viewed in a context I do not wish to be viewed, so I'm not going to do that." So we didn't do it.

About two months later, the guy who made the recordings in Tennessee went to National Geographic with my idea, and they said, "What a good idea!" So National Geographic did it, did the whole series, they went for the series around the country, and they have come back with it in CDs a second time and have made more money off of it a second time. So it was a good idea. But the board saw it as just, "Why would we do this?" It was outside of the vision of folks at that time. It wasn't what we did.

And it was a very educational process to me to realize how bound in tradition the organization was, that there was a resistance to new ideas, there was some inertia, that there was a language barrier that if you talked promotion and fund-raising and commercial ideas, that there really was a language barrier. So it was very helpful to me --

Lage: You were learning about the club, and they were probably learning about you.

Shaffer: Oh, yes. After my first experiences with the board of directors, I just sort of went off and scratched my head and tried to figure out what happened, because I had been accustomed-- I cannot think of another group of people that I could have made that presentation to that wouldn't have bought it. I mean, at that time, I can't imagine anybody else that I could have gone to that would not have said, "This is a good idea."

Lage: But it does sound like you came from outside with an idea that they hadn't asked for--

Shaffer: Oh, absolutely. And on one level, that they should look at me and say, "Why do this?" Because they hadn't seen anything like me before, I'm sure. They hadn't had anybody do this to them.

Lage: Was there anyone on staff who was supportive of that focus?

Shaffer: I had run it by some people, I'm sure including Mike [McCloskey]. I learned early on that Mike's way of operating is if he saw something as having merit, he kind of let it ooze on to the board's agenda and see what happened. That's what had happened. I didn't get on the agenda simply by force of will, I went through some process to get there. But it was an educational thing for me, and it helped me move back on. But it also, I think, illustrated early on to me that I was going to have some real difficulty in fund-raising and in membership development ideas and in raising the level of aggressiveness and dealing with the resistance to anything that looked commercial or flashy, or even used paper. [laughs] You'd get--"Why do we use all this paper?" So it was--it became a challenge.

Lage: Probably still is a challenge.

Shaffer: Oh, it is still a challenge. It still is.

Chair of the National Membership Committee

Shaffer: But anyhow, what happened next is Brant Calkin called me while he was president and said he wanted me to chair the national membership committee.

Lage: Is that pretty much the president's prerogative, to choose who is going to be chairman?

Shaffer: Yes, and still is, though some presidents use that authority and power and some don't. Brant heard me. Brant thought the things I had been saying made good sense. He wanted somebody that was aggressive; he wanted somebody that would challenge the organization with new ideas; he wanted somebody who would do something. He wanted to move the membership committee away from the sort of problem-solving role into a more

entrepreneurial role, and while not abandoning that side of it, having it tended to in some way, but to move out there.

So he called me, and I said, "Brant, I've never served on a membership committee in my own group." He said, "Good." [laughter] I remember him saying it. He said, "What I want is something different than what we're doing." So we talked briefly, and I said, "Good, I'll do it." And did.

Lage: So this gave you an official role.

Shaffer: That's right. That gave me the license, so I looked out and I said, "Well, there's three things I've got to do. One is I've got to make this committee a committee that is respected, that people look at and say, 'Well, if they say it's a good idea...'" So it wouldn't be Shaffer, it would be a group of people that made sense. Then we had to do something about staff, to get in place some staff so we could do something. And we had to become active immediately in getting out there and taking advantage of these things that were there for us to do.

We were not at that time really putting anything out there. I think we had done some coupons in the *Sierra Club Bulletin* asking people to join, or something like that, but it had been very, very--

Lage: Individual chapters must have been making some efforts.

Shaffer: Yes. Well, the method up until that time basically had been that people found the Sierra Club, or "I joined the Sierra Club because I heard about what it was doing and said this is a good idea, I want to be part of it." I may have said this to you, I got the address, wrote to the Sierra Club, and said, "Can I join you?"

Lage: It took an effort to join.

Shaffer: You bet. And an amazing number of people did that, but you're not going to get a big organization that way. There are not that many people that are going to go to that much trouble.

Lage: But you are going to get a more committed membership, most likely. Was that something you thought about?

Shaffer: Well, you're going to find--you're going to perhaps, by doing it that way, get people who are more proactive. And you may get a bit different type of cat. But ultimately how much that benefits the organization I don't know, because there are an awful lot of people who have joined the Sierra Club in other ways that have become great leaders in the club. I think clearly one of the best ways to get people to join the club still is, and always was, finding people that are of similar value systems, and you're a member of the club and you say to them, "Hey, let me tell you something you need to do. And here is a brochure." I have had, I don't know, certainly more than one hundred people I have asked to join the Sierra Club, and frequently you don't even need to have a brochure, you just get the check from them. Then you fill it out later and send it in. I think that's a good idea.

Some Thoughts on the Membership Effort Today

Shaffer: Ultimately, we're going to talk, I suppose, about the process--how we got the big organization, and how we got there, and direct mail, and things like that. But we're to a point in time now where we've forgotten about the fact that that is a way a movement grows, that movements grow because people care and they share the concerns with people, and they bring them in. The student coalition in the Sierra Club right now is teaching the Sierra Club, again, that because it has grown in this dynamic way, because these young people care so much and have just gone out and asked other people. They've not had a direct mail effort or whatever; they've gone and done it. And they've reminded us again, and what I've been working on for the last six, eight months just right now, is trying to get us back to a grassroots membership sensitivity and to provide the tools and the motivation and training to people out there to do this, because with the great ideas we had coming out of San Francisco, we didn't tend to the people out there in the field like we should have. So I think we're paying a little bit of a price for that now, and I think that's one of the reasons--

Lage: This is interesting, kind of a circular--

Shaffer: Yes, and this is not unusual. You come along, you have an organization that's built itself to a certain size using certain methods. Basically, your one-on-one kinds of things. You say, "Okay, boy, we could really be big." And in the seventies, for example--in the sixties, Audubon [National Audubon Society] and the Sierra Club were sort of the same size. At the end of the seventies, Audubon was twice as big as Sierra Club, because Audubon had found out about something called direct mail, and they started using it. They had like 400,000 members when we had like 200,000 members, having started sort of at the same place.

So you say, "Hey, there's something to be said for this." I was one of the people that said, "There's something to be said for this, this is a good idea." And it was a good idea. So I put a lot of energy into developing those kinds of things, but then we became a little lazy on the other side, and people out there began to think, "Well, you know, I don't need to do this any more, because National is doing it for us, and by golly, we've got more members in our chapter than we ever had, why do we need to worry about this?"

This is clearly one of so many examples where a little forward thinking and a little planning in this organization would be useful, and we don't do that. Anybody who had sat back and looked at this and wanted to develop a plan for the Sierra Club, which we still do not have, in membership development, would have said, "Okay, this is what's going to happen, but we've got to keep this going here, and who's going to do that while somebody else is doing this?" But we don't do that. We sort of muddle through.

Forming the Membership Committee, Camaraderie, and the Sense of Working Together

Lage: Well, let's go back and find out what we did do. It must have been about '76 that you became chairman; that's when Brant Calkin was president.

Shaffer: I would think that sounds right to me. Yes, if that's when Brant was president, that sure is it.

Lage: So you mentioned getting a group of people on the committee.

Shaffer: Well, that's right. And I can't remember all of the people that were on that committee, but they were good, strong leaders, and I can tell you three of them that went on to become directors were Jerry Lieberman, Sue Merrow, and Larry Downing, names you've heard before. So I didn't do bad in sizing up people that were coming up the pipeline and saying--

Lage: Did you get them from your contacts in the [Sierra Club] Council?

Shaffer: Yes. Because they were all council people.

Lage: But it wasn't a council project, I'm assuming, or was it? Was there some overlap?

Shaffer: Well, there was overlap. And certainly my field of knowledge on leaders from around the country centered at that point very much upon the council, because I had been there a little while. There were really a lot of good, strong people coming through there then. It isn't hard to figure out who the leaders are. You just sort of sit back and pay attention for a little while, and you say, "Well, there's a leader."

I had great help with this, too, after we had a staff. In '77, we finally hired Peggy Hynd, who is now Peggy Combs, as membership coordinator. She wasn't director of development, because we still had Denny Wilcher, and Denny was running something at that time called the Office of Program Funding, which was the fund-raising side. So I guess she basically was hired to just do membership. I'm sure that's the case.

And shortly thereafter, she brought under her Kim Martin-Carroll from Denny Wilcher's office. Kim had worked for Denny's office. They both were interesting people. They both were cause-oriented people; they were people who were there because they believed in what we were doing, not because they wanted a job. Kim had been a buyer for Emporium-Capwell and had come to the Sierra Club as a part-time telephone switchboard operator and part-time working in the Sierra Club store to get her foot in the door, which she then used to get into Denny's office, and then she used to get into this. She was clearly motivated by the fact that she wanted to be doing something that she believed in.

Lage: And she did come out of a business background.

Shaffer: She came out of a business background, that's exactly right. Peggy had a fund-raising background, but came out of this passion for social change, this passion for justice. Both of them.

Lage: What age group were they? It would be mid-seventies.

Shaffer: Well, let me think backwards. Kim is forty-two now--

Lage: And that was almost twenty years ago.

Shaffer: So that was seventeen years ago, so that would be twenty-five, wouldn't it? And I guess Peggy is maybe a year or two older than Kim, but not much difference. So they were bright people, and they were friendly. They liked people, they were people-oriented, they had people skills, they had political savvy, they worked the board of directors like lobbyists would work it. We would meet--the membership committee--and Kim and Peggy would meet before board meetings and divide up the board of directors: "You take this one, I'll take this one," and so on, and brainwash them on the ideas that we were working on.

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Shaffer: It was very proactive, if you would. And the staff always attended all the board meetings, I mean from beginning to end, we all went. We'd go out and have drinks afterwards, gangs of us, twenty-five to thirty of us would go out. It was this--[laughs] one of my favorite stories was, Kim had a little Volkswagen Bug that she called Trigger. It was worn out, but she would pack people in, and the volunteers would shuffle around. We were driving down the street, and it was Lieberman and myself and Joe Fontaine in this bug.

Lieberman said, "Look, there's that new council delegate from Connecticut. Stop and pick her up." So we stopped, and Jerry hollers at her, and it's Sue Merrow. First meeting she's at in the Sierra Club, as council delegate. "Come on over here, we're going to go out and get something to eat." She came and got in the car. We were going on to meet another twenty people, I guess.

She gets in the car, and we start off. And Sue is sort of taken aback, and with the charm that she has had all these years, and her way of saying things, sort of smiled and said, "You know, I've been in San Francisco two hours, and I'm already sitting on the lap of the Sierra Club president." [laughter] Because Joe was president at that time. But it was typical of that kind of energy that went into all of that thing, and the camaraderie and the sense of working together. So it was a lot of fun. And I'm digressing.

Lage: But I think this is an important part of the story.

Shaffer: Well, it is part of it. It's one of the things that [Ted] Snyder and I agreed on so much, that if we're not having a good time doing this, there's something wrong with the way we're doing it. I mean, this is a good cause, we care about the same things together, we ought to have fun. And boy, did I subscribe to that.

Membership Ads in Sierra Club Publications and Other Promotional Ideas

Shaffer: So early on, right away, before we got staff, going back to that, I remember me insisting that we needed to have ads in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*, and Mike agreeing that we would do that. So the *Bulletin* would come out and there would be no ad, and I'd get on the phone to Mike, "Mike, there's no ad again." And he'd say, "Well, you know, we're working on it." But in fairness to Mike, he had no one to do it.

So finally I lost it, and I said, "Mike, if you will say to me, 'Denny, will you get an ad in the next issue of the *Bulletin*,' there will be an ad in the next issue." He said, "Oh, well, would

you do it?" "I'll do it." He said, "Well, but it's only twelve days" or something "to deadline." I said, "I don't care, you'll have an ad."

Well, of course, I had no idea what I was going to do, but I hung up the phone and got my friend Bill Raue, and we sat down and drank beer until we thought of a concept, and put together and ad and sent it out in whatever way you sent things then--

Lage: Not by fax.

Shaffer: No, not by fax, and not by express mail. It was something like, you took it to the airport, and they flew it out, and somebody picked it up or something. It was very complicated, but it got here. And we had an ad in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*. It was not a great ad. If I were to look back on it, I'd say it was probably the worst one we ever did. But it got an idea started, and after that, we started doing ads for *Sierra* [the title of the club's magazine changed in 1977 from the *Sierra Club Bulletin* to *Sierra*]. We started the first inserts in *Sierra*; we started producing all of the brochures in Fayetteville. I wrote the copy and he Bill and I figured out the concepts, and he did the graphics, and we did this stuff in Fayetteville for years. Of course, staff had input by phone.

Lage: Do you have a file of those?

Shaffer: Oh, sure.

Lage: Those should go to the Bancroft Library (and maybe a couple for an appendix to the oral history) [See Appendix].

Shaffer: Oh, sure. And we did things like finding a way to get space in national magazines for nothing or something close to nothing, and we ran ads in national magazines. We went to work, and I'm not sure when this happened with getting ads in calendars. I was stunned at the idea that we were putting out calendars without an invitation to join the Sierra Club. I went to Mike, and Mike said, "Well, Scribner will not put up with this. This is a quality product, they don't want something that's commercial in there," and so on and so forth. I said, "Well, let's find out."

So we went to work on Scribner and finally got their agreement to do that. So we produced probably the first six ads in calendars came out of Fayetteville, with Bill doing them and with me writing.

Lage: Was there a good return on those?

Shaffer: Oh, absolutely, one of the best. Because it cost practically nothing. And very, very productive. I don't have the numbers in my head anymore, but just significantly productive. And again, you knew that anything like that was going to work. How could it not work? People loved Sierra Club calendars. The people who buy Sierra Club calendars look at this thing all year long and say, "These people are really neat." But they didn't know anybody that belonged to the Sierra Club.

Lage: They didn't even know it was a club.

Shaffer: They didn't know that anybody wanted them to join. They didn't know, if they wanted to join, how to do it. All you've got to do is put a piece of paper in their hand that says, "Yeah, we want you, and this is what it costs, and you're going to have fun doing it," and they'll say, "Well, that's a good idea." And they did. It was tremendously successful. Scribner was very happy not having this insert, but as a businessman I understood this was a two-way street. Sure, it made sense for them to demand a high quality insert. We owed them that, but they owed us too.

It's that concept that's often been missed in commercial dealings when the Sierra Club is doing them, that we were making a lot of money for Scribner. They had a good product here. Us asking for it to be more useful to us was not an outrageous idea, and while they may resist it because, all things considered, they'd just as soon not bother, they had enough business sense to know that what we were asking was not unreasonable.

Lage: Did you handle that kind of negotiation?

Shaffer: Not directly. I was not directly in it. The only time I got directly involved with all that was when we left Scribner, and that's probably for another point, when we went to Random House. I did get involved in that.

But anyhow, we did these kinds of things. We started doing clip art, making up sheets of things and sending them to chapter newsletters, so that the chapter newsletter would run not just an ad with a membership application on it, but we did little cartoons. I remember doing them on an airplane going home one time, and there was a couple bears looking out from behind a tree, and there was a bulldozer coming up, and they were saying something about, "Here goes our neighborhood." Oh, there was one with a bird that was standing on the only tree left in the clear-cut forest looking around, and the caption was something like, "Maybe it's time to do something about this." And then it would ask people to join the Sierra Club.

But none of this is great brilliance. This is not the sort of thing of which fortunes are made in the advertising business, but they had to work. And again, they cost almost nothing.

Lage: But who gets the newsletters besides the members?

Shaffer: Ah, but the members never had applications. So when their neighbor actually was interested in joining the Sierra Club, they didn't have anything to give them.

Lage: I see, so this served that purpose.

Shaffer: Absolutely. That's why there's such a big thing in *Sierra* magazine. The magazine goes to people who belong to the Sierra Club, but what it does, when their neighbor comes over and they're having dinner together, and their neighbor says, "You know, I've been meaning to join the Sierra Club sometime," the person says, "Oh, let me get *Sierra*, it's got an application in it, and let me give it to you." That's why it works. It's the idea of putting a tool in people's hands and keeping it there constantly so that it reminds them to use the tool, and when they want to use it, it's here. No, that's a good question.

As a matter of fact, it was a question and people insisted it wouldn't work because of that. Why would that work?

Lage: And yet, it is very little ventured, very little risk.

Shaffer: Oh, virtually nothing. Bill charged modest amounts of money to do his work, and of course, I did everything for free. I had done copywriting before, for commercial stuff, for money. And so it was not new to me. But it was more fun. Oh, and we did an ad during the Watt campaign that the Grinch that stole Christmas, and it was a takeoff of Dr. Seuss [Theodor Geisel] stuff, and we of course had to get hold of Dr. Seuss to do this.

But at any rate, so we got in touch with him, and his agent said, "Well, you know, Dr. Seuss gets a thousand requests like this a week, and we really don't do this sort of thing, but call back on this and I'll let you know." So Bill called back and he said, "Well, you know, I told you Dr. Seuss just doesn't do this sort of thing. We get these thousands of requests. But Dr. Seuss is with you on this one." [laughs]

Lage: How nice!

Shaffer: And so he gave us permission to do it, and set the standard. I wrote the copy, and Bill did the graphics. We sent them a copy of it, and they made a suggestion or two, and we changed it, and we got to run it. So again, the idea is there's so many people out there who are us, who would be glad to help us if we can find a way to reach them and use them.

Lage: It's not creating the demand.

Shaffer: No. There's people out there who care so much about what we're doing, and who have great skills to do this kind of thing, and we've not reached them as well as we could. But anyhow, we did all that sort of thing. We had a membership contest for chapters, and we gave out, oh, if you got a member, you got a tree from Stark Brothers Nursery, and I cut a deal with Stark Brothers because we were giving them a lot of advertising, so I got the trees from them for practically nothing. It was very successful.

Concerns Among the Directors, and a Basic Contradiction

Lage: Did this create any ripples on the board?

Shaffer: Oh, absolutely. Everybody was--not everybody; a lot of people were kind of outraged at it.

Lage: What was the objection to this type of thing?

Shaffer: Well, the--[sighs] "It's so commercial. It's what 'they' do. "

Lage: And are there people in particular who stand out as being leaders of the opposition?

Shaffer: Oh, I think Phil Berry [laughs] has been the leader of the opposition to commercial ideas, generally speaking. He has, I think, been somewhat offended by commercialization and using the club's name in connection with commercial products. And I think in the use of direct mail, for example, which we can talk a little bit more about, because that really was the big thing that made the difference in the size of the organization--but I think, though,

that the truth of the matter is, the overwhelming majority of the board at that time was not very enthusiastic about this sort of thing.

Lage: Was it that they didn't see the virtue of growing the club, to use that new verb?

Shaffer: Oh, absolutely. And there's still resistance to that. There are still people out there arguing that we should be leaner and meaner.

Lage: I saw that in your own words, you used that phrase "leaner and meaner" during your presidency.

Shaffer: Did I really? Well, there you go. I wonder what I meant when I said that. I suspect what I meant, [laughs] if I can do a little revisionist thinking here, we've never paid much attention to efficiency in this organization. We've had the luxury of being able to do things over and over again because it doesn't cost anything very much, the volunteers that are doing it. Or we don't think about what it costs us. I spent an awful lot of time--and this is outside the scope of fund-raising sorts of things--I spent an awful lot of time in this organization trying to improve the efficiencies of what we do, to learn and not make the same mistakes over.

But as far as size is concerned, I think we ought to be real big. If you read our vision statement, it's a revolutionary statement. It's a statement that talks about changing the value systems of the people of this country. That's not easily done, and it's certainly, it seems to me, better done if you've got a whole lot of folks out there doing it. Now, you need leadership and you need vision and you're not going to get it from everybody. If you've got a million people in the organization, you need a lot of people doing a lot of things.

But it's always been my concept to have a presence locally every place. I've said over and over again, if there's a town of 50,000 in this country, there ought to be a Sierra Club group there. And then you educate the people coming up, you get the city councilmen coming up, and who's going to become a governor some day, to the idea that there are these concepts we believe in. So I believe in big.

But there has been consistently and constantly an argument from people that getting big is a problem, and it's ranged from the people who were the Sierra Club in California who saw it as a club, who were the people left from the days when it was exclusive, where you had to get somebody to sign for you if you wanted to join. Who wanted it to be sort of a group of people that you knew and went on outings with, and that you didn't have to worry about strange crazy people coming in from North Carolina and bothering you with strange ideas, I suppose. [laughs] To personalize it.

Lage: But it must have been a broader group than that, because that was really a dying breed.

Shaffer: It was wider. That was a dying breed. Then you had--there is great difficulty in the philosophy in what we do. We believe in the conservation of the earth's resources, and the preservation of the wild places that can only be done if we do the first one, and yet many of us use a lot of the earth's resources, including me. I keep flying back and forth across the country. There's this built-in contradiction, and we live with this contradiction. It plays out over and over again in different ways. People offended by the idea that if you send out

millions of letters to ask people to join the Sierra Club, most of them end up in the wastebasket. And, "What a waste of resources!"

Now, the other side of that is, you will have 100,000 more people who are giving their money and their time and their thinking to the cause that we believe in, in an organized way. But a lot of paper is thrown away. So there's an argument to be made against doing these things, and it is a balance. It is a balance. I am a pragmatic fellow, I think, and I believe that having an organization of a half million people or a million people dedicated to changing the value systems of this country, and using up some resources to that end so that you can promote the sorts of things that might be able to save the earth from ourselves, has a hopeful possibility to it.

I think going the other way, which is for me to stay home and not do anything, and not use any resources, and simplify my life, is in some ways making a contribution, but it is not going to get us there. It is not going to change the value systems of the people of the earth, because not enough people are going to know I'm doing it. Even if they've looked at it and said, "That's a good idea, I'm going to do it," how many people would see me? So it's a balance.

But yes, I feel guilty when I use the resources, so I understand the argument, and I am sympathetic with the argument.

Lage: Seems to me the other side of the argument might be, which would lead into the next topic later, when the club gets to this size, how do we manage it? You must have the vision for that.

Shaffer: That's right, I can see how that can be done. This is not a big problem.

Lage: But many people can't.

Shaffer: And it's one we haven't resolved. We're not doing it. We're not doing it right now, but it is so simple. It's there to be done. You can organize--well, you're right, it is another subject. But there is a resistance, and it's also the resistance to the commercialized stuff, that big business, corporate America, behaves that way. Corporate America sends out slick brochures. Corporate America runs color ads. We don't want to be like corporate America.

Well, I find that sort of curious, because we are corporate America. We are a corporation, even with the bad finances we're in, we have a \$40 million budget, 500,000 members more or less. We're a California corporation, got a board of directors. I mean, we are a corporation. So to me, again, obviously I have figured out a way that it sort of suits me, and that is, you take the tools that they have used for things we do not believe in that are tools that work. You say, "Okay, we adapt those to social change," rather than saying, "We're not going to." And the majority is going that way. The majority of the people are going that way.

But yes, there is the argument against it right up to the moment, "Don't use the resources, don't waste the money, it costs too much money to send out direct mail, don't do it, don't send out, don't use up the paper, don't look like corporate America, don't get so big we can't manage it, don't get so big that we get the wrong kind of people. We want people like us." And this is not a racial thing. God forbid that it should sound like that. This is a dedication

to the cause kind of thing. "I want somebody who's as pure as I am, as driven as I am." [laughs] I don't! I don't want any more like me. I want everybody. I really want everybody out there.

Lage: Well, let's see how we've got--

Direct Mail: Roger Craver and Dick Hammond

Shaffer: Can we talk about the direct mail?

Lage: That's what I was going to ask you, how did you get the club, or how did the club get into direct mail?

Shaffer: When I went on the board of directors, I went on in 1977, I guess, and I was called in the middle of the night by Ted Snyder to say that they had chosen me to fill a vacancy. We can talk more about that later.

But I got on an airplane and got in a car and arrived at this ranch in the Southwest. [Added during interviewee review: This was the Baca Ranch in New Mexico that was recently acquired by the federal government.] That was the first meeting Roger Craver had come to. Roger Craver is the--how do you describe Roger Craver?

Lage: That's what I wanted to ask you.

Shaffer: He is clearly bigger than life. He raises more money for left-of-center causes than anybody else in the world.

Lage: Where does he hail from?

Shaffer: He is out of the Washington, D.C., area. He has a company called Craver, Matthews, and Smith, CMS. He is a revolutionary. He is a wild man. He is absolutely the most--as brilliant as any man I've ever known, more dedicated than 99.9 percent. I have vacationed with Roger, and I'm getting a long way ahead of the story, but when Roger sleeps in in the morning, he sleeps in until, say, four-thirty. It is not unusual for Roger to get up at three and start working on fund-raising in Europe that he's working on before people here are awake.

Lage: And this is on vacation?

Shaffer: Oh, yes, and he thinks that's quite reasonable.

Lage: How did he come to the Sierra Club?

Shaffer: He came to the Sierra Club because the Sierra Club, Mike and others, had decided that they really needed to talk to somebody who had some expertise in direct mail, and in fund-raising techniques of the time, if you will.

Lage: Did you have anything to do with it?

Shaffer: I don't recall having anything to do with it. I may have, because it sounds like something I would have been interested in. I did not know Roger Craver; I had heard of him.

Lage: What other kind of causes does he work for?

Shaffer: Oh, he has handgun control, abortion rights, things like Planned Parenthood. He always worked very closely with Cesar Chavez. John Anderson, when he ran for president, was a client of his; he's had the Democratic Senate campaign as a client--you go down the list of left-of-center causes, and you'd be hard put to find something that Roger hasn't at some time had some part in helping raise money.

Lage: He's not just direct mail, or is he just direct mail?

Shaffer: He is not just direct mail. He has a very large operation that includes quite creative sorts of things. I like the political hotline he put together, for example, a few years ago in which he convinced politicians that it would be in their interest to send him information by fax or electronic mail that would report on their latest knowledge of what was happening with their campaigns.

So he then had somebody who gathered all this in, piles of information, and then somebody would sit down, frequently Roger, kind of go over it and edit it, and they put out a newsletter right back to the same people to tell them what was going on, except they sold them the newsletter. It's a brilliant business move, because it creates a product out of something that doesn't cost too much, that people are giving you, but it was a great service, because it brought together all this information of the progressive candidates, and permitted people like us or others to know what's going on. So he's very creative, he's very knowledgeable--he is a force in Washington, behind the scenes. He talks to people who are thinking about running for vice president or president and encourages them or discourages them. I don't want to carry on too much about Roger except to say that I don't know really anybody who has personally contributed to the power of left-of-center social change organizations more than Roger, because he has enabled us to find ways to get resources which then we use well and move on.

Well, he was there. [laughs] He tells a story, I don't even know if it's true, because Roger loves telling stories as much as I do. But he insists that Mike took him aside when he got there and said--after they put me on the board--"Now, Roger, you need to remember when Denny comes in here that Denny's not been a part of the board before, and that he may be a little bit--" I don't know whether trouble-maker is the word he used, but it was sort of the connotation.

Roger told me later, he said, "Well, clearly that was the best thing Mike could have done, because I immediately wanted to know who you were, because what this organization needed was somebody who was going to change some of these things, and clearly if you were viewed that way, then you and I had something in common." So we had this introduction before we were introduced. We hit it off just like--I mean--

Lage: He was what you were looking for.

Shaffer: He was what I was looking for, and he saw me as somebody that he found interesting. We have since become just dear, good, close friends, a man I care about immensely. And he introduced me, through him I got to know other giants, people like Dick Hammond. Dick Hammond--I talked to Mike about this one time. I said, "Mike, I don't know whether anybody knows what a role these people played in building organizations like ours, and we're losing them." So maybe this is a good chance to talk about it a little bit.

Lage: Yes, I think it's important that we talk about this, because it hasn't been talked about in the oral histories, except just referred to briefly.

Shaffer: Dick Hammond was a man who realized early on that organizing mailing lists was a good idea. Now, you've got to keep in mind that direct mail can't work if you don't have people's names and addresses to send it to. And just starting with the phone book or something is not a good idea. You need to send them to people who might be receptive to this.

Lage: Was he part of the Craver organization?

Shaffer: Well, only loosely. These people whose names I'm going to mention all are people who were very close to each other--Dick Hammond has died, tragically, a few years ago, at a young age--and was godfather of one of Roger's kids. So all these people were so close together. Their financial ties were never clear to me, and I'm not sure necessarily to them. But they all helped each other--because they all were sort of interdependent of each other.

Up to that point there had been things like--magazines had mailing lists, of course, and so there was some trade on the commercial side. You could buy lists of names and so on. But there was nobody thinking about it as a tool to build social change organizations. Dick said to himself, A, this is a good idea, B, it needs to be done, C, I can make a living doing this. And he did all of the above, and did it extremely well.

So Dick built mailing lists of people who cared about justice as you or I might see it. And then they refined and refined and refined the process so that you got more and more focus and you had some certainty when you sent out this piece of mail it was really going to somebody that had some interest in your cause. They may not respond, but at least they had some interest in this.

For example, a new social-change organization coming along, maybe like handgun control, that might not have much money, and these crazy people would say, "Okay, we'll lend you half a million names, and then when you build your mailing list up, you let us use your mailing list, and that will make us even." From a commercial point of view, they were right. They eventually came out even.

But as advocates for social change, they made this tremendous gift to the new social-change organization of a mailing list that they could write to that would be likely to respond.

Lage: A mailing list taken from another social change organization?

Shaffer: From some other, yes. With constant refinement and updating.

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Lage: Okay, so we have Dick Hammond and--

Shaffer: Yes, and then there's Sheila Martin. Sheila Martin has a company named Triplex that's here in the Bay Area, and Sheila recognized what computers could do with all of this, and that all of these lists were useful, but can you imagine how much more useful they could be if you could computerize all this in such a way that you could pick among the names quickly by certain characteristics. She, as far as I know, invented the idea of the merge-purge, which would mean if we wanted to use Audubon's mailing list, before we used it, you'd run it through the computer and it would throw out all the names on it that were already on our membership list. So there would be a purge of those names, so that you weren't sending mail to people that already belonged to the club, asking them to join the club. I think, as far as I know, she invented that sort of thing. Certainly I know she brought it to another stage of perfection.

She has built, and is the repository, of these jillions of names, now separated out and refined, and of course now there's information by ZIP codes and so on, and there's all kinds of demographic information you play back against the list of names, and you can put as many screens over this as you want to. You can sort them out by age, you can sort them out by all sorts of ways, to target the very best.

Lage: Does she do this work just for social-change organizations?

Shaffer: Yes, as far as I know. All nonprofit stuff. Now, she may have some commercial stuff, but she got into business, just like Dick got into business, saying to themselves, "I really believe in this stuff. There's a lot of injustice in this country that needs to be addressed, and I can find a way here to play a major significant role in doing this, and at the same time, make a good living." It's sort of that best of all worlds, something I've not been bright enough to do. I've got to make a living doing something else, and do this in my spare time.

And really, all three of these people sort of were students of, if you will, a guy named Peter Tagger. Peter Tagger--oh boy, what an oral history that would have been to do. Peter's dead. He died three years ago, I guess, something like that. Peter was an Australian immigrant. His father was a playwright and they had to leave Europe because his political satire brought the Nazis down on them. He then became a very successful screenwriter in Hollywood. Peter was press secretary to Henry Wallace in 1948, which led to his being blacklisted during the McCarthy era. He then got into direct mail working for the Jewish Hospital in Denver, then moved to Santa Barbara and started the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in 1966. This was, I believe, the first liberal think tank. Using direct mail he built the list of supporters to over 240,000 by the late sixties.

He was working with the tools available then, which weren't very many. This was not direct mail as we think about it now, millions of pieces, computer-generated, so on. But he was the first one that figured out that you could do it this way. Up to that point, people had done fund-raising for social-change organizations, but they hadn't gone out and really tried to go for the small gifts and the memberships, and getting a commitment of people to the cause by "joining." And it was Peter that thought of this.

Now, it may not sound like a big deal at the moment, but that observation changed the way social-change organizations in this country were built, dramatically.

Lage: Do you know when he was operating, when these ideas came into being?

Shaffer: Oh, golly. It was a long time ago. This would have been--this was after the blacklisting. I would say probably mid to late fifties, maybe, something like that.

Lage: So he was definitely a pioneer.

Shaffer: Oh. And [laughs] one of the world's great characters. He was one of the few people that could come to our meetings when we were being our most cantankerous, and say something about us that we would feel comfortable laughing about. He had this way that was just so delightful. The greatest people skills.

Lage: How did he get brought in? Were these board meetings you're talking about?

Shaffer: Well, he's a Craver connect, though he is--and he actually worked in a formal way with Roger starting in 1974, and sometimes Roger would bring him in on specific kinds of things. But there were these handful of people, and these four are the giants. There's more, but these four are the giants. Well--

Lage: I don't mean to interrupt you, but I want to get a clearer picture of what Roger's role has been. In 1977, he made a presentation to the board. Did he become a consultant, an occasional consultant, a continuous consultant?

Shaffer: Yes, all really--all of the above. He was hired to do specific things for us at that time. He advocated us becoming a client of his on a contractual basis with a contract that said he would do certain things, and we then did that. Immediately, because of their personality, people like Kim said to themselves, "Aha, this is a good idea," and so she would use him, as would Peggy, when they had a problem. Whether it was in the contract had nothing to do with it, because Roger's motivation is justice. It is not making a living. Now, he likes making a living, and he lives well, and that's a good thing to do. But given an opportunity to make a significant difference, he's going to do that first, then think about, "How do I bill?" second, or, "Do I bill?" And so on. So we've gone through a variety of things.

Then he, in later years, after Kim left the club, became more involved in the production, and I think still is involved in the production of things, like mail appeals and so on. When Kim was there, they actually would get somebody to write the package, and then would hire a printer here and get it typeset and printed, and a mailing house they would hire, and they'd get it done.

Lage: This would be done out of the club office, Kim--

Shaffer: Well, yes, Kim did it here, that's right. And after Kim left, they pretty much hired Roger to do it. So he actually then got later into--and he has his own printing and his own art department, and he has writers who work for him, and so on, though he is by far the best writer, and he still does a lot of the appeals himself. He was telling me recently about one he had done that Kurt Vonnegut signed, and about how the interplay between writing copy that has Kurt Vonnegut's name at the bottom of it, [laughs]--

Lage: That must have been fun.

Shaffer: Well, he said it was, and he said that Kurt called him and said, "Thank god you understand that this is not supposed to be literature, this is supposed to raise some so-and-so, so-and-so money." And he clearly understood what it was all about, which is a problem that perhaps lesser creative people haven't crossed over yet.

Growth of the Direct Mail Program, and the Role of Interior Secretary Watt

Shaffer: But at any rate, Roger came in, and I just got fascinated with all these people, so obviously I got to know all of them, and spent time with them, they became personal friends. And they became friends of Kim's. Now, I don't know at what point in this I acknowledged the fact that Kim and I ended up being married to each other--

Lage: Well, we need to put it in.

Shaffer: Which at some point is relevant. [laughs] But at that point, we were not only not married to each other, we had no idea that a thought would ever enter either of our minds--as far as I know; it certainly had never entered mine. For a variety of reasons, it just never occurred to me. But we did find ourselves, Peggy and Kim and myself and these people I have named, all sort of learning--well, Peggy and Kim and I wanted to learn, and these people were the best and the brightest there were. And aside from that, they were nice people, and they were interesting, and they were fun.

So we learned a whole lot from them, but at the same time were able to introduce this. We got the club to go into direct mail a little bit at a time, and test it and test it, and move the numbers up a little bit, and it worked so well. It was hard to do.

Lage: Hard to get the--

Shaffer: Hard to get the board of directors to agree to. It meant putting a line item in the budget that said you're going to spend a lot of money to do this. They'd say, "Well, how do we know it's going to work?" Well, it's going to work. This is how we know: we test it and we do this. "But why do you write four-page letters?" Well, they bring more results than two-page letters. "Well, it's a waste of paper, you ought to be able to say it in two pages." Well, you should, except four pages brings more money back. We've tried it both ways. "Well, why do you put it in an envelope that doesn't look like a Sierra Club envelope?" Well, because more people open it then. "Well, how do you know that?" Well, you get better results. We've tested this, and you show them the test results.

Lage: You had tested it for the club?

Shaffer: Oh, yes.

Lage: Or Roger Craver had tested it.

Shaffer: Both--no, we test everything. We still test everything. In our direct mail membership solicitation, we send out a test package and then a new package and maybe a third package every time we do a mail, so that you see which one does better, and then you keep changing the package to respond to what's happening there. It's not only the way it looks, it's what's the substance.

And incidentally, and I do not think this is a small matter, the appeals that are responded to most strongly in this organization are appeals that have to do with the preservation of wild lands. The direct wilderness kinds of appeals. I believe strongly in the other issues that we're in, but people join the Sierra Club because they want to save wild places. And there's an important message there, and Peter Hart [Sierra Club consultant] has just come back with this study that was just run that reminds us, if you tell people that you want them to join you and give you a check and their time, because what you do is save wild lands and if they respond, you better keep reminding them and showing some evidence back to them that that's what you are doing. It's fine to work on global warming and population, and it is a good idea to do that, but don't forget the initial connection there. That's important.

Lage: So that's held up over the years?

Shaffer: It's held consistent from the beginning to the moment. But what we would do, I would do a back-of-the-envelope sort of thing that would show people, "Okay, you spend--" whatever it is, "\$400,000 for this direct mail, and this is what you get back this year. But next year, this is the percentage of those people that will renew, and the cost of renewal is only this." The club's largest block of discretionary money is renewal income from membership. There's no restrictions on it at all, and there's very little expense to it.

Lage: And the first year, there is a lot of expense.

Shaffer: In the first year, there's an expense of getting the member. But the second, third, fourth years, if you can keep them out there longer, are very profitable. So I would do this projection. "If you spend this," whatever it is, \$100,000, \$400,000, "this is what you get back." And if you'd play it out for five years, it was ridiculous payback. But you had the problem that it was over five years, and the Sierra Club has traditionally gotten tied up in trying to balance a budget for this year, and we don't want to cut program, and everything we're doing is very important, and we'll worry about next year next year. So it was very difficult to get any size to the program.

But we finally did, and we grew dramatically. This was the basis of the people and the money for the eighties. This is why we were able to be what we were in the eighties. Without this, it wouldn't have been possible. Couldn't have done it.

Lage: How did the Watt petition campaign figure into the success of membership? You always hear that as being a big factor in our dramatically increasing membership.

Shaffer: People have got the right general idea, but they don't have the focus right. You've got to have a devil. If you have a devil in fund-raising, you're going to do better. It is much preferable--if I come to you and say, "Look, if you'll give me some money, I'm going to do some really good things with it." I mean, this doesn't happen. Or worse, I come to you and say, "If you give me some money, it would be a good idea, because I really need it, we've got to make the payroll." Roger has made an observation that nobody buys Buicks because

General Motors needs the money. That's not the motivation. You buy a Buick because of something different than that, and you join organizations for something different than that, not because you need money.

So what was I saying? I got off on Buicks.

Lage: The Watt petition.

Shaffer: Oh, yes, the Watt petition. That was far afield. Watt was the perfect devil. Outrageous, an outrageous man. And he signified everything that we were opposed to. But the thing that was most significant was that we were in everybody's mailbox when they got mad at him. It was that we had thought about it in advance and said, "This guy is going to be outrageous. We know who this guy is. We know what this guy believes in." And we were out front of it, and when people were picking up the paper and reading the outrageous things he was saying, and then they reached for the day's mail, there was an envelope from the Sierra Club saying, "Join us, we're the people that are going to do something about this nut."

And that's the part people don't pick up. They sort of think that happened spontaneously, that this guy came along and somehow everybody joined the Sierra Club. Well, it could have been that he would have come along, and that wouldn't have happened, or it would have only happened in a very small, incremental way. What happened was that we had a plan, we were there, and we played the thing out, and we played it up pretty well.

Now, we could have played it better. If we would have had more--we could have been bigger, we could have raised more money. But we were pretty conservative on that. I wasn't. I was pushing all the time to get more and more active, because it would have worked. We could have done 50 percent more direct mail than we did, and it would have been a good idea, and we would have raised more money, and we would have been bigger and stronger.

Lage: Was the petition itself to get Watt out an important part of the membership development?

Shaffer: No. It wasn't in my opinion, except that, like the Brower ads, it gave you a national presence. It put us out there. It was a brilliant idea. It was a good thing we did it. I was there on the steps, and you wouldn't recognize me in the picture; I have a full beard then--only did that for a short time--[laughs] everybody in Sierra Club who's male has to try it, I guess, occasionally--but it was a good idea. I think it helped membership development and fund-raising in that it made us appear to be an organization that was out there doing something.

Lage: Do you know whose idea it was? I've never quite gotten--

Shaffer: I would give credit to it, without even knowing, to Carl Pope or Doug Scott. It sounds to me like their kind of thinking.

Lage: So it came out of the staff. That had been my impression.

Shaffer: We have--I have observed this--there is an old advertising saying that you don't sell the steak, you sell the sizzle. The Sierra Club, in using that metaphor, has more steak than

anybody. But we keep being hesitant to talk about the sizzle. Where Greenpeace at its best, and it's now on its decline, but at its best sold more sizzle than I've ever seen. I'm not sure it had any steak. But they had something out there. They had blond people on little rubber boats going between the whale and this big ship with weapons on the front of it, and people responded.

The Sierra Club has been hesitant to, in effect, think in terms of how it presents itself to the country, and therefore we make it more difficult to raise money and get members, because we don't--we let others describe who we are. We let others describe us, and say, "This is what they are, this is how they look, this is what they do," instead of being dramatic and getting out front. The Watt petition was dramatic and got out front. David Brower's ads were dramatic and got out front. The list is a very short list of things like that.

Lage: Are there things that you thought of that were rejected as sizzle?

Shaffer: Just philosophically, I think I am more aggressive and more dramatic--I would be more dramatic--an example: direct corporate action. A little while ago, there was an organization whose name has not come to mind that took on one of the fast food restaurants, Burger King I think, about beef grown on cut rain forests. They had people show up in four or five different media markets at the Burger King, or burger whatever it was, and make the point, and they got a lot of publicity, and eventually had that changed.

The Sierra Club, if they wanted to do that, the way we have a network of groups, chapters, across the country, could have shown up in the front yard of every Burger King in the country on that day, if we had wanted. I have suggested on occasion that we ought to do that sort of thing. I come out of the civil rights movement. You've got to get closer to being in people's face occasionally. You've got to put yourself out there if you want to have an aggressive--.

Now, the other side of that is that it's disorderly and it could get out of hand, or it could be offensive, it could turn off donors, whatever. But I think it's got much more positive--and we don't have anybody, as far as I know, that's sitting back thinking about opportunities like that now. By doing that, not only do you affect the specific substance that you're working on, but you create an image for yourself. We haven't done much to create an image for ourselves.

Promotion of Life Memberships and Building Endowment

Shaffer: The only other thing I can think of on membership side--well, two things I suppose. Life memberships. I was, to the best of my knowledge, the first and only person who promoted the idea of promoting life memberships. Let's go out and sell these things, let's get people to sign up. And I found immense resistance to this, because it was money that went into an endowment and you couldn't spend it. Well, I've been known to overstate things, but I still do not understand any logic in that argument, because the interest on the money is more than what they would pay in dues. So that if you got the money for the life membership and didn't spend it, and only spent the income that it created, you had more money to spend each year.

Lage: Than if they joined every year.

Shaffer: Than if you joined every year. And furthermore, you've got that income forever, including when they're dead and gone. Even if they get mad at you, you've still got it. Even if they die, you've still got it. But tremendous resistance to that.

Lage: Because they thought that would take away from the annual membership money.

Shaffer: Yes, take away from the annual membership money. Another objections was that 18 percent of dues went to chapters and nothing from life memberships went to chapters. So chapters didn't want life memberships because they didn't get a piece of the action. Well, we've changed that, they now get a piece of the action. That was easy to fix.

But there were different kinds of resistances to that, and then the idea, which was mine, that we should sell it in three easy payments was another one of those sort of, sounds like you're selling used cars. This is not a good idea. Well, I would contend that it's a very good idea, because we have built this endowment fund which has been the salvation of the organization fiscally, because we cannot spend it, but we can borrow against it. Without that, we do not have--we're not going to have a line of credit at the bank just because we're nice people. They want to know there's something there if catastrophe strikes.

So that permitted that to happen, so when we've had these fiscal crises like we're in now--the biggest and best I've ever seen, the one we're in now, \$2.9 million in the red they said this weekend--it's just inconceivable to me that we could let that happen, but we have--and we would be out of business if we couldn't go to the bank and borrow money, which we are now in debt to the bank, and we're in debt, and we have this--.

So of the things that I have anything to do with, I really feel good about that. I managed to get some other money put into that fund in addition to life memberships, some contributions and some other things--

Lage: Large donations?

Shaffer: Well, yes. For example, the two lakes behind Clair Tappaan Lodge [in the Sierra Nevada] that we sold. Golly, what was the name of those lakes? [Flora and Azalea]

Well, the Sierra Club Foundation owned that property, and we're not in the property owning business. So we cut a deal with the federal government that they would buy it from us, and they would take care of it, protect it, which is the best of all worlds. Now we've got this money, now what do we do with the money? Well, we could just blow it. We couldn't put it in this endowment, because this is hard money and that was soft money. This was foundation money, because that land belonged to the Sierra Club Foundation, because the club gave it to the foundation when we were in another financial crisis and were afraid we'd lose it, so we gave it to the foundation, got the foundation to sell it, and then when we talk about the foundation, we can talk about the fact that they didn't want to give the money back.

But eventually, we talked them into giving the money back to the club to fund tax deductible programs like books. That helped create a surplus. So there were two or three

years in which we ran a nice surplus. So at that point, I was able to convince the directors to take some of that surplus and put it in the endowment.

Later, Michael Fischer came along with the idea that it was really not an endowment, it was a quasi-endowment, and that because the board set it up we could un-set it up and spend it. I allowed as how when he decided to do that, that there was going to be at least one lawsuit that I could think of, because I was going to be the one hiring the lawyer, and I was going to win, because I wrote the copy for all these life membership brochures and so on that we put out there that said, "If you do this, your money will be there forever." And I've got all the brochures and ads we've ever run. That money has been so intermingled, nobody could ever straighten it back out again.

So this is an endowment that will be there forever and continues to grow, that has been the fiscal insurance for the organization. That was a good idea. Aside from all the other things, it's nice to have life members.

Lessons from Direct Mail

Lage: Now, the direct mail had its ups and downs too. Is that something we want to talk about now, or shall we talk about that under your treasurership?

Shaffer: No, we can talk about it now, because I don't think it's--there's not a whole lot to be said about it. The most significant thing in the ups and downs of direct mail is that for the last three years, it's been down. It's going the same direction, and there's some consistency to it, and it's a serious matter. It isn't working like it used to work. Costs are changing. The subsidy, as it is called by some people in Congress and so on, to nonprofits, meaning they get a cheaper mailing rate, is all endangered. So all those things are changing, and it's becoming a different thing.

There are basically two things to be learned from it, and I think that the lessons are on the table. Now, whether we've learned them or not--. One is that it's not going to work forever, that solutions to problems don't necessarily solve all your problems forever, and that when something works, you use it, and when it starts to not work, you start looking for something else, and if you're really clever, you start looking for it before the first one stops doing it. And so this is why I have been encouraging, as others have, this sort of reorientation to some other things which have worked in the past, which we know would work, that we're not using.

And also, we've encouraged us to think creatively to alternatives to everything we've done. Instead of going back to something we've done, what is it we have not done? How do we approach this in a different way? And we haven't done much of that.

But the second thing, the second lesson out of the decline in mail is the results of this Peter Hart task force.

Lage: Now, who is Peter Hart?

Shaffer: Peter Hart, the pollster [Added during interviewee review: His father, James D. Hart, was the head of The Bancroft Library, I have been told by Roger Craver.] He's, I guess, one of the best there is. Certainly he's an impressive chap. We hired him in November of '91 for the first time to do a survey of our members to really find out what our members thought of us. Now, we had done surveys before for other reasons; the *Sierra* magazine does one to see how much everybody makes, and whether you buy cars and televisions, so that they can show their advertising clients that it's a good idea to advertise in *Sierra* because we're the kind of people who buy--whatever, backpacks.

But we hadn't really done one that asked--that might bring bad news. Well, it did bring some bad news--and this came out of the work of the development department and development advisory committee, which we'll talk about a little bit later, which is one of the things I'm doing nowadays, serving on that. We didn't do anything about it, really, the November '91 study. So it kept getting worse.

So we insisted that we go back and do this survey again and see what this told us. And it told us a number of things that reflect on why not only membership development is going downhill, but the renewal rate is dropping. People who have been members for years, four, five, six, twenty years, are not renewing, but instead are throwing their renewal notices in the wastebasket. We now have some hard information to go by. Having learned a lesson from the November '91 experience, we this time--I sat up most of the night writing the resolution for the board that said, "Okay, this is what this man is saying, now this is what we need to do. We need to appoint a task force that's going to do these things," and that became part of the resolution, and it was passed. Robbie Cox is chairing that right now and is doing some dynamite work.

Lage: What did that second survey show?

Shaffer: [Added during interviewee review: Hart came back to us with so much information. We asked people for money and for their calls and letters on an issue, yet barely thanked them. The next thing they got from us was another ask for more money, and more calls, and more letters. We were not giving our members any feedback, just asking for more and more.

And we didn't even make the pitch very well. That is we just got to the ask, we didn't bring people along, let them know what we were doing, let them know how their contributions were helping. We were not even saying thanks very well. I referred to all of this as the care and feeding of the membership, which is a bit too cute, but the giving back to them, giving them a feeling of ownership in what we were doing.]

But the question is, what are we going to learn? Are we going to respond to what we learned?

IV FUND-RAISING AND RELATIONS WITH SIERRA CLUB FOUNDATION

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Relationship Between Membership Development and Fund-raising

Lage: We're just starting up again after a break, and I was going to ask you when does membership development merge into fund-raising, in purpose and effect, and how does it relate?

Shaffer: Well, it in some ways is part of the same fabric. The members become a source of money as soon as they join, because you have that membership fee and you have the renewal income. But they also become--the trade name is file, the file from which you work, to raise money. So they're the prospective donors of the future to the club, so as you build the membership, you build a base of support for other kinds of contributions. So it's all intertwined. It's not that simple--it's more complicated than that, but it's all intertwined.

So I moved immediately into the fund-raising side.

State of Club Fund-raising under Denny Wilcher: Tension Between the Club and the Foundation

Lage: While you were doing the membership development, you were also--

Shaffer: Yes. Well, I was interested in that, and it drove me crazy, because it was just terribly inefficient. We had Denny Wilcher at the club, heading the office of program funding, and then the Sierra Club Foundation had their own fund-raising staff, and the legal defense fund had their own fund-raising staff, and everybody was very competitive. Nobody really shared information or shared donors or so on. They literally could find themselves in the same office waiting to see the same person to raise money for "the Sierra Club" at the same

time. Or one could go in not knowing the prospect very well and do a rather superficial presentation and come out with \$500, where somebody else had been working two years on developing a proposal to get \$100,000 from this person, but the other guy didn't know it--it was just nuts.

Lage: Did it take you a while to figure this out?

Shaffer: Not very long. [laughter] That was pretty obvious. So you'd say--which I did--why are we doing this? This makes no sense, this is inefficient. You ought to have a central file, you should have central research on your donors, you should have coordination, and you should split up the territory and not have people flying past each other across the country--

Lage: Was it intended originally that the club wouldn't do fund-raising, and that the foundation was the fund-raising arm? That was sort of the way I had understood it, I guess.

Shaffer: Well, the foundation was set up as a device to permit the club to raise tax-deductible funds, when the club lost its tax status. I wasn't there, and all I know is what I've been told. I think it was more a protective device and a device to permit the charitable contributions, and I don't know at the time it was particularly clear as to who was going to raise the money.

From the beginning, though, we saw emerging a serious problem that's still around, though God knows we have worked to get rid of it, and that is the connection between fund-raising and fund spending. There has been a lot of tradition in the club that says, "If you raise the money, you get to decide where it goes." Well, this has got a tremendous downside, because what clearly works significantly better is to back off and say, "What we really want to do is raise the maximum amount of money we can for these organizations, and then we want to spend it on that which most needs to be done." As opposed to the fact that the person who raised it happened to be interested in a study of the pigeons on Maui or something, and so you go do a study of pigeons on Maui, which frankly nobody cares about much one way or the other, and you don't have money to do something else with.

Lage: Now, when you say the person who raised it, who are you talking about?

Shaffer: I'm talking about--unfortunately, this got to be contagious into the staff, but it also got to be a very much of a matter of a contention with the trustees of the foundation. Because keep in mind, the trustees of the foundation were originally all past presidents of the Sierra Club. The idea was, well, they're us, and so they will always be--. Well, what happened was they went there and then they weren't us anymore, they were now them. They looked at the current boards as less wise than they were, and they saw themselves as quite competent people with good wisdom as to what needed to be done--and with justification; they were competent people with good vision.

So you got into a controlling of the funds flow--so the more they raised, then the more they sort of had some power with, and the more the club raised, the less you had to deal with that, and so that was sort of a dynamic that kept all this working.

Well, in 1979, I became a trustee of the Sierra Club Foundation. A seven-year term, I found out after I said yes, and then I found out about a year later that that had only recently gone in place. Before that it had been like a lifetime term, and going to something as short

as seven years was a revolutionary move. It sounded biblical to me. I said in joking at the time, "I don't know that I've committed myself to marriage that long at a time. At least my wife and I need to talk about it every three or four years, but seven years is a long time."

So I found a bunch of things when I went on the board of trustees. This inefficiency, this people running into each other, and then in trying to figure out why, it became the control issue. But it also went back, I believe, to the Brower thing. Because you had people like Gary Torre and Will Siri and Ed Wayburn who were players at that time, who--and I don't mean to suggest they all thought the same or anything like that, because there was clear evidence they didn't--but they didn't really trust Mike. And it wasn't personal. They wouldn't have trusted Jesus if he'd been the executive director; they didn't trust the staff. They wanted to keep control of it, and then they knew it would be okay. And if you trust those people over there, you don't know what they're going to do with it.

So you got into these kinds of issues that then developed in goofy ways. Gary Torre and others then started presenting the idea that for the Sierra Club Foundation to remain in its tax classification of tax-deductible, it had to be a public foundation, and that if it raised money only for the Sierra Club, therefore it became a private foundation, and therefore--well, nobody outside of that group of people agreed with that position. But they were attorneys and bright people, and they made great lawyerly arguments, and certainly convinced themselves.

And then, of course, you can imagine what happens over here at the Sierra Club side, because what they're hearing is, "You mean these people are going to go out and raise money in the name of the Sierra Club, using the Sierra Club Foundation name, and we might not get it? This is not a good arrangement, because we're dependent upon this." So this got to be extremely messy, and much passion and anger and divisiveness.

Resolution of the Tension: 1980

Lage: Were you on their--I thought a lot of this had happened earlier too. Was this still being resolved?

Shaffer: Yes.

Lage: Ted Snyder had some role in all this, didn't he?

Shaffer: Yes. I think--well, Ted in his [laughs]--Ted brought a lot of this to a head. Ted was a dynamic fellow and very direct. He challenged a number of these things.

Lage: He was president of the club when you went on the board of the trustees?

Shaffer: All right, well, there you go. We were clearly working very closely together all the way through on this, because he and I had a wonderful relationship, and he was--I have the greatest respect for Ted. He was an outstanding president. He said, "This is nuts." And of course, he is a brilliant attorney, and he saw through all that, or at least he thought from his point of view there was no argument there.

So the first thing I did was to try to deal with that, to offer some reassurance to the club that they'd get the money, to lower the temperature there, and try to get some commitment from the board of trustees that they really weren't going to get mad at the club and give all the money to somebody else. And I tried a number of things, but I finally--I looked at what had happened, and they indeed had been passing all the money through to the club, 95 percent of it or 98 percent of it.

So I finally got passed a resolution [1979-1980] in the board of trustees that defined the purposes of the Sierra Club Foundation by saying that those who would like to understand the purpose of the Sierra Club Foundation should examine the amount of funds raised in the previous three years, and the manner in which they were expended. And understand that this board of trustees is committed as its purpose for existence to follow that pattern.

Well, this was a long way of saying, "We've really been doing nothing but raising money for the Sierra Club, and turning it over to the Sierra Club, and that's what we intend to do." But it got it into another language that wasn't threatening--

Lage: So they didn't have to say that.

Shaffer: So much to everybody's amazement, it passed. Peter Behr was a trustee at that time. I remember when I showed it to him, I said, "What do you think?" He said, "I find it absolutely charming." [laughter] And I thought that was a good sign. Because Peter was on the side of, let's get on with all this. He was not part of all this sort of thing.

Lage: He wasn't part of the old leadership circles of the club.

Shaffer: No, he was not. It made no sense to him at all. So that broke some of the tension over, where's the money going to go?

Fund-raising Inefficiencies

Shaffer: So then, the next thing was efficiency, how do we get about getting all this mess straightened out? That was infinitely more difficult. How do we get away from having double staff, so on and so forth. Mike claimed even after that resolution got passed that there was still the form, and I don't remember that very much, that the club sort of had to come and beg for the money, and that there was still an attempt to direct it. Which I suspect probably was so, but it was manageable. I'm sure it was much more of a problem to Mike than it looked like it was to me because I was sort of looking at it--

Lage: He had to deal with it.

Shaffer: Yes, he had to get the money. So he had to worry more about it. But it was less a concern to me, and that sort of moved the control thing out of the way, I think. And then we got into the, how do we make this thing more efficient? And that--we went through several iterations. We set up something called the funding center, and we drew up a document that said the three organizations would have a funding center for the Sierra Club's work, and

that there would be a management committee. So the management committee of the funding center became the device, volunteer committee, to pull together, to coordinate.

That was the first effort, and Bob Girard, as I recall, chaired that. It was my doing, though, I must admit. And I was on it. But Bob was a really, really good fellow to do that, because again, he was not part of any team or anything, and I was the Sierra Club, and these people over here were the foundation. Even though I was a trustee, I still was viewed as being a Sierra Club person.

Lage: And the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund was part of this--

Shaffer: Legal Defense Fund was part of it, but they were part of it--Rick [Sutherland] was the best I have ever seen at being able to just kind of figure out what was the advantage of what he was doing and taking that, and then not bothering with the rest of it. So he was part of this in the sense that he attended meetings, and he did not send anybody else. He did not have volunteers there. He came himself. He was interested in certain parts of it. The rest of us, I think, were more focusing on coordination. He was more focusing on the advantages for the legal defense fund. Which was his nature.

Now, and let me quickly say about Rick that that's one of the greatest losses the environmental movement has had, his premature death [in 1991]. Tragic for what we believe in. His work is--nobody can do what he did, as far as I'm concerned.

But the funding center and management committee didn't work very well. But it did for the first time provide an arena for asking questions about costs of fund-raising. I remember drawing up little charts that sorted out the fund-raising costs from the various budgets. Then I tried to show what it was spent for. For example a large bequest might come in over the transom. There was no money spent to raise it, so you put them in there on the income side, and they made your cost of fund-raising. But nobody had really said, "Wait a minute, let's separate that out, let's find out how much, for example, major donors are giving us and how much we're paying to get it." I started doing that, because I knew enough about how numbers worked, I just got the stuff and sorted it out myself and made charts and said to people, "Tell me it ain't right." And the truth of the matter is it was right, and that did not make people very happy, because--

Lage: Your costs were greater than--

Shaffer: Oh, yes. The costs were just out of line. But no reason for them not to be. What we were doing was a very inefficient way of doing it.

Lage: Was this when Nick Clinch was still head of the foundation?

Shaffer: It was. Nick then left--I don't remember exactly when Nick left. I do have that somewhere.

Lage: I believe it was 1980 or '81.

Relations with Foundation Trustees: Cultural Barriers

Shaffer: The next thing--yes--the next thing that happened, and this all came about at about the same time--I will say as an aside, I really was amazed at the old-timers. Will Siri and Gary Torre, people like that. I'd never met anybody like that before.

Lage: In what respect?

Shaffer: Well, they were sort of aristocracy in the way they behaved. I remember going down and having lunch with Gary Torre one time, trying to get to know him. I play off of understanding people. I invest a lot of time in trying to figure people out. That makes things work better for me. I went down to his office, and I asked him if we could have lunch, and he invited me to have lunch and made clear that I was his guest, and was very gentlemanly about it. We left the office, and he kept saying, "No, go ahead," and wanted me to walk in front of him. And of course, I didn't know where we were going, which made it a bit tricky, so I kept watching and looking over my shoulder. We went down an elevator and out the door.

We came to a very nice restaurant and I thought maybe that was it, and I sort of looked at him, and he said, "Oh, no. That's where the shop girls eat. We're going over here." And I had never heard that expression. I had read about it in sort of old English literature or something.

And so I found myself with this charming, gentlemanly, obviously very bright person, but who was clearly--I sort of think of myself as a little bit of a bomb-thrower. I mean not literally, of course, but I mean a real social revolution. It just was a real shock to realize how "establishment" he was. I'm not questioning his devotion to what we believe in. I mean, he believed in wilderness preservation as much as I believed in it, and did great things. But I found this again, as when I went to the directors I found myself with this language barrier when I started talking commercial things. I found myself when I ran into the representatives of the "old Sierra Club," if you will--I had come out of the new Sierra Club in the Southeast where it was a few years old, and everybody was open to ideas, and everybody was--I just found I was--

Lage: Maybe younger, also?

Shaffer: Oh, absolutely younger. I found it all very curious and difficult.

Lage: Did you find Will Siri the same in that respect?

Shaffer: Yes, I think so. And certainly what I did then made these people very angry. And what I did is I got an agreement through the management committee of the funding center--to get agreement from the three organizations to bring in a consultant that would look at the arrangement and tell us what they thought of it. I knew that if we got anybody competent, they'd come in and tell us, "This doesn't make any sense at all."

So I talked to my friend Roger Craver and said, "We're looking for somebody," and he said, "Well, let me think of some people." He called me and said, "I've got a guy for you who would be perfect, his name is Wen Forest. He's a director of development for Planned

Parenthood and his office is in New York City." So I go to New York City and interviewed Wen Forest, and within five minutes knew that this was the man. This was, again, a very professional, very pragmatic fellow, and he started asking questions about how we were doing things, and his reaction to my answers told me very quickly that he was going to be a man who would come in and see the things that needed to be changed and say so.

Centering Fund-raising in the Club, 1980

Shaffer: So we got agreement, we brought him in, he did this. He talked to all the people individually and did what consultants do well. He then met with the individual boards and made some really very strong suggestions, and they were of course exactly what I had hoped they would be, which was, "You've got to get one fund-raising department here, and get rid of this silliness, and what you're doing is not working very well." So we indeed went that direction, which ended up with the Sierra Club Foundation then not having any fund-raisers.

Now, this was dramatic. This was reducing a lot of power in some ways, and Nick Clinch has not, I'm sure, to this day forgiven me. I passed him on an airplane ten years after this happened, and he still wouldn't speak to me. I didn't know he was on the plane. I saw him and stuck out my hand, and he walked right past me. Ten years later. So great anger, because they saw it as--well--

Lage: A power grab, would you say?

Shaffer: Well, a power grab, and as sort of repudiating the great things they had done. They had raised money, and they had spent a lot of time doing good work, and here comes this guy along who has put in place some things which has caused that to change. And we will not have any reason to try to exert authority over the expending of this money now, because we're not really the ones raising it.

Lage: So they became administrators.

Shaffer: Well, the foundation trustees became then primarily responsible for trust kinds of responsibilities, as they saw it. Now, I argued at the time not so, that they could become the basis of major donor fund-raising from a volunteer point of view, but they were, as my mama would have said, sot in their ways. They had figured out what they did, and this made no sense to them. Now in fact, what the trustees are doing now with the Centennial Campaign is exactly what I had hoped would happen.

Lage: But a new board of trustees.

Shaffer: A new board of trustees, new cast of characters. And it's great anger. It's one of those ironies of life that Will Siri was sitting on the nominating committee this weekend (November 1993) that I was interviewed by, that chose not to nominate me to run for the board again. So these things have a thread that goes on. In fact, I was told, and I will spare us both the name, but I was told at that time that because of what I was doing, I would never hold another Sierra Club office on national level. It was that deep. I did. I became

president of the Sierra Club after that. I actually became an officer of the trustees, became treasurer of the board of trustees after that. But it was that deep anger. We're passionate people. We take stuff very personally, and this was taken very personally.

Lage: How do you react when you have that kind of personal anger directed at you? Or how did you?

Shaffer: I react a lot better now than I used to. I don't like it. I'm a passionate fellow myself, I'm a fighter. You bop me on the nose, I am philosophically and spiritually, I guess, attuned to the idea of bopping you back as not being the best answer, but there is part of me that finds that tempting. And so I find that difficult to deal with, but I find more difficult to deal with the long-running [emotions]--I mean, this thing has worked by now.

The change to having a coordinated staff, the contract with the club, bringing in professional fund-raisers, coordinated and so on, has raised immensely more money than we ever thought about, significantly more money. The outgrowth of that into the Centennial Campaign, which is now bringing in literally millions of dollars, which is--at last we have a million-dollar donor to the club, or two, or whatever, which we never would have had under this old system of going around sort of picking on things. So it's been proven that these were things; history has played itself out, and these were good things to do.

Now, I don't want to make this sound like this happened because of me. This has not been a success because of me. What I was able to do was sort of clear a trail, and then good people went out there and did it. I'm not raising million-dollar gifts. I don't know anybody that can write a million-dollar check well enough to ask them for it. But the fact that some people still are angry at me, personally angry at me, and see me as the enemy, or as a bad guy, I have a lot of difficulty with. It makes me sad. It makes me feel bad.

Lage: Where did Denny Wilcher fit in, then? Maybe we've never really talked about where he fit in before.

Shaffer: Denny, of course, when I first came along, was associate director of the Sierra Club. I still have his card that says, "Associate Director." I got to know Denny early on, and we roomed together in St. Louis when the board met there. He and I--there was a mixup in rooms, and he and I ended up sharing a room at his offer. He said to me, "Need a place to stay? There's two beds in my room," and I said, "Fine." So we got to know each other early on.

But Denny gradually was phased out of all of this and went on to his Alaskan deep love, and was really happy doing that, and was in a great position to do that, because frankly, he had developed personal contacts with donors all over the country, and he really, as far as I could tell, was happy moving on to doing that and letting this all sort of sort itself out. So I don't remember the year he left, but he sort of phased out in that period of time somewhere.

What happened is we brought in new staff, Audrey Berkovitz, who then became Audrey Rust, was hired to run the department. She became the boss of Peggy Hynd and of course of Kim (now Kim Martin Shaffer).

Lage: So she was over membership development?

Shaffer: She was over membership development and fund-raising. She was over all of the raising of income on that side. I was instrumental in that happening, or played a part in that. I spent a good year or so, year and a half, running interference for her, taking care of turf battles and so on, because I wanted to--we spend an awful lot more time in the club talking about how we're going to spend money than talking about how we're going to raise it, and there's a lot more interest in, "Is my issue going to get its share," than, "Is somebody going to raise any money so everybody has a share?" She got, as everybody who's done fund-raising in this organization does, caught up in the, "But are you raising it for me?" arguments. So I ran a lot of interference for her.

But that didn't work out as well as we had hoped. There was a difference in personality and style. She was a professional, and she is still in the field, and I think doing well in the field. But she brought a dramatically different style to it than the people who had been there before, some would argue more professional.

Lage: You have to fit the club culture. Was this part of the problem?

Shaffer: I think that's right. And this is again another issue, I suppose we might touch later, but the whole business of moving into "professional people on the staff," and moving away from people who have come into it because they are cause-oriented, has had its down side. It's had an up side, but it's had a down side. (I sound like Mike McCloskey; that's one of his favorite expressions. [laughs] We've listened to each other enough.) And she moved away from using volunteers in quite the same way. She got a development committee that had on it--oh, golly, an army of people, and they'd have retreats once or twice a year, and they'd have the big dog-and-pony show. But there was never a real involvement of volunteers. That sort of started fizzling out, which I thought was terrible.

So then I worked with some people like Joe Fontaine and Rosemary Carroll when she came on to head the department, and others, to put together a document which established the structure which we now have, which is the development advisory committee, which oversees all of the development efforts and has a charge to raise the maximum amount of money for the Sierra Club family. If you raise it for chapters, that's okay, just raise money, the biggest amount possible. Brings in good people--we've had professional fund-raisers who sit on our committee as volunteers, and at the same time created the entities committee, which is a terrible name, and it was mine, and I wish I had thought of a better one, but it deals with the political turf battles. It's now chaired, I think, by Elden Hughes.

Lage: Is this part of the development advisory--

Shaffer: Part of--well, it's the same document. The same document said, "We need this group, development advisory committee, for oversight, big picture, vision, raise lots of money, good ideas, creative. We need a group that's going to deal with the turf battles, the problems, and get that out of the way. That's going to be the entities committee. We need a committee that's going to train grassroots people," and that was the grassroots training committee, which still exists, "and we need a membership committee." And that continued to exist. So we had four of these.

Lage: Do you have this document somewhere?

Shaffer: It's a board resolution, probably from about 1988. I could look.

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Carl [Pope] allows as there's two kinds of people in the world: those who are horizontal filers and those who are vertical filers. He and I both file horizontally, which means you have a lot of tables covered with piles of things.

Lage: Who is your other vertical filer? Did you say?

Shaffer: No. Carl is a horizontal filer. Piles of paper. If you've ever been--[laughs] after the last earthquake, they went around checking the offices to see how much damage was done, and the only office they couldn't tell was Carl's because it looked that way before the earthquake hit. That was, of course, before he was executive director, but still, same style. All right, well I'll get that date.

And then out of this came the Centennial Campaign, and we know sort of where that's been going.

Lage: That's a subject in itself, but it does follow here. Do you think we should leave that for another time? You kind of run out of steam, I think, after two and a half hours.

Shaffer: Has it been that long? I think we probably ought to quit, because I am getting tired.

Lage: Yes, it's a good stopping point, and we can take up with the Centennial Campaign.

Shaffer: All right.

[End of Interview]

V FUND-RAISING: THE CENTENNIAL CAMPAIGN

[Interview 3: November 8, 1997] ##

Thinking of Events Conceptually Rather than Chronologically

Lage: Today is November 8, 1997, and this is our third interview after a very long hiatus. Four years. Almost exactly. We're just talking about how to conceptualize what's left.

Shaffer: Yes. [Laughter]

Lage: Repeat what you said about how you think.

Shaffer: I don't think chronologically. I think in concepts. I think of the things I have done as treasurer, or fiscal manager and management stuff. Then I think of the political stuff, and I think of the fund-raising stuff. More than I think, you know, "in 1982 such and such happened." It's just the way my head works.

Lage: I think it is important, then, to have our oral history work the way your head works.

Shaffer: [Laughter] It may make no sense to anyone else, but we'll see.

Lage: Well, it is the way we started out when we began interviewing in 1993. You said when you came out here to San Francisco in '74 there were three things that you immediately saw.

Shaffer: Yes, that's true.

Lage: Membership development, fund-raising, and management. We have discussed membership development. We discussed a lot of fund-raising, and we were just leading into the Centennial Campaign. So why don't we start there?

Major-Donor Fund-raising under Denny Wilcher

Shaffer: Yes. That's fine. And I think that is a relatively shorter story, because it was an evolutionary thing. For a long time we talked about how is it that you raised major contributions. And we didn't know. We had major donor fund raisers who went out and made the attempt to do it, but without great success. Denny Wilcher was for many years--what did they call themselves?--the Office of Program Funding; not the development department, but the Office of Program Funding. And he was the associate director of the Sierra Club. I still have his card. Denny Wilcher.

Lage: Was that terminology different because he conceived of it differently, or didn't we have the term "development officer?"

Shaffer: You know, I don't know. Knowing Denny, I think it probably was his desire to approach it in a different way. But he basically ran a one-man operation. He went out. He knew people who were sympathetic with what we were doing. And he raised money for the club, the foundation, the legal defense fund, and kept everything in three-by-five cards in his back pocket, if any place, and that's where we were.

Lage: Was he good at it?

Shaffer: Denny was one of the rare jewels of the world. If you were to write a manual for professional fund raisers, probably little that Denny did would fit in to what you would think you should do. But he was honest. He was sincere. His soul was right. He was a man of great humor.

You know he'd been a conscientious objector in World War II when you didn't do that, and he went to prison for it. Denny never married the woman, Ida. He never married his wife of many years with whom--he had several children. Denny was just that much of an individual.

And yes, he was good at what he did, but he had the limitations of a one-man show. With no investment in those donors, it was simply a matter of going to those people and having a pleasant hour or two with them, and saying, "We have some needs here, and you have some money, and can we put the two together?"

Lage: You mean no follow-up?

Shaffer: No, no. Very little follow-up. Very little reward for donors. Very little in the way of donor recognition. Very little in the way of developing the donor, of courting the donor, and helping the donor see what it is we are doing--getting their personal involvement and then going to them for money. It was not that deep. But we did all that over a period of time. And we had other professional major-donor fund raisers. When I was president of the club, Ann, who is now Ann Downing, married to Larry Downing--

Lage: What was her last name then?

Shaffer: Knoll. Like Knoll Furniture. She did major-donor fund-raising when Kim, my present wife, was the person who was director of membership development. At any rate, that's an aside to all that.

Ann and I made calls on people to ask them for money when I was president. There was no major investment in it, if you will. Support staff, research was all minimal.

A Desire for Change--Genesis of the Centennial Campaign

Shaffer: And so a number of people, primarily the trustees of the Sierra Club Foundation, felt we needed to get on with it and figure out how you did this [major-donor fund-raising]. Maurice Holloway was clearly one of the guiding lights to it. He understood how this was done. He was a man of, is a man, of some resources. He was accustomed to people developing his interest and then asking him to make significant financial contributions. He understood how all that worked. Allan Brown then came in shortly after who had done the same sorts of things.

Lage: Now are we talking about after the period when the club and the foundation kind of went through their crisis?

Shaffer: Oh yes. The crisis was over. The crisis was over.

Lage: We did talk about that last time.

Shaffer: Yes. And as a matter of fact, somewhere, I was looking here you have on my record here that I was a trustee of the Sierra Club Foundation for seven years [1979-1986] which is correct, but I also went back and served another three-year term, from 1991 to 1994.

Lage: Okay. That's what I didn't know.

Shaffer: And that was during this period of time, as I recall. It was one of the ironies of all the conflict between the Sierra Club Foundation and the Sierra Club over things which I believe we discussed that I was told at that time that I would never hold another office in the Sierra Club because I had done things which some people in the Sierra Club Foundation were displeased with. The irony of all this is, not only did I become president of the Sierra Club, but I also went back and served another term as a trustee of the Sierra Club Foundation and served a year of that term as trustee as the treasurer of the Sierra Club Foundation.

So, these things all worked. The changes we made worked. We raised more money. We spent less money doing it. Everybody had a good time. Everybody felt good about it. And so people looked back on that and said, "Well, it was a controversy and we took sides and we disagreed, but we got our major fund-raising ability in place and it's working."

And there were people who wanted to do this. And then there was the question of how do you do it. Frankly, nobody knew. We had Audrey Berkovitz, who became Audrey Rust, who had come in to head the development department of the Sierra Club. She had,

allegedly--I don't really know what experience she had in major-donor fund-raising, but allegedly had some--in truth did not have the experience to really make all this work. She helped us find some consultants which we hired and brought in who made recommendations, and it turned out they were all dead wrong. They gave us all bad advice. They didn't know what they were talking about. We went out and tried the things they said we should try, and it fell flat on its face.

Lage: Do you remember what kinds of things?

Shaffer: First of all, we had an enthusiasm from the onset of this to build endowment. And we would have this major Centennial Campaign at the end of which we would have an endowment build-up of millions of dollars which would continue to fund programs of the Sierra Club on forever. And they allowed as how this was a grand idea. They also led us to believe that there were people out there ready to put a million dollars into endowment with relative ease, that this would not be too difficult to have happen, that there were people out there waiting to do this sort of thing.

Lage: That's, after all, what you wanted to hear.

Shaffer: That's what we wanted to hear. But none of that turned out to be correct. We went into another set of consultants. We went through several directors of the Centennial Campaign. And then we finally ended up with a consultant here in town whose name was Charlie Howland. H-O-W-L-A-N-D I believe. I'd have to check that.

But Charlie came in as a consultant. Then he acted as acting director of the campaign when we fired another of the directors. We went through--my goodness--we went through three or four. He did a lot of reality checking for us. He got us in touch with the things as they really were. But in the meantime we built a larger constituency of people up around this that were willing to invest in our campaign and be part of it. Fred Weintz, a partner in Goldman Sachs, comes to mind, and all of the trustees.

Investing in Fund-raising vs. Spending on Programs

Lage: Now were these people willing to give or people willing to--?

Shaffer: Give money and raise money. And give advice and guidance. Invest in it. Steve Stevick, I would have to say Steve Stevick played a very major role in all this as an enabler. It was a dream of Steve's to see this happen. Steve is, of course, the director of the Sierra Club Foundation, and Steve always wanted to do something that would have--what Steve does is very important and has a lasting effect--but he always wanted to expand that and make it bigger and more important. The Centennial Campaign was a way he saw of doing that, and he invested a lot of time and energy and creative juices into it. So he was a major one that kept moving the thing forward because there was the constant conflict between investing money in raising money, and spending the money right now.

Lage: Conflict among policy makers in the club?

Shaffer: Among the directors. Yes, the policy makers. The board of directors and the top staff. And this was just an enlargement of the earlier problem with direct-mail fund-raising or anything else. People like Roger Craver, who led us for so many years in fund-raising in the mass mailings and so on, and who helped us find a way into this century in that area--Roger always said, "You should take a certain amount of this money that you are raising and set it aside, and say, 'Okay, we are going to invest this in fund-raising to build an ability to continue to raise money.'"

Well, this never was very attractive to directors who would rather go fight a battle with it. So generally we went and fought a battle with it, and then the next year you'd put together a budget that had an expense line item in there of something for fund-raising, and people would say, "Well, let's scratch this. Let's go fight the battle." So it was always that push back and forth. And it was the continuation of that into the Centennial Campaign only in much bigger numbers because you had to really invest money in this if you were going to do it.

Lage: But you did get the board to endorse the idea?

Shaffer: The board endorsed the idea. The board endorsed the idea really based on the recommendations of the initial--[laughter]--the initial folks we had who were consultants who made it sound easy, and highly likely to succeed, and not terribly painful. And so with no intent on anybody's part, I don't believe, I think the board bought in on it thinking it was going to be easier, and cheaper, and so on, than it turned out to be. I don't think the board was ever unhappy, however. I think the board has always been--to the best of my knowledge--very supportive of it, and feels like it's been a great success.

So then we eventually moved along, and we got Harry Dalton to come in. And Harry Dalton had been a council delegate from South Carolina. He had been a chapter chair in South Carolina. I knew him as an activist. Frankly I hadn't a clue he had any money. Which is one of the interesting things we found when we got into the Centennial Campaign. In the Sierra Club, everybody kind of looks the same. I mean, everybody kind of dresses casually most of the time, and you see them in the context of meetings and outings and so on, and the ridiculous thing was that we had all these members, and we didn't have a clue who were the potential major donors. And so that was one of the things which was much more of a barrier to our success than we anticipated.

I've done political fund-raising. You get into political fund-raising and finding your people who put big bucks into political fund-raising is fairly easy to do. They're known in every community and state, and you get the list and you know where you're going. In the Sierra Club there was no list like that.

Lage: It was a tradition almost.

Shaffer: Yes, that's right. So here comes Harry Dalton who it never occurred to anybody would have the ability to write a check for a million dollars if he wanted to and it wouldn't bounce. I mean, it never occurred to me. I certainly wouldn't have. I mean, I couldn't write a check for a million dollars and have it not bounce, why could he? It never occurred to me.

But he came along, and he put a lot of money in this, as did Allan Brown. And they basically funded the thing, along with some others.

Lage: Funded the effort?

Shaffer: Yes, they basically put up the nut, if you will, the kitty to get the thing over the hump. And that's really what made it work. So they deserve the credit for not only the energy and the vision and so on, but the willingness to put their money on the table and say, "We're going to make this happen."

Centennial Campaign Committees and Staff

Lage: I know Allan Brown was also involved in managing, on the advisory committee.

Shaffer: That's correct. Oh, yes. Allan was the chair for a very long time. We had two committees. We had a Centennial Campaign Planning Committee which I chaired and was on for as long as it existed, along with Larry Downing and a couple other people, from the beginning. We did that.

Then there was the Centennial Campaign Steering Committee, and the theory was that the first one, the planning committee, would take care of the political stuff that you have to do in the Sierra Club; when a chapter chair would get out of joint about the fact that we were coming into their state and asking people for money without going to the chapter, that Allan, the Allan Browns of the world, would not have to deal with this. We would deal with this and work it out so everybody was happy. And we made a lot of changes.

In bequests, for example, I had chaired the committee that had written the only bequest policies we had back, way back, that Drake hotel meeting we had in--oh Lord, years, way back. [Added during interviewee review: It was when Joe [Fontaine] was president and I was treasurer. We looked at a lot of the political problems between the national organization and the chapters and RCC's. Until that time chapters or any Sierra Club entity could do a fund appeal through the mail any time they wanted, so you could get three in one mailing. We worked out a time window for chapters, for example, and national did no mailings during that time. There were other problems we worked on.

For example, on bequests. A person would die and leave money to the Sierra Club. Well, there is only one Sierra Club, the national. So the club would take the money, that had perhaps come from someone who had been active in their chapter or who had thought of the club as what they saw the chapter doing. And the chapter would get nothing. So at that meeting we set up a way of evaluating a bequest, to determine if it should go to national, chapter, or be split.

But with the Centennial Campaign we made this policy more broad and set up a policy that the chapter got something from any bequest of a member from that chapter, even if the chapter was not mentioned. Of course, if the bequest was for a specific entity or program, it went to that. But we wanted the chapters to be working to get bequests, and giving them a part of the money that comes in was a good motivation.]

The Centennial Campaign Planning Committee did a lot of that. We worked through the budgets. We kept the budgets moving so that the steering committee, the Allan Browns

and the Maurice Holloways, did not have to go to board meetings and argue whether or not it was worth it to have a meeting or dinner for potential donors. We would take care of that sort of thing.

Lage: I see. That explains these two committees in a way I hadn't heard them explained before.

Shaffer: Yes. We sort of cleared out the--leveled the field so that those people could go about doing what they wanted to go about doing.

Lage: Did that--excuse me for interrupting--but did it become a policy that a bequest or major donation would be shared with the chapters?

Shaffer: Yes. So we moved through this, and then we finally had Bill Meadows come to the campaign with his wonderful background. He'd been a council delegate at one time. He'd been an activist in the Sierra Club. And he was a professional in major-donor fund-raising. He was able to not only bring to the table the professional skills, but he also brought to the table the understanding of the culture of the Sierra Club.

Lage: But before him you had somebody that was a big problem, as I recall.

Shaffer: As I remember, we went through three. I think we went through three directors, as I remember, and I would have a hard time sitting here telling you who they were. It's sort of this Freudian thing, your mind kicks out these unpleasant experiences. They weren't bad people. They just didn't fit; they couldn't understand the culture. They didn't necessarily understand the product, if you would.

Understanding Club Culture

Shaffer: If you are going to raise money you would love to be The Nature Conservancy rather than the Sierra Club because The Nature Conservancy hardly ever makes anybody mad. I don't know that they've ever made anybody mad. The Sierra Club makes people mad. And if you are going to do this major-donor fund-raising, you've got to have professionals doing it that understand that's the nature of the organization, and that you're not going to put a gag on the organization for five years so you can raise more money. The organization wouldn't stand for it, shouldn't stand for it, and if it did that it would no longer be the organization that deserved your money [laughter].

And some of them didn't really understand that. And it frustrated them and they would try to get things changed and it just was not a pretty picture.

Bill came in, he understood what our potential was and what our limitations were. And at this point we also began to realize that if we were going to raise this money we were not going to raise it for endowment; we were going to raise it for program. Everybody you went to, that was willing to give you a big piece of money, was willing to do it if they could see that they were going to make a difference in the near future.

Lage: Oh, I see. So you gave up the idea of endowment.

Shaffer: We pretty well gave up the idea of endowment. Now I will have to say this was not done over my dead body, but it was done over my badly wounded body. Because I have felt all along that endowment was a terribly important thing and that that would be the ultimate gift we could leave to the Sierra Club was some kind of financial security. The club's financial health varies based on political situations and the mood of the country, and things which are outside the control of the organization. Having some stability in the way of endowment would insure, or come close to insure, our continued being. But that was not, frankly, to be. That didn't work out that way.

So we've raised a lot of money. It's been very successful. And most importantly, it is built into the organization now, and this was the hope from the beginning: the capability of continuing to raise large contributions. And thank God, and Allan Brown and Maurice Holloway and a lot of other people, that we did that, because direct mail fund-raising and other mass means of fund-raising have become less efficient over the years. Had we not moved into this Centennial Campaign, we would be in a very bad situation at the present time. None of this is a surprise. Everybody knew that was going to happen, and that was one of the motivating reasons for getting into the Centennial Campaign.

Lage: So even though you promoted the idea of the direct mail, you recognized that it had its limitations?

Shaffer: Oh yes. [pause]

Lage: Or was that over time?

Shaffer: It's been my contention, and this is probably an overstatement, that I've never had a good original idea in my life, but that I've been blessed with the ability to know a good idea when I see one. At the time we moved into direct mail membership development it was a new concept, red hot, virginal territory, yet it just was going to work, it was just a wonderful idea. Not doing it was a bad idea. Going into it as slowly as we did is a darn shame. But it was there. Did it ever occur to me it was going to last forever? Not in my life. Absolutely not. Nothing like that lasts forever. When the business of telephone solicitations came along, which I hate--I just hate them--

Lage: The phone-mail programs?

Shaffer: Yeah, I hate those things. And you know I still get people calling me. I must have five brokers a week calling me, and I have no interest in talking to them. When we got into that program, which I hated and which I resisted, I recognized, however, that it worked. But I also recognized, this ain't going to work forever either. And there had been times when accessibility to government grants has been there. We've never done very much with that. Other organizations have been much better at that than we have. But clearly this is not the time for that now. Government's not doing that stuff much anymore. Certainly doing much less of it.

So, yes, when we went into those things I saw them as the good idea at the time, the thing you needed to do, and things which we'll always do, I think. I think we'll always do some of that. But it will come and go. And you will refine the tools. You will learn more about how they work.

The Next Step: Involving the Grass Roots

Lage: I wonder what the next step is?

Shaffer: Ann, I haven't given this much thought anymore. Twenty-five years or thirty years, or whatever, of this has been enough, and I really am thinking about other things. That's a good question, and part of me would love to sit down and think about it a while. There's going to be a next step. There's going to be new ways to fund organizations.

I will venture one observation. I think we have to get the feeling of the contribution and the effect of that contribution closer together. I think people are more and more wanting instant gratification. If I give you a thousand dollars, I want to know two weeks from now what happened and, best of all worlds, I would like to be able to go see it, or read about it in the local paper. I think that's the area we're going in, and that suggests getting things back closer to people, and if I were to think about this for another two hours, that's probably where I would end up. I think that's where it's going.

Lage: More of an almost grassroots involvement in the funding.

Shaffer: Yes. I think so. This really gets into the whole concept of what the Sierra Club ought to be in the future, and I just wrote a short note to Adam Werbach yesterday on the subject [see appendix]. But I really believe that we need the national organization to provide the leadership, the vision, the big concepts, but I think the action has got to be out there. And I think we need to give people tools. It's the same whether you're trying to save the local wilderness area, or whether you're trying to raise money. I think it needs to be done there.

Lage: Out at the chapter level, or field?

Shaffer: Well, we get into this mentality of the structure which--you know whether it should be on the group level, or chapter level, or the regional level, or the national level. It really just needs to be where the people are. You could structure it in any kind of way. But in the best of all worlds you would have people out there who have some training and ability and competence to tap into the resources that are available out there to do what needs to be done out there, as opposed to sending out ten million letters from San Francisco and getting the mail back--the money back to San Francisco and doling it out to North Carolina where something is going on. In the best of all worlds--

Lage: So more decentralized.

Shaffer: Yes, in the best of all worlds. [pause] Here you've got me thinking in the future. This is supposed to be history.

Lage: I know, I know. [Laughter] You're always thinking about the next step, and we wouldn't be getting you if we didn't get that.

Shaffer: Oh, and it's so much more exciting to think about what--to me the exciting thing always is what can you do tomorrow you've not done.

Legacy of the Centennial Campaign

Lage: Right. But analyzing what's happened in the past I think leads to that. Anything else we should say about the Centennial Campaign, or your particular role?

Shaffer: Oh, I don't think so. I think my role in the Centennial Campaign was like my role is in so many things. I saw myself as an enabler. I went from one group to another. When people were out of sorts about something, I tried to find a way to make it work. I got to know personally Allan and Marilyn Brown and Maurice and Jan Holloway as good friends. Not because I thought that would be a help to the Centennial Campaign, but because they are absolutely wonderful people, and the opportunity to get to know them was one of the blessings of my life.

Lage: Who brought them into the Sierra Club?

Shaffer: Oh, they had been there. They had been there forever, just about. But, I'm not quite sure exactly. Well, Maurice had been involved in fund-raising in the Sierra Club and in other things.

So I was thinking, on a whole totally different subject, I noticed the name Andrea Bonnette in here, and he [Maurice Holloway] was one of the people who interviewed her when she was hired, along with myself. He's clearly a very successful local businessman, and they wanted somebody who would be able to do that so they called Maurice, and he said, "Sure, I'll come down and spend a day interviewing candidates for this job." So he's been a friend of the Sierra Club for a very long time and was willing to come and play these kinds of roles.

But I think the legacy of this is that we now have the ability and potential to do this kind of fund-raising, we have some knowledge about how it is done. We have a group of people who have made major financial contributions, who have now some investment themselves in a major financial way in the success of the club, and in the continuing raising of money, and so on. So I think that's moved along very well.

And I think my role in it was that I understood from the very beginning it was a good idea, and that I understood that some of the people we got involved weren't going to make it work, and that I was perfectly willing to help get them out of the way and get somebody else in that was going to help make it work. Not in a vicious way, but, you know, they weren't--it wasn't working. So it's another problem you solve, and you solve it by getting somebody that can make it work. And we did.

VI DEALING WITH CLUB MANAGEMENT AND MONEY

Initial Impressions of Club Administration

Lage: Shall we turn back again to the early involvement and your concern with management issues in the Sierra Club? When you say management is one of your three major things, were you thinking of mainly fiscal management, or general club management in which you saw something of a problem?

Shaffer: Well, the thing that interested me when I came out here was it was clear there was nobody in sight on the staff of the Sierra Club that was a trained administrator. There was nobody there that when they were a kid said, "When I grow up I want to be a boss." They were people who said, "When I grow up I want to be a lawyer." Or, "When I grow up I want to be a scientist," or "I want to"--whatever.

But the idea of management systems, the idea of the concept of how do you arrange things to make them work better--the business of people and money and systems--how do you do that, came to them after they got into their kind of jobs. Mike McCloskey is a perfect example.

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Shaffer: Moving into the executive director position meant that he had to take this sheer brilliance that he brings with him and try this, or learn that, or whatever. But he hadn't been brought to it in that way. So it struck me immediately that it would be good to have somebody around here that understood those kinds of things. But it also seemed to me that management systems, if you will, as a shorthand expression, were not particularly valued. In fact there was a sort of hostility towards administration. You know doctors think that hospital administrators generally are yoyos, and that the doctors can run it better, and lawyers have little enthusiasm for the business community or the people who manage things.

Lage: And professors.

Shaffer: And professors think that the administration is inept at best, and so on. So many of the people who govern the Sierra Club historically look at these kinds of folks who are administrators or management people as sort of folks who get in the way of good ideas and progress. Well, I have my own bias since I spent all my life--I was one of those people who when I was a kid, and this is the literal truth, when I was five or six years old said to my mother when I grew up I wanted to be a boss. And that idea intrigued me, and so I had my bias here. But good management makes things work better. Good management backs off and says, "Okay, we're going to make widgets, how do we make the best widget at the least cost with the people making those widgets feeling the best about it, and our reputation twenty years from now being better than it is today?"

Lage: Now you came on the board in 1977.

Shaffer: Yes.

Lage: Did you introduce these ideas, and what kind of a response did you get?

Shaffer: I had a little introduction to the board before I came on through the membership development. I came to them--

Lage: And you were on the council.

Shaffer: Oh yes, and through the council. The council was an interesting experience because the council was different then, I believe, because the people who were on the council viewed themselves as national leadership more than they viewed themselves as chapter representatives. It was a sort of House of Representatives of the Sierra Club, if you will, everybody from their own district. But when they got here, they looked at the Sierra Club and said, "How can we make it work better?" And there was very little of, "I've got a problem back in my chapter and somebody's got to do something about it."

And out of that group of people grew some of the really good leaders of the club. The Sue Merrows, and Larry Downings, and Marty Fluhartys, and Bob Howards, and a number of others came out of that same group of people. And that group of people, when they were on the council, spent a lot of time thinking about the kinds of things we're talking about here.

Lage: So they were interested in--

Shaffer: They were interested in making these things work better. They, or we, I guess it would be fair to say because I was there with them, would take things on simply because it looked like they needed to be taken on and nobody was paying any attention to them. And so it was a continuation of the growth out of my days there.

I went to the board twice that I remember. One was with a point of sale display to sell memberships of the Sierra Club which I had developed back in Fayetteville, and the second experience was I put together with a friend back home a concept to put together recordings of the music of America [See chapter III].

Now, the moral of the story was [chuckles] that I went on the board knowing that we spoke a different language in some areas. And that did not mean that my first year was not rocky,

because it was rocky. But it helped me understand that good people think about good things differently.

Appointment to the Board of Directors, 1977

Lage: When you say that your first year was rocky, what kinds of things? I'm trying to get some specifics.

Shaffer: Well, I was appointed to the board to fill the seat of Brant Calkin, who resigned to take the position of southwest rep after he had not been reelected president of the Sierra Club which everybody thought he was going to be. And he really wanted to do the southwest rep, but he had served one term [as president] and he felt that it was in the best interest of the Sierra Club to finish out his second term, and so he did not put his name in the hat to be southwest rep. Much to his surprise, and to the surprise of a lot of people, the board chose to elect Bill Futrell in May. And it was a surprise. Perhaps not to Bill Futrell, but it was a surprise to a lot of people.

So then Brant came back and resigned, and the board then decided to wait until their retreat in the summer to fill the vacancy. And they did. They made up a list of names. I understand there were over fifty names on it, and they started going down the list, and voting on them, and I ended up being the survivor.

Lage: So somebody liked what you brought to the board.

Shaffer: Well, evidently. Certainly I had been conspicuous. I had certainly done things which were high profile. I look back on it with some embarrassment. Actually the first membership campaign that was held in the Sierra Club--we actually used to do this--we used to have membership contests, and chapters would challenge each other, and people would be recognized if they got a certain number of people to join the Sierra Club. We gave trees to people. Fruit trees. If you got a member, we sent you a fruit tree. And the ad that was in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*, that was a full page ad which I wrote, had my picture in it holding the tree.

So I had been very high profile. And I was interested in serving on the board, and I saw that as something I might do sometime. So yeah, people noticed me, and I think in fairness the board at that point was looking for somebody with some of the skills they hoped I had. I think that, I was told later, was the reason they brought me on.

But the board that I came on--I came in mid-summer and that year, which was Bill Futrell's year as president, which by then was already three months old--

Lage: And he was the first southern president. I don't know if that's significant or not, but he was.

Shaffer: Well, I never thought about that, but I guess that's right, yes. No, it wasn't significant to me. Obviously, I didn't remember it. [Laughter] But it's difficult for a one-term president. Bill had an agenda. As a matter of fact, he appointed me, and I served as the chair of the Urban Environment Committee.

Lage: Oh you did?

Shaffer: Which was his pet thing. It was very important to him. He asked me to chair that. I did.

Lage: Was that an interest of yours?

Shaffer: Well, I had had some--you know I had been a city councilman early on. I understood what some of these issues were. I understood how city councils, mayors, and so on thought. It was not--the truth of the matter is my primary interests are trees and critters, and the health of the earth and the people that live on it. And these other things were just things that needed to be done. But it was a year in which things sort of bounced around it seemed to me. And part of it was just me getting acclimated to the whole thing.

Elected to the Board, 1978, and Thoughts on a Bizarre Election System

Shaffer: Then in the following year I ran for the board and was elected, and was also elected treasurer at the same time. At a time we were in financial crisis, which was not great timing on my part.

Lage: And Ted Snyder was elected president.

Shaffer: Ted Snyder was elected president. Ted was my friend. I managed to help Ted get elected. I thought Ted would make a good president. I think he did. I think that was a correct thing at the time. The primary contender at that time was Richard Cellarius, who later got his crack at it, much later, but did. And I served with Ted as treasurer.

Lage: Is that a--just to go back in time there--are these presidential elections, or was that one, a particularly contentious kind of thing?

Shaffer: [Pause] A lot of them are eight-to-seven votes. [Laughter] Including mine, the first time. Directors are political animals. They're inclined to think rather highly of themselves and their abilities. And in most cases there's justification for that. Being president of the Sierra Club is a great honor. And when you become a director you have a chance of being president. It's a risk of being a director, I guess.

[Pause] Contentious, I don't know. Some of them have been that. Some of them have been hurts that people probably carry with them to this day. I think people generally, though, have gotten over those things. But, yes, it's important.

It's a bizarre system. It's a system which I've tried to change over the years, and had absolutely no success doing. We go into a retreat setting two or three days before the May board meeting. We elect our officers and the president presides Saturday morning at a board meeting over an agenda which he did not prepare and which he may or may not know anything about, other than just anecdotally. And, it's nuts. There's no preparation for the office. When I was president I prepared the two logical people to succeed me. They were Phil Hocker and Michele [Perrault]. I spent time with Phil and Michele on issues for the last six months of my presidency, assuming one of them would be president. I don't

know that anybody has ever done that before, or since. Certainly nobody did it for me. But I had been there.

Lage: Would you prefer to see the election take place earlier?

Shaffer: Oh yes. We should have a president-elect. I think a president-elect would be a good idea and you have a year of training. Elect officers in February, and have them have a chance to have the ExCom have a retreat and get to know each other, and set up some plans to work together and all that before they have the first meeting. You know, you're on the plane flying across the country and you haven't had your first lesson to where the controls are, or to where you are going for that matter. It's just a bizarre system.

I am a political animal. And I will acknowledge this. I have probably the most complete file of ballot statements, and so on that anybody has ever had in this organization. I've had great interest in the things I have done in that area. I, for example, was the first person to run for the board of directors of the Sierra Club who asked people to vote for me.

Everybody else just wrote all this stuff, and in self-aggrandizement assumed it would be so grand people would vote for them. I ended up one of my first statements saying, "Please vote for me. Let me have one of your votes."

Lage: Oh you mean, in the official statement.

Shaffer: In the statement.

Lage: Not on the side?

Shaffer: No, on the ballot, on the ballot statement said, "Please vote for me." Asked you to vote for me. Revolutionary idea. Well, of course everybody does that now. I was the first person to put my telephone number in my ballot statement and say, "I'm interested in what you would want me to do, and I would be pleased to answer questions that you have about what I would like to do. Here's my phone number. Call me." When I first did it, people thought I was insane. If you look at the ballot now, you'll find a majority of people doing it.

The last time I ran I used quotations from people who said nice things about me, rather than saying it myself. This is a concept that hasn't been copied much yet, but it will be. I've enjoyed this kind of political stuff. And I've enjoyed the elections the same way.

I have always, each of the years I served, three months before the elections came up started talking to the other directors. "Who's going to be the next president? Who's going to be the next treasurer?" It's been amazing to me that a number of directors don't think much about it until it's almost time to happen. I think it's unfortunate. But I think that's one of the reasons why the system ought to be changed. So that the system itself would dictate people think about it earlier.

We need to think about who is going to be treasurer, for example. We need to know that we have somebody that's competent to be treasurer on the board, and there are times in which we do not. And that's not putting down the people that are on the board. Their background isn't in it. You cannot do that job as well, if you have not got some real experience with numbers and management systems. You're going to get bamboozled.

Lage: Didn't at one time the club have the capability to appoint a member, a fixed officer or something?

Shaffer: I have tried several times to have the present system changed. I introduced the concept of having the board be permitted to elect a treasurer that is not a director. But it would have taken a bylaw change, and the board voted against it. I mean for some good reasons, but they did. I think more than the president the treasurer is a position that you need somebody with--I mean I think most directors have the skills that a president needs to have. They have them in varying degrees and they're assorted differently. But they all have some experience in that sort of thing.

Not infrequently the board is made up of folks who really have not spent much time working on budgets and finance, are not thinking in terms of risk assessment as a managerial concept as opposed to a toxic chemical concept. And that's unfortunate. That diminishes us. But, that's the way it is.

Elected as Treasurer, 1978: Dealing with a Budgetary Mess

Lage: But you did get elected treasurer after just one year on the board. [1978-1982]

Shaffer: I did.

Lage: Was that something you campaigned for, or how does one get elected treasurer?

Shaffer: It was sort of a given by that time. I think when they put me on the board they were looking for somebody that they hoped had some skills. They knew they had a mess. And they wanted me to do it. And I said, "Well, all right I will." It was awful. It was awful.

Lage: Let's talk about that.

Shaffer: It was just awful. [Laughter] I had been there a few months, and I should have known better. I had no clue how bad it was going to be. We went in to the September 1978 board meeting--well, first of all, there was a budget committee, not a finance committee. And basically the thing that that committee did was it worked over the budget and it met once a year. And it looked over the budget, and gave it to the board.

It was a budget committee that I did not choose. It was a committee that I inherited. That ain't all bad, except that when I have a committee I'm chairing I would like to have at least one or two people on there that I have enough relationship with that we know how we work, and that we are kind of going the same direction instinctively so you don't have to start every story with Adam and Eve and move forward, that you have some basis to start from.

But I didn't. And the budget committee met just a couple weeks or so before, about two weeks before the board met to adopt the budget. At the budget committee meeting I realized that the system that we had was that we had no system. At that point the budget was put together by each department preparing a budget, submitting it to the executive

director and the accounting department who sort of checked it over to see whether they had their numbers added up right. And they put it all in a pile, and they gave it to the budget committee. And the budget would be wildly out of balance, and the budget committee was to make it whole.

Lage: So they gave you what they felt they needed to run the departments and--

Shaffer: Well, unfortunately it was much worse than that. Because the department heads had learned that it was the inclination of the politicians, the directors, to pump up the income streams. To say, "Oh well, we'll bring in more than this, so what we'll do is we'll add five percent on to the revenue from dues." And so the same department heads would underestimate what they thought the income was going to be so that when the board overstated what they had submitted they would come out in the right neighborhood.

They did the same thing in expenses. They would overstate expenses on the assumption the board is going to cut them, so we'll put a little extra in there so after the board cuts it we'll still have enough to do the job. So what you had was a pile of numbers from each department, none of which represented anything that was related to reality. Or very dang little of which was related to reality. You had overstated expenses, understated income, none of which balanced, and you had a bunch of people who hadn't seen each other for a year coming together with varying degrees of skill. And the budget committee at that point was made up generally, as we had a desire to do at that time, from somebody from the RCCs [regional conservation committees], a regional vice president, somebody from the issue committees, everybody there to sort of protect their turf. And nobody really equipped to deal with the whole thing, except maybe the treasurer who may or may not have been able. Oh, it was awful.

Lage: Does the board usually adopt the budget in September?

Shaffer: Yes.

Lage: Would you meet in August?

Shaffer: Yes, yes.

Lage: Now what kind of staff involvement was there at these budget committee meetings?

Shaffer: The staff. The way that worked was the accounting department put all this paper together and gave it to you complete with the fact that it didn't balance. And then you would have a sort of dog and pony show. And you would have Jon Beckmann [books department head] come in and tell you about books and calendars, and you would quiz him and try to get him to commit for a little bit more money, and try to reduce expenses, and of course everybody knew what the game was.

So there were always some people--Fran, Fran Gendlin [head of public affairs], was one of the people that was very good at that. Fran always had a few thousand bucks somewhere hidden away that when things really got tough she would come in and say, "Well, I believe I could do so and so that would provide another ten thousand dollars." Which always increased her popularity and so on. But it was unfortunately--all this stuff became part of

the game [laughter]. This had nothing to do with a sensible way of putting together a budget.

A Legendary Budget Meeting of the Board, September 1978

Shaffer: So this mess, then, went on to the board, and we met over at the headlands.

Lage: Marin Headlands.

Shaffer: And for that meeting there was a large contingent of California activists who appeared at this meeting because they knew the club's finances were in trouble and they were there to protect those things which were near and dear to them.

Lage: Are we talking about a specific meeting now?

Shaffer: Yes. That was the first board meeting--when the board adopted the budget.

Lage: In '78.

Shaffer: In '78, which was my first term as being treasurer. And I am presenting this budget which has come out of a budget committee meeting in terrible straits, with numbers which are more or less accurate. Probably less.

Lage: Did you get it in balance?

Shaffer: The budget committee did not. I went to that meeting with a solution in my pocket. I never, as treasurer, went to a meeting with any budget that I didn't have a solution in my pocket. It was not necessarily a solution I thought anybody would buy. But I certainly wasn't going into a meeting and have no solution.

Several things happened. One was, there was this large contingent of folks from California who were there to not only protect, but to argue vehemently for what they believed in, and they took a great amount of time doing that.

Ted was president. Ted is my friend to this day and I love him. Ted ran a meeting as a parliamentarian. I mean everything had to be in the form of a motion, properly made and seconded, then debated, and then moved on. Well, you try to adopt a budget of ten thousand pieces in this way, you're talking about the potential for ten thousand motions. And it was a terribly frustrating system. It was one that almost made progress impossible, because you couldn't prioritize things, you could just put something up, and it would get voted down.

Lage: One after another.

Shaffer: Yes. Right. It was horrible. And it became clear to me, after two days of this that there was not a majority in the room for anything. No matter what you proposed, it would go down in flames because it would mean reducing spending, or whatever, and it had a

constituency opposed to it. John Higgins, who was then the head of general services, which was the department that sort of headed the--was the management systems sort of thing, resigned in the middle of the meeting. Turned in his--

Lage: Out of frustration.

Shaffer: Wrote a note on a piece of paper and gave it to Mike McCloskey, and said, "I resign my position. I cannot run my job in this way. They're tearing my department apart. They're doing it without understanding what they're doing. I resign." It was horrible.

Lage: Was it a particularly bad crisis year?

Shaffer: [slowly] It was a tough year. It was a year that we were going to have to reduce somewhat what we were doing. There had been no preparation for it. There had been no building up to this. There had been no ground laid--and we had had some years in which we had been having growth, and were adding a little bit here and little there. And, people were not psychologically prepared for it. It was awful.

I, to this day, don't know exactly how we got out of there, except I remember Dick Fiddler, who was new on the board--Dick, and Marty, and Nick Robinson were the three new directors which were elected with me in May. There was a carryover, and I don't remember who that was now. But, Dick Fiddler, I remember, realizing that we were totally stuck. And we were. And I tried everything I could think of. We took a break at one time, and I had about six people--Liz Meyer was one of them, Judy from southern California, Judy--

Lage: Anderson?

Shaffer: Judy Anderson. And others that have been active over many years, but they were all there. And there were all standing around. And they were all hollering at me, and I said, "Stop! Sit down!" And I sat down on the floor. Right there. And they looked at me like I lost my mind. I said, "Sit down!" And they sat down. I said, "Tell me what the solution is. Tell me how to get out of here with a budget that will serve the Sierra Club." Well, they were not prepared for that kind of question. And it did somewhat cool that part down. That was good.

And Liz Meyer, incidentally, went on--I put her on the finance committee, the budget committee the next year. Which, again, was my style. You find somebody that doesn't like it like it is, you invite them in and say, "Okay, let's change it." And it needed to be changed. She was a very bright lady. I haven't seen her in a long time. I'm sure she's still a very bright lady. But she came in and was a very big help. But we kind of got that part put down and then--

Lage: This was dealing with the California activists?

Shaffer: Yes, this was the California activists. I don't know if it was a major issue. It may have been. It may have been the question of whether they were going to have one or two field offices. I mean, I don't remember at this point what it was. But it was more a matter of just a long series of feelings that we were going to do them in, and this was a bad thing. Then Fiddler recognized the mess we were in, and he and I got together at a break. He suggested some packages of expenses and income that we started to vote on one at a time. Eventually

we got out of there with some semblance of a budget, and got through it. But it was a real learning experience for me, and of course I came out of that saying, "Well, this ain't ever going to happen again." And of course it didn't.

Lage: That's a good place to change the tape.

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Lage: What role did the staff play in this meeting, aside from resigning? Did they lobby for their programs?

Shaffer: Well, it was a political game, so the department heads were forced into a political game whether they wished to be in it or not. They were forced to defend their numbers. They tried to put something on the table that would help. Mike was carrying out the role that the board wanted him to carry out--which was basically to bring all of this together, and have it put on the table where the responsible people--quote unquote, the board of directors--would do something about it. The fact that it was not put on the table for the board of directors in a way that they could responsibly deal with it apparently hadn't been the issue, which it clearly needed to be.

Making the Staff Responsible for a Balanced Budget

Shaffer: After the meeting it was clear to me what needed to be done and we just proceeded to do it. I changed the make-up somewhat of the committee. I think the committee met an extra time. I charged, we charged, whoever charged--it was my idea--never again would we do this, and that the staff would be charged with preparing a balanced budget to submit to the budget committee; and that they would test the numbers and stand on them; and that the executive director would test the numbers and stand on them. And if this is a number that came in on membership income, the executive director was going to put his hand on it and say, "That is the right number." Then that would be changed at the peril of the board of directors if they changed it. That they in fact would either have to have some justification for doing that or they would have to say out loud, "We're going to change it; it's wishful thinking, but we're going to do it anyhow." But there would be no game playing. It would be, "This is the way it is."

Now, the system I set up was that this would be a balanced budget, and it would be a balanced budget with alternatives. That you would have a program in there in such a way that it could be identified by description: that this program will do this for you, and it will cost this amount of money. And this program will do this for you, and it will cost this amount of money. And here is a piece of program which we are not recommending doing and which is not in the budget which would do this sort of thing and would cost this amount of money. The idea being that the directors, then, if they wished could pull this piece out and put that piece in, if they were somewhat comparable of size, and build a budget in that way without going down into line items and questioning whether you needed to have your books department head, Jon Beckmann, travel to Europe to look at the calendar proofs or not.

Lage: That was the kind of thing they would--?

Shaffer: Oh Lord, yes! I mean, they got down into the most minute level of detail you could get down into. Literally. Phone bills, travel and so on.

Lage: Right at the board meeting?

Shaffer: Oh yes. Down to the nickels and dimes. I mean, yes. Yes, and no big picture. All just inside the workings of the machinery, sort of like little mites in a television set trying to rewire it with never having seen a television set in the whole, to know what a television set ought to look like. I mean it was a bizarre process.

Lage: Do you think this came out of the--I mean it must have come out of the history of the club somehow.

Shaffer: Well, of course. And it was a system that once worked. You could run a mama-papa business that way, you know. But the club had grown. I mean this was just the beginning of my discoveries of where we were. It was not much later than that--it may have been about the same time--that president Ted Snyder is in Alaska, and Mike McCloskey is in Europe, and Allen Smith, who is the controller, calls me up and says, "Denny"--or maybe I'm out here. I think I was out here. I spent fifty percent of my time in San Francisco the first couple years I served.

Lage: As treasurer.

Shaffer: As treasurer. And he said, "Denny, we have a problem. We have six thousand dollars in the bank, and we've got to meet the payroll in three days. We're not going to have enough money to meet the payroll."

And I said, "Allen, how do we track our cash flow?"

And the answer basically was, "We really don't." Now, nobody apparently had given this much thought: the fact that we ran business on accrual accounting. And the sort of feeling was, "Well, if we're running a little surplus, that means you're going to have money in the bank." Well, of course, that's not at all what it means. It could mean you have a lot of books in the warehouse somewhere. It could mean a lot things. But it doesn't necessarily mean you're going to have enough to pay the employees.

From that point on--for the next year and a half--I kept the cash flow records of the Sierra Club on a spreadsheet myself on a weekly basis. So I knew how much money we had from a cash flow point of view. By which time I was able to get the staff to start doing it. And frankly, in my judgement, in my last term in office I was still troubled by the fact that the board pays less attention to the cash flow than it should.

Lage: But should it be the board that pays attention to it or the staff?

Shaffer: No, but the staff should keep the board informed. The board should know what questions to ask. The board should know that you can have assets and not be able to pay your bills, as we've all known personally. I mean you can own a big house and a nice car, and you can't buy gas, because you just ran out of cash. Well, the Sierra Club can do that too. And

it's a concept that keeps missing the directors. It's a concept people don't think about very much.

Lage: But what about someone like Allen Smith? Being a controller, wouldn't he have thought of this? Or who else was responsible for financial management? Len Levitt comes to mind.

Shaffer: Len Levitt came in later. Len came in later. Len came in a little bit later, and Len's--

Lage: So Mike was trying to do it all himself.

Shaffer: Yes. [Pause] I don't know the answer to your question directly. Why didn't Allen Smith have somebody paying attention to this? My guess is there really weren't many people there. There were Allen Smith and Tom Combs, who later married Peggy Hynd, who was the director of development at a later time, both of whom are still my dear friends. [Pause]. I don't know. It was emphasis. It was resources dedicated to doing it. It was that sort of thing, I suspect.

Len Levitt was part of my concept of you've got to get somebody in here that understands management. Len had been an executive with Safeway, and had decided to retire from that and to do something that he thought would be better and serve humanity in some way, and it would still be a job that he could do. He took over the management of a co-op, in Berkeley I believe it was, and he found rather quickly that this was too crazy for him. This was cultural shock he was not prepared for. So he then came to the Sierra Club, which of course I suppose was equally a cultural shock, but fortunately--

Lage: Out of the frying pan, I would say [laughter].

Shaffer: Fortunately he had the co-op to acclimate him. But Len brought a sort of remote kind of approach to the club that was extremely helpful at that time to bring things along in an orderly way. Roger Craver--I remember one extremely controversial meeting we were at, and everybody was shouting at everybody about the money going in the wrong direction, and not enough money, and so on. And Roger Craver was there. Len Levitt was there, and so on. And everybody was exercised. And I remember after the meeting Roger Craver saying something of admiration about Len Levitt, and I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "Well, every organization should have at least one person that doesn't sweat." [Laughter] And he didn't. Everybody was just exercised, and screaming at each other. Len just sort of sat there and listened to it all through, and if you asked his opinion, he gave you a considered opinion, which you may or may not have agreed with, but which had a good chance that it would work--whether you liked it or not. And I found working with Len to be very good.

Putting the Executive Director in Charge of his Staff

Shaffer: Len was the first major employee of the Sierra Club that was hired by the executive director.

Lage: Rather than the board of directors.

Shaffer: [Rather than] by the board of directors. Allen Smith was hired by the board of directors. Jon Beckmann was hired by the board of directors. All these people up to that time had been hired by the board of directors. Ted Snyder had advocated, and I advocated strongly, and the two of us sold the idea, that if you are going to hold an executive director responsible for what the staff does, you've got let him choose the people that are going to be on the staff. The board of directors had never given much thought, apparently, to how you hold an executive director responsible. They just sort of assumed he would be responsible because he's a responsible fellow.

But it goes back to that management systems thing. You just cannot hold somebody responsible for doing something and then tell them that you have to do it my way and with my people, because they have the built-in excuse. They come back to you and say, "Well, you know I tried, but this fellow you gave me is just a yo-yo, and how could I make it work?" And it can't work.

Lage: Did Mike ask for that, or was this something the two of you, you and Ted--

Shaffer: No, I don't remember Mike asking for it. That would have not been Mike's style. Mike didn't come forth and say, "You need to give me this, or you need to give me that." Mike is, and always was, the good soldier. You tell Mike what you want him to do, and Mike will, by gum, go try to get it done for you, and in most cases get it done better than you dreamed possible. But he won't look you in the eye and say, "Boy, that's a dumb idea. This is not a good use of my time." He won't do that to this day. And the board will give things to do that are dumb ideas. And he will go do them to the best of his ability and deliver them. They don't do that very often, but certainly over the years there have been those things happen. And Mike's style would not be to say, "No." Or to come to the board and say, "You need to let me do this or that."

Richard Cellarius once said to me that's the most significant contribution that I made to the Sierra Club. I think he's wrong. But I think that it's important--

Lage: Putting the executive director in charge of his staff.

Shaffer: In charge. Yes! Now, we just mentioned two things: the executive director now responsible for putting together a budget, that he says is a responsible budget that would work to keep this organization moving in the next year in a good way; and he's responsible for hiring the key people to work here.

Lage: That really is quite a change.

Shaffer: It changed the whole concept of what kind of organization--is this a professional organization or isn't it? And then we moved into other things which I supported like having wage and salary studies done. Are we paying the people the right amount of money? Those kinds of things we did over a period of years, I think were important changes to the professionalism of the staff. You can't successfully hold people responsible unless you put them in a position where they can operate responsibly. When I came on board there were a lot of people in positions where they really couldn't control their own destiny. They couldn't control what they were being asked to do.

Lage: You mean in the departments as well?

Shaffer: All the way up and down the line.

Lage: Even as you mention this effort to put the executive director in control, I also think of the tradition of board members going to department heads, you know, and not going through the executive director.

Shaffer: Oh, absolutely. And in this same process you had a books committee which was sort of the advocate for the books program, and you had an outings committee that was advocate for the outings program, and so on. And so you had political constituencies of volunteers.

Bringing Clair Tappaan Lodge under Club Control

Shaffer: Incidentally, here's a case in point. Strangeness. I got involved about this time—it was when Joe Fontaine was president—I discovered that Clair Tappaan Lodge--we discovered, the club discovered--Clair Tappaan Lodge had a serious problem with sewage. We had a septic tank up there that was draining into the creek. And this is not a good thing for a conservation, environmental organization to have a lodge where the sewage is running into the creek. So there was appointed a Clair Tappaan Lodge task force, which I chaired. Dick Fiddler served on it. Lewis Clark served on it. I don't remember who else, but good people.

The problem was to solve the sewage thing. I got into this thing and I discovered, my gracious, we don't own the land this lodge is sitting on! We own land up around here. But we don't own the land under the lodge!

Lage: Was it Forest Service?

Shaffer: Yes. It was on a permitted lease kind of thing from the Forest Service. We owned land across the street.

Lage: You owned the lakes.

Shaffer: The Sierra Club Foundation owned Flora and Azalea Lakes. Which we had absolutely no use for. We bought them so something bad wouldn't happen to them. So what did I find myself in? I found myself bringing Clair Tappaan Lodge into the Sierra Club. It had been run by a volunteer committee who kept the records literally in a shoe box, who paid the people who worked up there literally out of the shoe box, or out of a checking account which somebody on the staff may or may not have ever seen. Were we in compliance with wage and hour laws? Were we in compliance with safety laws? Heaven only knows. Was the Sierra Club liable if we weren't? Absolutely.

So, we went from solving the sewer problem to bringing Clair Tappaan Lodge into the club, which was very difficult as these people--

Lage: Controversial as I recall.

Shaffer: Very controversial. These people saw it as a power play, to take this over, and throw them out. Well, it wasn't. It was just a matter of, it belonged to the Sierra Club, and the Sierra Club was liable and responsible. And there had to be a system that permitted that responsibility to be accepted and acted upon.

Then we got into the whole Flora and Azalea Lakes thing, and the land thing, and the end of that all is we sold Flora and Azalea Lakes to the Forest Service. Big piece of money. The lakes belonged to the Sierra Club Foundation, so the money went to the Sierra Club Foundation. Big controversy. Sierra Club Foundation got this money, and Sierra Club wants it. I'll get back to that in a minute.

And then we went on to the whole thing, okay now, let's acquire the land that's under Clair Tappaan Lodge. And people like Steve Stevick and Phil Hocker and others worked on that for years after I worked on that, and that's of course now all been done.

Lage: So the club was able to purchase that land?

Shaffer: Yes. Well, traded land. Traded other land we had that we had no earthly use for, for the land under the lodge. So now we own a lodge that's on our land, which is much better than owning a lodge that is on somebody else's land.

Disagreement over Proceeds from Sale of Flora and Azalea Lakes

Shaffer: Back to the receipts from the Flora and Azalea Lakes thing. This became a big controversy. The club wanted the money. Wanted to spend the money. The foundation said, "No. We ain't going to give it to you. We give it to you, and you'll blow it." And this was no--

Lage: So this is part of the power struggle.

Shaffer: A part of the power struggle. I went from one body to the other body. Back and forth, and back and forth. We cut a deal that was simple as it could be. [slowly] You give us that money to fund a program which is fundable by soft money. This will improve our bottom line because we will have dues income which we will not be required to spend on that program. We will not spend that money. We will let it fall to the bottom line in surplus. And we will pass a resolution that says that if the surplus this year is x number of dollars or more, we will put that amount of money into the life membership endowment fund.

Lage: Is that what the foundation wanted, to build the endowment?

Shaffer: They hadn't thought about it. They just didn't want to give us the money because they didn't want us to blow it. The directors, in fact, probably were thinking about ways to spend it. What I was thinking about, first, was how do we get the money to the Sierra Club which was really where it belongs, secondly, how do we not blow it? Because the trustees were right, we should not have blown it. It was sort of like, you know, somebody dies and leaves you some money. You go out and you use it to live on this year, and you're going to

be money short in your budget next year because they ain't going to die again next year, and [laughingly] we didn't have any more Flora and Azalea Lakes to sell. And that was it.

So more money now lies in that endowment fund in the Sierra Club. It was a matter of negotiation back and forth. And it was a significant amount of money. That's the kind of thing that I just kept falling into.

Finding More Money: Negotiating with Random House, Buying a Washington Office, Selling Life Memberships

Shaffer: Another story. Treasurer. 1982. Books been published by Scribner forever. Scribner, for whatever reason, is becoming less of a rising star, or less of a star in the publishing business. Jon Beckmann particularly said we need to shop around, think about other people doing this. We ended up working a deal out with Random House. Random House was a very strong publisher at that time. Well-respected, an ideal place for us to go. Jon Beckmann, working with Mike McCloskey, cut the deal with Random House. They're going to bring it to the board. They sit down with me. Of course, I'm following this the whole time. I'm saying, "That-a-boy, Jon. You're doing a good job."

Jon finalizes the whole thing, brings it back, and everybody knows the board has got to approve this thing. He brings it back. We're sitting in Mike's office, Jon, Mike and I, and they're telling me how this is, and I'm telling them how good it is. And I said, "Now, what else do we want?"

And they both looked at me like I'd lost my mind. "What do you mean what else do we want? We got what we wanted."

I said, "Yes, but we can get something else."

They said, "How do you know."

I said, "Because I know. Random House has already told their salesmen they're going to have Sierra Club calendars out there in a couple of years, and this is a done deal in their mind. They're going to be willing to throw something else on the table to keep from losing this at this point, if we can think of a reasonable thing to ask for."

"Well, how could we do it?"

"That's easy. You tell them that you've got a treasurer who is a nut, and you've come to the treasurer and the treasurer has said, 'Jon, you haven't done well enough. We've got to get this, or I can't recommend it to the board.' And you say to Random House, 'If the treasurer doesn't recommend this to the board, this ain't going to happen.' And they will convert. They will come along with it."

Lage: [Laughingly] How did this strike Jon Beckmann?

Shaffer: Jon Beckmann shook his head. Jon is one of the finest human beings that has ever served the Sierra Club. One of the finest editors, one of the finest publishers. Has done some of the best things to get the club's message before the public, and if anything tears at my soul it's that we no longer have a place for a Jon Beckmann in the Sierra Club, and have no longer a place for the products that he produced. It brings tears to my eyes, as you can see.

We sat there. They looked at me like I was crazy. They agreed that we do this. "But what do we want?"

I said, "I don't know."

So we sat there and we agreed that what we would ask for was a couple of percentage points more, which was a poor choice, but was the best we could think of.

Made the appointment, we went to New York to meet with these people.

Lage: You went along?

Shaffer: Oh yes. I went along. Good guy, bad guy. I'm the bad guy. I've got to be there. They've got to hear from me what a bad guy I am. And we go along, and I explain to them how proud I am of Jon for what he's done, but the truth of the matter is the club has--we have some real financial problems. While their reputation is wonderful, and we know they're going to do all these wonderful things, we really are interested in money. And this is not a matter of great product to us, it's dollars and cents. I'm overstating it now, I didn't quite put it that way, but that was the thrust of the thing. And I made this pitch.

They said, "No, we can't give you any more percentage because in fact we have five other organizations we do the same thing with. They all get the same percentage. If we gave you more, they'd all be mad at us." Immediately I recognized this is not going to sell.

Out of nowhere, and I had, of course, done my homework, I said to them, "I happen to know you all are in pretty good shape as far as cash flow is concerned. Let me tell you, we aren't. How would you feel about giving us an advance on our first year's contract"? Now at this point interest rates were double digit. I don't remember what they were. They could have been fifteen percent or thirteen percent, but they were big numbers. And we're borrowing everything we got.

"Well, we could probably do that." [emphatically] We walked out of there with \$500,000 [pause] as an advance on our contract, to get the contract. Now, \$500,000 at whatever it was, 13, 15 percent, whatever it is, was at that time for the Sierra Club a lot of money.

Well, it's that kind of stuff I found myself doing constantly as treasurer of the Sierra Club. Now, where is it written that that's what the treasurer does? The answer is, it is not written, and it's not normally--

Lage: And every treasurer doesn't do it.

Shaffer: No, no, no, no. And not every staff would let the treasurer do it. Mike McCloskey recognized that I could do things that were honorable, that worked, that make sense, and he was pleased for me to do it. Other executive directors wouldn't be that confident that they

should trust somebody who [laughingly] comes in from North Carolina, who is a small businessman, and what does know about--I'd never negotiated a publishing contract in my life. But I'd negotiated enough contracts to know that these people had--you know, to them the marriage was done, and the bride has come back to say, "No, I want a bigger ring." And the announcements are out, so you're going to get the bigger ring if they have the money to buy the bigger ring. They had, and they did. Common sense. I mean, you don't have to negotiate a contract to know that, you just know that's the way people behave.

Lage: Well, that's a good illustration of--

Shaffer: Well, it was the sort of thing we did--I did a lot of.

[Added during interviewee review: Then there's the Washington office story. As Treasurer during Larry Downing's term as president, we worked together to move forward something we both felt very strongly about. The lease on the office the club had in Washington D.C. was up. It seemed to us that trying to buy something on the hill was a good idea. Clearly, the Capitol was not going to be moved, and we were always going to be there to lobby.

I went to work on the project, talking to my friend Roger Craver who had just completed a major office move of his own. He gave me the name of a consultant developer named Jon Abbet. I went to his office in McLean, Virginia, and arranged for him to work with the club staff and with me. I talked to the directors about the location we liked, and we purchased it on August 9, 1988.]

I did three things when I was treasurer--a lot of. One is, I tried to find more money because I found out pretty quickly, it's a lot more fun to balance a budget by finding more income than it is by cutting programs. And that there was more money to find.

Lage: Are you also thinking of fund-raising when you say find more money?

Shaffer: Well--

Lage: Flora and Azalea Lakes?

Shaffer: Flora and Azalea Lakes. But we didn't spend that. But we spent the interest off the surplus it created and we have done it every year since. That money that is in that endowment pays interest every year that goes to program funding in the Sierra Club every year. So, every budget since then has been that much easier to balance because that happened.

The money from the advance on the contract was a one year help. I worked on the concept. I remember going in to see Len, we were putting together a budget, and I said, "I'm down to the last two ideas, Len, of where we can find money."

He said, "What's that?"

I said, "Well, we have got to find a way to get money from people who are not members. I mean, we raise money from members, but we have never raised money from somebody who has not made a commitment to join, or had an interest then in joining. And secondly, we have got to figure out a way to sell life memberships. And my suggestion, Len, would be that we set up an easy payment plan. We let people become life members by paying a

third a year, over a three-year period, that we raise the price (I think it was \$500 then or something, and we raise it to \$750), and that we have a fire sale. We announce in effect that it's going to happen in six months, so everybody who wants to join can join at \$500 now, which will encourage people to go in and write a \$500 check. These are the only ideas I have Len."

We put in place the life membership thing that year. It took us a lot longer to figure out how to go around to asking people for money whether they were a member of the Sierra Club or not. Clearly, we do that. But, I digress.

Vice-President for Planning: Scenario Planning

Shaffer: One [of the three things I did as treasurer] was to find money to balance the budget. One was to bring some order to the procedures of how you distributed the money. I mean, what really is more important? What's your priorities? I worked with the folks who had any interest in planning. Mike was very much interested in that. Bob Howard spent hours, and hours, and hours, working on planning for the Sierra Club. I, of course, was vice president for planning when I wasn't treasurer, in between terms, or whatever.

Lage: Well, how successful was that effort? You headed the planning committee obviously.

Shaffer: Yes. One of the things about it, it was a wonderful growing experience for me. I met world-class planners. We put together a meeting of a guy who used to be the planner for Royal Dutch Petroleum, the guy who was the planner for Nissan USA, the woman who was the planner for the local utility here. Pacific, no--

Lage: PG&E?

Shaffer: PG&E. Two other people of that caliber, and the Sierra Club. How can we plan our future? And they went into scenario planning with us. We developed scenario planning. We put it in front of the board. The board figured out the scenario that was most likely. And I want to tell you something. It's happened. It's happened. Now did we--

Lage: Did you put alternative visions, when you say scenario planning?

Shaffer: Yes.

Lage: Do you remember when this happened? Was Mike executive director?

Shaffer: No, Mike [McCloskey] was not. I think Michael Fischer was executive director.

Lage: So that was after '87.

Shaffer: Yes. But Mike was always involved in anything like that, because Mike has the vision. I mean look around for somebody with some vision and you can't get past Mike.

Lage: Mike's good at scenarios, I think.

Shaffer: Oh. I mean, yes. Mike can take the most complex issue and sit down with a piece of paper and make a matrix that breaks it down into logical pieces so that you can digest it, and so you can make a decision.

But, we did those things. We didn't profit by them because people--we predicted, for example, in that, that people's lives would become more stressed out financially, that there would be more conflicts for volunteer time, that you would have to start worrying about whether your kids were at a safe school to go to, and whether your parents were going to get health care, and whether the local library was going to close, and therefore you'd be less likely to be a group chairman. That the competition for your dollars as you needed more money to keep your local library open would become more severe. That more families would have two people working instead of one. There would be less spare time. People that are working, like Denny Shaffer, would find it harder. All of which is true. I mean, we laid all that stuff out there--

Lage: And what was the--?

Shaffer: Well, some of it was accepted. People shook their heads and said, "Yes," and some things happened, and some things didn't happen.

Lage: Would the logical conclusion to this scenario be we need more staff?

Shaffer: The logical scenario to that was--Had we proceeded with that, we would have then backed off and said, "That being the case, what kind of organization is the Sierra Club going to be in ten years?" And that is the point at which the thing fell apart because almost no one in the Sierra Club is willing to think ten years ahead. That's just something we don't do. We demand it of industry. We say government should be thinking that way. We don't think that way. We hear the bell and we go to the fire [laughter].

Lage: Yes. It's built into the organization.

Priority-Setting and Tying Priorities to Funding

Shaffer: But in this planning process, we were able to tie priorities (and that's before the scenario planning), we were able to tie priorities to funding. We did a study, it may have been when Sue was president, of what was important to people--maybe it was before Sue, but it was about that time.

Lage: I remember Doug Scott being involved in priority setting.

Shaffer: And out of that came three things. And we sent out questionnaires, and we held workshops, and we talked to people, and--

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Shaffer: And it came out they wanted three things. They wanted funding for state programs, state lobbying programs. They wanted a handbook. Something that reflected who the devil we

were, and where we came from, and so on, which, of course, was what David Brower was pushing.

Lage: I know. I thought that was just David Brower. But this came from the grassroots too?

Shaffer: It came out, I think, third on the list. But it came out, and there was enthusiasm for it. And David was the advocate. I would have to admit that.

The third thing the membership wanted was an office of volunteer development. Which would be somebody at the offices of the Sierra Club that was thinking not about what can we get volunteers to do, but what can we do to help volunteers. Who can a chapter chair call when he has just been elected chapter chair and he hasn't a clue what he should do? [He] knows that the person before them didn't do it very well; knows that there must be a better way of doing it, but hasn't got a clue how to do it. You know, what does my treasurer do? My treasurer has not turned in an accurate report or accounting for nine months, what should I do about this? Who do I ask?

Historically the answer was you would call the offices of the Sierra Club, and you would get moved around from telephone to telephone, and if you got lucky, you got a good answer. If you didn't get lucky, you didn't get any answer. You didn't have anybody thinking in terms of how do you develop the people out there. This is what they wanted. And we put those things in the budget.

I was treasurer. I remember going to the executive director, whoever he was at the time, and saying, "Okay, this is the year we're going to do this one. And this is the year we're going to do this one."

And the executive director saying, "I'm not sure we're going to have the money."

And me saying, "If this treasurer is going to support the budget, this is going to be in the budget."

Treasurer: the Most Powerful Position in the Club

Lage: But did this come from you as an individual because you thought it was important, or were you supporting a process?

Shaffer: No. You asked a question in some of things you sent me about my view of the power of some of the offices. Boy, I'll tell you there is no question in my mind, the most powerful position in the Sierra Club is the treasurer's position, if the treasurer knows how to do what the treasurer has the ability to do, the potential to do.

There are two reasons. One is you're tied to the money, and the money is what makes things happen. But secondly the treasurer is paying attention to what's under the hood. And most folks aren't. Most folks, they want to be in the driver's seat. They're not interested in what's under the hood. Well, I want to tell you, if you want to make things go faster or slower, being under the hood is a good place to be. And the treasurer can make

some significant differences. I think as treasurer--the contributions I've made to the Sierra Club in the years that I've served, the greatest contributions were made while I was treasurer, not while I was president.

Lage: Because you have that lever of power.

Shaffer: Well, the president is distracted by having to--it's sort of like being mayor. You've got to go kiss babies, and shake hands, and cut ribbons. Well, the president of the Sierra Club has got to make speeches, and talk to the media, and answer the phone when somebody calls. When CBS News calls and they're going to be on the air in fifteen minutes and they want your opinion on this, you've got to say something. People don't call the treasurer. The treasurer can be in there making things happen. And you can think longer range. You can have a vision of where things are going, and you can bring people along.

Listening to Grass-Roots Leadership and Getting Things Done

Shaffer: No. State level lobbying was not something I decided we wanted to do. The handbook was David Brower's idea. It sure wasn't my idea. The office of volunteer development probably came closer to being something I had enthusiasm for because I have enthusiasm for enablers. I have enthusiasm for an organization that--Well, in this little memo I sent to Adam [Werbach] yesterday, one of the things I said to him, I said, "Adam, what we need to be asking is not what the members can do for the Sierra Club, but what the Sierra Club can do for the members." Now I know I am doing violence to Mr. Kennedy, but we don't do enough of that. We send out things hourly saying, "You, member of the Sierra Club, write this letter! Jump over this barrier! Run through this fire! Do all these good things, because this is important." But very seldom do we go the other way. And that's what the office of volunteer development--and I saw the reason for doing that. I'm saddened by the fact that that's been cut back out again because the staff really never had enthusiasm for it.

Lage: So we had it for a number of years?

Shaffer: We had it for a number of years, and then when Carl Pope [current executive director]--

Lage: Was there good feedback on it?

Shaffer: Yes. Oh yes.

Lage: It was helpful.

Shaffer: It was very helpful. But, in Carl's administration that has disappeared. I hate to speak about somebody else's priorities, but having worked with Carl as long as I have, this is not the sort of thing that appeals to Carl as much as some other things. And, as executive director, one of the things I suppose it's his responsibility for him is to move things in a direction which he sees they should be in. He and I disagree on this, which he knows.

But anyhow. They were not mine. They were ideas which I saw as good ideas. Yes, I was responsible for getting them put out there on a list of things. No, I wasn't surprised when

the people said, "Yes, this is important." No, I wasn't surprised that the board bought into them after eighty-five percent of the chapters said that they wanted something.

Lage: And you got them into the budget, to come to the board.

Shaffer: I got them into the budget. But it was easy to get--Had I walked into the board one day and said, "I'm going to put this in the budget next year." They would have said, "You're nuts Shaffer. Who asked you?" And they should have. But it was a legitimate thing for the treasurer to see some things which had potential, to send them out to the people who were really the ones that should be involved in the decision making: the people in the Chapter, and group, and regional levels--get their opinion. Find out whether the treasurer is right or wrong.

One of the things I think is terribly important to do is to ask a lot of people's opinion about everything, because one of the things I learned a long time ago is I'm wrong a lot. That's how you find out, and it's better to find out before you do it. You learn a lot. So, you ask a lot of questions. You go into it with an idea. You have to know what you're asking about. You have to have the list that says here are some things, what are important to you.

But then they came back. They said, "This is what's important to us." I took it to the board. I said, "This is the membership. This is your grassroots leadership speaking. This is what they say is important to them. We are going to construct a budget that puts one of these in it. Which one of the three do you want?"

But I didn't ask them exactly like that. We had a process that permitted them to evaluate, and weigh them, and talk about them, and chew on it a while, and so on and so forth. And one went in. And when push came to shove, yeah, I remember going into the executive director's office saying, "This goes in this year, or I'm going to fight the whole dang budget." [Pause.]

That's a style. You've got to be willing to believe in something and say, "Okay, if you want me to spend this year of my life making this thing work, you've got to at least give me credit for having an idea once in a while, and this idea is a good idea. If you want me to support everything you think is a good idea, you've got to at least acknowledge that there's something else in the world, and that this is a good idea."

David Brower, who is my dear friend, and who I love dearly--David and Anne, of course, are having serious health problems--David would come to me and say, "Denny, this is a good idea, whether it was a handbook or whatever, and we need to do this, will you get it done?"

And I would say, "David, you're David Brower, what are you coming to me for?"

He'd say, "Because you know how to get these things done." And it's the most flattering thing that anybody could say to me. It's certainly flattering when a David Brower says it to you because, here's a man who has changed the world, but who recognizes that a guy like myself who has none of the skills he has, and none of the eloquence he has, and none of the vision he has, but who can line up four pieces on a table to make them work better, it's okay to say, "Would you mind lining up those four pieces to make this work better?"

Getting Inspiration from David Brower and the Complexity of Brower's Personality

Lage: Did you do that a lot with David Brower?

Shaffer: I did that a lot with every director. Yes.

Lage: Because when he came back on the board, he had--

Shaffer: I was president. I was president when he came on the first time. Oh, I think one of the real thrills of my life was to serve with David.

Lage: What did he bring to the board, do you think, when he came back?

Shaffer: [Laughter, followed by a long pause] David keeps reminding you why you're doing this. One of the dangers of being the kind of person I am is that you can be interested in solving problems and forget why the devil you're solving them. I do love solving problems. I love puzzles. You know, here's something that's broke. I like mechanical things that are broke that I can fix. I do less of that than I used to. My fingers and eyes don't work as well as they used to.

But David won't let you forget. David has focus on--he raises my spirits. He helps me feel the grandeur of the potential. He helps you see beyond where you're going to see by yourself. He helps you know that there is something bigger than your thoughts, and grander than your thoughts, and more important than that, and that you can be part of it.

Lage: It seems almost a religious thing as you speak of it.

Shaffer: Oh! Well, of course it is. Well, religion, philosophy, and leadership, all those things--they're all cut out of the same cloth I suppose. At some point you go from the mortal to the immortal. People joke about David not being sure which category it falls into. He's mortal. He's finding that out now, and it's painful I think, as it is for all of us.

I had an experience with David in a board retreat in Vermont, two years ago I guess it was now. When I arrived, Adam was there to meet me and said, "Come with me, right now." And I drove up with my family, and I hadn't a clue what he was talking about, and I thought he was crazy. But I got out of my car, got in his car, and my family kept on in our car. I went with him and he told me that David was sick, and that he was going home.

We went to the house where David and Anne were staying, and David was very sick. He had been up all night. He clearly had fluid in his lungs. You could hear him breathe. He had decided the thing for him to do was to go home. He was going to go to the local airport and get a plane, as I recall, to New York, and then a plane from New York to Dallas, and then a plane from Dallas to Oakland to see his doctor. And it occurred to everybody present but David that this was a terrible idea, and that the Dartmouth medical center was fifteen minutes away, and getting him there was a really good idea. Everyone had tried convincing him of this.

Lage: Including Anne?

Shaffer: Yes, and including Adam. Adam was waiting for me to get there on the assumption that somehow I would be able to convince him of this. So, I talked to David and David talked to me, and he was going to do this. David does not say, "This is what I think," he says, "This is what's going to happen."

And I said, "David, why are you doing this?"

"Well, this is my doctor."

I said, "So you trust this man?"

He said, "Of course I trust this man."

I said, "Good. What's his name and phone number?" He gave it to me and I said, "I'm going to call him."

He said, "You can't. It's the middle of the night there."

I said, "Watch me." I called him. I got an answering service. And I talked to the doctor who was on duty, explained to him what was going on. I said, "I need the doctor's phone number and this is why." He gave it to me. I called the doctor, woke him up, explained what was going on. I said, "You know David as well as I do. He's your patient. My judgement is his doing this is a very bad idea. I want to take him to the medical center here. He wants to come see you. I want you to talk to him. He talked to David. Convinced David that his going to the local medical center was better idea.

And we took him there. I spent the day with David. They put him in a wheelchair and I wheeled him from station to station because Anne could not physically do it. And he was amazed that I would do this. "Why would you do this? Why don't you go to the meetings?"

"David, you're my friend. What would I be doing at a meeting? That's crazy." And so we did. We spent the day this way. And at the end of the day the doctors allowed as how that had he flown home, the odds were he wouldn't have made it.

Lage: He had fluid in his lungs?

Shaffer: Oh, bad! And they gave medication to start draining the fluid down, told him to take this, and so on and so forth. And in two days of rest and taking the medication he was significantly better and was ready to go home. And in the meantime he had had two or three television interviews and done all these other things. But he'd gotten some rest and so on and so forth.

But it is a characteristic of David, who is this man who has influenced so greatly a movement and the people in it, including myself. The first talk I ever gave as a Sierra Club person, I quoted David Brower. I've still got the talk. And yet, David Brower could not figure out why I would spend a day pushing him around the Dartmouth medical center.

[Long pause] David understands why people, when he comes into a large auditorium, cheer him, but he doesn't understand why they would love him. And that's the best way I can describe the complexity of David Brower. I wish--I wish he understood he's lovable.

Lage: I think you're capturing him very well from what I know.

Shaffer: Because, boy he is. Cantankerous. Pain in the butt. But lovable. It's been good to have an opportunity to know him.

Emotions, and an Emotional Time of Life

Lage: Let's pause there for a minute. [tape interruption] We're talking about how emotional this is, [that you have had some tears] discussing not only David Brower but other things in the club, and since I don't really know Denny Shaffer really well, I want to know is this characteristic of you as a person, or is this an emotional time vis-a-vis the Sierra Club?

Shaffer: Oh, it's an emotional time for me in my life. I'm reaching a point in my life where I'm thinking about retirement. I'm thinking what I want to do with what time I have left. I'm going to be sixty-seven in just a short period of time. I have a seven-year-old daughter. It causes you to evaluate things. I'm cutting my ties with San Francisco this week, and this month. My role in the Sierra Club is not going to ever be the same again. Not because I--I'm certainly not angry with anybody--I mean, it's oversimplification to say, "Been there, done that." But, you know, been there for thirty years or so, and done that, and there are good people there that can do it well.

I believe that which is important in life comes out of feelings, not thoughts. That we think through things, and we rationalize them, and we evaluate them, and we weigh them, but in our best moments we do what our heart and soul says is the thing to do. It's not logical for me to have a seven-year-old daughter. But it's clearly the best thing that's ever happened to me in my life. The people in the environmental movement that I believe have been the most significant--or some of the people that have been the most significant, there's exceptions to that--but, you know, I think of Brower who was able to move people deeply. Brock Evans. Brock Evans who could bring tears to the eyes of people when he talked to them.

I remember I was involved--one of the things I have good feelings about--I was involved with the ExComs that gave Brock Evans, John McComb, Mike McCloskey, the Muir award. The only three over a number of years. The only employees that ever got the award, and I was on the ExComs that did that, and it's not a coincidence.

Lage: Because it was sort of an unwritten rule that they [as staff members] wouldn't get it.

Shaffer: Yes, yes, yes. And then when we got to Mike it was this, "Well, but he's still here."

And I said, "So what do you want him to do, die? Or quit, and then you give it to him? I mean, this is nuts. The man deserves it. He ought to get it." An argument that held up. I remember I gave Brock--I did the presentation for Brock's Muir award. I remember

writing it in the style that I thought Brock would write it because I believe that people who do something very well over a period of time, and recognize they do it very well get very attached to the way they do it. So, hearing something done in a way that is harmonious with the way they would do it, has a good chance of meeting with approval.

I started doing this thing, and I looked down front, and Cynthia Wayburn was in the front row, and she had tears running down her face, and I said to myself, "Denny, you got it right." [Laughter] And there were a lot of teary eyes before I was finished. Because Brock was a man who speaks from the soul, who speaks of this tie we have to the primitive earth that beats within all of us, and if we just shut up and be quiet awhile and hear it, that we would be enriched by it. These people who have done that sort of--I think it's very important. The emotion part of life is important to me.

I am of German stock. It does not come naturally. I don't remember being hugged as a child. All of this emotional stuff was something I had to grow into. Fortunately in the sixties when all the strange things were happening I learned that feelings were a good idea. So yes, I laugh about the fact that I can get teary at beer commercials.

Lage: [Laughing] Oh dear.

Shaffer: That's a slight exaggeration.

VII EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS AND THE FUNCTIONING OF THE CLUB

Mike McCloskey: Vision and Service

Lage: Yes. I'm not quite sure where to take us from here. You were treasurer under a number of presidents and executive directors.

Shaffer: A number of presidents and a number of executive directors.

Lage: I guess you're not really under the executive director, but along side.

Shaffer: Well, people have different view points of that, particularly different executive directors. But I always made the assumption that I did not serve under the executive director, that I served under the president and board of directors.

Lage: Yes, I think that's the way the organization works. But it would be appropriate to talk some about how you worked with club executive directors?

Shaffer: Sure.

Lage: Mike [McCloskey] was executive director until eighty-five. Let's pin down the years you served as treasurer.

Shaffer: Yes. Well, I was treasurer under Ted [Snyder] for two years [1978-1980], Joe [Fontaine] two years [1980-1982], that's four years. Larry [Downing] two years [1986-1988], that's six years. And then part of a year under Richard Cellarius [1988-1989] because that's the year I resigned as treasurer--which was sort of David Browerish--and then, of course, when I came on the board this last time and served as treasurer under Robbie Cox [1994-1995]. The difference. Oh my! They were different times. You want to ask questions? Ask me a question. Just what's the difference between the executive directors?

Lage: Tell us how you functioned with these different executive directors. It will give us a chance to have you sort of evaluate their styles, and tell something about what happened.

Shaffer: Let me talk about the executive directors beyond the context of treasurer. Let's talk about the whole concept of how they worked, and how it worked. Mike McCloskey is one of the best human beings I've ever met. He has no peer in quality. I have a letter here, that I found in digging out my file. [Reaches for and opens file] I wrote in 1993 to Mike saying I'm going to do this oral history, and I would be interested in your suggestions as to things I might cover. And he sent me back two pages, very orderly, that are mostly questions. How did you change this? What did you do about that? What did you see as your stamp on this? What did you think about how that worked out?

And then he went on to say in closing, "I'll be interested to read your responses. I've learned a lot from you through the years, and I look forward to learning more." No other executive director of the Sierra Club has ever come close to saying anything like that to me, other than Mike. Not their style. It would suggest I knew something they didn't know, and that would be threatening for them to admit. That's obviously a judgement statement on my part. They would probably see it differently. But I know they never did.

Mike still does it. Mike has no need to prove himself because his being proves him. What he is makes a statement, not what he does. Though what he does is outstanding.

Working with Mike was always positive. Never any game playing or anger, or never any threat of something being done behind my back. Never playing one party against another party. Always open, and always thinking, always organized. Mike kept on his wall a chart of important things that were happening in the Sierra Club, which could be something for funding a chapter project to tax status of the Sierra Club. Important, important to somebody. They were in the pipeline, and he would have this chart. Where are these things now? And when will they be ready for the next action? When will they likely get to the board of directors? And he kept all of these things moving that probably nobody but Mike really knew was happening--all of them, but knew about individual pieces of course. And it was all done out in the open for all to see and be a part of if they wished.

Lage: Now, I've heard the criticism that he wasn't a great administrator. As you say that, it sounds like a good administrator. So how do you--

Shaffer: Mike's strength is his vision and his lack of needing to prove himself. He has a strong enough ego that he didn't have to prove it. Brilliance. Absolutely a brilliant man. True believer. A man who understands the honor of service. I come out of the Christian faith. The Christian faith talks about the honor of being a servant. Not taking it too far, but Christ washed the disciples' feet. A bizarre idea for somebody who is supposedly God to be washing people's feet. But the point, I think, to be made is that service is a good idea. That serving your fellow human beings is the highest calling. Mike McCloskey understands this. Mike would do whatever needs to be done, and do it well.

But Mike was not trained as an administrator. He did not come from a background that made management system a natural part of your life. I'll give you an example. I'm treasurer. Times are tough. Board and everybody has agreed what we're going to do is we're going to reduce travel on the part of staff and volunteers for a period of three months because this is one of the things you could sort of turn down quickly. So it was decided that the treasurer would have to approve volunteer travel before it could be authorized, and the executive director staff [travel] before it could be authorized. Mike gets a call about something--he is to go to Europe about something. He comes to me and says, "Denny, I

don't know what to do about this because I've got to monitor the staff travel. I've got to go to Europe. What should I do?"

I said, "Mike, this is not a problem. What you do is you put a letter out to your staff saying 'I'm going to be gone for a week. You know what's going on in staff travel, if you feel like you have to travel, go and write down the story about why it is you got to do it, leave it on my desk, and use your best judgement.'"

Well, Mike thought about it, he said, "I believe that will work."

I said, "Of course it will work. They'll be harder on themselves than you would be if you were here." And they were.

Now that's a simple management system. But it was not something that readily came to Mike. It readily came to me. But Mike readily saw that it would work. The budget was just a terribly difficult task for Mike because Mike felt a personal responsibility for every dern number in it. And it ate him up. Wore him out. Wore him down. But the best executive director by far the club has ever had in my knowledge--now I never saw David Brower as executive director, so I have no judgement of that, but I've seen the rest of them, and there's Mike and then there's everybody else.

Creating the Position of Chairman for Mike

Lage: When Mike left and became chairman, was it because things like dealing with the budget that had just gotten to be too much or what?

Shaffer: Mike had worn himself out. Mike actually lost his temper in the middle of a meeting one time and threw a pile of paper down on the table and walked out. It was a small meeting of six or eight people, but I was there.

Lage: Was it a finance committee meeting?

Shaffer: No, it was a subgroup of people. But it said to me what we all had been noticing, that Mike was burned out. He was worn out. He was being forced to deal with stuff he really hated to do, and it was time for him to do something else. But that this was what he did. And so the board talked a lot about it, and we met and held a meeting, and talked about it some more, I was asked by the board of directors to sit down with Mike--at the Tabard Inn, in my room at the [Tabard] Inn after a board meeting. I said, "Mike, next year at this time you're going to be doing something different from being executive director of the Sierra Club. Now, what you and I need to do is figure out how to have this be a good thing for everyone: for you and for the organization. This can be done. But you know that you're worn out with this, and you know that we need to move things around. And I haven't a clue what it is I'm suggesting, except that it will be different."

And Mike, in typical Mike style, said, "Well, all right, we'll do that that way." Now, I'm sure in his stomach, it must have been like getting hit hard because he had been executive director a long time. I don't know what his thoughts were.

The job of chairman was developed at my kitchen table in Fayetteville. Mike came down there at a later time after a number of discussions and we tried to figure out what was Mike going to do, and it led nowhere. He came down, and we sat down one morning over some tea (Mike and I are both tea drinkers), and I said to him, "Mike, I've been thinking over night that we're stuck on this thing, and I don't want to talk about the job. What I want to do is talk about you."

He said, "All right."

I said, "Mike, tell me what it is that you really don't like doing, the sort of things that you might just have a second cup of tea before getting to."

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Shaffer: So he started listing a few things, and in typical Mike style sort of apologetically, saying that he realized these were important things and he was certainly willing to do them, and so on and forth, but that they weren't the things which he found most personally rewarding. With all those caveats I finally got a list put together. I said, "Okay fine, now let's do another list. What are the things, when you know you are going to do them, you can't wait to get in there?"

"Oh well!" And so we made this list up.

And I said, "Mike, we've got a job description. What we do is we throw away the first list, give these tasks to someone else, and we make a job of the second list, and that's it." And that became "chairman of the Sierra Club." It had to be titled and it had to be cited, you know, where does it fit in the structure, and so on and so forth. That's what basically Mike has done since then.

Lage: He doesn't have line authority. Is that correct?

Shaffer: That's right. He has no--now, that's what would--now, when we tried to work something out like that for Brock Evans, Brock could not do it. I tried to do the exact same thing with Brock at a different time when Brock's--

Lage: Previously?

Shaffer: Previously. And Brock looked at it and said, "But I don't have people working for me. And that's the test of whether this is an important job or not."

I said, "Well, it could be viewed that way. But the truth of the matter is what we want you to do is something that does not need to have twenty-seven people underneath you. This uses your skills." And Brock could not bring himself to do that. He saw that as a demotion, so he left the club, a loss for us and for Brock.

Mike, on the other hand, being just such a terribly different personality style, was looking more at the substance of what he would be doing, and less of what people would see when they looked at what he was doing.

One more observation--It was noted later when Doug Wheeler was executive director that he had an open door policy. The door to his office was always open, and Mike had often had his door closed, and that this was a wonderful thing because people could always go in and talk to Doug. It was Kim who observed to me, she said, "You noticed, however, that when Mike was executive director there was always somebody in the office with Mike. With Doug there's very seldom anybody in the office with Doug." That's, I think, a strong commentary.

Douglas Wheeler as Executive Director, 1985-1987

Shaffer: Doug Wheeler, I was not on the board when Doug was hired [1985-1987]. Michele was president. It was the year I was off the board. I was not part of that process.

Lage: Did you have any role in shaping the recruiting?

Shaffer: I had taken it up to the doorway. Because I had been involved with getting Mike's changes made, and so on and so forth. I had been involved in the search. When Michele became president, she decided that other people would do that better than I would, and I was no longer part of that. And that was fine. I mean, that's what presidents should do. They should have the people working with them that they want to have working with them.

Lage: Well, they used a search--

Shaffer: They had a search firm. Yes, they had a head hunter. Anyhow, so then Doug was hired. My experience--I have two observations, other than the one I made I guess about Doug.

Lage: But you did come back as treasurer while Doug Wheeler was executive director?

Shaffer: Yes [1986-1988]. I was involved in his executive director's evaluation by the ExCom. And Larry was having serious health problems. Larry [Downing, president 1986-1988] had back surgery shortly after that, during his presidency. I remember in doing Doug's evaluation of saying to him, "Doug, you know, I'm curious about one thing, and this is not your performance. It's just that I can't stand not asking the question. But you are really an establishment kind of fellow, and the Sierra Club ain't. You know we're kind of revolutionary at times. It's curious to me how you come to this job and see this organization that is--you're a very conservative fellow, politically and philosophically, and so on."

Lage: It wasn't just his being a Republican, but his temperament and all?

Shaffer: No, no. His temperament. You know, he was not a revolutionary. He was not--he was certainly in favor of change, but he wanted it to be comfortable--and he certainly didn't want to do things that irritated people like the Sierra Club is known to do--powerful organizations, or corporations, or things like that.

And his response was basically that he expected that he would move a little bit in the direction of the Sierra Club, and the Sierra Club would move a little bit towards the

direction of his thinking. He underestimated the spirit of the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club is not going to change because any one of its leaders has a philosophy that is a little bit different than the club's. It will listen to it, and it may adapt to it in some small way, but it's not going to make a big difference.

Doug was in our home in Fayetteville a couple of times for Sierra Club meetings when committees met there. Doug was willing to sign on a ballot statement when he saw something that was going to be run as an initiative on a Sierra Club ballot that he thought was detrimental to the club. I don't think any executive director before or since has been willing to take that risk.

Lage: Do you remember what that was?

Shaffer: It had to do with the effects of war on the environment as I recall. It was around that issue somewhere, which was the big hot issue of that period of time. So I admired that in him. I liked him personally.

Handling the Staff Mutiny against Wheeler

Shaffer: I, unfortunately, was involved with the fiasco of his leaving. I got a phone call from John McComb saying, "Denny, what are you doing?"

I said, "I'm trying to make a living."

He said, "You need to go to San Francisco."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "Things are in big trouble out there?"

"What is that?"

He said, "Well, the staff is really in revolt with Doug, and somebody needs to get out there."

I said, "Well, I'm the treasurer and vice president for political affairs."

He said, "Yes, but you need to get out here."

Larry was in the hospital as I recall. Bob Howard was the vice president. Bob Howard came out. I came out. We talked to Doug Wheeler. We talked to members of the staff, and it was clear that this was an incredible situation where the department heads had just risen up in revolt against the executive director.

Lage: Now, how would you describe the basic conflict? Was it this a cultural thing, philosophical?

Shaffer: It is hard to put into a simple concept. It was just that they had decided they had enough of him as executive director, and there's going to be no more of him. It astounded me because, as a guy who comes out of an administrative management background, I'm sorry, folks, you cannot let the employees decide who the boss is going to be. This is not a popularity contest. Someone wrote a letter for the department heads to sign saying that Doug had to go. Eleven of twelve department heads signed it. The one that did not, Len Levitt, was the one that had come out of a management background.

Lage: So that didn't fit with your concept of how things should be run.

Shaffer: No, this didn't suit me a dang bit. By the same token, it was clear to me we had serious problems. Bob Howard and I had a conversation in which we agreed that we were in the middle of a mine field, and that we were in great potential to be set up for something bad as individuals, and that we would make no decisions and take no actions unilaterally, separately. And if possible, the two of us would get together and get on the phone with Larry and get a third opinion before we said anything, but if we had to say something we would be sure two of us were in the room.

Almost within hours, the staff, which was meeting in a hotel somewhere downtown, got hold of Bob Howard, got him to that meeting. Didn't invite me. Gave him a letter which eleven had signed saying that they would resign if Doug Wheeler was not fired. Bob Howard came back and delivered the letter to Doug Wheeler. I am in the adjacent office, and Michele [Perrault] gets wind of something going on. At that point Bob Howard walks in the office and tells me what's going on.

Lage: So Bob did this without bringing it to you.

Shaffer: I hadn't a clue. I had no idea what was happening. And I went through the roof. I said, "Bob, how could you do this?"

He said, "Well, this is what they said needed to be done, and I believe they're correct. This is my best judgement, and so I've done this."

I said, "Well, indeed you have. Now you and I are going back into Doug Wheeler's office and tell him he is not unemployed because his employees wish him to be unemployed."

And he said, "Well, I don't know what we should do."

I said, "That's not the debate at the moment. This is the decision that's made. We're going to go do this because we just cannot do this this way. I mean, among other things, I'm not sure it's legal. I mean, this is just--we can't do this."

Michele was there for this conversation.

Lage: Michele was an officer?

Shaffer: She was a director at that point.

We went back in the office and had a conversation with Doug Wheeler in which basically I said to him that I don't know exactly what Bob said but, "I'm here to tell you from this

officer's point of view that you are the executive director of the Sierra Club. But I'm also here to tell you that you are in deep trouble. That ain't a news flash to you. But I'm not here to tell you that I'm going to make all this well, and that everything is going to be okay. I'm not sure that it is. But I'm going to tell you that I don't know exactly what Bob said, but the two of us are standing here, and I only represent myself in this and this is your job. You've got this job. You need to do this job."

This went down hill fast. There was a lot of bad feeling. Phil Berry and Michele both felt that people had done the wrong thing, me in particular, and that we had in effect run Doug off.

Lage: But if Michele was involved, didn't she see that you--

Shaffer: Well, you'd have to ask Michele. I've asked Michele. I've heard these stories, what bad things I've done, and I said, "Michele, don't you remember the conversation in which I got the news that Bob had talked to Doug?"

But Doug and I had another conversation later that was--. Then we tried to put together a budget under Doug, and Doug could not put the budget together. So we came together with the finance committee, as I recall, to put the budget together, and Doug didn't have a budget for us.

[Added during interviewee review: But Doug had been hired when Michele was president. This became very personal to her, very quickly. But I sure was not behind any movement to get rid of Doug, and was in fact very angry with the department heads for the way they went about this. And then with Bob Howard for his part. At any rate, then we quickly had a Finance Committee meeting. I tried to work with Doug to get the budget ready for the meeting, but Doug could not get it done. So we met, and he came to us and said he didn't have a budget for us.]

Lage: Was it because he couldn't cooperate with the staff?

Shaffer: Couldn't get staff--Nobody would do what he wanted done. It was mutiny. It was, pure and simply, it was just awful. So what we did was, we came back the next week and had a budget put together with the staff, without Doug. Because, being the pragmatic fellow I am, I said, "Well, if I can't get an executive director to put it together, I'll get the dang thing put together by the staff, because we've got to have a budget."

Some people viewed that as being detrimental to Doug. But I viewed it as, "Man, I gave you the chance, and you couldn't do it, and we can't stop the organization. We've got to have a budget."

Doug Scott--I don't remember who the other two people were [JoAnn Hurley and John McComb], but they took on the responsibility of getting a budget put together, and did a commendable job in the week. They did it with more enjoyment than I wished that they would, and I said as much. When I got out here the next week I remembering taking Doug Scott in a quiet office and saying to him, "Doug, this is not anything anybody needs to feel good about. There are no winners in this situation, and we all should be careful in the way we govern ourselves this weekend, that we recognize that this is a sad time for everybody, and that we're here to try and get something done."

But it developed so much into a winners-losers, us-and-them, bad stuff. And I do remember talking to Doug [Wheeler] at the end of that weekend, and trying to convey to him that I thought this was a situation which he needed to react to. He kept wanting it all to go away. And he kept thinking that this was going to be okay. And I'm saying to him, "Doug, this is not going to be okay. It's not just going away." He left that conversation and met up with Phil Berry within an hour or so, and basically said to Phil that I had told him that it was all over, and that he was broken hearted about it and so on and so forth. I think Phil viewed it as me, I don't know, firing him, or whatever. Obviously I couldn't do that. It took eight votes of the board.

I never did that. What I tried to do with Doug is to say, "Doug, this is a bad situation. I don't know exactly how it came by. I don't have any admiration for what these people are doing here. I don't know how to fix this. If I were you, I would try to figure a way out of this that lets everybody come out as good as they can. Nobody's going to come out of this very good."

Lage: Would one response have been to get rid of all that senior staff that was in rebellion?

Shaffer: That would have been one possibility.

Lage: Was that ever considered seriously?

Shaffer: It was never considered seriously. I think there was a willingness on the part of some directors to perhaps lop off a head or two. But I think in the main the board looked at this and said, "This is just a mess," and I think, it turned out the majority of the directors felt that it was time for Doug to move on. I think it was--I will tell you a story about that. I think some of the directors were hoping it would all go away.

Larry, who was president, recognizing the seriousness of this, talked to every director individually. And discussed the pros and cons, and listened to their pros and cons, and wanted their opinion, and so on and so forth. When he got to the point where eight directors said that they felt that it was time for Doug to be replaced, he got each of those directors, including me, to sign a letter saying that's how we would vote, which was a sort of lawyerly thing for Larry to do. It would never have occurred to me, but, of course, I'm not a lawyer. But it was a good idea because he didn't want this to come to a vote, and be close, and the guy stay and have a bitterly divided board supporting your executive director. So he did it.

The man who was the eighth vote was David Brower. And Larry said to David, "It's interesting that you feel that he needs to go, since you have been in this position and know what this feels like." And he said, "Would you share with me your thinking?"

And he said, "Doug has a fatal flaw."

Larry said to him, "Well, what is that?"

He said, "He does not listen to the people around him, and I should know because I have the same flaw."

I don't know what the final vote was. I don't remember. I don't know whether that was the eighth vote that was that significant, or if it was the eighth out of nine or ten, or whatever. It doesn't matter. But it was time for him to move on. [Added during interviewee review: It was, however, a very difficult meeting. Phil and Michele went so far as to try to get enough votes to remove Larry from the presidency. The plan, as I remember it, was to promise Richard Cellarius that he would then be chosen president to get his vote to their way of thinking. It had some support, but of course, the majority had better judgement.] And then, of course, the next executive director was Mike again, who came back again; reincarnation, and to great glory and applause. I was here for several meetings. I was here at the first staff meeting Mike held after he came back, and there was a standing ovation. If Mike ever needed to know how appreciated he was, it was clear.

But again, we called on Mike, and Mike was the good soldier. Actually Mike and Maxine stayed in (our) this apartment here in San Francisco for a while during that period of time because they didn't move back, because it was temporary. I said to Mike, "Do you want to use the apartment?"

"Oh, I wouldn't do that."

"Well, it's there, you know."

And they did.

Reservations about Michael Fischer, Executive Director 1987-1992

Shaffer: Then we hired Michael [Fischer]. Michael came in.

I don't know how much one is supposed to acknowledge in these things.

Lage: I think if you don't acknowledge, there's no point in doing this interview.

Shaffer: There were two people who opposed hiring Michael Fischer. I was one of them. Larry Downing was the other. I was the first one to voice that opinion after about nine people, or ten people had said this is the thing to do. It would have been easier for me to have kept my mouth shut. But I had reservations about Michael. Not about his sincerity. Not about--I mean, he's a good man.

Lage: Was this based on an interviewing situation, or what you knew about him?

Shaffer: Oh yes. He'd been interviewed twice actually. He'd been interviewed for the job when Doug Wheeler had been hired, and, of course, I was not part of that process. Then he was interviewed when he was hired, and I was part of that process.

Lage: Would it have been in front of the whole board, or a committee?

Shaffer: [Pause] I think it was both. I think the initial interview was by a small group, and then there was a final interview by the whole board.

As I recall it. I wouldn't swear to that, but that's the way I remember it. Michael came in to a difficult time, as did Doug. I mean, my goodness, following Mike McCloskey as executive director, anybody would have had a difficult time. Following an uprising of the staff that has just run off the executive director? Michael Fischer came in determined that that wasn't going to happen to him.

Lage: What was your initial objection? I interrupted you when you were saying you--

Shaffer: I have always felt that the Sierra Club underestimates its potential. The Sierra Club is the most powerful, most ethical, most--it has the greatest potential of any environmental organization in the world. It's high on the list of cause organizations. We ought to have the best in the world doing what we have--there are people out there who are so good, so capable, so--the executive director of the Sierra Club should certainly be somebody that could be executive director of General Motors. I mean why not? Aren't we as important as General Motors? Well, of course we are. Can we pay as much? Of course not. Does everybody work for money? Of course not. And the people we are looking for don't. They obviously need to be paid, but that's not what motivates them.

Lage: Did you want a manager or an inspirational leader?

Shaffer: Oh, I have always opted for a person who had the ability to lead, and who had people skills. I think the higher up the food chain of management you get, the more people skills are just what you've got to do because that's what you do. So, I felt they had to have people skills, some management background. They had to have actually run something somewhere of some size and some significance, and done it well. Have the cause deep in their soul, so they instinctively understand what makes these things happen and why people give large parts of their life to this. Be ethical. That's my list.

I wasn't looking, as some people suggested, for the second coming. It would be nice. But I felt that Michael had not ever been in a position comparable in any way in scale and size to all of that. I felt that he was very capable, but that there was no risk that anybody would ask him to be chairman of General Motors. Not that he would want to be. I mean, that's a figure of speech.

Lage: But he was executive director of the California Coastal Commission.

Shaffer: That's correct. But, to a North Carolinian that's less impressive than it may be to somebody from California. And it was a gut feeling, I suppose, because it goes back to what you talked to me about emotions a while ago. It's what I felt.

Anyhow we hired him. I worked very closely with him. He has been my guest in Fayetteville. He has been our guest in Italy with his wife, who is absolutely charming, Jane.

I had two problems personally with Michael. Michael was sort of a passive aggressive type fellow, and that drives me sort of crazy because I'm fairly directional. Tell me what the problem is and let's deal with it, and if we can't deal with it, that's fine, but, you know. There was a problem--if you went to Michael and said, "Michael, there's a fire in the library." Michael's response would likely be, "Oh, have you heard what we've done in the outings program that's really exciting?"

And I would say, "No, what is that?"

"Well, we've done this."

And I would say, "Well, that's good Michael, but what about the fire in the library?"

And he would say, "Oh. Well. But have you heard about this news coverage." And you never could get to deal with the fire in the library until it no longer mattered; the place had burned down.

Lage: Was that consistent do you think, or the way he dealt particularly with you?

Shaffer: Well, it was the way he dealt with--No, I think it was fairly consistent.

I resigned as treasurer when Richard Cellarius was president and Michael was the executive director because of the style of the two of them. The three of us would talk, or Michael and I would talk, and we would have an agreement on something that was going to happen. "We'll do this, this, and this. Michael, is that right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Do you feel okay about that?"

"Yes, I feel okay about that."

"Is it going to work this way?"

"Yes, this will work this way."

Then I would go home, and he would have a conversation with Richard, who was the president, and they would decide to do something else. I would find out about it later, third hand, and I would say, "Wait a minute. What happened to the conversation we had?"

"Oh."

It would sort of go back to the fire in the library. You would find yourself talking about three things, and I would say, "Wait a minute. You and I had an agreement that we were going to do A, B, and C. Now you're telling me that you and Richard have decided we're not going to do two of those, and the third is going to be done differently. I'm here to say to you that the president and the executive director are certainly in a position to do that, but the treasurer would appreciate knowing what's going on. Also, if these are financial matters, should I not be part of the conversation? I mean, if it goes from a three-way conversation to a two-way conversation, that's cool, but shouldn't I be there? I mean, what happened? What role do I play here?"

It got to the point where we were putting together a budget which was not responsible, in my judgement. It was not a budget which I felt was acceptable. There were things being done which I could not, in good conscience, permit my name to be--

Lage: Like a budget out of balance?

Shaffer: We weren't doing what we said we were going to do. And I can't abide that. I wouldn't abide that. I just said then, "You're going to take my name off this." I shocked the daylights out of everybody, because I said--we were in a closed meeting. I don't exactly remember the particular issue, but it was a financial matter having to do with the budget expenditures and priorities and so on. I said, "This is what we agreed to do, and this is what's happened." And I went through the details. "We did this. We had this agreement. Now we're here. Now we have this. This process stinks," and nya, nya, nya. And Richard and Michael sort of agreeing though that that's the way it's going to be. I said, "Well, it can be that way, but I'm not going to be treasurer. I'm going to resign. When we go into open meeting, put this on the agenda, I resign."

Well, people thought I was being temperamental. But I wasn't being temperamental. I went into the meeting, and within five minutes of the meeting opening up I had resigned as treasurer.

Lage: Did the reasons come out?

Shaffer: I don't think so. There was no need to beat it to death. I mean, I wasn't trying to discredit anybody, or pick a fight. It's just that I wasn't going to permit my name to be on something that I could not have some responsibility for.

Lage: Who would your main beef be with in that situation: the president, or the executive director?

Shaffer: Oh I think the truth of the matter is, it was with the president.

Lage: Because that's really your line of authority.

Shaffer: Yes. I think Richard has served the club honorably and well over the years. Richard is-- without any reservation, I could say has no peer as secretary of the Sierra Club in my time. Keeping things orderly, keeping us informed of what's going on. The business of bylaws, and all of that, standing rules. Richard is the man who understands that, as nobody else does. I have great admiration for Richard's service to the club. I consider Richard my friend. I think Richard had trouble adjusting to the role of the presidency. There was a lot of pressure put on Richard that he found difficult to deal with. As there has been in every presidency I can think of, there was a lot of controversy. As I recall it was the mountain climbing stuff, the mountaineers going off--

Lage: Insurance.

Shaffer: Yes, insurance not being available for certain kinds of outings which were then cancelled to protect the club financially. And this was not something that was happening because of anything that Richard did, but the storm fell upon him. He took it seriously. These were people that he respected and cared about, who he thought should treat the president of the Sierra Club better than they were treating him. They, on the other hand, saw Richard as a bad person doing bad things because they weren't getting what they wanted.

Lage: That happens a lot.

Shaffer: It happens. We do that to each other, in the Sierra Club and in the rest of the world for that matter. Anyhow, it was a reflection probably more--or as much on Richard, but Michael knowingly went in to it, making it happen too. So I lost a good deal in my confidence in him as well, and he and I had a conversation to that effect. That's my reflections on him. Of course we've got Carl now. I guess I might as well finish the deck.

Hiring and Working with Andrea Bonnette

Lage: Let me just ask one more thing about Michael. When you were no longer treasurer, did you have anything to do with Michael's leaving or subsequent relationships at the Sierra Club?

Shaffer: I worked a lot with Michael, particularly as far as Andrea [Bonnette] was concerned. Andrea came in to be the administrative person, and to shore up the staff. Michael's having strong sides and weak sides, or less strong sides, however you want to put. And the idea was to bring in a strong administrative person who will shape the place up and Michael can continue to be Michael and do the things which he is good at. Andrea was hired to that end. She was interviewed by, as I mentioned earlier, Maurice Holloway and myself, and a couple of other people.

It was a fascinating interview because she came from Chicago. Flew in. Her plane was late. Her baggage was lost. She had to come in the clothes that she traveled in. Did the best she could with it. Bought a scarf to put over her whatever to dress it up a little bit.

Lage: [Laughingly] Sweat pants.

Shaffer: Yes, whatever. Sweat suit, or whatever.

##[8B]

Shaffer: Both Maurice Holloway and I--We went around the room. We interviewed a number of people: three or four. After each interview, each of us would say what we thought. I was first with Andrea, for whatever reason. I said, "I'd like to pass." We went to somebody, and then we went to Maurice, and Maurice said that he had been interviewing people for a number of years. He, of course, was chief executive officer and one of the major owners of Corn Nuts at that time, a big corporation. So this is not something he is unfamiliar with doing. And he said, "You know, I don't have any negatives on my sheet." He said, "And I don't remember ever interviewing anybody before that way."

And I broke up. I just broke up. [Laughter] They all looked at me like I had lost it. I said, "Okay I'll fess up. That's why I didn't want to go first. Because I've never interviewed anybody that I didn't have any negatives. Everything I got down here is one hundred percent across the board. I figured, man, you've missed something. There's something wrong with the way you've done this."

So we hired her--

Lage: Now, Michael was in on this.

Shaffer: Michael was in on this, yes.

Lage: Because we talked about having the executive director hire people.

Shaffer: Oh yes. Well, let me back up and tell you how that worked. Mike McCloskey actually instigated this, instituted this, which was a very good idea. He did it first with Len Levitt as I recall. That was the beginning, and it's been followed ever since, to the best of my judgement. Before that the directors did the hires. Executive director puts a search in place. Executive director comes up with the two or three finalists. Those two or three finalists are interviewed by different groups of people. Depending on what the executive director seeks to do, one of the groups of people is always a group of volunteers: two or three volunteers who then give their recommendation to the executive director, which he can follow or not follow.

Lage: Okay, that gets it clarified.

Shaffer: That way the executive director has others' input into the decision. This is a very good idea for all kinds of reasons. One of which is that there's buy-in from a number of directions to the hire ahead of time, so if it doesn't turn out too well, then the executive director isn't left hanging out, all by himself. So that was the process. It's a good point.

So, going through this, Michael is down to two or three. We do these interviews. And it turns out that everybody agreed, including Michael, that this is the person to be hired. Turned out that Andrea was a very strong personality, to be kind about it. Extremely competent. Very bright. Absolutely genius-class woman. But really enjoyed a fight. And the first board meeting that we were in, she and I went at it tooth and nail. I mean she just sort of threw barbs at me, and I just would grab them and throw them right back.

Lage: You weren't treasurer?

Shaffer: I don't know whether I was or not. I don't know what I was then. I must have been.

Lage: Treasurer to '88, and then you said again under Robbie Cox. Well, anyway, we'll get the dates.

Shaffer: I don't remember what I was. But at any rate, it was just awful. I remember going in her office--I caught her after the meeting. I said, "Andrea, I want to talk to you."

She said, "All right, fine."

So we went in her office and closed the door. I said, "Andrea, how do you think you and I looked out there, in this meeting?"

She looked at me sort of strange and said, "Well, probably not very good."

I said, "Well, that was sort of my feeling." And I said, "It doesn't seem to me that either one of us are profiting by doing what we did in there." I said, "Can you and I spend a little time between this meeting and the next meeting figuring out how we can do this better the next time?"

She said, "Yes," and I went back to North Carolina. She and I never had any problems again in public, but she had a really bad characteristic of saying bad things about people to other people, including Michael. She would say that Michael did this, or Michael was that, and she would portray him as incompetent, and so on, and so on, and so forth. Again, I did what I do. I said Michael came to Italy and visited us. Andrea came to Fayetteville, and we played golf together. She had always wanted to play golf at Pinehurst. I said, "You come to North Carolina, and I'll take you playing golf at Pinehurst." And we did, and I still remember her laughing as we walked up on to the one green saying, "Do you suppose anybody in the Sierra Club knows who you are?" [Laughter.] I knew exactly what she was talking about because I do have interests other than the Sierra Club.

Lage: You mean the golf?

Shaffer: Well, yes. Golf or whatever. I enjoy a lot of different things that do not necessarily fit the stereotype. Whatever that is.

So I tried to solve this puzzle between these two people. I was involved in all that, and did it very poorly, obviously. Then Andrea left the club right before Michael. That was sort of Michael's final act: to work with Andrea to her separation. I don't know how that exactly was phrased, but she ended up leaving the club at that point. Then Michael left the club.

Differences with Phil Berry

Lage: How did you get along with Phil Berry during all of this? He was president during that period when Andrea left the club.

Shaffer: Phil's vision of what a director does and what an officer does is different.

Lage: From yours, or from other people's?

Shaffer: Yes, certainly from mine. [Pause] More hands off. More interested in specific issues and things. Less interested in the nuts and bolts. It's interesting. Phil and I have been adversaries a number of occasions. When I ran for president, he was the primary adversary to me. He was trying to get anybody but Shaffer. The Wheeler thing, he viewed me as the bad guy in that. We've fallen out like that. But I certainly view him as a brilliant, dedicated, long-term advocate--brilliant, very emotional. Another one of these people that is bright as hell and goes through all the analysis and then does what he feels is the right thing to do whether it makes any sense at all.

When I was president of the Sierra Club, I was presiding over the annual dinner at-- downtown. I think it's called One Market now or something. It was a big area down there where the annual dinner was being held, and we had a bomb threat because Lyndon LaRouche--we had offended him, and we were being picketed. Then after the dinner started we had a bomb threat. Staff is immediately on phones, and I'm presiding at this dinner and this meeting, and the bomb squad is going through the building, and we've got people on the phone trying to get the modus operandi of these people, and we discover in fact that when they picket there is always a bomb threat. The LaRouche people call the

media, and they get the pictures of the people coming out of the building with the demonstrators, and the big deal, nya, nya, nya.

So, I've got these hundreds of people gathered there, and I have got to make a decision, what do we do? Do we clear the hall or not? I remember going to two people. I went to Phil Berry and Mike McCloskey, and I said, "This is what's happening, and what do we do?"

They said, "We think we need to get the two guests of honor..." which was Sala Burton [congresswoman and widow of Congressman, Phil Burton] who was there, and the speaker was a syndicated columnist whose name is out of my mind. And so we took all these people aside. [Laughingly] People are eating, and they don't know what the hell is going on, except they see a lot of firemen walking around the place, and they're thinking, "That's strange." And we discuss what to do, and I remember what the columnist said. He said, "We can't live by intimidation." He said, "I'm going to stay. I don't care what you people do. I'm going to stay."

I thought, "Oh, that's interesting." And we did stay. But as an aside, I do remember that I did go back and at the head table there was this great floral display that had a base on it that looked like it could have held in it about twenty sticks of dynamite. For reasons which make no sense, I picked the floral display up, took it out of the room, and came back and presided in the meeting. Now, none of that makes any sense, but it's what I did. I also told the audience of the bomb threat, said we were going to go on, but gave them time to leave if they wished. No one left.

The point of the story, if it has a point, is that I went to Phil Berry, because I respect his judgement. Analytical, thoughtful, good lawyer. Would not want to be on his opposing side in a courtroom. Even if I was right and he was wrong, I wouldn't want to do it. Men do a thing that I have seen women do very little. I suppose they do some of it. But men with strong personalities do a sort of bull-elephant thing sometimes, and I think Phil and I have gone into that on occasion, and it's more an instinctive kind of thing than it is personal.

I have great respect for Phil. We disagreed a lot. We certainly have a different perspective of the Sierra Club. Phil's perspective of the Sierra Club--Phil has talked to me, "When are you coming back on the board?"

I said, "I'm not going to do it."

"Well, why not?"

"Phil, you have no idea what it's like to spend this number of years doing this, and living in a small town in eastern North Carolina. You come to a meeting. You get here thirty minutes late. You leave thirty minutes early. You work a half a day in your office. You sleep in your bed at night. It takes me ten hours to get here. It takes me ten hours to get home. You know the cost to me to doing this--the financial cost--"

Lage: And you have the apartment which makes it pleasant. Think of the people who don't.

Shaffer: Well, yes, but, what? The Sierra Club has not given this to me. [Laughter] I have less resources to retire on because I have this. And I'm not complaining. These are choices a person makes. I'm pleased I've made the choices. But they haven't a clue.

[Added during interviewee review: For example, before Kim and I had this apartment I stayed in a hotel like all the out-of-town volunteers. The club paid the bill, or some part of it. After Kim and I got married, I went to the executive director and the president, and asked if it would be okay for me to be reimbursed a small amount per night if I was in town for club meetings. Less than the hotel cost, but something to help pay the rent. Michele got word of it and raised a fuss, saying I was staying at my home, and that others who lived in the Bay Area didn't get anything. Well, of course it was not my home, my home was in North Carolina. But I just stopped taking any reimbursement. Now I never saw any of this as personal. Just a Bay Area viewpoint, that came up over and over.]

Cultural Differences, Fayetteville and San Francisco

Shaffer: And they also don't know what it's like out there in North Carolina where people don't have a clue what the Sierra Club is, or twenty years ago didn't know what the Sierra Club is.

Lage: You don't have the same kind of support from your community?

Shaffer: Oh, it's a different world. The Sierra Club--when we moved into our new offices--you have asked me at some point whether or not there was really a serious discussion to locate anywhere except in San Francisco. There really wasn't. But the arguments that were made in favor of it, and I was one of them making it, was that it would help the club's reality if it could get out of San Francisco. San Francisco has got to be the most wonderful city in this country, and one of the most wonderful in the world. But it sure ain't middle America. And you run a risk when you run an organization out of a place like this that you begin to think that this is the way the world is, or the country is. Well, this is not the way country is. I think the leaders like Ed [Wayburn], and Phil, and Michele and others sometimes have a somewhat different perspective of the club than the people who live in Georgia or Florida or Connecticut, or whatever. It's not that they're wrong and we're right, or we're wrong and they're right. It's just that it's a different perspective.

Lage: Does it affect their conservation goals? Is this what you're saying?

Shaffer: Oh, I think it affects their vision of how the club functions. I think it affects their vision on how the country feels about the Sierra Club. I think it affects their vision of what the issues are. Political climate. All those things are really different. It's easy to argue for endorsement of--Well, the view that people in California have of the Senate race in North Carolina, which involves a Jesse Helms, for example, is clearly different than it is in North Carolina. Now this is the state, of course, that elected Ronald Reagan, and Richard Nixon, and Hayakawa, and--who was it? The song and dance man.

Lage: George Murphy.

Shaffer: Yes, George Murphy, and a few other people who are not exactly on the raving left edge of the spectrum. But, there's just an interesting political dichotomy that's different. And it's not a--

Lage: And the Bay Area particularly.

Shaffer: Yes, and it's not a criticism. It's just that it's different. So I think when I say Phil's view of the club is different than mine, I don't mean that he's right and I'm wrong or vice versa. It's just I think we come at--he's been doing it so much longer. He's enmeshed in the history of it. I'm not.

Lage: You're getting there. Thirty years.

Shaffer: Well, I know. When I joined the Sierra Club, as I think we may have said, the nearest meeting was held in New York City, and I was in North Carolina. There was no history.

[Added during interviewee review: There is one more major difference between Phil and I. I come out of a background of people's movements. I see as most important the organizing, training, focusing of a mass of people. Phil does not have time for that...sees it as "process." And I listen to and talk with people. I believe they know some things I don't. Phil believes he sees the answer and pushes it at a meeting. Over and over again he and I would be on opposite sides of important issues and my position would gain the majority support at the board meeting. But what Phil never figured out is that I had worked to get those votes before the meeting by talking with folks, adjusting the motion to suit them, working out details. Phil would make brilliant arguments but I had the votes going in. I don't remember a single important vote of that type that he won.]

So anyhow. Can we finish the executive directors? Or do you want to quit?

Lage: I wondered if we shouldn't stop. I think we're kind of run down, and we can go on to Carl next time. That will be a good place to start.

Shaffer: That'll be fine.

[End of Interview]

Carl Pope, an Insider as Executive Director

[Interview 4: November 10, 1997] ##

Lage: We thought we'd finish up today going through the executive directors, and we had come to Carl [Pope] last time, and then we can go on to your presidency and your being treasurer under Robbie [Cox].

Shaffer: Why don't we cover Carl in the context we've done all the rest of them, and then we'll do the presidency, and then we can, at whatever point we can do it, clean up what's left.

Carl, of course, I knew a long time because he had worked with the club a long time, as had I. I had worked with him in the context of political campaigning, the whole SCCOPE [Sierra Club Committee on Political Education] program. I was vice president for political affairs at least twice. Carl is clearly brilliant, clearly one of the finest in developing strategy, political strategy, that I have ever seen. Very fast on his feet, verbally, presentations. He can get up before a group and weave pieces and parts of a political story together in a way which is interesting and entertaining and understandable and carries whatever message he wants it to carry. He does all those things, I think, extremely well.

I think Carl probably has a value system very similar to mine. I think he probably went through this stuff in the sixties that was the reaching out to cure the injustices of the world, and I think it boils in his soul. Therefore, since I think [chuckling] he and I share some value systems, I think his are very good! As we're inclined to judge such things by what we value in ourselves.

His performance as executive director has been interesting to watch because it was determined by people that we really needed to have an insider, somebody that really understood the Sierra Club. Having tried going outside and bringing somebody in and not having it be just exactly what everybody wanted, and since the one model that was clearly a winner was Mike, and Mike came from inside, maybe we should do that again.

Lage: Was that more broadly accepted than most of the votes have been for executive director?

Shaffer: Well, I think, generally speaking, that the other executive directors which were hired--I was not there when Doug Wheeler was hired, but when Michael Fischer was hired, the board was unanimous behind him.

Lage: [Michael Fischer indicated in his oral history that his hiring was not unanimous.]

Shaffer: [Added during interviewee review: When the Board of Directors discussed the hiring of Michael Fischer I expressed concerns. Clearly he was a good man, however, I felt that we could do better. I always thought the club underestimated what it is. We should have the best person in the country, and I could not believe that Michael was that. I wanted to keep looking. Larry Downing had the same position. The other members of the board were ready to hire him, and the straw vote in closed session was 13-2. Larry and I of course agreed to make it a unanimous vote when the official motion was offered in our regular meeting.]

So there's not been, a history, in my experience, of a sharp division of this is the right man, or the wrong man.

I think there was a general consensus that if we could find somebody that really understood the Sierra Club and how it worked and the culture of the organization and had the other skills we were looking for, that this would be very valuable. And I think it is. I think that's very important. Unfortunately--we talked about this earlier--the Sierra Club has not raised up through its ranks very many people whose training and background is in administration and management and how to be an executive director. Certainly, that's not Carl's background. Carl's background is a political activist and a man of strategies and planning how you change society's behavior through political action, which clearly is one of the things we do. So I think it was a general accord that having an insider was a good idea. We started looking around insiders, and it was a relatively short list, and Carl clearly brought a lot to the table, and so that was the choice.

I have a little trouble separating Carl from what the club has become under Carl's term as executive director. I think we can talk about that a little bit later, when we talk about me coming back onto the board for three more years after I thought I was done and had gone on to other things and finding just how really different it was. It's difficult, really, to separate the changes in the nature of the Sierra Club from those who are leading it when you discover it had greatly changed.

Lage: Maybe this discussion is out of order then.

Shaffer: Maybe it is.

Lage: It seems to me we should discuss Carl and recent club changes together.

Shaffer: Well, let's do. Let's do that.

VIII PRESIDENT OF THE SIERRA CLUB, 1982-1984

Becoming President: Elections and Internal Politics

Lage: We haven't discussed in any depth your presidency of the club, so let's turn to that now.

Shaffer: Good.

Lage: And I think the first question is why you wanted to be president.

Shaffer: It has always been my nature to move forward where there is a forward to move to [chuckling]. And I certainly did not come on the board of directors thinking that at some time I was going to be president of the Sierra Club. That wasn't a goal. I didn't have a plan to do that. That it happened certainly didn't surprise me. I probably saw myself as preparing to do that at some time, if the opportunity came. And much of whether you're president of the Sierra Club or not depends on things which are far outside your own control. First [you must] be elected to the board of directors. And fine people with great service have run [and been defeated.] The craziest one was Joe Fontaine, who ran again after being president of the Sierra Club, probably the most beloved president of the Sierra Club since I've been around, ran for reelection and wasn't reelected to the board of directors!

Lage: Incredible.

Shaffer: Well, it was incredible. It was a fluke of circumstance. There were a lot of people on the ballot from California, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. None of it had anything to do with Joe and his service; it just fell out that way.

So to have the circumstance to be president, you have to be on the board of directors, and you have to have eight directors that will vote for you. Assuming you will vote for yourself, you have to find seven more. Those decisions are often made by people not based on you particularly; it may be based on their own ambition. Maybe they want to be president at the same time you do. So I have always advised my friends who were thinking about being president of the Sierra Club to prepare yourself to be president when the opportunity presents itself because it may never arise again. To say that, "Okay, I'm going

to--I'm not quite ready; I'll do it in three years," may mean you've just decided you'll never do it. So that's the trade-off.

I guess I felt like I was in the right place at the right time, that I had some skills that might work. I had a group of people who thought it was a good idea for me to do it, as well as a group who thought it was a bad idea. Probably each of those positions encouraged me to do it.

Lage: [chuckling] You're not one to back down, after all.

Shaffer: Well, it's a challenge. If somebody looks at me and says, "Denny, I don't want you to be president of the Sierra Club; you'd be a lousy president," I just would like to show them that's not correct. And the only way I can do that is to be a good president of the Sierra Club and at the end of my term have them look me in the eye and say, "Well, that wasn't so bad." So those who opposed me probably encouraged me to run [chuckling] as much as those who came to me and said, "Denny, you would be great; you ought to do it."

Lage: Do you want to talk specifically about how these divisions occur on the board? Are they personal or are they philosophical?

Shaffer: They come in a lot of layers. It's a little bit like [chuckling] drinking a glass of good wine, and there's just layer after layer after layer that unfolds in your mouth as you taste the wine. It's this layered thing. It's a matter of styles. Sometimes it's a matter of emphasis. Certain directors were always put off by me because I spent a lot of time worrying about administration and budgets and I spent less time carrying the flag, fighting battles. Certainly, I did that, and I think when I did it, I think I did it well. I certainly had that experience when I came on the board.

But then there are those who wanted to be leaders, make decisions, promote their issues and ideas, and they always sort of were looking down on process people as spending all their time talking about things, not actually making a difference. The process people were the ones that were balancing budgets and training people and organizing new chapters, finding financial resources and things like that.

Lage: Did the process people tend to come out of the council?

Shaffer: I think to a large degree. I think some of the differences are geographical. The old-school California leadership--I spoke about this earlier--they don't really see the Sierra Club quite the same, I think, as people who have come from another direction. We see it differently, so we disagree on things. Not that either one is right or wrong, but that our perspective is different. I think someone like myself might be less inclined to see the rise or fall of the Sierra Club based on the mountaineering program that we have as would a Phil Berry, for example, to whom this mountaineering program is something he grew up with and is part of the heart and soul of the organization to him. The heart and soul of the North Carolina organization of the Sierra Club when I joined didn't have any mountains to climb, other than 6,000-foot Mt. Mitchell, and you don't need a rope; you walk up it. So those kinds of differences.

And then, of course, there was all kinds of perceived political sorts of things and political ambitions. People want to do different things personally. If you are in line to be president

and people are encouraging you, or somebody else who wants to be president, that's an opponent, and it's very difficult.

And it plays out in so many different ways. We talked about Brant Calkin and Bill Futrell, how--I mean, the leadership of the club that I spoke with assumed Brant would continue being president, and he wasn't. I don't know exactly what happened. I wasn't there. But whatever happened was dramatic. Some things were said that Brant did this wrong or didn't do this right or whatever, and the presentation sold to at least eight people, and there was a new president of the Sierra Club.

Lage: That doesn't happen too often.

Shaffer: No. That was a real unusual event in my time with the club.

Lage: There have been a lot of one-year presidencies recently, but most of them are finishing their term as board member.

Shaffer: Mostly by circumstances of their not being available to run the second year.

Defining the President's Tasks: Working with Chapters, the Media, the Club Staff

Lage: You followed Joe Fontaine as president, who has a very good-guy image.

Shaffer: Joe's presidency was a great help in laying the groundwork for my presidency. Joe's philosophy of the club and Joe's approach to it and mine were so similar. I served as treasurer both years Joe was president. I was on his ExCom. We worked very closely together. We had maybe one or two disagreements in that period of time and a whole lot of agreements. Joe traveled the country, visiting chapters and groups and regional meetings more than presidents had before that that I know of.

He was the one that spoke of the one Sierra Club and brought people together and tried to get people beyond this them-and-us, this national and chapter stuff. And he did a really good job. He was a healer. Joe, like Kent Gill, is not a threatening personality. The changes that were made when Joe was president of the club and Kent of the Sierra Club Foundation--They were both highly respected men who were not threatening to people. So Joe laid a real groundwork. I built on what he did, and it was a wonderful place to start. And it was a wonderful lesson to me to learn under him.

Lage: Did you follow his precedent of going out to the chapters?

Shaffer: I did. I came behind Joe and did it, again, with the same enthusiasm and devotion of time and energy, but with a slightly different message. Joe's message basically was that we're all together; if we work together, we'll do better; it's a healing message. Mine was that that's so, and I talked about that, but, more too. I tried to be an enabler; I tried to show opportunities; I tried to hear needs, to find tools, and to teach a little.

Lage: At the chapter level.

Shaffer: At the chapter level and at regional levels and wherever I went to meet with volunteers. I would attend council meetings. If there was a meeting going on of volunteers and I wasn't tied up doing something else, I went and did it. Jon Beckmann's books committee meeting or whatever it was. I also went to staff meetings. I went to the staff picnic the years I was president, both years. I was there and played softball. I mean, I just believed in being with the people who were doing things and hearing them. You would hear things at the staff picnic that the staff wouldn't necessarily tell the president of the Sierra Club if they came to a board meeting.

It was the same thing if you got out to a chapter meeting. Chapter chairs, chapter conservation chairs, people who didn't hold any office in the chapter but were important players--You'd sit around and talk with them, and you'd learn a lot. And they would learn some things, too, hopefully. So, yes, I did a lot of that.

Lage: How much time did you spend?

Shaffer: I didn't ration out my time as president of the Sierra Club in a rational way. But I looked at my calendars after I finished the two years and I realized, by adding them up, that I averaged working for a living four days a month for those two years. I was not married most of that time. My sons were grown. I had my own businesses. At the time, I had some pretty strong management, and, while it certainly cost me to not be there, it survived, and that was my standard, frankly. Ted Snyder closed down his law practice for two years to be president of the Sierra Club. I didn't sell my businesses, but I sure did turn things loose, and I basically spent all my time being president of the Sierra Club. I sort of camped out when I went home. There were rooms in my house I wasn't in [chuckling] for months at a time. I'd go in the kitchen and the bedroom and dump out a suitcase and fill it up again, and then be gone.

Shaffer: The traveling for the chapters I did a lot of. I did, of course, a lot of the political work, a lot of media stuff. I felt the media was terribly important, and it was a time the media was interested in hearing what the president of the Sierra Club had to say because it was the Reagan years. James Watt was there and then James Watt left, and there were stories there. We were on the front page. The stories were on the front page.

Lage: You had the petition campaign against Watt under Fontaine.

Shaffer: Yes, yes, yes. And that great meeting at the capitol, with Tip O'Neill coming like the godfather down from the top of the steps to pick up the petition from Joe Fontaine. We were standing in front of more microphones than Joe had ever seen in his life, I suspect, and may never see that many again. It's a great picture. I have this picture at home. I'm in it with a beard which, incidentally, I had when I was elected president of the Sierra Club. I shaved the day I was elected.

Lage: Oh, you did!

Shaffer: I did.

Lage: Was it some significant--

Shaffer: Well, I felt that it was sort of a stereotype, that, while I sort of liked my beard, that I thought it was too easy a target and that I'm perfectly happy without one, obviously, because I've never grown it again. But I thought about the public image and how I would be viewed and how I would be heard. How you look stands in the way of how people hear you sometimes, and if it's easily changed, without any compromised principles, I think it's reasonable to do, so I shaved.

So I have the picture standing there with Joe and these hundreds of other people, of course. So anyway, Watt is gone, and we're on the front page. John McComb was very helpful in setting up media appointments around the country for me. I remember in a two-day stretch I visited with the editorial board of the *Washington Post*; I visited with the folks at the *Wall Street Journal*.

I went to the *New York Daily News*, and I was the first major environmentalist to ever do that at the time, they told me. They were the largest newspaper in the country at that time, but everybody sort of put it off as a tabloid. It was quite a strange newspaper. They reacted quite strangely to my going there. They didn't really have an editorial board. They had people that sort of wrote on these kinds of things, and when they found out, after I got there, that I really was the president and not the guy who ran the New York City group, they were quite receptive, and we had a wonderful visit there.

Lage: Did they write--

Shaffer: Oh, yes. Well, what happens when you do these things, you get to know the people. I mean, quotes I gave the *Wall Street Journal* reporter kept showing up six months later. Then he didn't say Denny Shaffer, president of the Sierra Club, said this six months ago. He said, Denny Shaffer, the president of the Sierra Club, said so and so. And as long as it's in context, that's fair game, I think. Frankly, you're pleased they're doing it.

I got to know the reporter for the *Washington Post*, a lovely lady who did the environmental stuff for the *Washington Post*. I never went to Washington that I didn't call her before I came and asked her if she was free for lunch or dinner. We had many a meal together. She was charming. She was not married; I was not married; there was absolutely nothing on, other than the fact that we enjoyed going out and talking about the things which were important to us.

But I worked with the media like I worked with chapter chairs or whatever. I tried to get to know them as people. I tried to be accessible to them; I was accessible to them.

Lage: Were you managed? I have the sense now that everything is kind of managed by a media specialist at the club and the president is sent off on these different--

Shaffer: I used--Oh, that's a terrible word, "used." I found the staff to be a great resource in helping me sort out the various opportunities. One of the things I did early on in my presidency was to literally make a list of the things the president could or should do, then divide it down into those which only the president could do and those which you can delegate. That was one of the more important things I ever did because presidents frequently spend a lot of time doing things somebody else can do better than they can, but they do it because somebody else says, "Gee, how about doing this?" And it's a good thing to do, so they do it. "How about going to Japan?" "Oh, fine. I'll go to Japan." Well, fine, but as president of

the Sierra Club--is the club well served if the president of the Sierra Club is in Japan? Somebody offered me a trip to Japan. I didn't go, but I passed it on to someone else who did a fine job. So I made this list up. And that sorts things out very well.

And then the second thing I did was I took from the second part of the list those things that others could do as well as I could, or better; and I picked some things off it that I thought would be fun [chuckling] because I felt like if I'm going to be doing this for a couple of years, full-time, I need to have things which will recharge my batteries. I've got to have some things in here that will help keep me going. So I rather deliberately went about sorting out the kinds of things I would do, and then I made it really clear to everybody who was interested and probably a lot who weren't that I was available to do these things.

John McComb was eager to have a president of the Sierra Club who could go talk to people. I went to the *Christian Science Monitor*, met with their editorial board, and they were satisfied enough from that that they asked me to write an op-ed for the *Christian Science Monitor*; which I wrote. Now, I suspect the president [today] might be less inclined to do that sort of thing themselves. There probably would be people that would be more available to do that.

Now, I didn't do it in isolation. I can assure you Mike had input. Mike read it over before it went out. I made a lot of changes; others looked at it. But a lot of it was stuff you did yourself.

Asserting the President's Role as Leader of a Democratic Club

Lage: Was it easy to work with Mike on these things?

Shaffer: Oh, yes.

Lage: Was there any question of who was going to sign the public letter or who was going to make a trip?

Shaffer: Oh, no. Early on, Mike and I worked those things out. In talking with Mike at the beginning of my term as president, I talked with him very candidly about my view of things, and he was very candid in his view of things. As a for example, I said to him--the Group of Ten at that point was viewed as this very powerful group of ten people, and they were the heads of the ten major environmental organizations. They met sort of quarterly and made medicine and nobody attended but them, and no other staff went, and it was sort of a black box sort of thing, which scared the daylights out of everybody in the environmental movement because most organizations' staff felt that perhaps the executive director needed to have a little support there because they didn't necessarily have the handle on everything.

It was not a problem for the Sierra Club because Mike really did have his hand on everything. But I remember saying to Mike, "Mike, the truth of the matter is that the club might be well served, and the environmental movement might be well served, that if, at one of the meetings of the Group of Ten you're not available to go, that the president of the

Sierra Club go in your stead." Now, until that time, if Mike had not gone, nobody would go because it would not have been acceptable to send a second-in-command; that wasn't done.

Lage: To this group. Not acceptable to this group.

Shaffer: No. They would not have had it. Bill--The Wilderness Society--

Lage: Turnage.

Shaffer: Bill Turnage. I mean, there were people of strong personalities, Bill Turnage certainly fitting that role. And, incidentally, that happened. At a point where Mike could not go, he talked with them and I went, and I don't think they were particularly enthusiastic about me being there, but I was a gentleman beyond belief and was careful not to offend anybody. I think I made a serious contribution or two to the meeting, and I think it carried a message to all of them that the Sierra Club was different from The Wilderness Society, that the president of the Sierra Club really was the top person in the Sierra Club. I think that, then, carries the message to every member of the club that this is a democratically run organization, that the people the members elect are really the ones that govern. And so I was trying to prove a lot of points, and I think it did. I think it did.

Lage: Did you have some thoughts about the Group of Ten itself? Was it a useful meeting? Were they in accord with the Sierra Club's points of view?

Shaffer: It was very clear that Mike McCloskey was the leader of the group. There were a number of things that came up during that meeting which they simply put aside because Mike wasn't there. And it was clear that they didn't feel comfortable moving forward with this without his advice and guidance. That was my strongest initial impression.

There is a silly story--I don't mind telling you.

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Shaffer: It was always my style to check out a meeting room long before the meeting started because I wanted to know my environment before I got in. I went in and I saw [two large chairs at each end of this table], and I smiled, and I said, "I wonder who will sit in those two thrones?" There was no doubt in my mind that Bill Turnage would be one. The other was a little harder to pin down. I went in the meeting the next day. There were about three or four people there. The rest of the table had not yet filled up, but Bill Turnage was in one of those chairs.

So I--It was a meeting which I enjoyed going to. I think it served some purpose. I don't think I did any damage to the Group of Ten, nor to Mike.

Lage: Who sat in the other chair?

Shaffer: I don't even remember. I think it was by default. I think people just wandered in, and then finally that was the chair that people sat in.

Lage: I see. You didn't pick it?

Shaffer: No, I would not have taken it. I purposely got there early enough so I had a choice because it would have been exactly contrary to the message I was trying to deliver had I shown up in that chair. I wanted to be there as a humble servant.

Communication between the President and Club Members and Directors

Lage: One thing I noticed while looking at your papers in the Bancroft--I'm sure the file is not complete--but this was from your presidential years. You have a lot of correspondence with members.

Shaffer: Oh, yes.

Lage: Troubleshooting minor points that they were unhappy with. How did you see your role doing that?

Shaffer: I discovered when I became president of the Sierra Club there was no system to handle mail or phone calls going to the president. I was sitting in the office the day after I was elected. The phone rang, and it was a man that wanted to sell freeze-dried food to the outings program, so he called and asked to speak to the president of the Sierra Club, and here he was. I explained to him this was not part of my official duties and went out and spoke to the lady who was the secretary Mike and I shared and said, "What is the process for clearing calls to the president?" She said, "Well, there isn't one." "Well, there's going to have to be one 'cause this is silly!" She agreed. We talked about, well, what's Mike's system? It was a good system. I said, "Well, we've got the same one now for the president. If somebody calls like this, you send him to the right person, not to me."

And then I looked at the mail. How was the mail handled? Well, the truth of the matter is it wasn't. Ted Snyder, when he was president of the Sierra Club, would sit down in the office late at night and type out the answers, himself. After Ted, Joe's response--Joe's handling of that was much less formal. He sort of left it to the staff, in the main. Now, he dealt with what rose to the top. I see it all as important. It's part of the fact that I'm, in the rest of my life, I'm a business person, and you don't ignore the complaints and pain of your customers for very long. You shouldn't. I could not possibly stand that.

So I had the mail sorted out in a number of ways. I had it run through a screen to see who these people were. Is this a chapter chair? Is this a major donor? Is this a state senator from Nebraska? I mean, who are these people? So that not only did you know the amount of time and effort that perhaps should be put into the response, but where are these people coming from, so how do you respond to their issue?

But I did this, and I did it in a number of ways. The best system that I put in place was I put into the office in San Francisco an answering machine with a very long tape on it. I would dictate letters into that answering machine from airports all over the country, and the letter would go out the next day. And so I could get on an airplane with a package of fifty letters and go through them, and I would literally hand-write responses or outline responses. I'm not very good at dictating spontaneously. And then when I got to a phone and dictated

them. And so you could generate huge amounts of correspondence very quickly and very efficiently. Now, this was before some of the systems we have now.

Lage: No e-mail.

Shaffer: No e-mail, no fax, no a number of things. But, yes, I got an awful lot of letters out. But these were important things. These were important people.

I also carried with me on the airplane handfuls of chapter newsletters and handfuls of postcards, and when I would see the newsletter editor is resigning after four years of being newsletter editor, I would write that person a card and thank them, from the president of the Sierra Club. And I was inclined to think it was a good idea.

Lage: It sounds like a wonderful idea.

Shaffer: It didn't cost much, and it's probably better than sleeping or reading a boring book on an airplane. And I did travel. I traveled a lot, as you could tell by what I said earlier.

Maybe we ought to separate how I related to the board. I did the same thing with directors. I carried with me at all times a folder that had in it all the phone numbers for all the directors, and I carried in that folder the emerging and controversial issues and the emerging and not controversial issues. When a moment came up, I would call a director and say, "Brock, I want to ask you about so and so." And we'd talk about it, and he'd tell me how he felt about it. Or if he had questions, I'd try to respond, or if there were questions I didn't have answers to, I'd say, "Well, I'll get somebody to get back with you."

And I kept a chart of when did I last talk to Brock and what did we talk about, just in little symbols and so on and so forth. So there never was a month went by that I hadn't spoken to every director on the Sierra Club board once or twice and sometimes four or five times. It served a lot of purposes. It built a team. They knew they were important to me. They heard me. They knew how they felt was important to me. We worked out the controversy over issues before they came before the board, before they became controversial.

Lage: Now, is that different from what you had observed?

Shaffer: Oh, yes. I don't think anybody has ever done that before or since, not to the degree I did.

Lage: So seeing an issue come up, you would start to line up--

Shaffer: Keep in mind, now, that Mike McCloskey was executive director, too. He had this chart in his office that we talked about earlier of the emerging issues, so, you know, what was--I mean, certainly you got blind-sided sometimes, but you knew that there was going to be a question coming up of the reorganization of the field system in a particular part of the country, and there were discussions pro and con and so on, and you knew the people in that part of the country had a lot of interest in how this was going to turn out. Were they going to get another field office or not?

And so I talked to the directors in that area, I talked to the volunteers in that area, and then, when it came up, all the pieces were on the table, and the chances of getting it right were greatly enhanced. And this was not an act. I was not calling these directors to tell them

what the answer was. I really believed that I would learn something in the conversation, and I did. This was dialogue; this was not a monologue.

Lage: It wasn't arm-twisting on your part.

Shaffer: It was not a sales pitch. Oh, no. I was not calling somebody and saying, "Would you vote for this scheme of mine?" It was calling him up and saying, "We're talking about having an international assembly. How do you feel about it? What do you think we should have? Who should be there? We talked about inviting John Denver. Is this a good idea or a bad idea? How do you feel about it?" Rather than inviting John Denver and getting to a meeting and find seven directors saying, "What a dumb idea this is," publicly. And then we'd have an arm wrestle. We didn't do that. We just didn't do it.

Changes in the Outings Program and Clair Tappaan Lodge

Lage: Should we look at some specific issues that may have come up during your presidency that you think were most important? You mentioned last time bringing the outings program under club control. Was that a controversial thing?

Shaffer: Oh, sure.

Lage: Why don't you talk about how that was handled? If you can recall it.

Shaffer: Oh, sure. Well, it's not a long story.

Shaffer: The outings program is part of the great, important history of the Sierra Club and a terribly important part of the organization. I mean, nobody has to explain this to me. I mean, I've been an outings leader and did that for years. When my first wife died and I found myself with the two boys, two young boys, we were out there hiking on Sierra Club outings all the time, and so the importance of this is clear to me.

But [chuckling]--the outings program had basically been run by the committee. They hired the staff; they decided what the fees would be; they decided what the qualifications of the leaders would be; they decided about things like insurance and all kinds of things like this.

Lage: This was really a volunteer-run program.

Shaffer: Which at one time was probably a grand idea. But when things--Things began to change.

Lage: Was there an incident?

Shaffer: No, not that I recall. I think that prior to my presidency there had been some real attempts to bring this more in-house. Joe had tried to do that and had made some progress. But it wasn't going to happen until you had the committee on your side. As long as you had a committee that was an adversary of change, then it became a thing that the board was forcing on the committee, which would never have worked.

Lage: And the committee leadership was longtime volunteers.

Shaffer: Longtime volunteers. So Ted Snyder had been a longtime supporter of the outings program, a longtime outings leader, a man who was deeply respected by all concerned, and trusted, but who understood the problem, having been president of the Sierra Club, with the outings program sort of separate from the club. The risks involved. You don't have adequate insurance; you're not paying your leaders in a way that is necessarily quite legal. Yes. I mean, are you subject to a suit here from an unhappy outings leader, or whatever?

So I talked to Ted about it, and said, "Ted, you know the problems better than I do, and you know solutions here better than I do, and these folks trust you, and I need to have somebody chair this committee that can move it in this direction." He thought about it and said, "Yes, I can do that." And he did it. And we worked through it piece by piece.

Lage: Did things come to the board?

Shaffer: Well, only as--only after it was resolved, really. Things should never come to the board that are not really almost resolved when they get there. By that I don't mean that somewhere in a smoke-filled room somebody--two, three people decide how it ought to be or that the president somehow makes a pronouncement. That's a horrible idea. It would never work. But if everybody talks to everybody, if everybody sort of identifies what the concerns and problems are and finds solutions for them that satisfy all the players, then you bring it to the board on a piece of paper and get it blessed.

And there's no opposition to it. Everybody wins. It is a very poor idea to bring something in where you have one group says it should be this, another group says it should be that, and the board is asked in their wisdom to pick which one is right. Well, you can't win. So we handled it in that way.

Lage: Was it a very controversial move? I assume you diminished the power of the committee somewhat.

Shaffer: Actually, we didn't. What we did is we changed the form of it. People perceived that if they were not able to actually write the checks themselves, they would no longer have any fiscal control, for example. Well, that's silly. I mean, what president of any major corporation writes the checks? I mean, that's not the way it's done. There are other ways to maintain a fiscal control. And they eventually understood that the thing that people in the club observed to me all along, which is I believe the volunteers should maintain control. I mean, I think that's what our bylaws say, that the board of directors is the controlling body of the Sierra Club, and it's a volunteer body, and it appoints volunteer committees to do certain tasks.

This does not mean that the staff is less important. It just means that that's the legal flow of authority. And once they really understood that they weren't going to be diminished in being able to decide the important things and that indeed the program would go on and that it was more likely to go on, frankly, and that there were real concerns--You know, you'd sit down and we'd--I didn't go to many of these meetings, but you'd sit down and you'd say, okay, here is--We're legally exposed here.

I mean, it was sort of like the Clair Tappaan Lodge thing. We had a problem with the septic thing. I mean, the newspaper up there wrote up the fact the Sierra Club is polluting a stream with its septic tank. Well, you'd sit down with a committee, and with this clipping out of a newspaper, and it's hard for folks to say, well, there's really no problem here. Everybody in the room agrees there's a problem here. Now, when you start getting to the solution, then you decide does this mean you're going to fire the committee and appoint another committee? Well, of course not.

Does it mean that you're going to need to have some assurance that the committee is going to behave differently on things like this? Absolutely. And does it mean you're going to have to have some sort of reporting system and some sort of accountability, some sort of communication? Well, of course.

Does it mean that there's going to have to be fiscal controls so that the money is in the bank and audited like public money ought to be audited? Well, of course. Does that mean that they won't be in charge of putting together the budget? No, it doesn't.

And once they understood those things, and we worked them through piece by piece, it was fine.

Lage: Were there questions of-- This is coming out of a vague past, but I have some recollection that people were fearful the club was going to take a bigger cut for overhead, or charge more for the outings.

Shaffer: Well, I'm sure that's true, and I'm sure that it was a justifiable concern. The executive director and the comptroller and those who were responsible for getting the money in the bank are always looking for ways to do just exactly what you're talking about, and there's a tension all the time that way. I'm sure that was going on. But you deal with it the same way. You have those people sit down with this other group of people, and they work out what is the right amount, and you consult with other people and you get a number that everybody agrees on, and then that's what comes to the board in the form of the budget.

A director would question where did this come from, and it came from this process and these people and does the committee agree? Yes. Does the staff agree? Yes. All right, fine. What's the next item?

Facilitating Interaction on the Board

Lage: So what you're saying is that as president you tried to have things go smoothly at board meetings and be worked out before.

Shaffer: To a level of detail that is probably quite compulsive. For example, I never would have permitted the seating around the board meeting tables to be random. I mean, there was never a board meeting that I chaired that I didn't personally arrange who was sitting where.

Lage: Tell me your thinking on that.

Shaffer: Well, I mean, this is so obvious but I don't know any other president that's done it.

Lage: Did you have name plates?

Shaffer: Sure. We always had name plates in front of us, and the normal way of doing it is whoever is doing what Gene Coan is doing now would set them out and put up the mikes and so on, and they'd sort of randomly put them out, and so on. Well, I mean, let's assume that there is a controversial issue. We certainly don't want to put five people that feel one way on this side and five people that feel the other way on that side. Even though that's not something you're going to get to 'til the next day, they're still going to be sitting in those seats. And so you know what's on your agenda. You know your players.

Lage: So each meeting would be designed differently.

Shaffer: When I was elected president--and we haven't talked about this--there was a clear split on the board as to whether that was a good idea or a bad idea. Well, I want to assure you at the first meeting, the people that thought it was a good idea and the people that thought it was a bad idea were mixed up around the table, and there were no two opponents sitting beside each other, and there were no two supporters sitting beside each other. I wanted them to get to know each other. I wanted them to ask the other one to pass the water. They had to talk to each other. Beginning of healing.

So, yes. My theory, I believe, is correct. If there's opposition, if there's disagreement, if there's controversy, you go to it with an offer to talk that is sincere, that permits people to be heard, that puts you in there as someone who realizes you don't have the answers. I have said over and over and over again, and it's not an act. I believe it. I'm wrong a lot. I've been wrong a lot all my life. I am right a lot, but I'm wrong a lot. And if you're going to be this type of person that I am that makes a lot of decisions--I mean, you ask me a question, I give you an answer. I don't hedge. The risk is you're going to be wrong.

The more interaction you have with more people, the better your batting average is going to get because you're going to learn. Once people begin to understand that, it begins to be the beginning of the moving away from the controversy, that you and I are not an enemy. We are viewing this thing differently. What is it we want? What's our goal? What do we want to do? What's the point? How do you want to do it?

Getting Elected President: Opposition, Support, Healing

Lage: You hinted a minute ago there's more to say about your being elected. Let's go back to that.

Shaffer: Well, being president of the Sierra Club is just this unique thing. I was walking, as I said to you earlier, before we started this--I was walking yesterday with my seven-year-old daughter, Francesca, and my wife, and I was trying to explain to Francesca who John Muir was. We were talking about where he was born in Dunbar and how I had been to Dunbar as a trustee of the Sierra Club Foundation when we went over there, and that wonderful experience. And I talked to her about things Muir did. But it was clear that this was a little hard for her seven-year-old mind to quite grasp, though it was not objectionable. Finally, I

said to her, "Francesca, you know, like your daddy was president of the Sierra Club, John Muir was president of the Sierra Club." It's an overwhelming thought.

Lage: Yes, it really is.

Shaffer: It is an overwhelming thought. And the opportunity and the challenge and the risk involved with sitting in the seat that John Muir figuratively sat in is overwhelming. So the process to get you there, all of that is fraught with different kinds of things happening.

I felt that it was time for me to go ahead and be president of the Sierra Club. I thought I was ready to do it. I had spent five years on the board, or four and a half. I had spent four years as treasurer, two years under Ted and two years under Joe. So had been on the ExCom that period of time. And I did, before that, everything from a group newsletter editor to whatever, up through the ranks of the group and the chapter and the council and national committees, which I had been on a half a dozen, and so on.

I had done things like being a city councilman, which helped me understand a little bit how these things work. The board of directors is as close to a city council, a council management form of government, as it probably is to anything else. They're politicians, they're elected in a political way, you have an executive director that works with you in a political arena, you're dealing with funds which have come out the people's pockets that have elected you. There's a lot of similarities.

And so I thought all that was a good idea. And I also thought that I had spent enough time by now that I sort of understood how the organization was wired, you know, mechanically put together. If you try to pull a rope, I knew which rope, if you pulled it, something would happen and which rope, if you pulled it, nothing would happen. And I spent time talking to directors far in advance about what they thought of me being president of the Sierra Club. There was a clear division of thinking. Phil [Berry] and Michele [Perrault] particularly thought it was an eminently bad idea--

Lage: And people are honest in the way they respond to you.

Shaffer: Well, [chuckling], direct is a different way of putting it. Some are quite direct. There were on the board probably five or six people who were strongly encouraging me to do it and thought it was just the thing to be done.

Lage: Now, who were they? We're really going to get pros and cons here.

Shaffer: Well, the people who supported me doing this all along were people like--And, you know, it's funny. I don't even remember exactly who was on the board when I was elected.

Lage: I had meant to bring the list, and I didn't.

Shaffer: But, I mean, Joe was always very supportive of me doing this and Marty Fluharty was very supportive. Peg Tileston was very supportive and Brock Evans. Larry Downing has always been a very supportive person in whatever I was doing, but he came on the next year. I'd have to go back over the list, and I'm not sure I could tell you exactly at this point because I tried not to pay much attention to that after it was over. [Added during interviewee review: The directors that were my eight votes going into the meeting to elect

officers were Joe Fontaine, Peg Tileston, Marty Fluharty, Brock Evans, Nick Robinson, Phil Hocker, Dick Fiddler, and of course myself.]

Lage: But you do remember Phil and Michele not being too happy?

Shaffer: Well, they were the leaders of the opposition. Phil put together this strategy which was basically anybody but Shaffer. And so he encouraged a lot of people to believe that if they put their name in nomination, that lightning might strike, that there may be a deadlock, that there may be seven votes for Shaffer and eight votes for nobody, and that on the twenty-third ballot that somebody who had one vote to start with might have eight votes, and that's the way it would go. And that was the strategy. And I give him credit for that being an excellent strategy.

I thought I had a good strategy. I had eight people who had committed to me before I went over there. It turned out, however, that when we announced our intentions, that there were only--that one of the people who had made a commitment to vote for me announced that he was running for president. Which then meant that I had seven votes.

Lage: Should we name him?

Shaffer: Well, I don't think we should do that. I think that probably would be bad form; these things are confidential, and the person made a mistake. They knew they made a mistake thirty minutes later, and I suspect still regret it. But they got caught up in the idea that "maybe this will work and maybe I'll be president of the Sierra Club. I really would like to be president of the Sierra Club." And that's understandable. (He never was.)

So on the first ballot, I had seven votes. I needed another vote, and this was troublesome, but my supporters gathered around and talked to a number of people, including the person who had decided to run instead of supporting me, and at any rate, I was elected on the second ballot.

But there was, out of that, a real split on the board. Of course, the silly thing is you go right over and you start going to work. Michele became vice president. And I supported her being vice president. Peg Tileston became treasurer. Marty Fluharty was fifth officer. Sandy Tepfer was the secretary. It was an ExCom that was sort of balanced between those who thought I was the best choice and those who thought I maybe wasn't the best choice, and I thought that was a good idea because well, to be totally candid, I had three votes on ExCom. I had Peg, Marty and myself. And then there was Sandy and Michele, so if it, you know, God forbid, came down to a vote, I probably could have rounded up three votes. I don't think it ever did. I think the healing took place quickly.

And, frankly, in my presidency very few important votes--almost all the votes that are of any significance are overwhelmingly one way or the other, and many of the no-votes were symbolic. You mentioned somewhere along the way that I voted no on a certain budget. I wouldn't have a clue why I voted no on that budget. It was probably over some picky little thing that I was displeased about that I realized I could make my statement in this way and it didn't make any difference because there were, you know, twelve people supporting the budget and it didn't matter whether there was twelve or thirteen.

Lage: Yes, that's right. Things that looked important when you read in the minutes sometimes don't mean--

Shaffer: Don't mean that at all. I laugh at the fellow who wrote the history of the Sierra Club from the minutes. Maybe I shouldn't say--How should I say this? It is a book that does not reflect the history of the Sierra Club.

Lage: The Michael Cohen book?¹

Shaffer: Yes. It reflects what was in the minutes. It is a mildly amusing [chuckling] reflection on the Sierra Club by somebody who wasn't there because it sure doesn't get close to representing what happened. Anyhow, that's an aside.

Lage: You feel that that kind of traumatic election didn't carry over.

Shaffer: No.

Lage: Did Phil Berry pull back then? Was he a good loser?

Shaffer: Phil was not happy about it. I asked Phil to continue on as vice president for legal affairs, which he agreed he would do. I asked him to come and talk to the ExCom about what it was that he did or saw that task being, and he took that as a challenge, and I remember his saying that if necessary to be knighted he had to come forward, and if he had to bow down, he would in order to be knighted.

Lage: Did you mean it as a challenge?

Shaffer: No. I simply said to him, "Phil, I mean, we really don't know what the devil it is that you do. And I've served on the board of directors now for four years, four and a half years, and some of these less. And I think that it's fair that if you're going to be a vice president of the club that it ought to be on a piece of paper somewhere what the devil it is you're doing and that the ExCom would like to talk about this first. You have the position. I have said you've got it; you've got it. But we want to talk about it."

And we did. But there were bumps in the road, sure. There was still animosity over other things, but it worked out very quickly. And it worked out quickly, I think, because the style used was an important style. We listened to people; we talked to people. I mean, Phil Berry was on my list of people I called with a high degree of regularity, and it was not--and he knew it was not--it was not a song and dance. It was serious stuff. I knew what his interests were. I would no more have dealt with anything in the Sierra Club presidency that had to do with legal affairs without talking to Phil. I just wouldn't have done it because he was the expert, and I learned from talking to him.

We had social events. I had dinners for the board, which I paid for out of my pocket. I made attempts to visit with people. Michele and Phil had me over to their home. We went out to dinner. It was a different time. The board, in the main at that time, was much more social. I mean, we literally went out and danced. We went out dancing Saturday night, and

1. Michael P. Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988).

we partied. Now--I mean, I'm getting into these times now, but it's different. There was more people working at--We knew each other's children's names. We knew when people were having good times and hard times and what it was about. We knew if somebody's mom was sick and maybe going to die.

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Shaffer: It's easier to have healing when people know--Well, let me turn it backwards. I think a negative approach, but--It's harder to really be angry with somebody that you know. It's harder to be angry with somebody you're talking to than it is somebody you're talking about. I didn't permit very much to happen to where people weren't talking to each other, and to where you break down that kind of thing, and it worked very well.

Internal Matters: Evaluation of Officers and Making People Accountable

Shaffer: I put in place the evaluation of the officers of the Sierra Club. I said to the board, you know, "At the February meeting, we're going to set aside a period of time. I want to have evaluation of each of the officers of the Sierra Club, starting with the president. I want to know what I'm doing right, what I'm doing wrong. I want you to think ahead of time about it. Anything is fair game, but I'd just as soon not have a public stoning."

Lage: How long into the office did you do it?

Shaffer: Well, it was in February. I was elected in May, so--

Lage: Nine months.

Shaffer: Nine months. I wanted to do it before I was up for reelection, so there was a self-serving motive there, but there was also a desire to learn.

Lage: Did you get good feedback?

Shaffer: Absolutely. And fair. And they pointed out some things I had done very well, and I felt good about it. They pointed out some things they wish I had done that I hadn't gotten to, and they were right. They pointed out things which I had done that had not worked, and they were right. It was a very good process. And the other officers, I think, profited by it. We did the same thing again the next year. It's a process which has not been done a whole lot since then, which I think is unfortunate. I think it should be instituted in a formal way.

I believe in accountability. I believe in evaluation. I believe in feedback. Whether it's the executive director or the president, it shouldn't make a darn bit of difference. But that's hard to do.

Lage: You've hardly mentioned Ed Wayburn so far. Was he on the board during your presidency?

Shaffer: Yes. Ed was on the board when I was elected. Ed is the ultimate politician. When I was appointed--I was appointed to the board to fill Brant's seat. The first real board meeting I

went to would have been whatever was the first meeting in the fall; September, I guess it was. And we met, and Ed wanted to take a walk with me. Ed took a walk with me and talked about how pleased he was that I was on the board, and how I had said all these things needed to be done and now I was in a position I could do something about it, and that he was so pleased to see this and so on and so forth. And gave me the feeling that he had really been the moving force to getting me on the board. I was led to believe by others afterwards that in fact Ed supported another candidate. There's nothing wrong with that, except that it is the ultimate in political wisdom that you build--And here's a guy who's now going to be here for a while, and I want him to see me as an ally and build--But Ed. Ed has his own agenda.

As treasurer, I had worked with Ed on a couple of things. I was quite chagrined to see how the board treated Ed on financial matters before I was treasurer. Ed had for years gone out and found donors that would support something he was interested in doing, sometimes people fairly close to him. And then he would come back and say, "Okay, I have raised "x" number of dollars. I want to spend it in this way." And sort of dare anybody to not accept the money to do that with, and so they would accept it.

But there was some suspicion that Ed had perhaps spent it two or three times and that in fact he had manipulated the system to these ends. And so when I was treasurer, there was really some rather harsh stuff going back and forth about Ed and the way he raised money and spent money and whether you could trust the system that was being used and so on and so forth.

Lage: When you say harsh stuff--

Shaffer: Well, that he's not being straight with the board, that he is in fact spending \$50,000 which was a \$25,000 gift, and he spent it here and there, and so on. Or that he said he would raise this money, this \$50,000 and in fact \$25,000 came in and we spent \$50,000 and where's--The other \$25,000 came out of the conservation budget, or whatever. And these were people generally who had a desire to spend the money doing something else. So that was the conflict. It was which issue do you spend it on, or whatever.

As treasurer, I went to Ed and said, "Ed, this won't do. You and I need to understand this and write it down, and I will stand by it and you will stand by it, and there will be no more of this silliness." And we did, and there was no more of that silliness.

Lage: And that worked?

Shaffer: Of course it worked! I mean, it's the same thing as making people accountable. He knew darn well that if anything was done in the future that was not according to what had been agreed upon, everybody would know that it was contrary. It was accountability. Everybody would know it was contrary.

Lage: You were keeping closer track of where the money was going, obviously.

Shaffer: No question about it. No question about it. Here it is; now we know this is what it's supposed to be; this is what you're going to raise; this is what you're going to spend it for. Is this what you want to do? Yes. Good. Here it is, we've written it down. That's it. Yes. Fine.

Lage: Now, was that done without animosity?

Shaffer: Sure. Ed and I did it. Then, when the next controversy came up somewhere, I'd say, "Look, this is not a problem. The treasurer and Dr. Wayburn have worked this out, and the executive director has signed off on it; the president has signed off on it, and there's no problem."

But Ed basically--I have great respect for him. He wanted to be chair of the International Committee, as I remember, and we had a chair at the time. It was for Ed that I created the position which he held for so many years, vice president for parks and protected areas, to work on anything he wanted to. It wasn't just an official title, but it was a hunting license to go out there and save any wild lands you could in the world. Ed resisted it a little bit at first, but when he realized that it really was a good idea, he was quite happy with it, and he served in that position long after I was president.

Lage: So that's a job that you structured.

Shaffer: I created, yes. We had the chair of the International Committee, and the skills are different. To chair a committee that's working on the policy and all that and to be able to go out and do the wheeling and dealing and being a recognized power in conservation circles around the world [are] different things. Ed's greatest skills were in that second area. I said, "Why do you want to mess around with this other stuff for? There's another person over there [who] wants to do this and will do it real well and wants to do it, and you want me to fire them and put you there? That makes no sense to me. Why don't we have two good people doing two good things?" And it worked out very well.

The World Wilderness Conference was held while I was president. I sent--And it was my choice. I sent Ed [Wayburn] and Jim Dockery from North Carolina, one of the real rising stars in the club at the time. Died prematurely, unfortunately. Brilliant attorney, brilliant conservationist, a brilliant lover of wilderness. By all reports, they made the greatest two-man team that has ever gone out like that because Ed knew the ropes and had been there and done that, and Jim was so bright and so capable and so competent and understood people. A great sense of humor, great ability to work with people, a humble man, not unlike McCloskey in that respect. No ego problems at all.

And I will add that it never occurred to send myself. They both did ten times better than I would have ever done. And I think that's a temptation presidents have, is that this would have been a fun thing to do. I would love to be able to look back on memories of having been there, but I would not have served the club as well as those two.

Lage: That's interesting. Okay, that was a good little aside on Ed.

Purchase of Headquarters Building on Polk Street

Lage: Were there issues internally--we talked about the outings program--I know one thing going on with planning a move, the club move. Is that something we should discuss?

Shaffer: That was not particularly controversial. That was--And Phil Hocker, to give him great credit, Phil Hocker put immense amounts of hours into the planning of the move and exploring of the alternatives and the development of a direction. It unfortunately didn't turn out the way we all hoped it would because, among other things, the government changed laws dealing with limited partnerships and the neighborhood we moved into did not develop like everybody thought it would.

Lage: But it was an agreed-upon choice to move to Polk Street because one of the choices was Howard Street, where the headquarters is now near.

Shaffer: There was one [chuckling]--There was one fellow on the board at the time that had reservations about Polk Street and expressed them, but the vote was unanimous without his vote, and so he withdrew his concerns. And that was me.

Lage: Oh! And what were your concerns?

Shaffer: My concern was that it was a very elaborate business proposition we were entering into and that the Sierra Club doesn't--

Lage: Describe it just very briefly.

Shaffer: The concept was that this warehouse, and it is owned by a man who wants to sell it. We want to buy it and do a rehab on it--We don't have any money. We want to buy it cheap, so we worked out a deal where it was sort of a bargain sale that he got a contribution, a tax deduction, to the Sierra Club Foundation. And the land, then, was sold, given to, whatever, the foundation, and he got this write-off, and then the limited partnership was formed, in which the club was a general partner and the limited partners were the people who put up the money.

And they would get tax write-offs along the way and, when everything all worked out at the end, they would have developed a situation where the club owned the building and they would then be able either to get their money back or they could, at that time, make a contribution of their limited partnership assets to the foundation, which would then give them a significant tax write-off. I mean, that was the structure.

Lage: Was this a common thing that was being done then? Or was it a brilliant idea that someone came up with?

Shaffer: It was a common--Limited partnerships were the big thing that was happening then. Historic renovations, all that sort of thing. Shortly thereafter, the tax laws were changed and really reduced, really gutted the advantages for doing this--

Lage: To the people who invested.

Shaffer: Penalized greatly the limited partners. I had reservations about the ability of the club to, I mean, become a landlord. We had to rent out the other spaces; we had to do all these various things; and I had reservations about it.

Lage: It seems to me Dave Brower also had reservations. He came on the board.

Shaffer: He may have. It ultimately--The final decision was left to the ExCom. It was at an ExCom meeting that I expressed my concerns, and everybody else in the room sort of allowed as how that was not correct, that we could do all this, and I said, "Well, I just feel an obligation to put them on the table." Nowhere is it said the president is supposed to vote on this anyhow. But I had chosen not to be a limited partner because I thought it was better that I not do that.

Lage: Better because you were president?

Shaffer: Well, I thought--I just thought I should stay arm's length from the thing. If it turned out to be a great financial thing and I had my money in it, I was worried about how it would look. And I was worried that if my concerns about the club's management of it turned out to be correct and I lost the money, I could see how I would feel about that because I don't have that much money, and I just stayed out of it.

Divisiveness over the Effects of War on the Environment

Shaffer: The controversy at the time that was most troublesome--Each president has a controversy. We mentioned Richard Cellarius having the mountaineers upset with him. I had the folks who were interested in the subject of the effects of war on the environment. That was my politically thorny issue at the time. There were ballot initiatives. There were editorials, particularly in the Bay Chapter newsletter. Steve Rauh, I believe, was the editor here. Very, very competent newsletter editor, but really a--I mean, he could blindsight you really well, and did it, routinely.

Lage: And this started during Joe Fontaine's presidency. The controversy [on war and the environment] started before your term.

Shaffer: Yes, yes, it did. It came right over to me. Oh, there were--I mean, there were--The personal attacks. You know, that I lived in Fayetteville, North Carolina, which was the home of Fort Bragg, and many of my customers were soldiers; therefore, I was suspect. You know, whatever that--

Lage: Now, where would these things come?

Shaffer: Oh, out of committee meetings and out of editorials in newsletters and all kinds of mailings that went around and all that sort of thing. I tried handling it in the way I tried handling everything else. I tried to sit down and talk to these folks, and I met with them several times. And when I think we'd worked something out, then there would be another two people that hadn't been at that meeting who would talk to the people that had been to that meeting and talked them out of what they had just agreed on, so that you never could find the head of the monster. You found someone who represented the group, and you worked things out with them, only to find out that the group then said no, they're not the ones. They didn't have the authority. And you'd be back to square one.

Lage: What was the basic issue? What was the difference?

Shaffer: Oh, there was this passion that if we were all going to get blown away in a nuclear explosion, what else did any of this stuff mean that we're doing? And therefore that should be our issue, and that's where our resources should go, and why are we messing around with all this other stuff? And you could make the argument that they were right. I mean, philosophically it's a correct argument. However, it's not quite that simple. If I joined the Sierra Club, put my money in the Sierra Club because I'm interested in fighting for the old-growth redwoods, you're going to have a very difficult time convincing me that, having done that, you should take my money that I put in there and spend it on lobbying in Washington against nuclear energy, or that we should do away with any efforts to protect old-growth redwoods. You're going to have a hard time with that. In fact, I'm going to tell you you're nuts and go someplace else with my time and money and work on it. And so that was the controversy, and it was very difficult, very passionate. Demonstrations and meetings. I mean, people coming to a meeting with posters and standing in the middle of the room, saying "This is what we need to be doing instead of that."

Lage: Was the board divided?

Shaffer: Yes. As I recall, there were a few, two or three people on the board that were supportive of this. In the main, it was viewed as a problem. The solution I came to, which worked very well, is I found the chair for the committee that was acceptable to the people on the committee. They didn't necessarily like him, but they accepted him.

Lage: So this was the committee on the environmental effects of war.

Shaffer: Yes, the effects of war on the environment. That was Bob Girard, who was a brilliant attorney, professor, longtime activist, longtime trustee of the Sierra Club Foundation, friend.

Lage: From here?

Shaffer: From here, yes. You don't know Bob Girard? You've missed a colorful character. I don't want--

Lage: Did he have ties with this group that was protesting so much?

Shaffer: Yes, he did in that he believed many of their positions were correct positions, but he also had a view of the Sierra Club that was a little bigger than what was being presented here. And he also understood the realities of the whole thing, and he trusted me, and I trusted him, and we could talk with each other. And when we'd say something to each other, that's the way it would be. We wouldn't, you know, come back and say, "Oh, well, I talked to somebody else now and I didn't mean that." So he was willing to go out on the front edge and take a lot of the punishment to make things move forward. Not only the issue but to permit the Sierra Club to move forward in other areas and not get sidetracked.

So people like Bob Girard on that issue, Ted Snyder on the outings, they took very much the lead in working these things through, and they were better equipped to do that than I was for several reasons. One is they were part of the group of people they were working with and had been historically, and they were trusted. They knew more about the issues than I did.

But it also permitted the president of the Sierra Club to function as president of the Sierra Club. Presidents of the Sierra Club can get so distracted with those kinds of issues that they don't do the other stuff we've been talking about. They don't have time to talk to the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Washington Post* because they're in a meeting on an issue. And that's unfortunate.

Lage: Did Bob Girard and his group move the club more into these types of issues?

Shaffer: We made a commitment, and we did move into the issues. We did some lobbying. We put some club resources into it [the effects of war on the environment]. Significantly less than what the people on that issue wanted, significantly more than what some people wanted. It was a middle ground. It permitted the club to keep moving forward.

Ballot Initiatives, and the Election of Directors

Lage: I see. That's a real thorny one.

Shaffer: Well, but everybody has one. I mean, we've just been through this zero cut logging thing. I mean, should we or should we not cut any trees off of any public land? Well, you know, I have trouble with nevers. I mean, I won't say I never say never, but I don't know that I'm wise enough to be that all-inclusive on anything, I think. And it has been a thorny issue, and very divisive, and we've had them over the years. Many of them are related to a particular activity, like mountaineering, or they're related to a particular issue. Nuclear power certainly has been one, not in the sense of war and the environment but nuclear power. When I came to my second meeting, when Larry Moss was president, that was the big controversy at the time.

Lage: And then some of those things that seemed so controversial, like nuclear power, the club eventually did come to oppose.

Shaffer: Yes.

Lage: It doesn't seem so far out now.

Shaffer: No, no. I mean, we're going to have, I believe, a vegetarian initiative on the ballot this time, and there are people out there who are very passionate, who believe that there is no reason in the world why you would call yourself an environmentalist if you're not a vegetarian. I mean, you've got to understand the importance of this, how much better the Earth would be if we all were vegetarians. I understand their argument. They're right. I don't have any problem with that. I also understand that you do not make six hundred and some thousand people who belong to the Sierra Club vegetarians by decree, any more than you make them by decree decide that some other issue is more important.

The organization's strength is its diversity of thought, diversity of action, willingness of people to get out there and put their selves in doing what it is that's important to do, and that means that you've got to let them be responsible for much of the agenda. You can't sit here in a palace and send out the word, saying, well, this year we're going to do this.

Lage: Do you like the idea of the ballot measures? Do you think that it contributes to democracy in the club?

Shaffer: It's a little bit of a California sort of thing, the initiative kind of thing, and I think it has at least as much downside as it does upside, and I think California has certainly proven that. Some of the worst ideas that have ever developed in this state came through initiatives, so, you know, yes, I think it's a mixed bag. Club ballot initiatives have never threatened me. I've been involved with probably seven or eight of them, in which I've either written the ballot statements or helped orchestrate them, and none that--No position that I ever took was opposed by the voters. And so I think I understand the will of the members of the Sierra Club and how you reach out to them and get the answer.

I think the ballot initiative on no cut only was passed because the board sat it out, did not take a leadership role in it. I think if the board had decided that this is not what they wanted to do and had taken a leadership role and had a well-written statement that it would not have passed. And that certainly was the case with the war and the environment initiatives and it would be on a vegetarian initiative. So they're not threatening to me.

More threatening to me, frankly, is the fact that people can so easily get elected to be a director. I think that's the real threat to the organization, rather than the initiatives.

Lage: Is that something we'll talk about when we're getting into the more current issues, or do you want to elaborate on that now?

Shaffer: Well, it's not--We might let me just say something about it now. If a person of a minority race--What am I trying to say? Un-Caucasian ran for the board, was a woman and was from Alaska and had anything to put in a ballot statement that was creditable, and did not have a known background that was threatening (executive of Exxon or whatever), they'll be elected to the board.

Lage: Based on their categories, more or less.

Shaffer: Based on the nature of the electorate. There has not been a minority run for the board that has not been elected.

Lage: But not too many have run for the board.

Shaffer: Well. But I stand on what I've observed. Nobody from Alaska that I can remember has run and not been elected except Peg Tileston, and she ran holding a fish, which has been the standard joke with all of us, including Peg. But--

Lage: You mean, her ballot picture--

Shaffer: Her ballot picture had her holding a salmon about four feet long. No, two feet long. But--and it was a standing joke that this did not help her.

My point being, I think that an orchestrated effort to take over positions on the board can be successful. I think the last election has shown that, where a slate [supporting zero-cut logging] ran, raised money, did mailings. I'm not sure whether those people are going to be

healthy for the Sierra Club or not that were elected in that group, but it's a scary concept. It is a complete--It is a long move from democracy. It is--

Lage: What do you think the answer is?

Shaffer: Get out of California, and incorporate someplace else.

Lage: Now, why? Tell me.

Shaffer: Because California law bends over so far to accommodate the dissenting voice. Therefore, under California law the members and the restrictions, the rights of the members, the restrictions on a non-profit corporation are significantly different than they are in many other states. And therefore you have access to the ballot with many fewer signatures, for example. I mean, a handful of people can get you on the ballot.

Lage: And that's California law, not the club's own bylaws.

Shaffer: That's California law. And I don't think we'll do it until it's too late. I think that's one of the serious threats. I did a risk analysis for the Sierra Club some years ago, most of which--none of which was ever published because we decided if we published it, it would be counter to the point. If we exposed where our risks are, this is disadvantageous, obviously. I think this is one of the greatest risks, and I think that one is playing itself out. I think that we should do whatever we need to do to prohibit people spending money or having others spend money to get them elected to the board of directors. Getting on the ballot should require some great difficulty in getting there. I would go so far as to require some tenure of service or whatever, something. Just walking in off the street and getting elected because--you've raised a lot of money to do mailings, and promote yourself--a bad idea.

Lage: Do you fear [a takeover by] the wise-use movement? Or do you fear the more radical environmentalists?

Shaffer: No, no. The more radical environmentalists are less well organized than we are. I fear that the corporate power--When we become troublesome enough to the international corporations, they can do us in on this one. They know enough people out there to look real good, a credible background, and are of various colors, ethnic backgrounds, educational backgrounds that live in attractive places to voters. It's a lot easier to get elected to the board of directors of the Sierra Club if you live in Alaska or if you live in, oh, Jackson Hole, Wyoming. A much better place than Fayetteville, North Carolina, or San Francisco, for that matter. San Francisco is both a plus and a minus. You've got a lot of people who live here who'd vote for you, but you've got a lot of people who'd vote against you because you're from there.

Lage: Well, that's disturbing.

Shaffer: That, again, is an aside, I suppose.

The International Assembly at Snowmass, 1983

Lage: Okay. Now, we've skipped back and forth, but that's okay. That's the way the club works.

The Snowmass Assembly [1983]. That seems like a pretty significant thing.

Shaffer: It was significant.

Lage: And that happened during your presidency.

Shaffer: Oh, yes.

Lage: But the planning must have started way before.

Shaffer: Yes, but I had been involved with it from the time the first egg got laid, before we started hatching it. The thing to be said about an international assembly, Snowmass, was that it was a success. It was a success. It was wonderful. It was a time all the politics was going on. The presidential candidates showed up, the members showed up, the planning had been done well. We had small groups and big groups.

They had something--I think they called them learning trees--and at a given hour they would be sitting in a certain place and if you wanted to go, and a bunch of people wanted to go, and talk to Ed Wayburn for an hour, he's going to be there for an hour. And you'd go chat with Ed Wayburn or David Brower or whoever. It was an opportunity for people who were rising leaders to meet and spend time with these people.

John Denver was there. I spent a good deal of time working with John Denver's agent, who--of course, John was nearby and shared a lot of issues that were important to us, and he really kind of relished the idea of coming and talking to us. His agent was aghast at the idea that he might sing and play. Well, of course, we really wanted him to sing and play. And so it was my task to somehow get all of the above, which we did. When John Denver showed up, I greeted him. And the fact that he had a guitar in his hand I took as a great sign. So, having seen a guitar, I assured him that what we really wanted to do was hear his thoughts on the issues. Had I not seen a guitar, it would have been a different conversation. I probably would have started out saying, "Gee, I was hoping you could bring--"

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Shaffer: Gary Hart was there, with his entourage. He decided to come rather at the last minute, and when he decided to come, announced when he would be there and announced that he wanted to meet with the board of directors at that hour. Of course, we had planned this thing out. There were seventeen things going on at any given hour the whole time we were there. And I shoved and moved around, and I got freed up probably ten of the fifteen directors. I allowed this to be known to them, and they, Gary Hart's people, are most upset, but they finally accept this. So we meet, and Gary Hart came in. I introduced myself to him, and he proceeded to just give me a very difficult time because we hadn't gotten all the directors there. It was the most curious way to have a start to a meeting, from a presidential candidate coming to a group that he wishes to endorse him. He came in and he really fussed at us.

Lage: As if he were doing you a favor.

Shaffer: He really fussed at me. And I pointed out to him, quite politely, that what was happening was exactly what I had informed his people was going to happen and that if he had any misunderstandings, he needed to talk to his people, not to me. And that was all I had to say on the matter. That sort of ended that, but it was a curious thing, and it made me believe, frankly, that Gary Hart would not make it because clearly he had some blind spots that I saw were going to create problems.

But we had other good people there. Of course, [Alan] Cranston was there. It was an exciting time. It was a growing time. I was hoping, frankly, that it would be something that would come out that we would do more often. It was an investment in the people that were there. There was nobody there that didn't go away feeling better about the Sierra Club, more likely to be active in the future. It was a growing event. It was an enriching event.

Lage: It was a statement of the volunteer--

Shaffer: And it was a statement that the volunteer was an important person. I believe, as much as I believe anything, that in any given moment, things are moving and that, you know, you personally are born, you start moving towards dying immediately. It's not a straight line; you go forward and backward. Sometimes you heal up and get stronger; sometimes you move further that way. And organizations, relationships are that way. The strength of the people involved is some way related to the amount of time and energy and the attention you're willing to invest in it. And we invested time and attention into those people, and it was a wonderful experience.

Political Endorsements, TV Appearances

Shaffer: It was at the time that all the political stuff was going on. We talked about the media stuff. We didn't talk about the endorsements.

Lage: No. That I'd like to--

Shaffer: I did endorsements all over the country.

Lage: Now, this was the first time that the club had endorsed national political candidates.

Shaffer: I guess it was. I'm not sure. We'd have to check the record on that.

Lage: I checked, and they had some trials in California, but this was the first--

Shaffer: But I went all over the place. I went up and down--

Lage: And this was, just for the record, the congressional election, '82.

Shaffer: Yes, yes. I guess that's right. '82 would be it.

Lage: After Reagan had his great victory.

Shaffer: Yes, right, exactly. Wonderful stories. I spent eight days being passed from volunteer to volunteer, sleeping in volunteers' homes. I didn't know where I was going to sleep tomorrow night until I got there; that sort of thing. One of the people I worked with was a guy named Howard, Congressman Jim Howard from eastern New Jersey, chair of the Public Works and Transportation Committee. He's now deceased. He was a stereotype of what you might think of a New Jersey politician. He had a car with a magnetic sign stuck on the side, you know, and the car was furnished by the local Teamsters Union, as was the driver, and he never knew from day to day who the driver would be or anything, and it was very strange.

We met, and I had met this guy--I spent five minutes with this guy, I guess, fifteen minutes. We end up at a radio station, which there is a black jazz radio station in New Jersey, and we're in a talk show thing. So I talk about how the president of the Sierra Club could only go to so many places and do endorsements but how all congressmen are not equal. Every congressman is important and gets a vote but there are some in Congress that when they stand up and make a statement that they sway the opinion of the Congress and that, clearly, this Representative Howard was that kind of man. I went on and on and on like this, and there were some questions and so on, but it was basically a love fest.

Then we left and we got back down to the car, and this gentleman turned to me and looked me right in the eye, and he said, "Now, what you said in there, that's right. That's right. You just keep saying that all day long because that's right." And we did. We went from place to place, newspapers and so on. We ate at I-Hop [International House of Pancakes], where the owner was a guy he had played high school football with and the hostess was Howard's sister in law. But it was that kind of real personal, down to earth.

I ended up in Connecticut, I think, on that trip. And I met with volunteers. We did fundraisers. And it was all day long. I mean, it started early in the morning, and it went till ten o'clock at night, at which point you'd get into a volunteer's house and there would be seven people sitting in the living room to meet you and talk about politics or whatever. If you got six hours sleep, you were very, very fortunate.

Lage: Now, in all these various places across the country that you went to, how much did the Sierra Club endorsement mean? Were there places--

Shaffer: It meant a lot. It meant a lot. It was clear it meant a lot. It was clear it was important. And it was clear they were really glad to have me there. It was important to have the president of the Sierra Club there. It made a real statement. They really saw that as a real--I mean, the fact that the president of the Sierra Club would come. They didn't know who the dickens he was. I mean, and--

One of the difficulties of being president of the Sierra Club is it's very easy to get confused with the importance of the office and the importance of yourself. That confusion is quickly removed when you go out of office. The phone stops ringing, and the mailman stops coming. But at the time, you know, people really want to hear what you have to say, and, you know, the phone would ring, and it would be CBS News, wanting--CBS radio news. "We're going on the air in twenty minutes, and we need a statement from you on so and so. Would you give us a statement which we can record and use on the air?" And so you

would do it, and you'd get to thinking, well, maybe you have some wisdom here. But it's the office which is the important thing.

We did a teleconference that was paid for by some major donors that was sent over the country to different media markets, in which there were a number of experts who spoke about the role of the environment in the elections and tried to carry that message to the media that was stacked around sets around the country. That was the first time we had done anything like that. I was on--I [chuckling] remember being on, oh, what's the TV, Ted Turner's thing?

Lage: CNN.

Shaffer: CNN news out of Washington, live, on this political and environmental issue. And on the way to the program, the taxi I'm in was broadsided and totalled, and it was one of the more strange interviews I ever had in my life. I got to CNN about five minutes before the program, and they said, "Have a seat" in the lobby. I mean, it's five minutes before the program, and I'm having a seat in the lobby. This is nuts! And about three minutes before, they come out and get me, and they go in and say, "Sit in that stool," and they looked at me and said, "You're too short. Let me get something." And I thought to myself, well, I didn't know I was. And somebody is running a wire up my sleeve for this mike, and they're saying, "There's a knob down here" and "Don't watch the monitor because there's a thirty-second delay, but you'll get a voice from Atlanta in your ear as well as this here, and be sure which one you answer the questions of [is the one corresponding to] whoever is asking it." And so on and so forth.

And then the guy looked at me and said, "You know, you've got blood on your face?" And I said, "No-o, I didn't." He said, well, we've got to get makeup, someone to get in here and clean this blood off his face. And it turns out that I had been cut with flying glass, which I didn't know, and we're on the air. And we're talking about electoral politics, and one thing or another. It was quite, quite curious. But not unusual for the way I was doing things. I just--We'd go from one thing to another thing to another thing.

Lage: It must have been an exciting time.

Shaffer: [Added during interviewee review: It was. And we were effective. We did 15 endorsements for the Senate and won 11, in the House 153 and won 121, and in gubernatorial campaigns we won 9 of 11. Of the races too close to call before the election we won 3 of 5 in the Senate, 11 of 18 in the House, and 1 of 1 for governor. And we won 9 more races that the polls said we would lose. I met with or appeared for 20 of those candidates. But I spent more time with the volunteers. An article I wrote for the Jan/Feb 1983 *Sierra* sets out the details, and expressed my thanks to the volunteer activists.]

The second part of the *Sierra* article was called "The Untold Stories." A copy is attached [See appendix]. It is rather a good example of how I worked with volunteers. I wrote all of this article as I did most things that carried my name.]

When Watt resigned, Reagan wanted to appoint his friend Clark, Judge William Clark. And William Clark was the national security advisor at that point. I'm sitting in the president's office on Bush Street, and the phone rings, and the secretary came in and said, "Denny, William Clark is on the phone and wants to talk to you." O-kay. I pick up the

phone. "How are you?" "I'm fine." And he talks to me about what he would have to do to get the support of the Sierra Club to his appointment as secretary of interior.

Lage: Did you know he was in--

Shaffer: There were rumors that his name was going in, that that was going to be Reagan's choice. And I said to him, "Well, this is a serious matter." I said, "This is a matter which, frankly, I would like to have the opportunity to discuss with you personally, rather than over the phone." And he said, "Well, when are you going to be in Washington? We'll do that." And I said, "Well, I'll be in Washington at whatever time it is that you feel would be appropriate for us to do that." So he said, "Well, fine." He said, "That's --"We talked a little bit more, and he said, "I'll tell you what I want you to do. Call me Saturday morning at 9 o'clock at this number." And he gives me a phone number, and I repeat it back to him, and "Yes, that's the number." "Okay, I'll call."

Well, now, of course, it's six o'clock Saturday morning here, so I get up at five o'clock and get myself prepared to make the phone call. Make the phone call, and somebody answers the phone saying, "McFarland." And I said, "Is Judge Clark there? This is Denny Shaffer, president of the Sierra Club, and I'm supposed to call him at this number." The man said, "Oh, I don't know. He's around here somewhere. I've seen him recently. Let me see if I can find him." So he goes looking for him, can't find him, says, "Wait a minute. Let me see if I can find his secretary." And so he comes--There's nothing for a while.

Finally, the secretary comes, and allows as how they can't find Mr. Clark, that if I would leave a phone number, he could call me back. So I go into great detail, explaining what this is all about and that I'm just calling at this time because this is the time he asked me to call. So we then negotiated a time for me to call back. Which I did. What transpired was that we set up a meeting.

And then there was another meeting set up for all the environmental organizations to go meet with Clark. Well, I stuck by my guns. I said, "You want our endorsement. I want a meeting with you. That's fine, but I want to meet with you." So we had two meetings. We, Mike and I, had a meeting with Clark, and then there was a whole group of environmentalists met with Clark. But the Sierra Club had their own billing.

Lage: And Mike came along?

Shaffer: Mike went along. Oh, yes, Mike went along. And we met with Clark down in the bowels of the old Executive Office Building, as I recall. I remember several things about it. No, it was the White House. It was the White House. I remember the pictures of Reagan on the wall in his pajamas, which I thought was curious. He was in his pajamas on Air Force One. Very curious.

But we had this meeting, and basically we said to him, "You know, you've got to give us something substantive. The fact that you're meeting with us is very encouraging, and we appreciate this very much, but if you want us to say this is a good idea, you're going to have to make a commitment to us to do something of some significance that we can hang this on. Lacking that--"And we had some suggestions, none of which he felt comfortable with. And we left.

Lage: [Added during interviewee review: Can you specify what your suggestions were, and his reasons for not feeling comfortable with them?]

Shaffer: As I recall Alaska was on our agenda, another wild lands issue and a pollution issue. He just was not going to take any position that would cause him problems later.]

Walking down the street, I remember Mike and I talking sort of--We were quiet for a while, and finally we talked. I remember saying to Mike, "Mike, you know, the thing that is most incredible about this is that this man really has no particular qualifications for the job, has no particular desire to do the job, has no particular knowledge about the job, but he is a friend of the president and is willing to do it."

Well, back to the story of the phone call to him originally, that I got this strange answer. It turned out that who I had been talking to was Mr. McFarland, who ended up being the incoming national security advisor and that this phone number is the number of the national security advisor of the president of the United States, Clark being the out-going national security advisor, and this was the morning that they invaded Grenada.

Lage: Oh, you are kidding!

Shaffer: So that's why everybody was so confused down there in that basement that particular morning. So you find yourself in all sorts of very strange situations. The president of the Sierra Club talking to the ingoing and outgoing national security advisor--talking to the incoming, trying to find the outgoing, national security advisor of the president in the morning in which they're invading an island, about whether or not the Sierra Club is going to support the next nomination for secretary of interior.

Lage: Do you remember how the meeting with the Group of Ten went?

Shaffer: I did not attend that one. No, I did attend that. I stand corrected. I did attend that meeting. It went very much the same way. He was very pleasant. He was very positive. He was very noncommittal. He held as his highest thing that should encourage people to support him the fact that he was talking to them, that he had shown a willingness to break through the animosities and so on, which really wasn't--

Lage: Did the club support him?

Shaffer: No.

Lage: Did they actively oppose him? Do you remember?

Shaffer: I don't--I think we ended up saying this was not a good idea. Yes, I think so. I'm not sure of that, but I think that's right.

Involvement in Electoral Politics

Lage: That's another interesting tale. Had you been involved in SCCOPE [Sierra Club Committee on Political Education] before?

Shaffer: Oh, yes, yes. I had been involved with SCCOPE almost from the beginning and ended up being chair, you know, vice president of political affairs a couple of times, when I wasn't on the board. It has been an interest of mine all along. I felt we should be in electoral politics all along.

Lage: So that was something you pushed for.

Shaffer: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And I believe that very strongly. I'm not sure we should be involved at the presidential level. I think that's a harder call.

Lage: And we were in '84.

Shaffer: Yes.

Lage: With Walter Mondale.

Shaffer: Yes, and that was--It was at that time we realized the difference. I understood it, I thought, beforehand. But it becomes very partisan. You can support a Democratic candidate for Senate over the Republican and have some appearances of it not being partisan, but when there's two people running for president and one's a Republican and one's a Democrat and you support either one of them, it looks real partisan. And it is.

Lage: Now, the Sierra Club supported Mondale [in 1984] and not [Michael] Dukakis [in 1988]. Do you know the thinking?

Shaffer: I don't remember all the details. I remember meeting with him. I remember meeting with Dukakis out at the Cliff House, as a matter of fact, on a foggy day.

Lage: As part of this SCCOPE process?

Shaffer: Yes, but I couldn't give you a clue as to what the date was. I met with a lot of these people. I remember meeting with Paul Simon, who was most impressive. Of all the people I talked with, I liked Paul Simon about as much as anybody.

Lage: On the environment. You stick to the environment in these meetings?

Shaffer: Well, yes, pretty much, pretty much. But it's hard. I think you make a mistake if you isolate things too much. I think you need to include more things.

Lage: When you say it becomes very political when you endorse the presidential candidate, is that something you're uncomfortable with, seeing the club--

Shaffer: It's divisive. It's more partisan.

Lage: Within the club.

Shaffer: It's divisive within the club itself. We lost members the first time we did it. We lose members each time we do it. I think we should be careful about when we do it. Having said that, I have supported it each time we've done it, so I may be speaking out of both sides of my mouth.

Lage: Did the club not endorse Dukakis because they didn't think he was a good candidate? Or for these reasons that you're mentioning?

Shaffer: I'm not sure I can give you the definitive answer to that. I don't remember. From the beginning, the message I carried to our SCCOPE program is that you've got to have enough wins to be creditable. If we go out there and endorse people who are pure on our issue and lose 80 percent of the races, ain't nobody gonna be paying much attention to us in four or five years. By the same token, if you take on no candidates except those which are going to win without your help, then that becomes fairly clear that that's what you're doing, and you won't be a player that way. So it's a delicate balance.

I always encouraged us avoiding what I call kamikaze races, where the outcome was clear that it was going to be a horrible crash landing at the end and that, while we could stand high on our principles during the campaign, we would walk away with nothing to show for our efforts other than the fact that we fought a good fight. But we wouldn't have any more votes for our issues, and perhaps we would have a more rigid vote against us in the future. I think that view has been generally the policy of the club.

At the beginning of SCCOPE, there was real enthusiasm for picking the good guys. You know, this man is a friend of mine, he's great, he's so--You know, and he's got \$700 in the bank, and he's never run for political office before, but he's right. He's got the right soul. Well, unfortunately, it's not that simple. But, having said that, I don't mean that you make--You make the decisions based on a number of things, and the person needs to be a creditable candidate.

Lage: So one of the factors would be--

Shaffer: Can they get elected? Because if you're going to put your resources and time and energy into something that's bound to fail, that's not good use of it.

Lage: Do you think the process works?

Shaffer: I think so.

Lage: Well, you're a process man. And all this takes place locally, or a good deal of it.

Shaffer: Yes, yes. I think that's right. And yes, I think it works well. There have been occasions where it has been very difficult, and the national leadership then needs to become involved and has. You can have a congressional race where you want to do an endorsement, and some local people get ticked off at the guy and say, "No, we're not going to endorse him," and yet he's important to the Sierra Club on a national level. A particular issue, he holds a committee position that's important, and you sure need to do this. And this is why people

have to get out of San Francisco and go talk to those people. When we've had problems, it's because people didn't get out of San Francisco and go talk to the people.

Lage: You mean the national officers.

Shaffer: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

North Carolinians in the Sierra Club

Lage: How has it worked in North Carolina?

Shaffer: Oh, I think it has worked perfectly in North Carolina. We've had no problems at all. We've had a lot of people really understand the thing there. I mean, Robbie Cox, Chuck McGrady, who has just finished being chapter chair there, who was chair of the SCCOPE committee, national SCCOPE committee. We have always had--and I say it with some local pride I guess--our share of folks who understood the bigger picture. We've got two members of the board of directors now from North Carolina. We've had two presidents, we've had four directors in this period of time I've been involved. That's disproportionate for the size of the state.

Lage: How does that happen? Is it tradition?

Shaffer: I think it started a long time ago, with a lot of attention to the sorts of things that I think are important. The business of making service rewarding. The North Carolina Chapter has by far a better awards, honors and awards program than the national organization has. Their awards are better looking, they're given to more people, they're given with more style and grace. And I don't mean by that that some of them are not done well at the national level. I mean, when Mike McCloskey gave me the presentation for the Colby Award that I got a little while ago, I mean, he brought tears to my eyes. I couldn't value that more. And particularly I couldn't value more the fact that Mike did the presentation. But there's just--In North Carolina there has been a real attention to people and rewarding people and so on.

Lage: So it's strength within the chapter. I was thinking in terms of a tradition of people moving onto the board, and mentorships.

Shaffer: Well, it is mentorship. I mean, you know, Chuck McGrady is going to be at my house in a couple of days, coming by. Wants to sit down and spend an evening talking to me and picking my brain about what he can do and so on. And I will share with him my thoughts, and he'll pick out what he thinks are good ones and use them, and what he doesn't think much of, he won't use. And that's the way it ought to be.

Lage: It's good to see chapters that carry on like that.

Summing up the Shaffer Presidency

Lage: Okay, now, do we have other things, kind of looking back at the presidential term, that we've missed or some overall assessment?

Shaffer: [Added during interviewee review: There is one story I might tell you. Part of the fun side of being the club president.

Ansel Adams gave the club a lot of large photographs over the years, and Mike had talked about the fact that none were signed. So we set up a little social in the library, at which Ansel had agreed to sign the photographs.

After refreshments and visiting, Ansel sat at a small table, and I handed the pictures to him one at a time. He examined them, signed them, and passed them on to Mike.

The fifth or sixth picture he looked at for an overly long time, shook his head and gave it back to me, saying, "I'd like to sign it. It's very good. But it's Eliot Porter's."

I still wonder if we ever got Eliot to sign that one.]

There were other little things. I mean, the annual dinner, for example. I mentioned one annual dinner at which we had the bomb threat. I gave attention to that, but it amazes me that--It seems frequently it's discovered at the very last moment that we're going to have an annual dinner and wonder where we're going to have it. I found great joy in those dinners because it's a celebration, bringing the people together and having a good place to do it and thinking ahead about it and making the reservations two or three years in advance.

The one time the club has met in recent history in the Garden Court of the Sheraton Palace Hotel was because I made the reservation when I was president. Now, that happened two or three years after I was president. But you don't get that room at a moment's notice. And I hope they were fun. You know, I brought in a bluegrass band. It was called the Good Old Persons, which was a women's bluegrass band that played for the cocktail party beforehand, which I thought set a kind of tone that I was trying to find.

It's funny when I look back on what I did as president, I think a lot more about the people and what I was able to do to make it more fun for them, more rewarding. And a whole lot less about which bills we got passed. Because to me the second is a product of the first. We'll win the legislative battles if we have an army of people out there dedicated to the cause. That'll happen. So I would rather spend my time having an army of people out there that are rising up to overthrow the evil in the country, and they're feeling good about it, not only while they're doing it but after they do it, than worrying about other things which other people do very well.

Lage: You had Brock Evans on the board while you were president.

Shaffer: I sure did.

Lage: Was he a good board member after being a staff member for so long?

Shaffer: Yes. Well, everybody brings to the board something different. Brock brought this great wealth of history and background and passion. He was frustrated, I think, in some occasions with service as a director as I think he was frustrated with being on the staff of the Sierra Club because Brock is a man who has vision. These things are important; he wants them to happen. He's not very patient with all those things. But Brock is my friend. Brock has been to my home; I've been to his home. I have a picture of him and his son in my office, as a matter of fact, which I hadn't thought about. It's true. At home. He's one of the unique and special people. I learned a whole lot about him, and about the environmental movement, and about the Sierra Club.

Did I tell the story of the Eastern Wilderness Bill? Have I told that story? That's when I really got to know Brock.

[See narrative on Eastern Wilderness Bill, Chapter II]

And I still have the letter Brock wrote to Ed Easton after that meeting--Ed Easton was then the chapter chair--saying, "This fellow you sent up here was quite unusual. Let me tell you what he did." But that was the beginning of a real long relationship with Brock and I. It goes back, deep roots, many evenings having a drink, talking about philosophy and so on. We've walked together; we've talked about tough times in our families together. Having him as director was nothing but a blessing.

Lage: And he was on the staff of the National Audubon Society while he was a club director, so that was sort of a cross-over.

Shaffer: Some people saw that as a conflict. I don't think it ever was. I mean, there were some times it was perceived that it would be. We don't have any secrets from--

Lage: Each other.

Shaffer: No. We really don't. I mean, that's silly. The people that serve--Really, there were no negatives. There's nobody that I've served with on the board of directors that has not been in some way very much a personal and organizational positive. They've all had things to offer the cause, the organization. They bring a diversity. They bring various levels of knowledge and ability and training for certain issues. But it's a good system. It's a good system.

Lage: So far.

Shaffer: Yes, if we don't screw it up.

Lage: Let's stop a minute here.

IX LAST TERM ON THE BOARD, 1994-1997: REFLECTIONS ON CHANGES IN CLUB GOVERNANCE

Running for the Board in 1994, Elected as Treasurer: Troubling Changes in the Volunteer's Role in the Club

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Lage: We are back on tape now, having discussed where we're going from here. We've pretty well gotten a good view of your presidency and how you viewed the role of president. And we talked about the years after your presidency last time, in the context of the treasurership. But what we haven't talked about is your last term on the board [1994-1997]. Why you came back to the board. Had you intended to come back?

Shaffer: Well, that's easy. No, I did not intend to come back, though I did not say never. I was much less positive on the subject than I am now, for example. But I came back because the club had run cumulative deficits of about \$5 million over the three years while I was gone, and I saw no real evidence that that was going to stop. We were about to run into a brick wall, and it was clear to me that it was going to take a serious effort to change that, and it was important to do.

I had encouraged others of my friends to run again, and they had, past presidents of the club. I guess I thought, when I decided to come back again, that it would be viewed with a lot of enthusiasm and the nominating committee would jump up and down and say, "What a good idea, Denny." In fact, what happened was the nominating committee chose not to nominate me. That was a rather unpleasant experience, and it came out of--I mean, there were issues raised about things I had done when I was doing fund-raising before I had been president that had adversely affected a California chapter, for example, and that--

Lage: This came out in an interview?

Shaffer: In a nominating committee interview, as to whether I should serve on the board again. It was just awful. There was absolutely no positive comments made by the nominating committee to me.

Lage: Who was it chaired by? You mentioned Will Siri was on it, when we were talking about the foundation.

Shaffer: Will Siri was on it, come to think about it. I had forgotten about that.

Lage: I was taking that from the last interview four years ago.

Shaffer: Sally Reid was on it. I don't remember who all was on it. It really wasn't important. There was another lady who was from California. Not important. But anyhow, that was somewhat sobering. But the truth of the matter is I recognize, as a political animal who has paid attention to this, that frequently you're better off running by petition than as a nominee, so I wasn't all that distressed about it, and I decided to go ahead and run. And did. And getting the signatures was no problem at all. I just did a mailing out of the house to a lot of folks I had worked with, and I had plenty of signatures almost immediately. And then membership gave me the most votes in the election, which felt good.

Came back and ran for treasurer and was elected. There was a general accord that me being treasurer was okay. I don't think there was much of a contest. I don't remember much of a contest. It seemed to me people were quite agreeable because they recognized we were in a mess.

Lage: Were we in a mess because of poor management or because of the economy or what?

Shaffer: We were in a mess [chuckling]--without being overly simplistic, we were in a mess because we had been spending more money than we had for some period of time, and we did not have the discipline to do anything about it. We kept wishful thinking; we kept hoping something was going to come along that was going to solve the problem; we spent money we knew we didn't have and did it deliberately. We were doing some efforts on the Clean Air Act; the staff knew we were going to exceed the budget for that. And they decided to go ahead and do it anyhow because it was important.

Lage: This was on Carl's watch.

Shaffer: Yes, this was on Carl's watch.

Lage: I'm looking to see who was president. Tony Ruckel and Michele [Perrault].

Shaffer: Tony, Michele, yes. At any rate, I watched all this and was somewhat frustrated by the whole thing, and then I came on and was elected treasurer. The first thing that I did in coming across was I came into the office and spoke with Robbie [Cox, who was then president] and the lady who was in charge that took Andrea's job [Debbie Serrando]. She had the administrative position. And we came in and Robbie was there and she was there, and I think those were the only two people in the room. I asked a couple questions having to do with how many people were on the payroll now, what is this, what is that. Because, frankly, one of the major expenditures that the Sierra Club has is for payroll. It was clear to me that understanding the growth in this area and how many people were attached to it, and how many of those people were permanent positions and how many of those were not permanent, and all that, was an important thing for me to grasp right up front.

I was basically told that that wasn't something I should know, that this was inappropriate and so on and so forth, and that you couldn't--We had a union now, and you can't talk about this. We're going to have all [kinds of] trouble with the union if the word gets out that you're in here talking about cutting the payroll. And I said, "Well, first of all, I thought the door was closed. I don't see anybody in here that represents the union. But that's not what I'm talking about; that's not the subject. The subject is I'm trying to get information because y'all have been spending more than you've got, and I'm trying to figure out how you solve the problem. The first thing you need to do is know what's going on."

So we had that very unpleasant conversation, at which point I ended up saying, "Well, this is not going anywhere. I'm going back to Fayetteville tomorrow. I'd planned to stay here, but this isn't productive, so I'm going back tomorrow. But in the meantime, I'm going downstairs and go through the accounting department and speak to people" and so on.

Keep in mind some people in the accounting department I had worked with ten, fifteen years, and I was told not to do it. "Don't go down there. There are people down there already upset enough." "Upset?" "Well, they're upset because you're treasurer." This is the woman who is the chief administrator for the club. And Robbie is sitting there. And Robbie is allowing that just me going down there is a bad idea. And I said, "Wait a minute. I mean, what has happened around here? I suffer the illusion that the treasurer of the Sierra Club, as an officer of the Sierra Club, would not be out of order if he spoke to people who work for the Sierra Club." I said, "I'm not going down there to gather information. I'm going down to say hello to people and say, 'Well, here I am again.' And, 'You and I have worked together before. I'm looking forward to working together with you in the future.' And 'How have you been?' You know, 'How's the kid'?"

And they allowed as how this was verboten and I should not do this, and I finally said, "Well, this is nuts. I will not do this. But this is nuts." And I went back to Fayetteville, realizing the Sierra Club had changed in my absence.

Lage: Who was treasurer in your absence?

Shaffer: Who was treasurer?

Lage: Ann Pogue was.

Shaffer: Ann Pogue.¹

Lage: I'm just thinking that the office must have changed considerably.

Shaffer: Everything. My impression was my goodness, the whole, the whole--I mean, it was clear that I was being viewed as somebody that was incompetent, that was going to create problems rather than solve problems, that the way to deal with me is to try to get me out of town, and that the sooner I left, the happier everybody would be and the safer the Sierra Club would be.

1. Several treasurers have served since Denny Shaffer's last term as treasurer: Robert Howard, Richard Fiddler, Ann Pogue, and Jim Dodson.

Well, this is not anything that anybody had ever conveyed to me so clearly before. They may have thought it on occasion, but they had never conveyed it to me so clearly before. And it was a serious shock. I went home. I did a number of things.

Jim Dodson had been treasurer [1993-1994]. I believe that's right. At any rate, I asked Jim Dodson to continue to serve as chair of the finance committee, if he would do that. Well, he gave it some thought and agreed that he would. Now, no treasurer had ever done this before. The treasurer had always wanted to have control of the finance committee, including myself. But I felt that it was time to send a different message, and, frankly, the job had gotten bigger and that having two people doing these two jobs was better than having one, particularly when one was very competent. Jim Dodson is--Jim Dodson ought to be treasurer of the Sierra Club today. I mean, he's clearly the most qualified, the most prepared, the most equipped to do this. But he isn't the treasurer of the Sierra Club. He agreed to do this. We agreed on how we'd form the committee.

You mentioned Ann Pogue. Everybody assumed I would take Ann Pogue off the finance committee because she and I had disagreed when she was treasurer. And that's precisely the reason why I did not take her off the committee because it would have sent the wrong message again. And, frankly, she brought something to the table. She brought two things to the table. One is knowledge and competence and history of what had been going on while I was gone. But she also--Ann can be very tough on people, and it's always good to have somebody on a committee that's tougher on people than you are. Then you can back down a little bit and not necessarily be playing that role yourself. So she was an asset to the committee and stayed on it.

I think I made one change in the committee, total. And then we started figuring out a game plan. I had a prayer meeting¹ with Robbie, in which I said, "Robbie, I don't know what's going on, but this is nuts."

President Robbie Cox and Executive Director Carl Pope

Lage: Had Robbie worked out a new way of working with the staff?

Shaffer: He had, but I don't know that he knew he had. Robbie--First of all, I had encouraged Robbie to run for the board of directors. Robbie and I knew each other in North Carolina, of course. We worked on the Hunt campaign together. He was chapter chair when I headed the group with my wife, Kim, called Environmentalists for Hunt. Hunt ran against Jesse Helms. We made a lot of appearances together, or several. We would work together. I had great respect for him. He was a good chapter chair. I encouraged him to run for the board; I encouraged him to run for president. We came into this as people who saw each other as allies.

1. This is an expression from the South that means serious meeting. – D. S.

But his strength--he's a professor of rhetoric, and that's where his skills lie. He is excellent in grasping big political issues. He has a good history of the need for movements, and how they can be effective, and the value of them. And he is passionate in his desire to make these things happen and has made great sacrifices personally to that end. Like a lot of people who have come into this position, Robbie has not had a lot of time and experience in administration and management and how do you structure things and how do you trust people.

I think one of the toughest things in a position like president of the Sierra Club or executive director is can you trust people? Is it okay to trust people, knowing full well that they're going to mess up sometimes? Well, the answer is you can't do it any other way. I think that Carl came in with a whole different concept of how things should be structured, how the role of the executive director--Carl is a man who I believe sees the answer. You name the problem; he sees the answer. That doesn't mean he won't talk with you about it, but it does mean that he's made the conclusion most of the times before the conversation, and it isn't going to be any different after the conversation.

He views the role of the volunteer very differently. And it plays out in minor ways. There are serious ways. The club no longer pays, really, the expenses of directors when they come and stay at a hotel. They pay a small amount, but it is less than you can rent a room for in most cases. Those directors who live in San Francisco and the staff say, "Oh, well, you can share a room." Well, those people who live in San Francisco go home and go to their own bed at night, and the executive director goes home and goes to his bed at night, and you have two directors in a fourth-class hotel, sharing a room, where the heat and plumbing may or may not work. It sends a message that's very clear: You're not very important; your contributions are not important.

I have always been offended that the club would not pay the out-of-pocket expenses for room and board and transportation. Now, I've always said everybody ought to pay for their own food. You eat everywhere anyhow. It costs more here than it will at home, but you still eat. And anytime I've been an officer of the club, I've seen to it that everybody was kept whole as best I could.

I found out very quickly that was no longer the philosophy. You got everybody to put on a hair shirt and convince them that suffering was good for them and that they weren't being loyal soldiers if they expected the club to do this, besides, these were hard times and there were better uses of the money. Bad, bad ideas. And it's still the way it is.

Lage: It seems more fundamental, though.

Shaffer: In what way? What do you mean?

Lage: Well, to say that the treasurer shouldn't talk to people in the accounting department and shouldn't know how many staff members there are says something very fundamental about the role of the board.

Shaffer: No question about it. Yes, it was a horrifying change. It was a change from "whatever is going on is the business of the officers and directors of the Sierra Club," to a "what is your need to know" sort of philosophy, that I'm executive director or I'm the director of this department and I know, but why do you need to know? And it played through the whole

time I was on the board. The things that came to the board came in bizarre ways. The agenda was developed in very strange ways, not an open process, in my judgment. Not having things worked on and refined. More just problems thrown on the board's table and say, "Oh, here's a problem. What are you going to do about it?" A very poor system.

Restructuring of the Volunteer Committee Structure, A Move Away from Democracy

Shaffer: But from the point of view of the budget, to talk about the budget for a few minutes, we had a good Finance Committee, a strong man in Jim. I knew how you do this. I knew what needed to be done. Great resistance from Carl, which consequently meant great resistance from Robbie because Carl and Robbie--If you got a response from Carl and then you asked Robbie, you got the same response, almost without exception; they'd talked about it, or whatever, before.

Lage: So that relationship was--

Shaffer: Well, I don't know whether it was close or not, but I knew that the president was supportive of the executive director's position on whatever it was. This, of course, was after Robbie had led the effort to do all the restructuring of the club. Now, I had been somewhat critical of the restructuring effort, of the volunteer side. And still am. I think the restructuring did great and serious damage to the club which we have not yet overcome.

Lage: In--

Shaffer: Oh, in a number of ways. It was done because Carl wanted it done, and Carl's reason for wanting it done was so we could make decisions more quickly. I mean, there were other things, but that was the primary thrust, that we were awkward, and we don't make clear decisions quickly, and they get debated forever. You think you've made a decision and if somebody else appeals it--You can't operate this way. Well, that's a fair point, and he's right. But democracies are messy. Dictatorships are neat, and you can make quick decisions and so on.

Well, we've moved more away from democracy, and you can make decisions more quickly, but you have less buy-in of those decisions; you have less support of those decisions; you have less knowledge of those decisions; the decisions aren't as good decisions; and you reach a point where the governing body no longer is governing. I think that that's very close to where we are now.

Lage: It becomes a sandbox.

Carl Pope's Approach to Club Governance

Shaffer: That's right. The governance of the Sierra Club is now basically the executive director, and to some degree the president of the club on those issues which are important. And, to some degree, other powerful people, the Ed Wayburns or Phil Berrys of the world, whose particular issue is at stake. And they will rise up and defend it and fight for it and move it forward. But on the more basic, probably much more important, fundamentals of where is this organization going, what are our standards, what is our mission and goal, how do we go about doing this, I don't see the board even really being asked the questions under Carl.

And so when it came time to redo the budget, Carl insisted that we would have to do a budget first that was a schematic budget, that you, rather than talking about numbers, that you talked about the various parts. I understood what he was saying, except I argued that a budget without numbers is not a budget, no matter what you call it. But he wanted to sort the parts out.

Lage: You mean, like, the plan, the programs?

Shaffer: Well, yes. Let's say, okay, these are the things we do to communicate with our members. That's *Sierra* magazine, that's the books program, that's chapter newsletters. One of the things he saw little value in was chapter newsletters, so let's do away with funding chapter newsletters and let's use that money to do something else with. That was a conclusion that he had along the way, which never got far off the ground for a number of reasons, not the least of which is chapter newsletters are funded by funds which chapters view as their funds and that the national sends them money and they raise money and they put out a newsletter and it's their decision. And I happen to agree with the chapters. I think that's absolutely right.

I understand what Carl was saying. If you were to take the broad picture view of the organization and say how's the most effective way, he was convinced something like the little tabloid we send out now, the *Planet*, was the answer. I again disagree. I think the *Planet* is no more useful than most conservation program kinds of things. It comes out, tells you "this is what you need to do; write this person; make this phone call; do this; this is why." And I think long-term that diminishes the membership rather than growing the membership because you get tired of making the phone calls; you don't get any reward when you do. You get another newsletter that says, "Do it again," and you get worn out by it. The rewards are not very great. If you don't do it, you feel guilty, so you stop reading the dang thing and put it away.

This has been my argument with much of what I see as Carl's approach. There has been a feeling for years that people who headed the conservation department in more or less [any] form saw members as sort of cannon fodder that you throw into the battle; you know, where is the next body that's willing to go in there and fight? And the pressure on the conservation department to get this bill passed, to win this vote that's coming up next week—It makes it understandable. I understand that, and I'm sympathetic for them. In the long run, you don't want to run an organization that way, and I think Carl has had a difficult time making the transition from this short-term, immediate, "You've got to get people out there to do this; we've got to pass this bill," to a broader, longer range perspective of

"You've got to make the members feel good about it. " You know, you've got to give them something back.

Lage: And let them have a sense of ownership.

Shaffer: Have ownership in it. And I think this is the big difference that I saw. I think it's why I never would consider running again for the board of directors while Carl is executive director. And I don't mean by that I have any desire to get rid of Carl. I mean, Lord knows, it's not on my list of things to do. It's just not rewarding to work with Carl. I never had a conversation with Carl about anything that was important in the Sierra Club that I felt that he wasn't, while we were having the conversation, preparing the response to explain to me why I didn't get it.

That's the way he deals--Copious amounts of e-mail. I mean, he reads all the stuff that comes in and puts out very well-reasoned and very intelligent and articulate responses to somebody that has resigned from a position. But the response is never one of praising and building them up and saying, "Well, maybe we were wrong about this and maybe we should go back and rethink this and maybe you and I should sit down and talk about this, how we can move this forward and how can we heal? How can we make you feel better about this? " If the response is, "This is where you got it wrong, and this is what is right, and I need to set the record straight because I'm right and you're wrong," that's not fun. That's not rewarding. It doesn't make you feel good. It makes you feel bad. And I think that that's Carl's shortcoming.

I think that Robbie got caught up in that because Carl encouraged Robbie to do what he does well, and Robbie was--Oh, I think about a story. I had a landscape architect who was a dear friend of mine when I was building my house and landscaping my yard, and I was watching over his shoulder for a while, and finally, after an hour or so, he said, "Denny, would you mind going and getting some fertilizer?" And I said, "Well, no. What kind do you want?" And he said, "Well, I need six bags of so and so." So I went and bought it, and I'm coming back before I realize he didn't need fertilizer. He just wanted to get me out of his hair for a couple of hours.

I had a sense with Robbie that Carl got him out of his hair a lot by having him do good things that needed to be done that Robbie would do very well, and would be an honor to the club and honor to the organization, to move things forward. But it also served a purpose of getting him out of the way so that Carl could do what Carl wanted to do.

Lage: Did you raise this as a member of the executive committee?

Shaffer: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Lage: And what kind of response did you get?

Shaffer: I think Robbie wanted to think it wasn't so, that I was being troublesome or irritable and that--And, you know, there's a risk in all that. I mean, one of the things I was so conscious of when I came back on the board is that I remember people who had done things and had gotten older, and then they'd sit around, grumbling about the fact that things aren't like what they were a long time ago. You know, not like it was in the good old days.

Boy, I am conscious of that because those kind of people drove me nuts. I don't want to be one of those kind of people. You run a risk because your mind does edit out the bad and you remember and cherish the good, and the warm feelings stay with you. But having said that, I think there was enough evidence and there were enough people that I talked about this with, including people who were directors, who felt the same way and said, "I wouldn't do this."

But I think Robbie wore himself out as president. I mean, physically wore himself out. I would see Robbie sometimes when he looked like he was just barely able to make it, he was so tired. And he really worked hard at it, and he really was devoted. He struggled with it. He's a good man, an honorable man, and I have great respect for him. I don't think Carl was the kind of help to Robbie that Robbie needed, frankly. I think he had his own agenda of how to move the club forward, and he was doing that.

Adam Werbach as President

Shaffer: Adam [Werbach] was another kettle of fish. Adam called me, saying he was thinking about running for president; what did I think about it? And I said, "Well, let me think about that, but my gut feeling is I'll probably end up supporting you. But that's not a commitment." He said, "I'm not asking for a commitment." I said, "Well--"

Lage: You just knew him from those two years you were on the board.

Shaffer: Yes. I said, "You would have taken one [a commitment] if I had given it to you, but I didn't, and I want to make that clear." In both Robbie and Adam--Robbie had very little experience as a national director before he became president.

Lage: Yes, that's what I was thinking.

Shaffer: And where I came on as the president with four and a half years and Joe Fontaine came on as president having been around forever--Well, not forever, but a long time. A number of people came on as president with a lot of history behind them.

Lage: Michele.

Shaffer: Michele and so on. In evaluating Robbie's presidency, one of the things you've got to say is my goodness, he had little time to prepare. I suspect Robbie Cox would have been a stronger president of the Sierra Club two or three years later, but I talked to Robbie when he had the chance to be president and gave him the advice I mentioned earlier, which was, "Robbie, you just may not get the chance again, and so you've got to make the decision whether you want to do it now or whether you want to wait until you're better prepared, and you may not have the opportunity. And that's your choice. You've got to make that decision. Nobody can make that for you. But you've got to realize that may happen." He chose to run, and was president.

Adam, another kettle of fish. My God, so much energy, so refreshing, so--Boy, you talk about a different perspective and good for the organization, absolutely. I wish he had had a

little more time before he was president, but he would then be a different person. Pros and cons. I found working with Adam to be a real joy. I found Adam to be one who respected me as an individual--didn't necessarily agree with me--which is all I ever ask for. Lord knows that if I find anybody who agrees with me all the time, they are suspect immediately because they're crazy or missing the point or something. I mean, they're wrong. But give me credit for being an honorable person trying to do the right thing, and we'll get along just fine. And Adam certainly has done that.

Lage: Does he stand up to Carl? Does he understand that past relationships may have been different?

Shaffer: Yes, the answer is yes. I think that he is a much stronger personality in dealing with Carl. The downside is that Adam doesn't know how it was before. He doesn't know what has been stripped away from the governance power of the board of directors, of the support the board of directors once had from the staff, of the resources made available.

Reimbursing the Expenses of Club Presidents and Board Members

##

Shaffer: There was great debate when Adam became president about how much support he could have. Of course, Robbie would never have raised the question. Robbie--I'll give you an interesting perception--Robbie needed to have some financial supplement while he served as president, and this is a long-standing policy of the board, that if this is needed, that this would be forthcoming. It has always been worked out between the incoming president and that president's treasurer. Robbie Cox went to Carl and worked it out. From that moment forward, he was in some ways an employee of Carl. Now, he didn't see himself doing that, but that is the effect that his doing it that way had.

Lage: Now, you were treasurer, so you needed--

Shaffer: I was treasurer. And I advised him. I said, "Don't do this. Don't go to Carl. I mean, Carl works for you; you don't work for Carl. And what the board feels is fair is what's fair, and he ain't got a vote. Not his job." Adam, on the other hand, went to the board but got some resistance from directors who would have rather not had him as president and who--

If I have animosity about any one thing, it probably is that the Bay Area directors have traditionally had no understanding or sympathy for the need to provide a hotel room that's comfortable or resources that are important to directors who come here from Connecticut or Florida or North Carolina or someplace else. The penny-pinching on the volunteer budget has been led by the folks who live here in the Bay Area and are on the board, and I just think it's so unfair. I mean, you know, justice would be best served if they then had to serve twenty-five years on the board that met in Bangor, Maine, and they had to find their way there for all the meetings and stay in the local, fourth-class hotel.

Lage: The local YWCA [chuckles]. And for the president it's even more so. He spends more time here.

Shaffer: It's ridiculous. The president of the Sierra Club is one of the most valuable assets the Sierra Club has, and for Lord's sake they work without pay. And even if they get a supplement, the supplement the presidents have gotten have been just pathetic little amounts of money. I don't have a clue what Adam is getting, but I think on the average we've been talking numbers that are somewhere in the \$20,000 area, something like that, just enough to let you keep paying your bills. I can tell you from personal experience that being president of the Sierra Club is expensive. You go places; and I paid all my own expenses. Looking back on it, I think it was a mistake.

Lage: A lot of people can't do it.

Shaffer: Well, I could do it, and at the time I didn't have--I mean, now I'm thinking about retirement. I have a seven-year-old daughter. I wish I had saved some of that money. But at the time my kids were grown, and I wasn't worried about the future. I was young enough; I didn't think I'd ever retire, I guess. I don't know. But it was a mistake because the club should not permit that to happen. The president of the Sierra Club should not be financially diminished because he's president of the Sierra Club. He should not be enriched, but he should not be diminished. He or she. Because that's a disservice to them.

And the same for the other officers. You're not talking about very much. If you're talking about \$25,000 a year difference, I would be surprised. In a budget of millions and millions of dollars, it's bizarre. But it is kept there for reasons which I think I pretty much stated. I think that it's very, very unfortunate. Adam had some real trouble getting the kind of support he needed to have. I think eventually he got most of what he needed, but it was a fight. He had to fight.

Lage: So it was a fight on the board.

Shaffer: It was a fight on the board, and it was a fight with Carl.

Lage: Did you ever understand why Robbie went to Carl instead of to his own board?

Shaffer: [pausing] Robbie doesn't like controversy. Robbie would rather not have controversy. He'd rather find a way to smooth it over. I'm inclined to go in--if there's a controversy--go in and pick it to pieces and find out who's got what problem and work it out with this group and work it out with that group and so on. More Robbie's style was to try to find something that would cover it over and put it away and let's go on to something that's working better. I think that he saw that he could go to Carl and that Carl would probably agree with him and it would be a done deal and they wouldn't have to think about it or talk about it or argue with some other director about it or whatever. It was, in my belief, less well done than he could have done it because, as I said, if somebody wants something from me, I'm not going to let them buy me a lunch. I'm just not going to do that. You don't let yourself get obligated that way. And this is bigger than buying your lunch.

Restructuring the Finance Committee, a New Role for the Treasurer

Lage: How did your role as treasurer this last time differ from the earlier times?

Shaffer: I think the big difference was that most everything was done with great resistance by the staff. Getting information was extremely difficult. I really had to push and shove and use political power just to get information, which would have been unthinkable before. I mean, under any of the directors, any of the executive directors--I mean, that was--my goodness, that's what the treasurer is there for. It was just obvious distrust on the part of the staff. The staff distrust--Just not trusting me and being perfectly comfortable showing it, which suggests to me that they had treated other people the same way and found that that was accepted and so they got into the habit of being able to do that.

Lage: Do you think that Carl was particularly wary of you because you did have the reputation for getting things done?

Shaffer: Oh, sure. Oh, sure. Yes, I'm a threatening fellow to somebody who has their own agenda. And Carl has his own agenda. People like me are, I would think, threatening because I'm going to mess with his agenda. He's going to have to work around me or through me or whatever, and he's not going to--I mean, yes, I would think so.

Lage: Did you work to get the information directly with Carl, then?

Shaffer: I went anywhere I could go until I got it. I mean, including, you know, having prayer meetings with the ExCom or with Carl and the ExCom, or Debbie and Carl or whoever. I mean, if I needed something--and sometimes going to the point of putting it on a piece of paper and say, "This is what I need. This is why I need it, and this is when I need it."

Lage: And would Robbie support you on that?

Shaffer: With great discomfort. I mean, he really wanted this just not to be such a problem. And I think he felt that a lot of what I was doing I was doing to create waves, where I clearly saw what I was doing as doing something because we got something broken, we're trying to fix it, and we need information to be able to fix it. The fincom was very supportive. Jim and I worked very well--

Lage: How did you work that? It used to be the treasurer would be the chairman of the Financial Committee.

Shaffer: Always had been and is again now. Has been for the history of the club except for that one year.

Lage: How did it work out?

Shaffer: Oh, it was a wonderful idea. It worked beautifully.

Lage: What did your role become if you weren't chairman of the Finance Committee?

Shaffer: My role became the advisor to the board of directors on financial matters. The treasurer of the Sierra Club is, by definition in the bylaws, the chief financial officer of the Sierra Club, and I played that role in advising and consulting with the board of directors. The big picture development of, you know, how much does a budget have to be reduced? What are the important areas of service that must be maintained? How much flexibility do we have in this or that? Those kinds of things I played a role.

In board politics I played a role because Jim wasn't on the board of directors, and so if something came up in a session that may not have started out being a financial discussion but became one--Jim was brought in whenever there was known to be a discussion of the budget, for example, but sometimes it would just happen. And then I'd spend--Of course, that was sort of my role. And Jim's was to chair the committee, develop the agenda for that committee with me and with the staff. I certainly went to the committee meetings, and I had input into the committee discussions and all that. But it was clear it was his committee.

Much better idea. It's the way it ought to be. I was very disappointed to see that the next year then it went back to well, I'm treasurer, so I'm going to chair this committee.

Lage: How long were you treasurer?

Shaffer: One year.

Lage: Just one year.

Shaffer: Just long enough to get us in the black.

Lage: And did these changes have an effect?

Shaffer: Oh, big time, big time, big time surplus. I mean, we can look it up, but it was a couple million dollars.

Lage: And then did you decide you didn't want the treasurership again?

Shaffer: I decided I did what I came for.

Lage: Are we still in the black?

Shaffer: You know, I haven't paid that much attention for the last few months. I don't know, but I do know we are no longer in danger. It was a serious matter that particular year because the banks were getting worried. The auditors were getting ready to consider giving us a qualified audit, which would have meant the banks would have probably moved backwards on our line of credit or cut us off or whatever, and without our line of credit we are out of business. That's an overstatement, but we'd be facing going to the endowment and trying to steal the money out of there and spend it or something. And I use that word advisedly. That's the way I would feel about it.

I mean, it was a critical time, and I saw something that needed to be done. I came in, and I did it. And that's that. And I tried to get off the board after I did it. I tried to resign and get them to replace me with Jim Dodson on the board. Let him be treasurer. Much to my surprise, that didn't work. The people who didn't want me to be treasurer and didn't want me to be on the board also didn't want me to resign and have Jim take the position. I'll never understand that until the day I die! You would have thought they'd be glad to get rid of me if they didn't want me there in the first place, and they seemed to like Jim, but I think the objection was that it was my idea, and there must be a catch somewhere. The only catch I could think of is that I'd have more time with my daughter.

Resolving Budget Issues, Past and Present

Lage: Now, in getting the budget in balance, as treasurer, does it work by your saying, "Carl, cut back on spending and bring this budget into balance."? Or does it work by you helping devise where the cuts will be made?

Shaffer: In my previous incarnations as treasurer, the way it worked was that you looked at the size of the problem and you looked at what you had to take out, and you looked at things that you could approach that would help you to that degree. I mean, shaving the peaches, we used to say, didn't get you there if you needed \$4 million. You needed to upset the fruit basket. And then you decided on priorities. The board had input on what their priorities were and what was less important and so on.

This time, the process, as I started to say, was Carl's insistence on putting together a sort of schematic thing. We dumped all this stuff out on the table and said, "These are the parts." Then Carl relabeled the parts, put different names on them, and put them back together again in different piles. We re-piled them on the table and if you had seventeen piles before, you've got seventeen now, but the names on the piles are different and the names on the pieces that are in it are different, and some pieces have disappeared.

Lage: Did other people see it this way?

Shaffer: Other people saw it that way. Other people did not see it that way. It was a very difficult process because you did a sort of dice and slice, and when you were done, you weren't sure whether all the pieces were still there or not. One of the great lines about the tinkerer is you don't throw away any of the parts, and there was never any clarity as to which parts were still there and which weren't, and you couldn't follow the process. Only Carl knew for sure.

So clearly I had great difficulty with this. What I wanted to do was get on with what I saw the business of getting a budget that would get us where we wanted to go. Carl said, "This is what I'm doing." I said, "I don't think so." We spent an awful lot of time talking about repackaging, re-forming, doing different things. This is a generational thing. There is a wonderful book on generational trends, one of which has the folks of Carl's age absolutely smitten with the idea of reinventing things and renaming them and saying, "They're mine." [chuckling] Because it has a new shape and form and name, it is therefore mine, and I have discovered it. This is a concept which drives me crazy because it clearly is a lot of action, and you really still have the same sorts of things before.

But we went through all this. But we went through all this with my knowing darn well that I'm going to get my day, and I got my day.

Lage: How?

Shaffer: When you put numbers on it, the numbers have got to come out. Now, we had very serious disagreements which reflected the philosophical differences. I mentioned chapter newsletters. Carl was willing to slice them out in one fell swoop as very, very expensive and not very productive and there's better ways of doing this. And I mean, I'm sorry, this is just not something that's going to happen. This is not going to happen. And it didn't happen. Not because of what I said. I mean, anybody who knows anything--I mean, I was

amazed that Carl would jump on that, but Carl wants to preserve the staff he has because that's what he operates with. Those are his tools. He wants those people there that he could call on to do things which he knows they can do--There are people he knows who can do that. And that's a high priority. He wants the field system. He wants those people. He wants those other, you know, whatever.

This money that goes to train volunteers or this money that goes to pay for your hotel room if you're a director, these things don't give Carl Pope a darn thing, and so he doesn't have any enthusiasm for them. And all those kinds of things disappeared, or pieces or parts of them did. And so it became a really difficult process of what do you do about this.

Reducing Staff and the Books Program, Re-forming the Size and Shape of the Club

Shaffer: Clearly, we had to do some reduction of staff. And with the unions, of course, this was a very difficult thing to do. I am very sympathetic to that. I understand how that is. I've never owned a business that was unionized, but I've been a member of a union before I was an owner of a business. Familiar with how all that works. And it's tough. And it was a difficult problem. And Carl had reason to be concerned that you couldn't go out and start making wild statements about what you were going to do with employee salaries and benefits and so on without getting--But nobody was ever going to do that. Certainly, I was never going to do that.

But eventually we worked out a situation. He proposed some things, and we talked about things. Other things were put out until there was a process put in place to reduce the size of the staff, which clearly had to be done. The budget could not have been balanced in a real way without doing that. Too much of the money was going in to support salaries and benefits and all that goes with it: travel budgets and phone bills and so on, that goes with having those people, that you just couldn't do it any other way.

There was some real re-forming in the size and shape of the club, and this budget was a drastic re-forming. There was real pain in it. There were good people who were laid off out of it; there were good people who took an early buy-out of their contract, if you will, with the club, that wish now they hadn't. It was a budget that I will say shared the pain with everybody. I don't know if it was equal or not, but there was pain--

It's not a budget I was ashamed of. I didn't like the process at all. I would have much preferred a much more open process, much more dialogue. Carl was absolutely correct that some of this stuff could not be done openly. Staff salary stuff could not be done openly. I regret that terribly. I regret we were unionized. I think that came about through management error. We didn't have to be unionized. If we had spent more time listening to our employees and treating them like they wanted-- You don't unionize over money; that's what you talk about. They unionized because they feel like they're not being respected and they're not being treated right and they're not part of the decision-making process. We've still got the union. And I think we've still got the union for the same reason.

Lage: Now, was this cutback when Jon Beckmann left, or was that before?

Shaffer: Yes.

Lage: So was that part of the cutback, that you couldn't afford a Jon Beckmann?

Shaffer: It actually came out of that. But it was not an instant thing, but it was part of all that whole thing, the changing of the whole program, the books program.

Lage: Was that a change that the board took a policy role in?

Shaffer: Yes, but. Early on, when I came on as treasurer and I realized that the books program could spend a lot of money, and the club had gotten in trouble with the books program before. You can have a lot of books in the warehouse and think you have assets, and if nobody wants to buy the books, you don't have assets. For years, the board of directors, ExCom, approved every book title, quote unquote. You've got a piece of paper. Here's the title of a book, this is how many we're going to print, this is how much money we're going to make on this, and this is what this book is about. And the ExCom would bless it and they'd go on.

I said, "Why are we doing this?" Well, we're controlling it, the expenditures. Well, of course, we weren't controlling anything. So I devised a sort of plan which said that the books program had "x" number of dollars to work with, and that's how much they could have in inventory and royalties and that sort of thing, and that was the ceiling, and as long as Beckmann stayed within that ballpark, he ran the program. If he needed more money, he had to stop spending money until he got it, came back and got it from the board.

Well, somewhere along the way, that got gone, along with a lot of other things. People forgot about it or executive directors changed or whatever. And so the control of the book program again went back more to what is the program for and what is it doing? And the whole program started to change. It was clear that again this is not an instant gratification program. This is not something that's going to get a bill passed in Congress next week or influence how Congress is going to vote on a trade treaty. And so this appeals less to people who think that way. But it appeals a whole lot to me. I joined the Sierra Club by finding the name and address of the Sierra Club in a Sierra Club book and writing and saying, "I want to join the Sierra Club." No Sierra Club book, no Denny member, I suppose, then. Larry Downing, lots of people came through the books program. But we moved away from that.

In fairness, the books business is a whole different business. People aren't reading books like they were. People aren't buying books, and small bookstores are being forced out. It's a whole different world. And maybe it's a victim of the times. But the thing I said about it at the time, when we started moving away from the books program, I said, "Let's invent the substitute first. How are we going to reach the next generation if we don't reach it through books? Let's find someplace to go before we leave where we are." And we haven't done that, I don't think.

More on Changes in Club Management: Missing the Big Picture

Lage: Who on the board is thinking in the terms you just described? Is there someone else that's going to step in and ask those questions?

Shaffer: Oh, I'm the worst person to answer that question. I don't know the new directors. I know that historically people like Mike have said that one of the things I offered the board was that I asked the questions that nobody else asked and that I saw beyond an issue that we were discussing and said, "Well, how will this affect that over there?" I think we've had other people who are very good at that.

I think Larry Downing is very good at that. And Larry had a big vision of the organization. Larry was both, at different times, president of the club and president of the board of trustees [of The Sierra Club Foundation], took the board of trustees to Scotland, got an involvement with the John Muir Trust in Scotland and brought those two bodies together and served on both, served on that board in Scotland. A big vision of what we are and what's important. And a big understanding of the stuff we've been talking about, the value of the individual and the value of the person.

Sue Merrow brought that sort of thing. Sue had that. When Sue was president she put together what she called the big projects list with Michael Fischer, which was basically the sort of concept of what Mike McCloskey used to put on his wall. But she just--Well, let's talk about what the big things are. Let's put them on a piece of paper with two paragraphs each. After each one of them, let's say where they are, where they're going, who's got them, and so on. And she kept it updated. A brilliant idea.

It's been asked to be continued under subsequent executive directors and has not been, as far as I know, continued. There's an accountability that comes out of those kinds of things that some executive directors find quite annoying, which is the same thing with planning. Planning is a very annoying concept to some executive directors because it would remove some control from them and put it into institutional control. This is what we have together decided we're doing. And that may interfere with an individual's agenda, and so planning in the Sierra Club now is nonexistent, as far as I'm concerned. I don't see any planning.

Lage: No planning committee activities.

Shaffer: No strategic planning.

Lage: Long-term planning.

Shaffer: The govcoms all have as a charge long-range planning. Well, of all the silly ways of doing it, you break it up in seven pieces or whatever it is and say, "Now, you each plan for what's going to happen in the future of the Sierra Club. But don't talk to each other." I mean, it doesn't say that in there, but it also doesn't say "Talk to each other." And there's no place for the individual parts to come together in the form of a complete mosaic.

Lage: And their missions overlap.

Shaffer: Yes. Much of the restructuring was a debilitation, caused the debilitation of the volunteer governance by fracturing it into pieces that were not well-connected and which had no normal flow into a place that got resolution of the big picture. The theory was that it would permit the board to have the big picture. But the big picture comes about by getting pieces of small pictures. You've got to get information flow. You've got to understand what the subject is. You've got to understand the implications of what's happening in that area. It just doesn't happen spontaneously, and it hasn't happened. The big picture is not--The board is not discussing it.

Lage: This is kind of a discouraging note that we're coming to.

Shaffer: Public-interest organizations, cause organizations are in trouble in this country. Movements are in trouble in this country. There aren't many of them left. The labor movement is struggling, the women's movement is wherever it is, the environmental movement comes and goes in its strengths.

Lage: It does better when the politics in Washington is against it.

Shaffer: Oh, sure. Oh, sure. Well, yes. People will come to the cause if there's a threat. And in some ways the strength of the environmental movement is diminished by having Al Gore as vice president. I mean, that's a bizarre statement, but people are less inclined to write a check than they would if James Watt were secretary of the interior and the risk is there on the front page. But the country has changed. There is less enthusiasm, I think, on the part of people to become actively involved in cause organizations across the board.

To the credit of the Sierra Club and the credit of Carl Pope: the Sierra Club remains strong, when other environmental organizations have been diminished greatly. Greenpeace is recently having to lay off a lot of people; other organizations are on the ropes. And we're not. And you've got to give the folks who have got their hands on the steering wheel credit for that being the case. This is not an accident. They've done some good things and have done them right.

So there are some things, I think, to feel good about. The Sierra Club, I think, as much now as ever in its history is the preeminent voice for the environment in America. I think it is generally well respected by people who know much about it. I think we need to spend a bit more time thinking about our future, if we want to ensure our future. Because we're going to have one anyhow.

Lage: Whatever it's going to be like.

Current Lobbying Effort in North Carolina

Lage: Well, as you leave your active involvement out here, do you plan to stay active in [the] North Carolina Chapter politics?

Shaffer: I've just spent the last year and a half lobbying in North Carolina for a piece of legislation that affects my industry and which affects the environment, having to do with site pollution

from dry cleaning solvent. I have looked for years at what is happening in Superfund legislation and how it's putting good people in bad positions. Small businesses, small property owners, and people who have never polluted anything in their life but happen to own a piece of property that they rented to somebody twenty-five years ago--they polluted it and they moved on or died--and now they own the land and it's polluted, and they get a notice from government saying, "You've got to clean it up, and it's going to cost half a million dollars." And their net worth is \$150,000, and the government says, "Well, tough." The pollution of course took place twenty, thirty, forty years ago when folks did not know it was a problem.

This is legislation that we've helped put through and I helped put through, and I spent the last year and a half trying to prove that it can be fixed. I think we fixed one little piece of it in North Carolina. And I kind of hoped that it will be a model.

The Sierra Club unfortunately, I don't think, quite gets it here. I don't think they quite understand what I've done, and there has not been much enthusiasm for it beyond a few people. I think Adam understands and sees it as a good idea and moving in the right direction. I think what I might be inclined to do in the future is to pick up things which I see there is something that can be done. I don't think anybody but me could have gotten that bill passed in North Carolina because I knew the industry problem, I knew the politics, and I knew the environmental problems, and I had the credibility to get out there. I knew the players. [Added during interviewee review: I know governor Jim Hunt on a first name basis, and I worked with him. He was excited about finding a system that would actually work to clean up polluted sites. These states are told to do this, but there is no money, no system, no solution really. Financially destroying the business and the owner is not productive and in fact continues the story our enemies tell of how we just don't care about people. That even if the person never broke a law, it's their problem and they should clean up the site. Having the money to do it does not seem to matter, or for that matter having the technology that can do it. But now in North Carolina we have a program that is funded by the industry, seventy-seven million dollars in the next ten years, and managed by the state that will, before it is done, test every site and clean each of them up to the level that will protect the environment and people's health. There is no other program for any other small business group like this in the country that I know of. It is historic, really. I could not have done this as a Sierra Club leader, but could as an individual.]

Devoting More Time to Family and Friends

Shaffer: So I see myself doing things like that. But I want to go walk with my daughter. I want time to enjoy what time I've got left. I want to figure out how to retire gracefully, or perhaps retire not gracefully, but retire.

Lage: From your business?

Shaffer: No, no. From working every day.

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Shaffer: Oh, I work hard when I work. You know, I talked about working four days a month when I was president of the Sierra Club. It would be fair to say that I have always thought in seven-day weeks and that I have never thought about an eight-hour or ten-hour day. I mean, it's not unusual for me to get up at five o'clock and be at work at six o'clock and come home at seven o'clock in the evening. I mean, those kinds of things I have done all my life.

My two sons grew up too fast. I lost my wife in the middle of all that, and it was very difficult. It got past me. I didn't spend as much time as I wanted to with them. I'm really frightened that my daughter is seven and a half and I'm not spending as much time with her as I really want to. Because she wants to spend time with me now. She's not far away from the time where I will be seen as the person who knows the least about anything in the world, but right now I'm not that person. I'm the person that knows everything about everything in the world, and I don't want to miss that. That's really what I'm going to be doing. I'm going to be enjoying that. I'm going to be--

I'm doing things which are important to me. I've gotten back to being active in the church. Important to me. I've gotten back to supporting--getting back into my friendships of people that I care very much about that I've neglected over the years. Spending more time, frankly, with the rest of my family, my two sons. I talk to my older son, who lives in New Jersey, on a regular basis now. We try to see each other three or four times a year, at least.

These are changes for me, from trying to save the world [chuckling] or do grand schemes of things. I guess I'm really looking forward to trying to spend time on things which are smaller, definable. I said to Adam that, "If you find something that the Sierra Club needs done that you can draw a neat circle around and say 'this is how much energy it would take and how much time it would take' and you think I could help you out, I'd be glad to try to do that."

But I don't want any more to be an officer of the Sierra Club or to be president of the Sierra Club or chapter chair in North Carolina. I'm looking forward to going to the next chapter retreat and being there, seeing old friends. And I might end up accepting some task that might be, you know [chuckling]--might be group newsletter editor. Would not offend me to do that.

But I'm really looking at--I'm really looking now--If there's anything clear to me is, as you look back over your life, what is important are those human relationships. Things are not very important. Historic things are written in sand. How many people know that James Watt resigned on my watch, and what difference does it make? What difference does it make? What difference it made was that he did resign. It didn't matter who was president of the Sierra Club. He would have resigned if somebody else had been president of the Sierra Club. Sure, it's historic in some ways, and I'm kind of glad he resigned on my watch. I kind of like that.

I like some of the things we accomplished. I feel good about them. But, as it has been said that on your deathbed nobody says, "Gee, I wish I had spent more time in the office," I'm not sure that on my deathbed I'm going to say, "Gee, I wish I had spent more time in a Sierra Club meeting."

Lage: You probably couldn't have spent more time! Let's face it.

Shaffer: That's possible. But I could see myself saying, "I wish I had spent more time with my wife and daughter, my sons and my friends." I wish I had spent more time reaching out to people I know personally who need help. I'm now the guardian of a woman who worked for me for thirty-nine years, who was an employee for me for thirty-nine years, and she is in a home because she is no longer able to care for herself, Alzheimer's. Almost no resources, a little bit. No family that is interested in caring for her. I'm her guardian. I'm inclined to think, when I look back on it, that that makes more sense than a lot of things I've done. And I think that's the sort of thing I'm going to spend my time doing.

Reflections on Accomplishments in the Sierra Club

Lage: I'll just make one comment. I think you're playing down a little bit too much all the good you did by being so involved in the Sierra Club. I think that will come into your thinking before too much longer.

Shaffer: Oh, I'm just not the one to evaluate that. You know, I talked to Larry Downing last night, and I mentioned I talked to Mike McCloskey, and they both suggested [chuckling] that I made some significant contributions. And it makes me feel good when people like that, who I respect and who I know are honest people and who would not say it if it's not the way they thought--I mean, it makes me feel pretty good. But I'm not the one to evaluate that. And I'm certainly not the one to think that if I hadn't done it, it wouldn't have gotten done. It might not have gotten done as fast, may not have got done the way I did it, but other people do things.

Lage: Yes, the organization--

Shaffer: The organization has been here a long time. When I was elected to the board of directors the first time, I had in my mind, as my primary goal, that I wanted to leave it as well as I found it, or a little better. And that was my only standard. And I think that I've done it. I think the organization has grown and prospered, become more powerful, become more respected. Good life. Fine.

A Sierra Club Romance

Lage: Now, one more thing because I think we have overlooked this because it's a given in your life: You never mentioned when you and Kim got married or very much about Kim. Maybe we should end on that.

Shaffer: Oh, it is--Yes. Kim and I got married the day after I stopped being president of the Sierra Club. We got engaged in Chicago at a fund-raising event [laughing]. We fell in love during my presidency, which--we had known each other, for heaven's sakes, years. Many years. And worked together. And it never occurred to me--I mean, I worked with her like

I worked with everybody else. She's a wonderful, personable, cheerful, positive person who had great interest in making the experience of the volunteer committees--I mean, we'd all go out for dinner. It was always a pleasant sort of thing.

And she worked for Peggy Hynd. We haven't said much about Peggy Hynd, who is now Peggy Combs, who was the director of development who Kim worked for. She was director of development; Kim was director of membership development and worked for Peggy. Good, wonderful people, and I admired and liked them so much. They were my friends.

But sometime when I was president, a bunch of us went out for dinner or went out to have a drink one night after a meeting, and there's fifteen of us sitting around a room, and I said, "Well, who wants to have dinner? I've got to go get something to eat. Who wants to go with me?" And the first three people between me and Kim said they had other plans and Kim said, "Yeah, that'd be great." And there were seven or eight more people, and they all declined. So it ended up the two of us went to dinner and went to Le Central, which was right down there next to the offices, and somewhere between the poached salmon and the dessert, it occurred to both of us that we were seeing each other in a different perspective. We also recognized that, my goodness, this is a very difficult situation because I'm president of the Sierra Club, this woman works for the Sierra Club, and so we talked about it, and we decided, well, we were going to see each other.

Shortly thereafter I went and had a heart-to-heart talk with Mike McCloskey, and I can assure you this made Mike extremely uncomfortable, on a number of levels. But I sure--I said, "Mike, you know, this is not anything that I planned, and yes, this is not a good idea."

Lage: So you were reporting to the executive director!

Shaffer: Well, I mean, this woman works for him and I'm his boss in some sort of a way, and this is not a good arrangement, and this is disorderly to my structure of management and administration. But I assured him that we would be discrete about all this, and we did, we were. We stayed in the closet as best we could, although it never worked out quite as well as we thought it would. You'd keep running into Sierra Club people in the strangest places. But the relationship developed, and Kim came back to Fayetteville to see what Fayetteville looked like, and I introduced her to Fayetteville. Shortly thereafter we went down to the coast, below Carmel, and I proposed to her down there, and she accepted.

I went back home and I got a diamond for her, and I'm flying out, and there is a fund-raising event in Chicago, and though Kim didn't usually do those things because she did membership development, they were shorthanded, and they asked her to go along with two people that were going. Of course, this pleased me. I found out she was going to be there, and so we got there, and before the dinner I gave her the ring, and she opened it up. She thought it was earrings or something. I mean, she hadn't a clue. And she opened it up, and her eyes got big as saucers, and she slammed it shut and said, "You're kidding." I said, "No, I'm not kidding." "For me?" "For you."

And so she got the ring then, and that made it formal, and everybody then knew what was going on, and that was near the end of my presidency, and then we got married the day afterwards. We had a small wedding here in--What is the name of that little church that's over the hill here? I'll think of it in a minute. A lovely little church, perfect for us.

Lage: The little Swedenborgian Church?

Shaffer: Swedenborgian Church [on Lyon Street in San Francisco]. You got it. My family and her family and everybody came. Small wedding. And then we had the Haas Lilienthal House for a party. We invited all the directors and families and friends, and there was two hundred people, I guess, there, and we partied and danced. It was the best party I've been at. It went on long beyond what anybody thought it could. Consumption of food and alcohol beyond anybody's belief.

Kim and I then, of course, went back to North Carolina and immediately got involved in the Hunt campaign, so Kim was introduced to North Carolina in that way. She went on then to be chapter chair of North Carolina chapter and did a number of things on her own back there that carried on her tradition of involvement. And then, of course, seven and a half years ago, this wonderful daughter came into our lives, and refocused everything, in a wonderful way, in a wonderful way.

Lage: Well, I think that's a nicer note to end on than some of the other things.

Shaffer: Well, it's a positive one. It is a positive one. I will tell you one more story. I actually wrote the introduction of a book on North Carolina, and I included this. It's fitting because I'm sitting here in this apartment. The man who takes care of this apartment, takes care of the maintenance of this apartment, I've gotten to know. He's a real environmentalist from way back. He's sort of found a way to make a living in keeping up a few of these apartments. We've gotten to know each other well. And I told him about Francesca's birth, standing down in front of this apartment, and he looked at me and he said, "You know, I wish for every man a daughter." And I thought to myself, "What a grand phrase that is. I wish for every man a daughter. What the devil does it mean? What is he talking about?"

She was then just weeks old. And, boy, I found out very quickly what he was talking about. Francesca, you know, looks at me like I've never been looked at before and has brought the joy into my life that's never been there before, with all the variety of great joys that have been there. So his wish was correct and true, and I didn't have the wish because I didn't have enough sense to have it. But now that I know what it's about, I'm so pleased that that's where it is.

I'm so much looking forward to what lies ahead and the opportunities that will be there. It's going to be fun.

Lage: Very nice. Let's end on that note.

Shaffer: Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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Appendix A--Early Sierra Club Brochure, 1960s

Sierra Club, P.O. Box 7959, Rincon Annex, San Francisco, Ca. 94120

I have informed myself about the purposes of the Sierra Club and wish to support them. I hereby apply for membership and enclose \$_____ as total payment. (See schedule on right.) Dues include subscription to the Sierra Club Bulletin (\$3) and chapter publications (\$1).

Print Name(s) _____

Print Mailing Address _____

Zip Code

Signature _____ Date _____

Gift Memberships: A card will be sent acknowledging the membership as a gift.

gift in you

DONOR:
Print Name:

Print Mailing Address

Print Mailing Address _____ Zip Code _____

Zip Code

reserve the nation's forests, waters, wildlife and wilderness ...

ADMISSION FEE AND ANNUAL DUES

	<i>Admission fee</i>	<i>Dues</i>	<i>Total</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Life	*	\$400.00	\$400.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing	\$5.00	50.00	55.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	5.00	25.00	30.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	5.00	15.00	20.00
<input type="checkbox"/> with spouse	5.00	22.50	27.50
<input type="checkbox"/> Junior (thru 14)	*	5.00	5.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Student (thru 23)....	*	8.00	8.00
<input type="checkbox"/> with spouse	*	13.00	13.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior (60 & over)..	5.00	10.00	15.00
<input type="checkbox"/> with spouse.....	5.00	15.00	20.00

*Admission fee is waived for junior members, full time students through age 23, and life members.

... To explore, enjoy and preserve the nation's forests, waters, wildlife and wilderness ...

Sierra Club
1050 Mills Tower
San Francisco, Calif. 94104

Why the Sierra Club?

"Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed; if we permit the last virgin forests to be turned into comic books and plastic cigarette cases; if we drive the few remaining members of the wild species into zoos or to extinction; if we pollute the last clear air, dirty the last clean streams and push our paved roads through the last of the silence, so that never again will Americans be free in their own country from noise, the exhausts, the stinks of human and automotive waste.

And so that never again can we have the chance to see ourselves as single, separate, vertical and individual in the world, part of the environment of trees and rocks and soil, brother to the other animals, part of the natural world and competent to belong in it." —Wallace Stegner

Why the Sierra Club was founded.

Wallace Stegner's words express the same instinct that caused John Muir to found the Sierra Club in 1892. Muir knew that man's spirit can only survive in land that is spacious and unpolluted.

John Muir founded the Sierra Club to enable more people to explore, enjoy and cherish the wildlands that are their heritage. He felt that man should come as a visitor to these places—the mountains, river canyons, coasts, deserts and swamps—to learn, not to leave his mark.



To rescue these untrammeled places.

He wanted the Club to rescue these untrammeled places from those who see them only as wasted space.

From experience, we know that these places are only as safe as people, knowing about them, want them to be. That is why we work to let more people know about them.

Time has proven that the people the Club takes to the mountains, rivers and other wild places, become their most determined defenders.

Through them, the Club helped bring the National Park Service and the Forest Service into existence; played a leading role in the establishment of such national parks as Kings Canyon, Olympic, Redwoods, and the North Cascades; was instrumental in creation of the Wilderness Preservation System and the Wild and Scenic Rivers System; and led the defense of Yosemite and Grand Canyon national parks and Dinosaur National Monument against dams. It has led efforts to obtain new parks in Alaska and to reform the Forest Service so as to curtail overcutting in national forests



These places are only as safe as people, knowing about them, want them to be.

and to secure adequate study of roadless areas as potential wilderness.

The challenges ahead.

While much has been done to ensure that wildlands will not vanish from our lives, too little has actually been saved. Man's rising tide threatens to engulf the little that still remains unprotected, and the quality of life everywhere declines.

Protected areas must now be expanded: we need more national parks, wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, natural areas, and wildlife refuges; endangered species must be protected, estuaries safeguarded, scenic shorelines conserved, and open space reserved around our cities.

The environment of the cities now also needs to be made fit for man: we must be more effective in combatting air and water pollution and the prevalence of chemical contaminants, noise, congestion and blight. Most of all, we must prevent the exhaustion of resources and control the growth of human numbers so that a balance may be struck between man's works and the remaining natural world. Technology must be challenged to do a better job in managing the part of the planet it has already claimed.

What programs does the Club offer?

The Club offers programs as diverse as the environmental challenges that man faces. Each offers an opportunity to become involved.

You can join in your chapter's work. Active chapters with scheduled events exist in all parts of the country. In addition, chapters exist in Canada and groups are found in other places outside the continental United States.

Club publications are issued. To keep you informed, a monthly magazine and a monthly chapter newsletter are sent to all members; dozens of books published by the Club are available at a discount to members (send for a catalog); special newsletters are published also.

Educational opportunities are provided. Talks, films, exhibits and conferences are scheduled by chapters and club committees. Our library is available for armchair exploring.

A worldwide outing program is provided. It helps you see what needs to be conserved and lets you explore, enjoy, and learn how to properly use what has been conserved. From seeking out the remote corners of the earth to cleaning up back-country litter at home, you find variety:

- Wilderness outings throughout the year; daily costs as low as \$7.
- Whitewater trips in wilderness.
- Ski touring and mountaineering.
- Local trips—walk, knapsack, or climb.
- Clean-up and trail-maintenance trips for young people aged 16 and over.
- Huts and lodges—14 in California and one in Canada, open to all members (12 have sleeping accommodations).

Most important, there is the conservation work. Members work in hundreds of Club committees on urgent campaigns to save threatened areas, wildlife and resources.

How to become part of it.

All who feel the need to know more of nature, and know that this need is basic to man, are invited to join.

You can be as active as you want—we put dozens of outings into the field every weekend, and our conservation campaigns need all the help they can get. We will value your membership alone, however, because it shows you care and allows us to carry our message to more people.

The Sierra Club has been expanding in every way: in size, extent and interests. It now has over 40 chapters in 50 states, with offices and staff in San Francisco, New York, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Seattle, Arizona, Wisconsin, Wyoming and Alaska. The Club also maintains an office at the United Nations in New York.



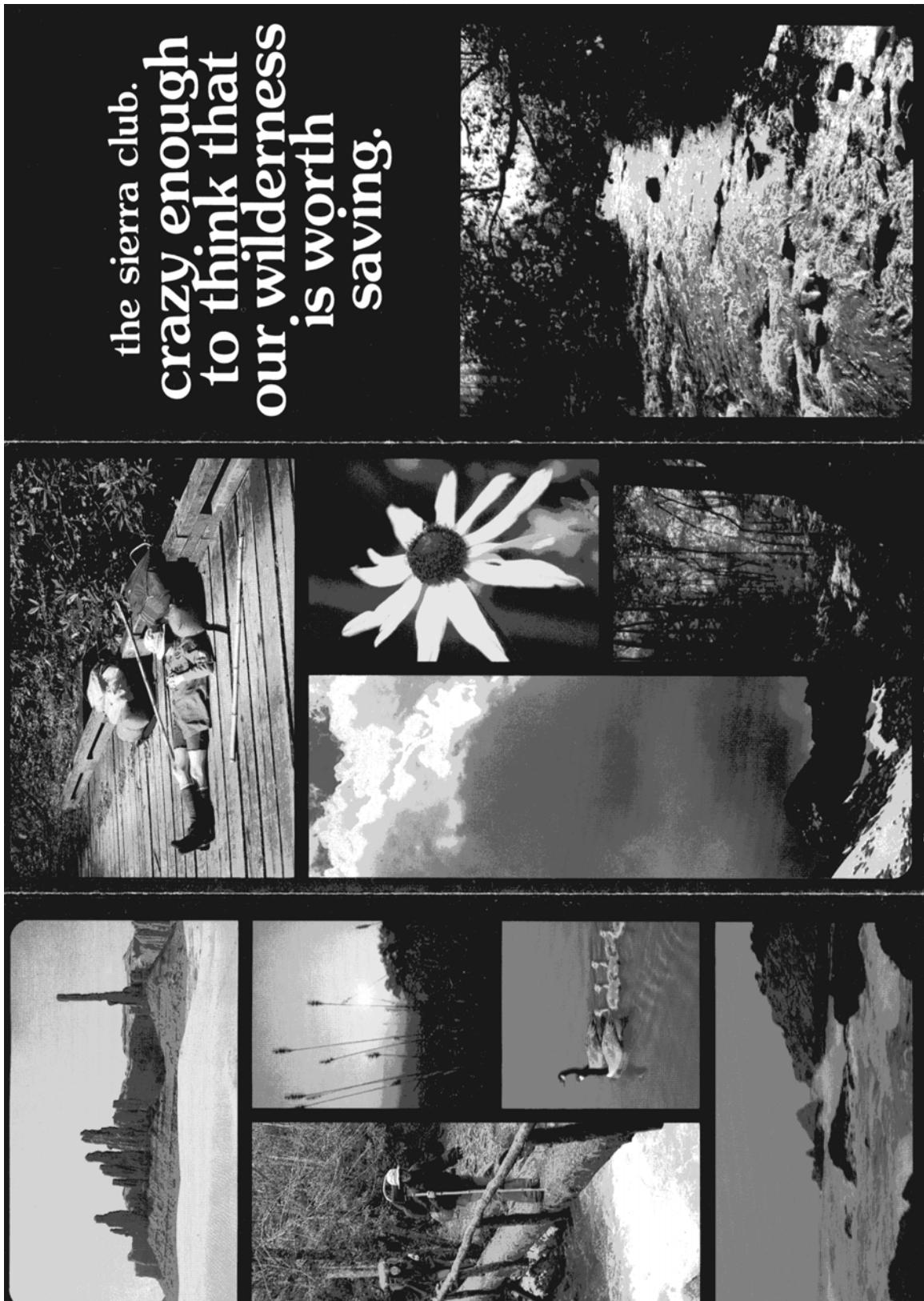
Man should come as a visitor to these places to learn, not to leave his mark.

Wherever nature needs defense, the Sierra Club wants to be on the scene. We welcome all who want to be part of this defense. With new members strengthening its resources the Club can better act on behalf of all that is defenseless, irreplaceable and voiceless in our natural heritage.

Annual dues for Regular Memberships are \$15 (with spouse: \$22.50). Dues are reduced for Juniors (through age 13), Students (14-23), and Seniors (age 60 and over). An Admission fee of \$5.00 (waived for Student and Junior Memberships) is charged to cover initial processing. Those whose generosity allows them to contribute more can become Supporting (\$25), Contributing (\$50), Life (\$400), or Patron (\$1000) Members. An application listing classifications is attached.

"Not blind opposition to progress, but opposition to blind progress."

Appendix B—Shaffer-developed full-color Sierra Club brochure, early 1970s





**CRAZY ENOUGH TO THINK THAT PEOPLE
SHOULD BE ABLE TO BREATHE CLEAN AIR.**

Because the air belongs to all of us, not just those who pollute it . . . **TO WANT WILDLIFE PROTECTED.** The endangered species list grows, and each day the earth dies a little more . . . **TO BELIEVE OUR ENERGY NEEDS CAN BE MET WITHOUT DESTROYING THE ENVIRONMENT.**

Conservation and development of renewable resources like solar energy must be given highest national priority . . . **TO OPPOSE WASTE OF OUR NATURAL RESOURCES.** Recycling and returnable bottles save resources, energy, and money . . . and reduce litter too.

TO WANT TIMBER CUTTING DONE RESPONSIBLY . . . Because the priceless soil and water of the forest must survive the cutting, or forests will be no more . . . **TO WANT OUR NATIONAL FORESTS MANAGED FOR ALL OF US.** Recreation, wildlife protection, water and soil quality, grazing, sustained yield forestry . . . all these values must be preserved.

CRAZY ENOUGH TO THINK THE BATTLES FOR THIS EARTH WILL BE WON WHEN ENOUGH PEOPLE LET THEIR LAWMAKERS KNOW THEY CARE . . . The Sierra Club is a powerful force in Washington. A staff of respected professionals, backed by an informed membership, makes our voice heard on the federal level. In state capitols, county courthouses and city halls throughout our country, Sierra Club members are an effective force for environmentally sound legislation.

CRAZY ENOUGH TO THINK THAT RECREATION CAN RE-CREATE . . . Come with us to wild places and listen to their sounds, see the flourishing of life, feel the wonder and solitude. Return renewed, knowing wilderness and yourself a little better . . . **TO BELIEVE THE BATTLE CAN BE WON.** Millions of acres of wilderness have been preserved, dozens of rivers kept wild, new legislation is helping to protect our environment and scores of court decisions are improving enforcement of those laws. Sierra Club victories are helping to preserve the good things on our earth.

CRAZY ENOUGH TO ASK YOU TO JOIN US.
MAYBE WE'RE NOT SO CRAZY AFTER ALL.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

<input type="checkbox"/> Life (per person)	\$750.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Contribution	100.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	40.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	20.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Student	8.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Junior (thru 14)	8.00
<input type="checkbox"/> With spouse	28.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior (over 60)	13.00
<input type="checkbox"/> With spouse	8.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior (over 60)	13.00
<input type="checkbox"/> With spouse	8.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Student	8.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Junior (thru 14)	8.00
<input type="checkbox"/> With spouse	28.00
<input type="checkbox"/> With spouse	13.00

I'm interested but not ready to join. Please send more information.
 Check if you wish to be billed for the renewal of this membership next year.

Print Mailing Address _____ Zip Code _____

Print Name _____

FOR GIFT MEMBERSHIPS: A card will be sent acknowledging the membership as a gift in your name. Fill your name, as donor, in below:

Print Mailing Address _____ Zip Code _____

Print Name(s) _____

I hereby apply for membership and enclose \$ _____ to the Sierra Club Bulleitem (\$3) and chapter publication (\$1). Dues include subscription to the Sierra Club's total payout. (See schedule on right.)

Mail to: Sierra Club, Dept. MS, P.O. Box 7959, Rincon Annex, San Francisco, Ca. 94120

APPENDIX C—

Letter from Shaffer, including minutes from 1980 meeting of Sierra Club Foundation Board of Trustees, regarding resolving issues between the club and the foundation.

2910 Skye Drive
Fayetteville, NC 28303
September 13, 2003

Dear Ann,

I am getting some things together as you requested, and this is not it. However, I came upon the minutes of the BOT meeting of The Sierra Club Foundation for Jan. 26, 1980. Perhaps having the story from the minutes might be helpful. At any rate....here it is.

In my oral history, I mentioned the club/foundation problems of the early days of my work with the Club. The Foundation, under Torre and Siri, with Clinch as Executive Director, insisted that the Sierra Club Foundation would become a "private foundation" if it raised money only for the club. That had serious tax consequences, they said. Lawyers for the Club said they were wrong. So it was a stand off.

The Foundation was raising some money, folks assumed it was for the Club, the Foundation in fact then gave it to the Club...but would not say in advance it was going to happen, and in fact suggested it might not.

I was a member of the BOT of the Foundation on Jan 26, 1980. Several Trustees had forced the matter on the agenda. After much discussion, I offered a resolution:

"Resolved that the purposes of an organization are frequently best revealed in its actions. Those who would ask our reason for being are respectfully referred to the purposes for which the Sierra Club Foundation has raised and granted funds in the past four fiscal years. It is the intent of the Trustees to follow that precent."

Since the money had been going to the Club, this resolved the matter, and permitted face saving on the part of some Trustees who could not deny history, and were not willing to say that it was not going to be repeated.

This removed the major trust issue. Now the Club knew they would get the money, so they would now have more interest in a larger fundraising effort on the part of the Foundation. This then opened up the way for the Funding Center, and the Management Committee of the Funding Center that put accountability and responsibility into the fund raising for the Club, Foundation, LDF. (It also led to the resignation of Nick Clinch.) As I think we mentioned, I chaired that committee, and wrote the Fund Raising Plan for the Funding Center, that was adopted by all three organizations. (Included)

At the same meeting we resolved the Flora and Azalea Lakes money. The Club had given the lakes to the Foundation in the Brower days when there was a real fear of going broke. Since neither the Club or the Foundation was in the property management business, some of us in the club worked out a plan to sell the property to the Federal Government with an agreed upon plan to preserve it. The

sale took place, and the Foundation had the \$312,000, and would not give it to the Club. Their given reason was that the club would just spend it on a campaign and it would be gone.

I looked at the Club's programs. If we moved the calendar income out of the Books Department financial statement we had a large deficit. Since the budget was in place, if that deficit was covered by funds from the Foundation, the club would have a surplus of the same number of dollars. I got agreement from the majority of Directors of the Club to agree if that happened to support a resolution to transfer that surplus to the Life Membership Endowment Fund. Then I talked to each of the Trustees, explaining the plan. Since this removed their given concern, they agreed. So on this same day in Jan 1980, my resolution to begin the transfer of funds was approved.

The Funding Center was in business in just a very few months. Accountability and responsibility were in place, and a co-ordinated fundraising plan for the three organizations could move forward.

I am looking for pictures as you requested. Larry says he had some, but he is in Italy. I am also sorting out the papers that should have gone to the Bancroft years ago.

Life is still full here. We are going to take a family trip to the South West for Easter, including three days in the Grand Canyon. Now that will be a test of the old man!

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jenny Denny".

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1) that an Addenda under Item VI, Page Six be inserted, to wit: "Trustee Wayburn indicated that the \$735,000 thus allocated makes The Foundation's contribution appear to be 'woefully inadequate,' and pointed out that of the approximate \$9 million Sierra Club budget, \$6 million represents monies that come 'in and out': the \$3 million in dues, approximately \$2 million for the books program, and \$1 million for outings. This \$6 million represents monies in which The Foundation cannot participate. Upon Wayburn's inquiry, Swatek noted that the expense budget of the Conservation Department is \$1,622,500. Wayburn pointed out that with this figure as a point of comparison, it is clear that The Foundation's \$735,000 contribution is a much more significant amount than it otherwise might appear to be." (Submitted by Wade)

2) that the words "informal meeting notes" be changed to "minutes" under Item V, page 3 (submitted by Avery).

III. APPROVAL OF ACTIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AT THE MEETING HELD ON DECEMBER 5, 1979.

Upon motion by Wayburn, seconded by Roush, the Trustees unanimously approved the actions taken by the Executive Committee at the meeting held on December 5, 1979 [see APPENDIX 1].

IV. APPROVAL OF ACTIONS BY THE PRESIDENT IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE TREASURER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AND ACTIONS BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE ADMINISTRATOR.

Upon motion by Roush, seconded by Brooks, the Trustees unanimously approved the actions by the President in conjunction with the Treasurer and Executive Director and the actions by the Executive Director in conjunction with the Administrator relating to Agreements to Administer Funds, Grants from Special Funds, Small Grants from Special Funds, and Recycled Funds [see APPENDIX 2].

V. DISCUSSION OF THE RAISON D'ETRE OF THE SIERRA CLUB FOUNDATION

President Torre opened the discussion of the raison d'être of The Foundation by stating his desire to include within that discussion the consideration of the proposed Lobbying Charity status of The Foundation, henceforth called the Conable Option. He also referred the Trustees to the past history of the Flora and Azalea lands, particularly the appendix referring to same of the November 17, 1979 Board of Trustees meeting, and the implications involved in the transfer of the proceeds from the sale of

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these lands to the Sierra Club, to wit the question of maintaining The Foundation's 501(c)(3) status as a result thereof.

For the benefit of the new Trustees and the general edification of all, President Torre summarized the history of The Foundation:

The Sierra Club Foundation, incorporated in 1960, was originally directed by past presidents of the Sierra Club who felt that The Foundation was simply to exist as a dormant organization with small sums of money under a charitable status which would stand in reserve awaiting its activation at the time of the not unforeseen loss of the Sierra Club's charitable status. Certain directors were opposed to the formation of The Foundation, such as Richard M. Leonard who felt that the existence of The Foundation could possibly fracture the Sierra Club structure. The question involved was how The Foundation could maintain its own vitality without injuring the Sierra Club. Further, the original organization of The Foundation, particularly the fact that its Directors were all past presidents of the Sierra Club, led some of the "old guard" to believe that The Foundation would continue under the direct leadership of the Sierra Club.

President Torre then expressed his views regarding his role as a consultant and subsequently Trustee of The Sierra Club Foundation. Torre felt his role to be primarily that of legal advisor to The Foundation, working to protect its charitable status and to "protect" The Foundation from the old guard of the Sierra Club. There was an excessive fear, at times, on the part of the Club that The Foundation would also lose its charitable status due to its connection with the Club; nonetheless, The Foundation continued to support the Sierra Club's programs.

President Torre noted that the Sierra Club budget and programs fall solely within the internal control of the Sierra Club and that The Foundation cannot make any pronouncement on them. Torre also noted that some Trustees on the Board of The Foundation also act within the Sierra Club's structure, but that these individuals have not used their personal interests to change or modify the Sierra Club's programs or budget while sitting on The Foundation's Board. While it is clear that the realm of activity of The Foundation precludes modifying the Club's programs or budget, nonetheless it is just as clear that the Sierra Club's requests for funds must be presented in such a way as to clearly indicate those funds to be used for legislative purposes so as to protect The Foundation's charitable status. This is the reason for the itemization of funding requests. Because of this acute awareness of its status, The Foundation can be said to support the structure of the Sierra Club rather than its specific programs.

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The primary commitment of The Foundation is to support the Sierra Club's national programs, although local Chapters can also use The Foundation as a repository for their funds. The question of Chapters maintaining their own individual accounts and funds falls solely within the circumscription of the Sierra Club.

Wayburn offered an elucidation of some parts of President Torre's statement. Wayburn pointed out that the original Board of Trustees was comprised of fifteen people of whom twelve were former Sierra Club Presidents, and the remaining three Nathan Clark, the then President of the Sierra Club; Clifford Heimbucher, first Treasurer of The Foundation; and Dr. Wayburn, first Vice-President. He further noted that the Foundation's funds, totalling something less than \$10,000, were spent in small sums over the next seven years. In 1966 the Sierra Club lost its charitable status, and in 1968 The Foundation finally became an active organization.

President Torre continued his presentation of the history of The Foundation by noting the need at the time of its activation in 1968 to coordinate a fundraising plan and initiate a development program. It was necessary to staff The Foundation, and Cole Wilbur began as Financial Secretary, that is, a position from which to raise funds. Wilbur's work was effected on a personal basis rather than on a professional administrative level.

Later, gifts of land were proffered to The Foundation; at the same time, the Club had parcels of land which some Club people felt might be executed upon by creditors. In order to preclude this possibility, the Sierra Club gave these lands to The Foundation unconditionally in order to prevent their possible loss. The Trustees of The Foundation, especially George Marshall, were very reluctant to accept these lands because of their concern for The Foundation's charitable status. The end result, however, was that The Foundation did accept these lands and other subsequent gifts of land. Torre noted parenthetically that at present The Foundation should only accept land that can then be sold rather than land to be held because of the administrative costs involved. Because of two particular instances -- the creation of the Frontera del Norte Fund by Harvey Mudd, and the Heartline Fund by Mudd's brother -- it appeared to The Foundation that its land-holdings would continue to increase at a regular pace because these seemed to be, or it was hoped that there were, wealthy donors around who were desirous of contributing parcels of land to The Foundation, thereby benefiting from the gift's tax deductibility. It thus became apparent that while some donors were responding to specific Sierra Club programs, others were primarily contributing because of deductible tax benefits; in effect, both the Club and Foundation became fundraisers, appealing at times to donors whose motivation stemmed from different sources. A single fundraising program was needed, but its conception raised some fundamental questions:

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Would it be possible for a public charitable institution to support legislative and activist organizations, and how could The Foundation accept gifts intended for legislative purposes. In the proposed coordinated fundraising program, which party -- Club or Foundation -- should be in control; and should The Foundation take the role of a development committee rather than that of a public foundation. That is, who should bear the responsibility for instituting and carrying on a fundraising program.

It is precisely to the resolution of these questions that the Board of Trustees must now direct themselves. President Torre then asked each member of the Board to give his or her own thoughts about the raison d'être of The Foundation, within a five-minutes limitation.

Wade declined to comment.

Roush expressed the thought that The Foundation exists as an independent organization within the Sierra Club "family."

Wayburn felt that The Foundation is an independent organization primarily devoted to the Sierra Club; however, he stressed the concepts of independence and of balance between the two organizations. He felt it is essential that The Foundation be a public organization; that is, one whose funds are distributed to various organizations or individuals rather than exclusively to the Sierra Club.

Girard questioned the legal definition of a public organization, but was generally satisfied with Wayburn's definition. In a brief general discussion that followed, the apparent conflict between The Foundation and the Club was brought out, and the concept of sibling rivalry was used at times to describe it.

Wheat also perceived The Foundation and Club as belonging to the same family. She inquired about the significance and function of the Funding Center Management Committee and the Conable Option, topics to be later discussed.

Behr felt that the raison d'être of The Foundation is peculiarly for the benefit of the Club, that The Foundation should thus be looked upon as a favorite child of the Sierra Club, and that the smooth flow of information between the two groups should be an integral part of the whole Sierra "family." Behr stressed the necessity of maintaining The Foundation's independence while simultaneously maintaining those intangible ties that exist between Club and Foundation. He further noted that the apparent conflict between the two may incur great damage upon both. With specific regard to the proceeds from the Flora and Azalea lands, Behr noted that since The Foundation's independence rests on a primarily legal basis, it is in the self-interest of The

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Foundation not to jeopardize its charitable status; and that, therefore, Behr was willing to vote the transfer of these funds upon written Sierra Club reassurance to the effect that the funds will not be used in any way that might be construed as threatening The Foundation's tax-deductibility.

Shaffer expressed the view that this apparent conflict has reduced The Foundation's level of efficiency. He noted the personal integrity of the personnel interested in and working for both Club and Foundation, and yet saw also the discord and misunderstanding that exists between the two groups. He felt that the Sierra Club had "failed miserably" in communicating with The Foundation Trustees, and proposed that the Board prepare a written statement to be communicated to the Club regarding the raison d'être of The Foundation in order to resolve the existing discord. Torre directed Shaffer to present his resolution after the entire Board had expressed their comments.

Girard presented some tentative views on the subject. He felt that The Foundation is a fundraising auxiliary to the Sierra Club, and that it is precisely this fundraising activity which is at the root of the present conflict. He felt that The Foundation Board should exercise its own independent judgement in raising funds but do so after consultation with Sierra Club staff. Girard further felt that all available Foundation non Trust funds should be at the Sierra Club's disposal, and that the question of the Conable Option and the hiring of a Sierra Club lobbyist should fall solely under the jurisdiction of the Sierra Club.

Snyder expressed the idea that the purpose of The Foundation is to support the national programs of the Sierra Club. He felt that it is the Sierra Club programs which enable The Foundation to raise money. In turn, the Sierra Club is dependent upon The Foundation for the support of a great number of its activities; the Sierra Club, therefore, has much at stake with regard to the efficiency of The Foundation. The Foundation, on the other hand, should not consider itself entirely independent of the Club. The Foundation is indeed independent, but independent within certain limitations. Snyder further elucidated the legal difference between a public versus a private foundation: the primary difference is that a public foundation receives money from a multiplicity of sources. With regard to the Conable Option, Snyder felt that The Foundation should take this option provided that The Foundation will not employ its own legislative programs. Snyder noted that The Foundation could support Sierra Club staff who would implement legislative programs, thereby increasing the efficiency of The Foundation since The Foundation would not have to institute its own program.

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Gill remarked that, from the point of view of donors and people interested in the Sierra Club, The Foundation is considered a part of the Club; but Gill supports the view that the Foundation and Club are separate organizations. Gill felt that The Foundation should be independent to the minimum extent necessary from a legal standpoint; that is, that there should be a minimum amount of outside grants and a minimum interest in land acquisition and acceptance. Gill felt that fundraising should be a cooperative venture and that the Sierra Club should perhaps be the "lead agent." The same should be true of electing the Conable Option. In sum, Gill sees The Foundation as a part of the Sierra Club yet independent in a legal sense.

Avery lamented the lack of early open disclosure on the part of the two organizations, both as individuals and as groups. While donors may think of The Foundation and the Club as one single entity, nonetheless knowledge of the existing discord has spread; Avery recommended that both Boards maintain a united front. She further brought the Board's attention to the concept of the "territorial imperative," and felt that the conflict between Club and Foundation is an expression of territorial infringement. Brooks and others expressed agreement with this analogy.

Clinch acknowledged the discord that exists and noted the difficulties involved, as Executive Director of The Foundation, in reconciling the two organizations. He felt that The Foundation is a necessary organization whose primary purpose is to raise money for Sierra Club projects -- projects which are determined by the Sierra Club alone. Most of the Sierra Club programs are in fact examples of this successful joint venture. The objective of The Foundation is, simply put, to create, maintain and excell in, the most effective fundraising programs possible.

McCloskey noted that the problem involved is how to keep the three entities (Sierra Club, The Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, and The Sierra Club Foundation) working together, and at the same time how to recognize that each of the three continues to develop as does a living organism. He saw three bases of the current discord: the first, that with changes in staff the "flavor" of the organizations changes as does the context of the understanding among them. More and better communication among the three entities can diminish the impact of these changes. Second, that the relationships and "ceremonies" involved are now too complex -- including the fact that three boards of trustees exist who must work together and the fact that the size of the Sierra Club is increasing, as are its problems and complexities. McCloskey further noted that the amount of money involved, approximately \$500,000, is a small amount in comparison with the emotional involvement of all parties. Third, that an "organic" problem arises upon attempting to reconcile the legal separation of the Club and Foundation with the practical working relationships integral to the two entities; indeed, it is

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Upon motion by Wayburn, seconded by Brooks, with the abstention of Avery, the Board of Trustees approved the following resolution:

WHEREAS on May 14, 1978 the Trustees of The Sierra Club Foundation elected to become a 501(h) Conable organization as described under the Internal Revenue Code, be it RESOLVED that The Sierra Club Foundation find ways to implement this election in cooperation with the Sierra Club.

President Torre requested that Snyder, as President of the Sierra Club, and that McCloskey, as its Executive Director, communicate the action taken by The Foundation on the Conable question to the Sierra Club Board of Directors at their next meeting, a copy of the resolution to be provided them by Wade.

VII. DISCUSSION REGARDING THE PROCEEDS FROM THE SALE OF THE FLORA AND AZALEA LANDS.

Upon motion by Shaffer, seconded by Behr, the Board of Trustees approved the following resolution:

Whereas the Sierra Club Foundation now holds the proceeds from the sale of the Flora and Azalea Lakes property currently valued at about \$312,000, and;

Whereas it is the intention of the Sierra Club Foundation to make these proceeds available for use by the Sierra Club by the simplest and most prudent process, and;

Whereas the Books Department of the Sierra Club currently anticipates a deficit during fiscal year 1980 of approximately \$50,000 per quarter in books-publishing alone but not considering other Books Department ventures such as calendars;

The Sierra Club Foundation therefore resolves to provide to the Sierra Club on a reimbursement basis, the same as used for Foundation Grants to Conservation Programs, approximately \$50,000 each quarter or the amount actually in deficit (whichever is less) from the Books publishing operation as indicated by quarterly financial statements until the proceeds plus accumulated interest on the proceeds are depleted.

Torre was informed by Shaffer that the latter, having spoken with two or three members of the Sierra Club Board, felt the Club Board of Directors would be jubilant to learn of the approval of this motion. McCloskey remarked that perhaps next year a similar resolution could be passed to continue transferring the remaining proceeds to the Sierra Club. Behr noted that with the approval of this motion, the key to the disagreement between

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the Club and Foundation is reasonably resolved without jeopardizing in any way The Foundation in terms of its legal standing; that is, that the motion as such is clearly within the legal requirements of The Foundation.

VIII. RESIGNATION OF MEL B. LANE AS TREASURER AND ELECTION OF NEW OFFICER

President Torre noted with regret the resignation of Mel B. Lane as Treasurer of The Foundation, and called for nominations for a new Treasurer.

Upon motion by Wayburn, seconded by Shaffer, the Board of Trustees unanimously elected Robert Girard as the Treasurer of The Sierra Club Foundation.

IX. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer's Report was presented by Stephen M. Stevick. Stevick submitted for the Board's review the Financial Statements (unaudited) for the three months ended December 31, 1979. Stevick remarked upon some of the items therein, specifically the facts that the \$98,955 under "Other Receivables" represents the proceeds from the Belridge Oil stock; that the \$335,843 under "Unrestricted Current Funds" includes the \$312,000 from the sale of the Flora and Azalea lands; that under "Expenses (Supporting Services)" there is a one-time item of \$35,000 which represents the cost of office construction; that the \$18,683 under "Revenue (Interest)" represents a significant increase in earnings from current high interest rates; and that the difference between the 1978 and 1979 figures under "Expenses (Program Services)" is due to the disbursement of the proceeds from the Thorne Estate in 1978.

X. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director Nicholas B. Clinch presented his report and included within it a presentation of the revised Supportive Services budget which would increase The Foundation's budget by \$20,400 [see APPENDIX 3]. The present Foundation budget provides for an assistant to Pete Wilkinson and \$9,000 towards a Research Assistant. Additional funds are needed to cover the hiring of an assistant to Ellen Wetzel who will become Director of Donor Relations and Support Services, and an additional \$2,600 is needed to be added to the present already budgeted \$9,000 whose total -- \$11,600 -- would represent the salary of the Research Assistant.

Appendix D—Untold Stories of the 1982 Election, from *Sierra*, January/February 1983

S I E R R A

THE 1982 ELECTIONS

An Environmental Impact Statement

Kudos for the Club

DENNY SHAFFER

ON ELECTION DAY, November 2, 1982, I was in the Sierra Club's Washington office with a group of local volunteers and the Club's staff. The computer was keeping track of all the congressional races. Three televisions were ready, individuals were assigned to phones for receiving returns, and charts were on the wall for marking results.

The excitement began to build as the first news came from the networks. Soon the phones were ringing with early returns and predictions from the East. Stafford, Mitchell, Sarbanes and Roth in the Senate were all doing well. Frank, Wise and Mrazek were running strong in House contests.

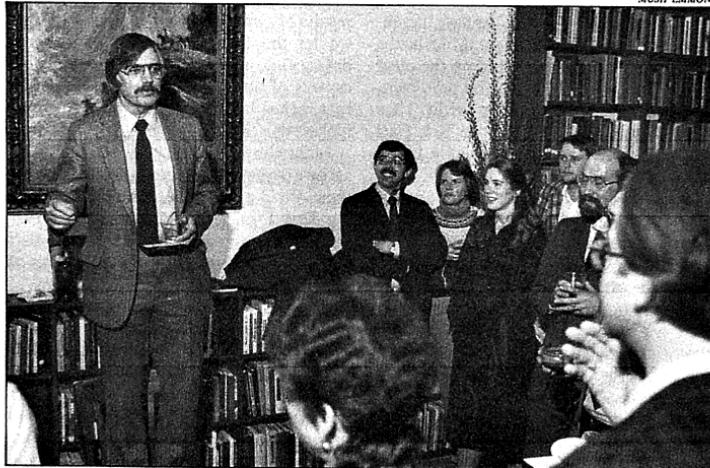
My friends were calling from my home state, North Carolina. Rose had won. Neal was winning, and Clarke might upset Bill Hendon, one of Watt's allies on the Interior Committee (Clarke did—by 1316 votes).

The office was frantic with activity late into the night as the results from the West came in. The Washington office's computer traded information with the San Francisco office's electronic equipment. The close votes in California kept staffers and volunteers in the San Francisco office on tent-erhooks for hours.

The next day we were still pulling it all together. Every network, the national news magazines, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post* and a lot more were calling to get the Sierra Club's reactions to the elections.

And how did we do? By any standard, incredibly well. In the Senate we were in 15 races and won 11. The Club had made 153 endorsements in House contests—and 121 won. In gubernatorial campaigns, 9 of 11 races went our way.

The Sierra Club did not "play it safe" by



Club President Denny Shaffer discusses the 1982 election at the SCCOPE victory celebration.

endorsing only probable winners. Many races were too close to call before the elections; of these, Sierra Club-backed candidates won 11 of 18 in House races, 3 of 5 in the Senate and 1 of 1 for governor.

Even in the contests the polls and experts said we wouldn't win, we made an impressive showing with 9 very sweet unexpected victories. Moreover, we won every race we were favored to win.

After the initial celebrations, a calmer mood of victory set in. We had done it. We built a marvelously effective political organization and managed to keep it running full speed while it was still under construction.

Our staff was magnificent in even the very toughest races. Media contacts, strategy sessions, coordination, record keeping and fund raising—all faultlessly accomplished. The Sierra Club came up with money, too—more than \$235,000 in cash and in-kind contributions to candidates.

But the best story, to no one's surprise, is the involvement of volunteers from virtually every Sierra Club chapter and group.

I was fortunate to travel during the campaigns on behalf of candidates. I met with or appeared for 20 candidates the Club endorsed for the House or Senate. Everywhere I went the enthusiasm and effectiveness of Sierra Club members was evident as they staffed phone banks and campaign offices, walked precincts, wrote, printed and distributed literature. They held fundraisers and contacted media, planned strategy and coordinated campaigns, and finally got out the vote. Thousands, even tens of thousands of volunteers were involved.

The environment was not "the" issue of the campaign, and we knew it would not be. Environmental issues did make the crucial difference in some campaigns; the involvement of environmentalists made a difference in many more.

Perhaps the greatest benefits are less obvious. I walked the streets of Asbury Park, New Jersey, with Representative Jim Howard; we held joint media interviews, had lunch together at the local pancake house (where his sister-in-law is the hostess). It

became clear to me that Representative Howard, chairman of the Public Works and Transportation Committee, has come to see the Sierra Club a bit differently. We have done more than just ask him to vote correctly on issues important to environmentalists. The Sierra Club has been there when we needed us, helping him to be reelected. Our relationship is different now—and better.

I spent a day in Michigan with Bob Carr and the Sierra Club members working for him. Although the economy was the central issue—unemployment is higher than 25% in parts of his district—Bob Carr saw the environmental vote as important. I received a note from him a few days before the election: "We're going to do it," he predicted, "and let the Sierra Club claim credit. They will deserve it." Representative Bob Carr will see the Sierra Club differently in the future, too.

It is a major, subtle accomplishment that elected officials now see us differently, as folks who are willing and able to help them get elected. Moreover, we've made it important for them to take positive positions on the environment. In 1980, many politicians ran on a frankly anti-environmental platform, against strong pollution regulation and for opening wilderness to oil, gas and mineral development. In 1982, virtually every candidate wanted to be able to claim some good environmental votes or a favorable environmental record. They seemed eager to separate themselves from James Watt and the Reagan administration's positions on environmental issues. It was a bit curious, even amusing, to see some unlikely candidates strain to find a way to depict themselves as friends of the environment. They were often ingenious, if unconvincing; their desire to make the effort was heartening, nonetheless. Finally, and most important, we accomplished what we set out to do. We have added to our tools and enhanced our ability to reach our goals. We can continue to educate and lobby—and now we can help our friends be elected.

The Sierra Club has thousands of volunteers who have built up experience in campaign work. Thousands who know now why we must be involved in electoral politics. Thousands who have the satisfaction of knowing that they, through their personal involvement, have changed the political climate in Washington, D.C., and in many state capitals.

All of us in the Sierra Club are proud of our accomplishments in this election. We are heartened, too, by this political strength as we look forward to 1984.

The Untold Stories

The political results of the Sierra Club's first major venture into national electoral politics are now history. But they're only part of the story—the public part. The untold stories—our personal, human experiences—are just as important. Our memories of what happened, how it felt, how we reacted.

We take care to preserve the political results of our Club activities, but too often we let the human history and personal drama fade away. Yet these are valuable aspects of our work, threads in the fabric that makes up the Sierra Club. I'd like to make a personal suggestion.

What I'm proposing to you is a sort of archive of the 1982 campaigns and our part in them. I'd like your help. The results will be a low-keyed, unofficial history of what part Sierra Club activists, volunteers and staff played. You might call it a folk version of "How We Spent the Election Campaigns." I like to think of it as the side of history that doesn't get told. You might like to think of it as memories for your grandchildren.

Let's get specific: Here's what I'd like you to do. Set aside half an hour or so and sit down at a typewriter or with a pen and paper. Write me your reminiscences—your memories and experiences. Tell me who you are, why you decided to get involved, what

you did, and what happened. Tell me, too, the stories of those who worked with you in the campaigns.

This isn't an essay contest, so you don't have to worry about fancy writing. There aren't any prizes—or any rules. Make it as long as you like; personally, I find details and anecdotes fascinating.

When you've finished, make a copy of what you've written for me. Put the original in your safe deposit box, and mail me the copy.

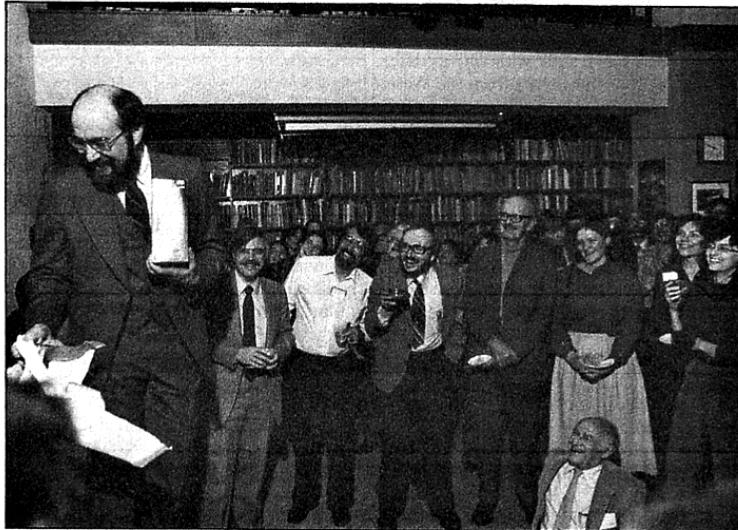
I'll see that these are all gathered together. They'll be read by those preparing for the 1984 elections. They will help us to evaluate not just the results, but the human involvement of our 1982 SCCOPE effort. We'll sort through them for vignettes that can be used by Club leaders to explain who we are and how we work. Then they will be neatly and carefully registered in the Bancroft Library, the official repository of Sierra Club archives.

The Sierra Club is so special and unique because of the involvement of people like you. We must not lose that human record. We must preserve for history more than the dry account of results that were so exciting in the making.

So take that few moments today to write your letter and mail it to Denny Shaffer, President, Sierra Club, 530 Bush Street, San Francisco, CA 94108. □

Denny Shaffer is the president of the Sierra Club.

Howard Saxon, national SCCOPE chair, hosts a celebration of SCCOPE victories during the November Board of Directors meetings.



MUSH EMMONS

APPENDIX E—

Memo to Sierra Club President Adam Werbach from Denny Shaffer, 11/7/97, regarding involving the grass-roots.

[1315] From: Denny Shaffer at Sierra-Club-SF 11/7/97 10:15AM (1811 bytes: 21
To: Adam Werbach-Private, David Brower at Internet, Michael Dorsey at Interne
Anne Ehrlich at Internet, Betsy Gaines at Internet, Chad Hanson at Internet
Susan Holmes at Internet, Mike McCloskey at Sierra-Club-DC, Chuck McGrady a
Internet, Richard Cellarius at Internet, Jim Dougherty at Sierra-Club-DC,
Mark Gordon at Internet, Leslie Reid at Internet, Sally Reid at Internet
To mailing list: #Board + Carl & Mike at Sierra-Club-SF,
#Past Directors and Presidents at Sierra-Club-SF
Subject: Should we focus on fewer issues nationally?

----- Message Contents -----

Adam, it seems to me that the organization must, from the top down, have a strategy to win the hearts and minds of the people of this country. I would not say the hell with issues, but I would start with the question of weather it will win the hearts and minds first. Fighting battles that diminishes us, means at some time we disappear. Others have shown how that is done.

In the field we must let folks fight the battles they want to fight. Your memo makes clear that you understand that. Sure you can organize them, give them tools, encourage them. But that does not mean beat them up daily because they are not working on the issue of the day, week, or month. The Club needs to ask not what the member can do for the Club, but what the Club can do for the member. (sorry...but true.)

As it is we have a system in place that often turns off the public, and a system in place that often turns off the Club activist. This is not a matter of issues. This is a matter of understanding, and caring about, someone other than self. The Club has trouble with that concept.

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ANN LAGE

Ann Lage is a principal interviewer for the Regional Oral History Office, UC Berkeley, in the fields of natural resources and the environment, University of California history, state government, and social movements. She has directed major projects on the Sierra Club since 1978 and on the disability rights movement since 1995. Since 1996 she has directed a project on the Department of History at UC Berkeley. She is a member of the editorial board of the *Chronicle of the University of California*, a journal of university history, and chairs the Sierra Club library and history committee. Ann holds a B.A. and M.A. in history from Berkeley.

