Karl Linn

Landscape Architect in Service of Peace, Social Justice, Commons, and Community

With an introduction by
Lisa Rubens, Ph.D.

An Interview Conducted by
Lisa Rubens, Ph.D.
in 2003 and 2004

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INTRODUCTION—Karl Linn

Karl Linn had already experienced fascist attacks in his native Germany, before Hitler came to power. In 1933 at the age of ten, he and his mother fled the Nazi state and settled in Palestine, where Linn's father had recently established residence. At the age of eighteen Linn completed a formal education in agriculture and helped to establish a socialist kibbutz. His life would remain marked by these early formidable experiences and follow a course in which he combined study and activism—responding to social injustice, mastering systems of knowledge to understand human development, and creating institutions and programs for community betterment. He was inspired and guided by an array of dynamic thinkers and doers, and he in turn influenced many others.

After a brief sojourn with Trotskyism, Linn left Palestine for Switzerland, seeking treatment for a back injury. He ended up earning a degree in Applied Psychology and moved to New York City in 1948, where he practiced child analysis and ran a school for emotionally disturbed children. Frustrated by the limitations of psychoanalysis, he revisited his love of horticulture and in 1952 established an exceedingly successful career as a landscape architect and designer. His work could be seen in the major corporate headquarters and watering holes in New York City—most notably in the Seagrams Building and its Four Seasons Restaurant—and in the expanding suburban upper middle-class residential communities surrounding the city.

His career took another radical turn, when he joined the Landscape Architecture Department of the University of Pennsylvania in 1959. There he encountered Lewis Mumford, Ian McHarg, Louis Kahn and a host of others who were reconsidering the nature of American cities, architecture, and social services. Linn and his students developed, in coordination with residents and institutions in a blighted neighborhood in Philadelphia, a neighborhood commons—a combined park and playground— independent of city financing. This became a model for neighborhood commons and other community design-and-build projects throughout the country. For the next twenty-five years Linn served on the faculties of prominent universities, such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology and New Jersey Institute of Technology, promoting community landscape design and resource development in the service of social justice and peace. He was active in the American Association of Landscape Architects and gave lectures and workshops at conferences and universities throughout the world.

Linn "retired" to Berkeley, California, in 1986. There he spent the remaining thirteen years of his life promoting environmental leadership by people of color, municipal support for grassroots greening efforts, and dialogue between Arabs and Jews. He guided the creation of a cluster of handcrafted neighborhood commons within lush community gardens graced by public art—receiving numerous awards and accolades for his work. He worked with the American Community Gardening Association to share these models, to raise awareness of and inspire others to organize gathering places where gardeners can socialize and build community.
This oral history continues the ROHO series on Architecture and Landscape Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Area, but shifts the focus to the community level, paying particular attention, in Linn's work, to disenfranchised communities of color. With the generous support of the Ford Foundation, ROHO will conduct a series of interviews with activists, intellectuals, and academics whose work intersected with that of Karl Linn and who were influenced by his ideas and his legacy.

When I began this interview Linn's brother had just died, and so mortality weighed heavily upon him. Linn had already prepared his voluminous files documenting his work and sources of inspiration in landscape architecture, environmental psychology, and the design and building of neighborhood commons, as well as his course syllabi, correspondence, conference records, and project designs, for deposit with UC's Environmental Design Library. So he was primed to reflect on his life with a narrative coherence and selected documentary evidence that sometime eluded probing. Karl Linn spoke with a very thick German accent and the transcription by Lea Barker was demanding but ably rendered. The text here is extensively edited.

Sadly, Linn died of acute leukemia, after he had edited his nine interviews but before a tenth, video, interview could be recorded. That interview was intended to capture the passionate and artistic way Linn approached his work. Linn was spirited and effervescent. A month before the onset of his illness, he was lecturing to architecture, landscape architecture, and planning students at UC Berkeley, communicating his deep and abiding commitment to social change, demonstrating his amazing and eclectic knowledge base, and inspiring yet another generation to ask questions and find means to better the human condition.

Lisa Rubens, Ph.D.

May 4, 2005

Berkeley, California
Interview 1: December 22, 2003

Linn: I’m Karl Linn, and I would like to introduce the oral history process emphasizing the special meaning the oral history project has for me.

Rubens: You were about to read something. When did you write this?

Linn: Just over the weekend, thinking about our meeting. This oral history project of the Bancroft Library came about at such perfect timing that rational planning could have never achieved. It happened in a most fortuitous and mysterious way. Catherine Cook, a good friend, participated in my joyous eightieth birthday celebration that brought together about 250 people during which about a dozen people shared their experiences of working with me in the service of community and peace. Catherine was working at UC Berkeley, knew about the Oral History Project, and suggested that I would be a perfect candidate for the project.

In my remarks at the birthday celebration, I mentioned my eagerness years ago to reach the age of seventy-seven so that I could experience the turn of the century. But the outpouring of good wishes and love at the birthday celebration inspired me to raise my expectation to reach the age of 100. Yet, having just returned from my brother’s memorial, I was eager to start the oral history project process at once—without delay. As one ages, one’s future becomes less certain. Having learned that the oral history project had expanded its goal of inquiry to include environmental activism, which has been the center of my work, I realized that the Bancroft Library would be a most fitting home for my work. Much of my work has been a pioneering effort, with its share of trials and tribulations. My reflection on my work in preparation for the oral history process has inspired me to go through my files, which should contain helpful information for students, colleagues, and other interested parties. Over a half a century of work is assembled—my writings, illustrations, project descriptions, and commentary. The oral history project will serve as a most helpful guide for mining this archive. My archive will become part of the Environmental Design Archives of UC Berkeley. To be able to share my work through the systematic interview process of the oral history project at this particular juncture of my life, is an extraordinary gift, a blessing from the cosmos.

Rubens: I’m glad this oral history project means a lot to you.

Linn: Honoring this extraordinary opportunity, I prepared myself and I wrote a twelve-page outline for ten interview sessions that I think will cover my life. We should attach it as an appendix. To substantiate the content, I selected some material from my archive that I would like to quote as we go along. Please review the outline. It will help both of us in guiding the interviews.

Rubens: But Karl, this not an autobiography. I want to push you to reflect on your life, perhaps from a different perspective. However let’s start with the basics about where you were born, when, who your parents were.
Linn: I would like to start the interview with a tribute to my ancestors, because in many ways they’ve been role models. And it’s absolutely amazing, as I looked into their backgrounds, how much inspiration I can still draw from their concerns and ways of life.

My grandfather on my mother’s side, Carl Rosenthal—Carl with a “c”—was a very successful banker and grain merchant in Berlin, who, in response of the persecution of Jews that happened earlier in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, wanted to assimilate to the existing culture, as did many west European Jews—to achieve Jewish security. He pursued a strategy of upward mobility in the face of anti-Semitism.

Rubens: So, despite his name, Rosenthal, he did not present himself as a Jew but as a German subject.

Linn: At that time, as a result of the French Revolution, which had brought about a renaissance in thinking, German Jews gained the right to own land and become full citizens. But what is so interesting to me is how the concern for Jewish security—security for survival—has motivated Jews to this very day. It also motivates me; my life has been a progression of strategies that held promise to ensure survival. I ended up not necessarily limiting my concerns to Jews, but thinking about human beings altogether.

Rubens: Sure. Did you know your grandfather?

Linn: No, but I knew my grandmother. Apparently, despite his financial success—my grandfather was considered one of the cleanest businessmen on Berlin’s Wall Street. He was very unhappy that he was not able to become an officer in the German army. My grandmother, who actually stayed with us at the beginning of my life, also came from a successful Jewish family. She was a very beautiful woman, and it took my grandfather four years to court her. They had four children, three boys and my mother, who was the only daughter and the youngest child. My mother, Henny Rosenthal, was born November 29, 1884, and grew up in a very supportive environment with loving parents who had a very close relationship with each other, and her brothers doted on her. She developed an inner security, which made it possible for her to accomplish all that she did later on in life.

Rubens: And did they identify as Jews at the time?

Linn: This wasn’t the focus of the Rosenthals. They really wanted to forget about their Jewishness. There was no celebration of Jewish tradition. My mother initially went to business school and became the only woman procurator (financial manager) in Berlin’s Wall Street. A very high-level financial advisor. She had her own fancy flat.

An amazing thing happened with my grandmother, who was very close to my mother. Although my mother was a good landscape designer, she didn’t sketch much. One day she sketched my grandmother floating over a bed. I still remember the sketch. This was the night that my grandmother died but before we received the news. My mother was in telepathic communication with her mother. Just like my sister with my brother who just died. Did I tell you about that?

Rubens: No, you didn’t.
Linn: My sister was ninety-eight. Because my father was a widower whose children my mother adopted, all his children are much older than I. I’m the only child of his second marriage. My sister just had a cancer operation, removing a big clump of cancer. When she came out of the operation, she asked her son for details about her brother’s death. My nephew told her, “You must have dreamt that, I didn’t say anything about Theo.” The next day, when I called to tell him that Theo had died, he was flabbergasted. Can you imagine what a strong telepathic connection existed between the siblings? My brother Theo was ninety-five when he died.

Rubens: Amazing. Can you tell me more about your mother’s family?

Linn: My grandmother was absolutely delighted that I had bluish eyes and blond hair, because I looked like an Aryan. As the color of my hair and eyes changed, it was painful to her. For years she and my mother kept a little box with my blond locks.

Rubens: So your grandmother lived in the household with you.

Linn: She lived with us for quite a while. Later she moved to a pension. Paula Wiesenburg was her maiden name. She was from Breslau. My mother’s brother Adolph was a gynecologist. My Uncle Moritz died in the civil war in Spain. My Uncle Otto installed railways in South America, where he died.

Rubens: How many children did your father have?

Linn: My father, Josef Linn, was a widower, who had three children, Bella, Theo, and Henry.

Rubens: And how much older was he than your mother? Was he much older?

Linn: He was around ten or fifteen years older than she was. My mother had found her financial success unfulfilling. She enjoyed meeting very inspiring people, many of whom were feminists and socialists. Some of them argued that in a healthy society people would move out of cities, return to the land, and work with nature.

Rubens: Where did she meet these people?

Linn: In Berlin. One such person was Gustav Landauer, a writer, humanist, and politician, and his wife Hedwig Lachman, herself a well-known writer and translator. Landauer founded Eden in Germany, the first collective settlement guided by an earth ethic. He was convinced that a spiritual revolution must take place in order for socialism to succeed.

Rubens: So your mother is in her early twenties—

Linn: Middle twenties.

Rubens: And she’s meeting these people in cafés or hearing them give talks. It's an effervescent time.

Linn: Exactly. Landauer lived from 1870 to 1919, when, as a political prisoner in Munich, he was killed by a German soldier. Another couple that my mother connected with was
Heinrich and Lily Braun, socialist humanists and writers who greatly influenced German youth. Heinrich edited a monthly, *Die neue Gesellschaft*, which means *A New Society*, and Lily Braun’s most famous book was *In the Shadow of the Titans* [*Im Schatten der Titanen*]. Among the first to struggle for women’s rights, Lily inspired my mother to become an early advocate of feminism. It’s really interesting how far back it goes, you know, the influences that affected my mother and, through her, influenced my life as well.

Rubens: Do you remember your mother talking to you about these people?

Linn: Not really. But my sister told me about it. Fortunately, I learned a lot of things about my parents from my sister.

Rubens: How come your sister told you instead of your mother?

Linn: I was too young. I was just a little kid. My sister was adopted when she was a teenager, and she was curious. I have always deplored that I was unable to engage a mature dialog with my parents because I was too young.

Rubens: Did you ever go back and read these works that influenced your mother?

Linn: I’ve read some of them. She was also influenced by the writing of psychologist and pedagogue Siegfried Bernfield (1892–1953). And there was another pedagogue, Gustav Adolf Wynecken (1875–1909), who promoted the Free School Movement. In these schools children lived in nature and learned not to be ashamed of their bodies and were encouraged to be in harmony with themselves.

Impacted by these influences, she abruptly dropped her business career, much to the surprise and dismay of her affluent, aspiring relatives. She entered a women’s school for horticulture, where she endured a lot of anti-Semitism as the only Jewish student. She was the only Jewish woman who ever graduated. The school was in Marienfeld, not far from Berlin.

She almost named me Neils after Neils Lyne, the protagonist in a novel by Danish poet and scientist Peter Jacobsen, a writer held in high esteem by poet Rainer Maria Rilke. But since Neils was a tragic figure, my mother decided not to name me after him.

Rubens: Had the career in banking been pushed on her by her father? After all, he was a banker and businessman.

Linn: I suppose my grandfather may have pushed her into the business career. But being a very secure woman, curious and alive, my mother became familiar with the then—prevailing thinking of socialists and pioneering nature-oriented educators.

Rubens: Would you have considered her a rebel at that time? Or did her parents?

Linn: I don’t really know. But I do know that she was very courageous, doing incredible pioneering work. After she graduated from horticultural school, she really wanted to work in nature with children. She spent a year in Belgium working in an orphanage in Nieuport, Belgium. What I never understood is why, since my grandfather was rich, my
mother had to borrow money to buy land. Something must’ve happened with the money. She bought a piece of land in Dessow, a very small village in northern Germany.

Rubens: Where is that?

Linn: Sixty miles north of Berlin, between Berlin and Hamburg. She designed and supervised the building of her own house in 1910, then started a fruit tree farm. At first she grew agricultural crops. Then she planted two thousand fruit trees. She had to import good soil, because the soil wasn’t very good for the trees. She used the first mechanized plow, which consisted of two steam engines, to which a plow was attached by a steel cable with six blades sticking out of the ground and six in the ground. One of the steam engines would pull the plow across, then the two steam engines would go ahead, and the other steam engine would pull the plow back. For a woman to do all that she did, in the midst of a very conservative population, where there were no other Jews around, is to me absolutely incredible. I don’t know how she ever did it.

Rubens: Do you know if she had any help at all? She must have hired some help.

Linn: Yes. She hired people from the village and worked with French prisoners of war to help build the house. It was difficult to get labor then because of the war. She developed wonderful relationships with everyone she dealt with. For all the holidays, all the workers got presents. She always remembered people’s birthdays. She paid special attention to people at the train station, the postman, and whomever she had contact with. Whenever people came by the farm, there was always room for them to sit down and share a meal or a snack. She really established herself in the village, becoming a member of the village council in charge of education and transportation.

She bought a total of fifteen acres. The plot with the house, barn, and orchard was more than twelve acres. The other, a meadow where she grew agricultural crops, was almost four acres. She did, or oversaw, all the grafting of the two thousand fruit trees—cherries, apples, plums, and pears.

Rubens: You learned this all from your sister?

Linn: Yes. I inquired. I asked my sister and brothers to tell me about it. My mother selected a wonderful painting to become her symbol. A painting by Francesco Cossa called Allegory of Autumn. It depicts a woman with a bunch of grapes and a spade in her hand. The trouble was, my mother couldn’t find a man who could deal with her emancipation.

For twelve years she built the farm all on her own. She called it the Immenhof, literally the beekeeper’s yard. She kept thirty-six beehives and seemed to have a wonderful relationship with the bees. I could never understand how that worked because the bees were not so happy with me. Most likely I expressed anxiety, which caused them to go after me.

The Immenhof became an accredited training center for gardeners. My mother was a master gardener, and people, especially young women, went there for training in order to enter the profession. Some of the trainees came from unstable emotional backgrounds. My mother looked at gardening as a healing profession, and the Immenhof also offered horticultural therapy.
Rubens: Had she had any training in horticultural therapy?

Linn: I don’t think so. This was before the concept of horticultural therapy had emerged, but I guess she was sensitive and insightful enough to practice it without formal training.

Rubens: It must have been in the air with all these other things, the socialists, and Freud.

Linn: Many of the trainees she recruited were Jewish women. That’s how she met my father, who was chief librarian in a Jewish center in Berlin, where she looked for recruits.

Rubens: What was his name?

Linn: His name was Josef Linn. According to his passport, he was born on January 28, 1877, but as far as he was concerned, it wasn’t in January but around Passover and in another year. We could never determine for certain what year he was born. He grew up in a small Russian town in Tscherei Mohilow next to Witebsk, the birthplace of painter Marc Chagall. His father, Schmuel, and my grandmother, Paula Aisikowa, raised six children. My father was the youngest. My grandfather was a rabbi, who, I was told, was the descendant of fourteen consecutive generations of rabbis. That most likely goes back to the Inquisition, when Jews were chased out of Spain.

Rubens: Do you know how long they were in Russia?

Linn: No. But what I do know is that my father, at seventeen, left for Berlin because he became inspired by the emerging Zionist movement that promoted Jewish security by trying to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Another reason he left that town was that my grandfather and a friend of his had made an arranged marriage, and he either did not like the young lady as they grew up or didn’t want to get involved in an arranged marriage. So he went to Berlin. My grandfather, ironically, challenged my father, saying, “I, as a religious Jew, am going now to Jerusalem to die. And you, as a Zionist are going to Germany.” Before he left Russia my father graduated from his rabbinical studies but never practiced.

My grandfather was a very devoted religious Jew who found spiritual security and realization of his life ambition in going, at his life’s end, to the Holy Land, the Promised Land.

Rubens: And, of course, this is a time when the whole idea of Zionism is taking shape.

Linn: But my grandfather had nothing to do with that.

Rubens: He was not a Zionist?

Linn: Not at all. In fact, religious Jews were waiting for the Messiah to liberate them and were not interested in establishing a Jewish state, which was the focus of Zionism.

Rubens: But he wanted to die in Jerusalem?

Linn: He wanted to die in Jerusalem. He was buried there. My father was inspired by the new social movement of Zionism and particularly attracted by those early Zionists who
wanted to create a new society based on social justice as a model for humanity. When he came to Berlin, he established the first Hebrew-speaking course at a local university.

Rubens: Why would it have been the first? Because it had been suppressed—?

Linn: Because it never existed before. At that time Hebrew had begun to evolve as a modern language. It had to incorporate centuries of new advances in technologies and sciences, which the Biblical language did not.

Rubens: It had been dead.

Linn: It was not dead at all. It was very actively used by religious Jews.

Looking through some documents, I found out that my father left Belorussia—White Russia, in 1899, came to Berlin, and started studying philosophy at Humboldt University between June and October 1899, when he switched to medicine. By May 1900, however, he had to admit that medicine was not for him. He couldn’t stand the sight of blood, and I inherited that from him. When he had to operate on the corpse of a very beautiful young lady, he fainted. And when he had to write a paper about the physiology of hearing, he wrote a long philosophical essay about the act of hearing. He went back to studying philosophy and matriculated on June 2, 1908.

My father edited and published the first magazine of modern Hebrew writers and poets, which came out from 1903 to 1906. It was called *Ha Keshet, The Rainbow*. An amazing thing happened: my sister’s son Amnon changed his surname to *Keshet* without knowing about the publication.

Rubens: His last name?

Linn: Yes. Isn’t that amazing? Miracles have happened! My father also published articles in a monthly called *Ost und West* from 1907 to 1928.

So, you see, in my own family, four different approaches to achieving Jewish security? One is represented by my mother’s father aspiring to assimilate into German society through upward social and economic mobility. By contrast my father’s father, as a religious Jew, found security by being buried in Jerusalem. My father aspired to assure security for Jews through establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. And my mother associated Jewish security with social justice and the healing power of nature.

Rubens: Do you think your father got caught up in some of the same world that your mother was inspired by?

Linn: Not at all. Much of my father’s writings dealt with the pogroms in east Europe. He tried to find employment and housing for the people who ended up in Berlin escaping the terrible massacres happening then. My father was influenced by his direct experience of the pogroms in east Europe, just as my mother’s father had been influenced by the pogroms that occurred earlier in west Europe.

Rubens: Tell me more about your father’s writings.
Linn: The magazine *Ha Keshet* and other publications my father wrote for portrayed the discussion between religious Jews who didn’t want any part of Zionism because it was much too secular and the east European Jews who wanted to go to Palestine and the west European Jews who wanted to assimilate. My father, as a historian and as a literary critic, also wrote a book, *The Evolution of the Hebrew Press*, which embraced a period from the 1860s to the late 1920s. It was published in Berlin in 1928 and is still used extensively by researchers. My father was known for his encyclopedic mind. He had incredible memory. He also was well known as a poet.

Rubens: So how is he making his living in this? As the librarian?

Linn: He became the chief librarian at the Jewish Community Center in Berlin. That was his regular job. But he also wrote articles and was paid for it. He gave a lot of lectures and promoted the whole emergence of Zionism. He was highly respected as one of the early founders of Zionism. He was also a friend of Albert Einstein.

In the early 1920s, during the great inflation in Germany, my father wrote a very small article for a New York paper. He received $25 and literally needed a wheelbarrow to carry home all the deflated German currency.

Rubens: He told you that story?

Linn: Right. I can picture him pushing the wheelbarrow, with all those paper notes.

Rubens: Yes, that’s an oft-described phenomenon in Germany during that period, people carrying money in wheelbarrows. Did your father tell you other stories about his work? Did you ask him about it?

Linn: A little bit. But, when I taught in Israel at the Technion (the Israeli institute of technology) in 1987, I went to libraries and dug up a lot of archival material. And my sister told me some about my father.

Rubens: Your father was really quite prolific. When did he and your mother get married? At what point or phase of their lives?

Linn: He was first married to another Russian immigrant, a physician, whom he apparently met during his brief time in medical school. They had to go every week, with their children, to the police station to register as refugees. She was told that if she would be willing to work in the hospital for tuberculosis, they wouldn’t have to go there every week. So she agreed, but then she died of tuberculosis in 1917. My siblings shared with me their memories of seeing her bleeding to death at the top of a staircase. Her death was a tremendous shock to them. My father put the two boys in an orphanage in Dienstlakan in 1919. My sister, who kept house for my father, was very unhappy that the women my father associated with wouldn’t adopt the children. But my mother did. They were in their teenage years in 1922 when my mother married my father and adopted his three children. My brother Theo, who became a physicist, told me that he was really inspired by the discussions he had with my mother about nature, which aroused his curiosity about natural science.
Rubens: How did your father, as a Zionist, deal with your mother’s lack of connection with Jewish culture?

Linn: I discovered in the periodical *Ha Keshet*, which my father published, an advertisement for my mother’s farm, “Recognized, accredited center for the training of gardeners.” In addition to “Wonderful nature,” the ad mentions “teaching in Hebrew.”

Rubens: And what is he doing at the farm? And how does your mother’s family respond to her marriage?

Linn: That’s what he tried to contribute. But he was there only weekends.

We had a horse, two cows, pigs, and poultry. It took my father, most likely, quite a few years to expel the pigs. Although he was not a religious Jew, the pigs, I guess, were too much for him. It must have bothered him even more that my mother cured a pig to celebrate my birth.

When my mother decided to marry an east European Jew, her family flipped out. Because the west European Jews were very scared that the east European Jews would diminish their success in assimilation. My Uncle Adolph—the gynecologist—had become an officer in the army, much to the delight of my grandfather, I’m sure. He severed his relationship with my mother when she married, which was very painful to her.

His first wife and son had spent a lot of time at Immenhof before her marriage. There was a car accident with Adolf driving: the door opened up and his wife and child fell out and died. Despite his intimate connection with my mother, her marriage to an east European Jew destroyed it.

Fortunately, the occasion of my birth brought about a reconciliation. My uncle came to the birth, and I became a sacrificial lamb for assimilation, branded with a very Germanic name—Ulrich Karl.

Rubens: Ulrich Karl?

Linn: Ulrich Karl. I’m still not at home with my name. The nickname for Ulrich is Ulli. So, when we escaped Nazi persecution to Palestine, I chose a name; phonetically the closest was Eli. So my diploma from the Kadoorie School of Agriculture in Palestine says Eli Linn.

Rubens: When did you start being known as Karl Linn?

Linn: That is another story to tell.

Rubens: Why not tell it now?

Linn: When I went to Switzerland to study, I went back to my old name, Ulrich Karl Linn, which is printed on my diploma from the Institute of Psychology in Zürich. But since the “Ulrich” always bothered me, I dropped it. When my brother Henry filed an affidavit for me to come to the United States in 1947, he told me that there’s no such
thing as Karl in the English language. He had come here before me and become a very successful businessman, making a very superficial adjustment to American culture. He said I should call myself Charles. Little did I know! So I came here as Charles L-i-n. Later my son’s mother Anita asked me, “Can’t you possibly add an ‘n’ to your name, because Charlie Lin is too close to Chinese hand laundry?” So, I’m stuck now with Karl L-i-n-n.

Rubens: You didn’t take “Charlie?”

Linn: The first year, I did. Even now—my wife, Nicole, who also escaped Nazi persecution in Belgium, always writes my name with “C,” not as “Karl.” Actually, my father wrote under two names, L-i-n and also L-i-o-n. Somebody must have dropped the “o” from Lion, as they crossed borders. Someone suggested that centuries ago our name might have been De Leon. These various aliases reflect the heavy price I had to pay for my own deep-rooted survival insecurity. To this very day I’m unable to identify with my name. Experiencing great affinity for Spanish culture and music, I fantasize about going through another name change, especially since some of my friends have already begun to call me Carlos.

Rubens: So tell me more about your birth and early childhood.

Linn: I was born in 1923. As I mentioned before, to celebrate my birth my mother decided to cure a pig, which must have disturbed my father. But there was some divine intervention, because a spark from the fire burned the roof of the house. This was one month before I was born; and, as a consequence of the damage from the fire, I was born in a Catholic hospital.

I grew up in the incredibly beautiful environment of the Immenhof, which lives on most vividly in my childhood memories as a sensual world of beauty, taste, and scent. I felt deeply connected and at home there. In springtime, a vast orchard of two thousand fruit trees blossomed into snowdrifts of masses of white and pink flowers framed by a blue sky sparkling in bright sunlight. In the summer, the ripe sweetness of cherries, plums and berries tempted me to eat until I had no appetite for meals. So that’s where I grew up. My deepest roots are there at the Immenhof. I can close my eyes and instantly call up a vivid memory of my mother and sister working with other women, tilling the earth, propagating, pruning, spraying fruit trees, harvesting, packaging, shipping, and preserving fruits, and caring for animals. My family’s daily life, recreation, and celebration reflected the rhythm of the changing seasons and gave formal cadence to the days of my childhood.

Rubens: She literally worked? You would see her on the land, pruning—

Linn: Everybody worked, yes.

Rubens: Tell me a little bit else about what was taking place.

Linn: Since the farm was about half a mile from the village, I had no company of other children, which upon reflection seems so contradictory to what my mother wanted to do, to raise children in nature. It may have been a result of economic pressure that she ended up training apprentices in gardening rather than working with children. So I made
a special connection with trees and plants. Today you would call it a deep ecological connection. I really feel the bond, which also reflects my whole sense of being now. Nature really became my temple; the dome of stars is my place of worship. So you might call me a pagan, because really I don’t relate to any organized religion. Not Jewish religion, but nature.

Rubens: Let me ask you a few questions just to get the overview. You lived on that farm until how old?

Linn: Until about eleven.

Rubens: Do you remember having toys?

Linn: I had a lot of toys. I had a special playroom. I was an only child and my mother tried to take as good care of me as possible. And my sister helped a lot.

Rubens: Your sister was not married yet?

Linn: No. She was about seventeen years old then. She was my surrogate mother. In fact, the German word for vice president is called Vizepräsident, and vize is very phonetically close to Mitze, which is an endearing name for pussycat. Since I had a great fondness for cats, I called her my Mitze mother. She spent a lot of time with me, telling me stories while putting me to bed in my own little room, which had a tile furnace. In winter she would put the feather bed against the furnace and warm it. I was really very well taken care of. But I had no role models in terms of other children. I was always center stage. When I was little, my mother brought a little girl to play with me. I hugged her and kissed her and she got all frightened. I didn’t know how to relate.

Rubens: How come your mother didn’t have more children?

Linn: My mother told me that it was hard for her to nurse me. She said I bit her nipples too much. A psychoanalyst later on suggested, when I told my story, that most likely my father was jealous, that it was too sexual for him to see mother nursing.

I felt very lonely and so much wished I had a sister close to my age. I felt unsupported in terms of my own peer group. I’m mentioning it now because I think that my search for community goes back to that deprivation. When I went to school, I was the only Jewish kid. And I knew that the church was not a place for me to go. When my brother Henry, Heinz in German, tried to explain to me what a church is, I said, “Oh, I understand. It’s God’s office.” The only thing we did that was Jewish was lighting candles on Friday. We celebrated Hanukkah and also Christmas. We had a Christmas tree, so I got double presents.

Rubens: Did you observe Passover?

Linn: Yes, partially.

Rubens: But you did not go to a synagogue?

Linn: Not at all.
Rubens: And is the farm doing well enough?

Linn: During the first twelve years of development before I was born, they had no electricity and no toilets. We had an outhouse. And even when I was little, we had to make a fire around the pump in the courtyard to unfreeze it.

I still remember the kerosene lamps and the candlelight, which are much more appealing to me than electricity, much softer. The farm was hooked up with electricity in 1920. At that time, also, cars and trucks became more prevalent, so that we no longer had to use the big, horse-drawn wagons to take the fruit to the railway station. The trucks were loaded at the Immenhof and driven to the market. The fruits were so well liked that they got a high price in Berlin’s wholesale market, and they were also sent to all kinds of restaurants. The Immenhof was not only an accredited training center for gardening but it became officially a model farm.

It was my responsibility to clean the courtyard. That was my little piece to take care of. That’s why I always feel so at home in the community garden and always go around picking up papers and checking that everything is okay. Being able to care for a piece of land, especially one you don’t own, is a very special privilege. To be a caretaker, to me, is the most noble profession—taking care of living things and of the earth—or being a gardener or parent or teacher, you know, allowing plants and people to grow naturally in their right supportive niche.

Some of my friends in Germany are working to put together a publication about my mother’s pioneering work, both as a feminist and also a professional person. Growing up in a family that was very supportive emotionally and feeling very secure, she was able to accomplish so much as a single woman in an era when women were treated as second-class citizens. But money to operate the farm was a problem she struggled with, and my father—who was completely unworldly—often tried to assert a manly role, in ways that weren’t very helpful. It wasn’t easy for my mother. According to my siblings, I grew up with friction between my parents over money issues, which undermined my security despite the bucolic environment. This childhood experience has haunted me throughout my life; it’s difficult for me to deal with anger and intense arguing.

Rubens: Is there some sense for you that, starting in the twenties, the farm is not able to be kept up?

Linn: No, they kept up the farm, right up to 1934 when we escaped.

Rubens: Do they electrify? Do they modernize?

Linn: They electrified and installed plumbing and indoor toilets. There was continuous development of modernizing the farm and making it more efficient.

Rubens: Why do you think your mother married your father?

Linn: I’ll tell you exactly what my mother told me. Because he was a strong person in his own right. He had his own career. He was a visionary. Both of them were pioneers in their own ways. Both of them realized their own visions. So she felt he had a central strength that other men, who couldn’t deal with her emancipation, didn’t have. She needed some
space for herself. My father needed space for himself. They were both very mature, self-realized people when they met.

Rubens: How did your parents’ relationship affect you?

Linn: I had a wonderful relationship with my mother. I remember in my childhood I would go into her office, which was her library, where she had books from floor to ceiling—German, English, and French classics—philosophy, pedagogy, poetry—many new editions straight from the publishing house. The content of these books dominated the discussions that took place at mealtimes, reflecting concerns about society, about poetry, and other intellectually stimulating issues.

My mother had a wonderful flair for throwing parties and having people participate. She always engaged people in the preparations. She would cut huge branches of flowering fruit trees and bring them into the house. The house was always full of flowers; but, when parties happened, the house was decorated in very special ways. I must have inherited something from her, because I love to create an ambience for parties and other gatherings with candlelight and flowers.

I felt deeply loved by my mother, except when she, I guess, fussed with my father, and would sometimes slap me, which was very humiliating. But I was really secure, deep, deep inside, that here was a person who really loved me. Unconditionally.

My father was much more of an ominous person, who only spent weekends at the Immenhof and brought people from Berlin, because it was a wonderful recreation setting. Sometimes I would run after him on Monday mornings and ask him not to go to work. Frequently he would argue with me, trying to get me to come down from trees that I had climbed, and I never would. So there was a kind of an Oedipal situation: I felt supported by my mother and loved to climb into her bed and she would show me the advertising that came with the newspapers. But on Friday evenings I couldn’t do that any more. I was displaced! I experienced my father as a competitive, ominous person. I believe that this childhood experience is what made it difficult for me to deal with corporate hierarchy later in my life.

Rubens: When your father brought people from Berlin, was there a lot of discussion about new ideas?

Linn: Yes, but I was too young at this point to really take it in. I have a vivid memory of my eyes being at the height of the tabletop and seeing the scary underworld of old oak table legs with big claws.

Rubens: But you’re eleven—

Linn: My memory of the tabletop is from a younger age. Let me tell about my school years. Does all this give you a sense about my life on the farm?

Rubens: Oh, yes, very much so.

Linn: First of all, I was the only Jewish kid in the village. But there was another difference that made me feel like an outsider. Most of my schoolmates were children of peasants,
many of whose parents worked on the farm. And I was middle class. When I revisited the village, as an adult, I saw a picture of our class. I was sitting in the middle wearing fancy clothes, with bushy hair, and all my classmates with crewcuts. So I was also an outsider on a class basis. I remember climbing trees ferociously so that my clothes would be torn and later on patched, to look more like the clothing of my schoolmates. To be an outsider was always very difficult. But this was also the root of my concern for equality and social justice. I experienced the burden of being from a privileged strata of the society.

My experiences of being an outsider were corroborated when I went back to the Immenhof for the first time after forty-two years, in 1986 as a Fellow of the German Academic Exchange Service, teaching and doing research in Germany. I was able to spend enough time there to apply for and receive a visa to East Germany, which at that time was governed by the Communist regime. I saw our farm again and met with some of my old schoolmates, such as Martin Probst, one of the sons of the butcher, who was a close friend. When he saw me, he hugged me and exclaimed, “Are you really THE Ulli?” It was very touching. I felt like the lost child of the village. Because nothing much had changed in their lives in East Germany. They were much more concerned and curious about what had happened to us than I had ever been about them. Martin also said, “Look, we had a wonderful time playing soccer together, except that you weren’t really a part of us. You played soccer in new boots and we played barefoot. You had a bicycle, and we did not. But we were very relieved that you were able to escape in 1934, because in 1935 villagers were summoned to a larger town to witness a public spectacle as a cart was pulled around a courtyard with a young Jewish woman tied with strings, and hot tar poured over her and feathers stuck onto her.” The Germans had to learn how to ridicule Jews. So, they were aware that I was of a different class and race.

I remember having arguments with my schoolmates about Moses and Christ. Little did I know about any of them! But then they told me that Jews used Christian babies’ blood to make matzoh on Passover. Hearing this, I was deeply disturbed because I could sense the potential for tremendous violence and rage at the root of this belief. Being an outsider was not the most supportive environment for a child to grow up in. Our school was in a very small building with two rooms, and two teachers, each of whom kept four grades busy, often with a little disciplinary bamboo stick, which we rubbed with onion juice so it broke when you were hit. When you were at the last bench up against the wall of the first room, you graduated to the fifth year.

In 1932, all of a sudden, big posters appeared from the emerging Nazi movement. The words and images of these posters carried the message: “Destroy the Jews!” It was very scary. I could also hear that message in Hitler’s shrill voice on the radio.

To this day, I feel my stomach being pierced by that knife. It was really overpowering and I never went back to school. Fortunately, my mother found a young Jewish woman who had lost her teaching job and hired her to be my tutor. One day, my father introduced me to a tall man with a black coat and a long beard who was supposed to teach me Hebrew, but he stank of garlic so much that I wouldn’t have anything to do with him. I don’t know whether my reaction resulted from an exaggerated German-Jewish snobbism that looks at garlic-smelling Polish Jews in a derogatory way or some other factor, but to this day I can’t smell garlic without throwing up. My schoolmates suggested I join the Hitler Youth Movement. They told me they had a lot of fun.
camping, and so on. A few months later, they realized that I was the only target they could practice anti-Semitism on. It was tremendously painful to me, because without any change on my part, all of a sudden, through the glasses of racial difference, I became their enemy rather than a schoolmate. This experience is so deeply anchored in me that I really understand what racism means. One day they lifted me bodily onto a chair, and forced me to sing a song about “Jews’ blood drops from a knife.” Apparently the son of the minister instigated the incident.

Rubens: So you were tutored at home about a year?

Linn: Yes. And my mother and sister started burning books and papers during February and March of 1933 after Hitler took power at the end of January.

Rubens: Why?

Linn: To remove controversial material, because our library was full of free-thinking writers.

Rubens: Was your father in agreement with that?

Linn: I don’t know, since he was away during the week. April 1, 1933, was the day the German boycott of Jewish businesses began. Germans were not allowed to buy from Jews, and Jews were not allowed to sell, which undermined our economic base. We had a wonderful relationship with the wholesale merchants, and they were very sad that they could no longer buy from us.

That same day my sister discovered two packs of newspapers at the gate to the farm. And all of a sudden two Nazis came in uniform and asked for my father. I remember they cornered him with their pistols—a gun in front and a gun in back. They said, “We’ve come to search your house. If we find any incriminating evidence, we will take you away.” They proceeded to search the house and made a shambles out of it, like a pogrom had hit it.

Rubens: You remember this?

Linn: Yes, vividly. They pushed my father from room to room like cattle. They emptied all the drawers and cabinets in the house, and they also ransacked the big barn. So my father got very scared.

Rubens: You literally remember this?

Linn: Yes. A month later, he fled to the land of his dream, to Palestine. We tried to follow, but we needed to sell the farm first. We didn’t have enough money to escape.

Rubens: Did he take his other children, his daughter?

Linn: My two brothers studied in Berlin. Theo studied physics, and Heinz studied medicine. As Jews, they couldn’t continue studying. Since both their parents were not German-born, they lost their citizenship. Since my mother was German-born, I retained my citizenship. Being stateless, Theo went to Prague and later on to Basel, Switzerland, to get his Ph.D. in physics. Heinz went to Palermo in Sicily, continued his studies in
medicine, and was beginning to become a good surgeon, but couldn’t afford to complete his training. He went to Cuba, and later to the United States where he became a businessman. My sister, Bella, who also studied landscape architecture in Berlin, returned to the Immenhof and stayed with us.

Rubens: So your father went alone to Palestine?

Linn: Right. To him it was a life-and-death matter since they threatened to kill him. My father never wrote any articles critical of the government. The Nazis had planted the newspapers as an excuse to threaten us and eventually dispossess us and take over the farm.

During the next fifteen months, not being able to sell our fruit, our economy became very stringent. Being the only man at home, I tried to participate and started to eat less, which was my interpretation of how to help.

I also changed my books around. I had the Dr. Doolittle books, which had red covers, and I knew that red was a scary color Nazis didn’t like, so I put them in the front row. And also two toy guns, I made very visible. In my own childish mind, I tried to protect the family as best I knew. But from time to time, the Nazis would come and look, search the house, and I could always hear the goosestep on the cobblestone roads from the village to the farm. To this day, whenever I hear ladies in high heels on a pavement, I re-experience the threat of Nazi soldiers.

Rubens: What were they looking for?

Linn: They were trying to find a pretext to take the farm away. My mother and my sister had started negotiating with the owner of the local guesthouse who insisted we keep the farm in tip-top shape. Trees were severely pruned so that in the following year, which was also very favorable climatically, the farm produced a bumper crop. One day, my brother Heinz saw two young men in SS and SA uniform who came and screamed, “The Jews are not entitled to own pure German soil.”

The Nazi government started introducing laws to take land away from Jews. The owner of this guesthouse put all kinds of conditions on the farm to delay the sale, hoping that he could get it for nothing when the Germans came out with a new edict, which they did later on. In the meantime, Nazi inspectors came and devaluated the farm by, I think, 75 percent. At the same time they noted that it was in tip-top shape. We had to keep it in tip-top shape to satisfy the sale.

I remember enduring fifteen months of ongoing house searches and hearing Hitler’s voice on the radio, screaming “Destroy the Jews.” And at the same time, seeing the Nazi posters and having the telephone disconnected during the night and tapped during the day. I felt like a cornered fox on a hunt. All around, no support whatsoever, except when, in the summer of 1933, after the Nazi takeover, my parents made contact with another Jewish family who were packing up to go. They wanted to get their kids out of the way, so their two sons stayed with us. For the first time, I had peer contact with other Jews and other middle-class people. During the winter I stayed with them for a few months. But those were scary, scary months.
Rubens: Did you hear from your father during those fifteen months?

Linn: I’m sure we did, but I don’t remember it.

Rubens: And did your mother seem scared, for the first time in your life?

Linn: My mother tried to reassure me before 1933. Like many German Jews, she thought that the Nazi movement was like a big advertising campaign and encouraged me not to pay attention. They would come and go. She was so deeply rooted in the German culture that she didn’t really associate with Judaism much and certainly didn’t think of leaving. But after the house searches, which were very serious, she could not be very reassuring.

She never wanted to go to Palestine. She only went for my sake, because she felt it was a country that would secure a good future for children. She would have preferred to go to England, feeling much more at home in European culture. On July 4, 1934, after completing the sale of the Immenhof at a fraction of its value, we were finally able to escape. Then we had to pay 25 percent of our money to the German authorities to obtain a permit to flee. My mother had to have a capitalist visa, which required a deposit of 1,000 English pounds to prove that she would not be a burden to the British mandate in Palestine. Fortunately, we had enough money for that.

My sister couldn’t get a visa automatically, because she was stateless, so we went through Switzerland and spent six weeks in Torbole, a wonderful resort on the Lago di Garda in northern Italy, not far from Milan, waiting for her visa application to be processed. Eventually she qualified for a visa because she was a professional gardener, which they needed in Palestine, and could prove that she would be self-supporting.

Rubens: What do you remember, literally, about packing up and escaping?

Linn: The worst thing for me was saying goodbye to my dog, Rolf. I told him that I’d see him in twenty years. I tried to be an adult and push down my own anxiety, so as not to exacerbate the situation. I was the only man in the house and I shouldered all kinds of responsibilities kids usually do not.

Rubens: Can you tell me more about your trip?

Linn: We went first to Switzerland. As we crossed the border, I looked out of the window and tried to find the red line that I had seen in geography books! [laughs] We were delighted at being able to escape. We spent a few days in Switzerland, and then went on to Italy. We had to wait about two months for my sister’s visa and spent a lot of that time in a villa-like resort hotel in Torbole on the shores of Lago de Garda in northern Italy.

Being in Torbole was a treat; apparently Goethe had spent time there too. There were some Nazis staying at the resort. I was glad to not be in Germany, but I envied the Nazis because they obviously enjoyed a sense of community. What’s even more contradictory is that sometimes I would hum Nazi songs: “SA marschiert die Reihen fest geschlossen….” It was a very paradoxical kind of experience.

Eventually we went south and visited Venice on our way down to Naples, where we boarded a ship to Palestine.
Rubens: What do you remember, particularly, about the ship?

Linn: I was curious about the classes and visited the first and second class.

Rubens: What class did you sail?

Linn: We sailed tourist class, which was very luxurious. But the others were kind of extravagant.

Rubens: On this ship, were there a lot of refugees?

Linn: I don’t remember. Maybe not, since we had to escape very early. Once we landed in the port of Haifa, my father came and picked us up, but we didn’t recognize him at first. In 1933, when my father escaped from Berlin, the library had two ways of compensating him for his many, many years of significant service—either giving him a lump sum or sending him monthly installments. He took the lump sum, stuck it in his back pocket, and it was stolen on the ship, although his papers were returned. He was so upset, having devoted his life to Zionism and having helped Jews escaping pogroms to settle in Germany. He was embarrassed to tell us about the loss. He had developed an ulcer from stress and from eating very poorly and had lost his pudgy stomach. We literally didn’t recognize him when he came to greet us.
Interview 2: December 29, 2003

Rubens: We ended last week talking about the trip to Palestine, your arrival in Palestine. How old were you when you landed?

Linn: Eleven.

Rubens: What are your first memories? Where did you live?

Linn: My father had rented a house in Bat Galim, on the outskirts of Haifa, right on the Mediterranean. I really enjoyed a lot the proximity of the ocean and being able to go swimming every day.

Rubens: What had he been doing that he could make some money, having had his money stolen?

Linn: He started a new library, called the Pevsner Library in Haifa, from scratch. It became a well-known library. My sister told me later on that somebody plagiarized his contributions, and she tried hard to reestablish his name as the founder of the Pevsner Library, but wasn’t able to do so. My father was an idealist. No matter whatever happened to him, he was never critical of Zionism. That’s why he was so pained when his money was stolen by Jewish immigrants on this ship. But he was also amazingly impractical, unlike all his compatriots, who were idealists but also had a practical streak. He had none.

Rubens: But he made a living. He could rent a house.

Linn: Yes, but it was always minimal. We shared the house with the owners.

Rubens: Did you go to school?

Linn: I went to school for a year in Haifa, and during one year learned to speak Hebrew. Then I went to another school in Kiryat Motzkin in the Haifa Bay.

Rubens: What did your family do to secure a livelihood?

Linn: We started to build a new farm in the Haifa Bay, between Haifa and Akko, in the little village of Kfar Bialik. The farmers were all German refugees, mostly doctors and lawyers and other professionals who had no inkling of farming. We were the only family with a farming tradition. But we were also not very accustomed to the new climate. Since we also grew watermelon, we watered them too much and they ended up the size of grapefruits.

Rubens: What did the farm look like?

Linn: The farm had three pieces of land; one surrounding the house, that was covered with moving sand dunes. We had to plant very fast growing legumes to establish a wind-breaking hedge. Then we had another larger piece of land that was very fertile soil, and the third piece on a hill that had very porous soil and was good for fruit trees. On top of
the hill was a cement watchtower. At the end of the other side of the hill a barbed wire fence was built to protect the fruit trees, separating the orchard from Arab pastures. From the watchtower one could see a little grove of trees where the Arab shepherds brought their flock to the shady spring in the midst of the grove.

I was very proud at the age of twelve to be able to defend our plantation because Arabs would pull some of the trees out. We were given whistles; we learned Morse code and each of us youngsters had their own turn to watch the field from the tall watchtower. When Arabs came to pull out trees, I would blow the whistle.

Having been uprooted by the Nazis and displaced from the land I was raised on, I was amazed to learn years later that the hill was an Arab cemetery. I could imagine how Arabs would feel looking at the area beyond the barbed wire at a hill where Jewish settlers planted trees on top of the graves of their ancestors? That is why I feel very sad about what is happening in the Middle East. I carry a heavy burden that my life was saved escaping Nazi persecution, by becoming a settler who displaced other people. Our land was bought from absentee Arab feudal landlords, displacing Arab sharecroppers.

I had another experience that was very confusing. For a year before we escaped Germany there was a German boycott of Jewish merchandise, including our fruits. Germans were not allowed to buy from Jews, and Jews were not allowed to sell. When we had just moved into our new house in Palestine, Arabs came with camels to sell their wares. All of a sudden, I saw young Jews come with big posters that said, “Don’t buy from Arabs. Don’t hire Arabs. Hire only Jewish labor.” I got really mixed up. I couldn’t understand because I saw similar signs in Germany. This had an impact on me early on, much deeper than I realized.

Rubens: How had your family acquired this land?

Linn: Though the British had a mandate to Palestine, Jews got land from a Jewish agency for ninety-nine years. My mother, having sold the Immenhof, had some money to buy the land and build a house.

Rubens: Was this a collective settlement?

Linn: Not a collective but a cooperative settlement; that means we were able to market our produce through the cooperative.

Rubens: How did your parents operate the farm?

Linn: My sister, who had become a master gardener in Germany, really shared a lot of the responsibility and work for the farm. She grew vegetables, flowers, and had chickens. My mother couldn’t take the climate very well—it was too hot for her; she had health problems. My father had an ulcer; he was operated on. It’s the only time I beat him at chess. [laughs] The only thing the doctor prescribed him to eat was ham, which was an irony because we had to buy it from a German section in Haifa, and ham is not a kosher meat. My father, because he spoke Hebrew, continued doing the same thing he did in Germany, namely butting into things he didn’t know much about. We ended up with a chicken coop that could have been an air raid shelter. It’s the only chicken house that
had cement walls. Somebody took him for a ride giving him that idea. We lost more and more money. We had to sell our piano and other possessions. When my sister married and moved away, I dropped out of school at fourteen to keep the farm going. I was already working a lot on the farm during weekends and vacations. I assumed financial responsibility for my two ailing parents and myself, growing vegetables and flowers and chickens, which was very hard for me not only physically, but the financial responsibility, which I voluntarily assumed, was overwhelming.

Rubens: Did you get help from any members of the cooperative?

Linn: No, I did not. The other settlers, either the men were more able-bodied or their children were older than me. I always prided myself on being able to grow vegetables as effectively as most of the others, because we had a farming tradition. But the burden was really difficult, and after doing it for a couple of years I thought of suicide. I remember I cried when I didn’t have money to buy a load of manure. I went along with shoes with holes in the soles. So I know what poverty is.

Rubens: But you literally were alone out there. There was no council?

Linn: At that time I joined a coeducational scout movement which provided much peer support. The scout movement was part of the whole pioneer youth movement, and we all were dedicated to building a new homeland for Jews, based on justice and equality. It was a wonderful vision. And since a lot of Russian immigrants came there, there was always this Soviet influence. Still, today—you heard me play a Russian song on the harmonica in the film, *A Lot in Common*, that I showed at my eightieth birthday? I was happy wearing a shirt that had a turtleneck with embroidery like the Russians wear.

Rubens: Who were the leaders? Were any of these people influential to you?

Linn: One person who was most influential in my life was a wonderful teacher at the school in Kiryat Motzkin, which I went to after we moved to the Haifa Bay. My teacher’s name was Moshe Zvorai, a very famous man today. He inspired me to join the scout movement. He spent wonderful times with many of us, camping, stargazing, dancing, inculcating in us the whole new mission of what it means to be part of a movement that created a new society. So it was very inspiring. Though I was dead tired and the financial burden and the physical work was very heavy, I felt rejuvenated participating in activities with other young people.

Rubens: You kept it up.

Linn: Right. The first year when I took over the farm, I also hired somebody to help me in the transition. So I had an employee, who taught me work discipline. Sometimes when I would hoe and take a rest, he would throw a clump of earth at me, and say, “Look, don’t stop. We are going to have regular resting times, then you rest. While you work, you work.” He also taught me judo and jujitsu. We made a big mat out of straw, then practiced on it.

Rubens: Did you talk to your parents at night? Did they direct your reading and work and administration of the farm?
Linn: Since I was head of the household, in a sense, I was also short-tempered. It was a complete role reversal. I will always remember I saw my father sitting on a little tripod thinning out carrots so they could grow. He looked like a real defeated man to me. And my mother suffered terribly. She could barely cook a meal, and since we had so little money, I couldn’t—as other farmers did—send the produce through the cooperative to the market. But I took a bag of vegetables on my bicycle, brought it to a local grocery store in exchange for groceries, then brought the groceries home. This is why I still have backaches, which I got a few years later, because I always had to carry heavy bags of fertilizer and produce on my back, and it shrunk the space between my vertebrae. This was while I was still a teenager.

Rubens: When you’re supposed to be growing. You were fourteen.

Linn: The young people who were closest to Moshev, he recruited into an underground paramilitary organization, which was called Etil (National Military Organization). I remember we were all dismayed since the British wouldn’t let ships land with refugees from Europe. Many ships capsized, and many ships were returned, putting Jews right into the hands of the Nazis so they ended up in concentration camps. So, I joined this organization because our motto was “Never Shall We Walk Docilely into the Gas Chamber Again.” We learned how to use guns. This group blasted the King David Hotel [July 22, 1946] and killed the British Administrator Count Bernadotte. These acts were initiated by people who called themselves freedom fighters, while others called them terrorists. They got the British out. I know there were also a lot of fights with the Arabs, but I really focused much more on the British Mandate, who favored the Arabs and therefore limited the immigration of Jews.

Rubens: So, did you literally shoot guns?

Linn: I didn’t shoot, but I learned it. After a few years of doing so, I was bothered by the regimentation of the group, which was very militaristic. Our officers wore leather boots right up to the knees. They looked too much like the Nazis with their boots. I realized it really wasn’t my cup of tea. Violence hasn’t been, for many reasons.

Some people have a deep impact on your life, especially when you’re young. Often a lifelong bond develops with those people. In 1986, when I was able to spend half a year in Israel as a guest professor at the Technion (Israel Institute of Technology), that gave me a chance to visit Moshev Zvorai. He lives in a two-story building in the West Bank, and he complained that Prime Minister Menachem Begin was a fool by giving the Sinai Peninsula back to the Egyptians. They should have kept it because there was so much oil. Israel could have gotten all the oil revenues, since you can’t trust Americans to keep on supporting Israel. He also felt that Ariel Sharon was a sellout. So Moshev was an extreme nationalist. He was very close to Avraham Stern, founder of the Stern gang.

Rubens: You should say what that is.

Linn: It was a terrorist group. There is a difference in what they were called. They called themselves freedom fighters, the Lehi (Lohamei Herut Israel—Fighters for the Freedom of Israel). Prime Ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir were all leaders of Etil, the other underground organization that I was in. Though today I completely disagree with Moshev politically, I still experience an incredible bond with him.
Rubens: Would you go back and see him, when you were in Israel?

Linn: I saw him only in 1986 in Israel but he came to the United States once and he gave me his book, *From Lehi to Etzel*, that just came off the press.

Rubens: Did your parents know you were in that group?

Linn: No. After all, it was an underground organization.

Rubens: What did you do after you left the underground organization?

Linn: In 1939, when the Italians started to bombard a refinery that wasn’t far from our village in Haifa Bay, my parents moved next to my sister, who had moved inland with her husband. She had just had a child, so my parents were very delighted to be able to be with their grandchild. And I was fortunate to get a scholarship to an agricultural school. The agricultural school was closed for a year because there was a lot of fighting in that area between Arabs and Jews, but they opened the school again in 1939. It was called the Kadoorie School of Agriculture. There were two hundred applicants and only six openings. I was lucky to be one of them.

Rubens: Who ran that school? Was it a British or a Jewish school?

Linn: It was a British government school. The government established a school for Jews and also for Palestinians, in different locations. It had an incredible reputation and the teaching was very, very intense. It was a vocational school that covered the natural science subjects that would be usually covered right up to your high school matriculation. Yitzhak Rabin was a year ahead of me. He was a bright and thoughtful person and was the valedictorian of his class. All my schoolmates just continued their liberal education. I had a whole different experience, which also isolated me from many of my schoolmates. Because I knew that the survival of my family depended on my knowledge of horticulture, I really studied very intensely. To me, learning was a survival imperative. The more I knew, the better would be my survival threshold. My fellow students couldn’t understand that. They said I was over-ambitious, over-eager. So I had few friends, and it wasn’t a very pleasant atmosphere for me.

Rubens: What were the classes like? Did you get hands-on experience?

Linn: The students maintained the school farm. The first year we worked in the morning, studied in the afternoon. The second year was the reverse. We studied different branches of agriculture. So I spent six weeks amongst the shepherds. I worked in an orchard. We did everything. I learned to milk thirteen cows per day. We did all this practical work.

As much as I enjoyed growing vegetables back at the farm in Kfar Bialik, and had real aesthetic satisfaction seeing plants germinate and grow, I couldn’t stand the sight of the field during harvest time. Because, when you see a field of truncated cabbage stems, they look beheaded. So I really didn’t like the looks of it, and I found myself at the agricultural school spending a lot of time in the arboretum, seeing ornamental plants and enjoying them just for their sheer unfolding.

Rubens: Where did you live?
Linn: We had big dorms. And the housemother kept it like a military camp. Every morning there were check-ups on how well the beds were made. We all had our wooden trunks next to the bed. The fellow who lived next to me kept a big snake in his. [laughs] So there were all kind of funny things. And there was a girls’ agricultural school twenty miles away. We often stole the farm vehicle to visit them.

Rubens: To go off and see the girls.

Linn: To see girls. And, I remember, Friday nights Mediterranean food was served festively, which I still like, such as baba ghanoush, tabbouleh and falafel.

Rubens: Did your parents ever visit the school?

Linn: I am glad you asked. First I’ll give you a little background: German Jews in Palestine were derogatorily labeled yeka, which means overly pedantic. Unlike Jews born in the Soviet Union or Palestinian-born Jews who thought of themselves as much more practical. Fortunately my father was Russian-born, a founder of the Zionist movement, so I was only half yeka. [laughs] I became more excited about his stature since he came to the school and gave talks, which raised my esteem in the eyes of my fellow students.

During my school years I also connected with friends from the coeducational scout movement who did not join the underground military organization, but were more involved with the restoration of the landscape, planting pine trees on eroded slopes of hills. They were part of the pioneering spirit of the youth movement. Being the son of a farming family, I experienced a philosophical reinforcement of being a farmer. It wasn’t just being a farmer, who in other countries are at the bottom of the barrel of the social hierarchy. Farming in Palestine became a very prestigious vocation because Zionists were very eager to re-root Jews in the land. In the Diaspora, Jews were not allowed to own land or be members of craft guilds.

A wonderful spirit prevailed. All these friends from the scout movement with whom I still had contact, and some students in the agricultural school who were also scouts wanted to stay together beyond eighteen years of age. We liked each other a lot, and the scouts only enrolled people up to age eighteen. We then became inspired by the emerging awareness of what it means to live in an egalitarian society, which really started at the turn of the century and generated the kibbutz movement. We were all eager to live together in an egalitarian collective, and went into training for a year and a half in Dagania A, which is the oldest kibbutz in Israel. In 1941, it had existed thirty-three years.

Rubens: Where was this kibbutz?

Linn: This was on the shores of Lake Nazareth.

Rubens: What happened to the family land in Kfar Bialik while all this was going on?

Linn: We rented it to a neighbor.

Rubens: Tell me about your experience at the kibbutz.
Linn: In the kibbutz, I paid special attention and tried to work as much as I could in the ornamental gardens. As part of kind of apprenticeship in landscape architecture, I got to design, create, and maintain open spaces for private use of individual families, and also communal spaces.

One day while I was working in the ornamental gardens at Dagania A, I pulled my back out. I had a slipped disc, and I ended up in hot springs in Tiberias, which, to me, was a terribly debilitating experience because all the other people there were decrepit old people, and I was just nineteen. I felt like an invalid. After that I couldn’t do a lot of physical labor any more. I kept on working at night in the cow barn because it was nice and warm, and I worked more on layouts of the landscape. But I also realized that, all of a sudden, plants were not only ornamental entities, but space-forming elements, and this was my entry to landscape architecture: realizing that I could use plants to create spaces for private use and for communal use. Since my mother was an excellent designer and my sister had studied landscape architecture, both of them became my mentors. I served an apprenticeship with them designing landscapes for private residences in Kfar Bialik whenever I had the opportunity during my visits.

Rubens: What about your personal life?

Linn: I also had my first girlfriend there, Ruthie. She was the daughter of a school principal. She enjoyed poetry, which she wrote and read to me. I will always remember sitting in the shade of towering trees, with a gun, guarding the fields. We were right next to the enchanting Lake Nazareth glistening in the moonlight.

Rubens: What happened after you finished your training at the kibbutz?

Linn: The Jewish Agency gave us some land to form our own independent kibbutz that we called Maagan Michael, now a very famous kibbutz. I co-founded it with my friends from the scout movement. Other scout groups followed later on. It has 1,200 people today, two very successful industries, an ornamental fish farm and also raising fish for food. They also have a sculpture garden. The recreation area looks like Club Med with undulating lawns and ameoba-shaped swimming pools. I was able to contribute to the kibbutz also by going back to our old farm in Kfar Bialik, emptying the tool shed and bringing tools and glass frames for propagation beds. I had become a very good glazier and a very good plumber installing our own irrigation system in Kfar Bialik.

Rubens: How many people were in this founding group?

Linn: Thirty-five people.

Rubens: Mostly your age?

Linn: Yes.

Rubens: How did you organize the kibbutz?

Linn: We all shared equally. There was a lot of discussion about whether we would have private clothes or share them. There were a lot of philosophical discussions about everything, and since we didn’t commit ourselves yet to any particular kibbutz
orientation, whether more liberal or radical, a lot of people from other kibbutz movements came to proselytize. Then, women got pregnant and gradually the intellectual fervor diminished when we had to deal with hard work and getting things done. My problem was that I had backaches, and needed special conditions, so I ended up getting a room in some of the wooden sheds we put up, where pregnant women also found shelter. It gave me a terrible sense of myself in terms of being a young invalid. I always prided myself on being able to work physically, and I was good at it. People acknowledged my contribution.

Rubens: Were there other people who influenced you in a personal way besides Moshev?

Linn: Yes, I had a very special relationship with my brother Theo. Since my father had already raised children, he was not on the farm during the week, he really had no relationship with me, which my siblings confirmed. So my brother became my surrogate father. When I was fourteen, I took my first bus trip alone to Tel Aviv, where he lived, to visit him.

Rubens: What was your brother doing there?

Linn: He was a physicist and worked at the Weitzman Research Institute in Rechovot. He did many other jobs too, being also an engineer and mechanic. When he came to Dagania A, he challenged me. Here is the letter he wrote to me in 1943. He said,

When I visited you in Dagania A in 1943, the sun was shining, its sparkle reflected in the morning waters of the Jordan River, spilling into Lake Nazareth. Grapes were the size of plums, each containing the searing midday heat of a tropical sun. Equally glowing were our discussions as we struggled with issues of deep concern. Our dialog continued for years, solidifying our friendship and broadening our horizons. I’m as grateful to you as much as you appreciate my participation. It was a flow of life that gushed out, with which we tried to cope.

My brother became an important mentor.

Rubens: How did he challenge you?

Linn: He said that as much as a kibbutz aspired to socialist ideas of equality, it did not include Arabs in its membership. Consequently, it was not a real socialist experiment, but it was much more a national socialist experiment, which means that the nationalistic consideration predominated. My brother felt that this doesn’t work. He thought the only thing that could ever create a safe, secure situation for Jews would be to make friends with their neighbors. And he was then very much for creating a democratic secular state composed of Arabs and Jews. And the same struggle still continues today. He thought the Zionists had a wonderful opportunity to work out joint economic agreements as more and more Jews came to Palestine. So he got through to me, and I realized that my search for security did not reside in power such as my earlier affiliations with the military underground movement. I always questioned what is gained through violence, if you use violence you beget violence. I also realized that you can’t get security by excluding others. He then tried to portray to me another vision that was more exciting.
I also knew from my grandfather’s life ambition to assimilate into German culture—he became economically very successful, but German Jews know more than other Jews that to become economically successful doesn’t give you security. Whenever ruling classes find it convenient to focus on Jews as scapegoats, they will knock you down from the ladder you tried so hard to climb. The Nazis really inflamed the hatred for Jews in order to make the genocide of Jews a rallying point for their new emerging movement. Upward social mobility doesn’t guarantee security.

My brother started to explain that the only way Jews can have security is if everybody has security. In July 1965, former U.S. presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson eloquently described this interdependence of humankind.

We travel together, passengers on a little space ship,

dependent upon its vulnerable reserves of air and soil,

committed for our safety to its security and peace,

preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work,

and, I will say, the love we give our fragile craft.

We cannot maintain it half fortunate, half miserable, half confident,

half despairing, half slave to the ancient enemies of mankind,

half free in a liberation of resources undreamed of until this day.

No craft, no crew, can travel safely with such vast contradictions.

On their resolution depends the survival of us all.

Rubens: Where was this dialog taking place?

Linn: I went to see him quite frequently in Tel Aviv. It wasn’t far from Maagan Michael, maybe an hour away. Finally, because of my physical handicap and also because I became less inspired by the kibbutz movement, I joined him in Tel Aviv in 1943. I wanted to be close to him. My whole kibbutz experience became to me a shattered dream. Living in Tel Aviv, I had a lot of discussions with him.

Rubens: Tell me more about what you discussed.

Linn: Theo just died recently, in October of 2003. He had a great impact on my state of consciousness. I wrote a eulogy for him. In it I included the excerpt of the letter he wrote to me, that I mentioned earlier.

He told me about a radical socialist movement that he was part of, a Leon Trotskyist movement. Leon Trotsky organized an international conference in France, to urge nations to open their gates to Jews who were trying to escape from the Nazis. But nobody took Jews. The small number that America took was just ridiculous. Trotsky
was also a Jew, so he identified with the Jewish search for security. He promoted a social system that’s tolerant of whatever racial or religious background you come from. So, I was very intrigued with that. Trotsky also helped me to understand the Soviet Union. Many Communists who were Stalinist still supported the Soviet Union, which had become a terrible, repressive, slave labor camp.

Trotsky challenged Stalin, because he felt you couldn’t bring about a different social system unless industrialized countries, whose workers are of a high level of consciousness, participate in it. Stalin killed off the revolutionary movement in many industrialized countries because he knew that Russia was an agrarian country, and the level of consciousness of the peasants was very low. So Stalin advocated national socialism, like the Nazis.

Rubens: Are you getting this understanding of Trotsky and Stalin from your brother, or literally from the movement that you are joining?

Linn: Initially from my brother. Later on, I joined an underground cell of about half a dozen people. There were different groups, and because it was underground we didn’t really know much about other members. But our own cell gave me a sense of community, just like the kibbutz did, which I had so missed growing up alone in Germany. We all felt responsibility for each other’s livelihood. We shared food and money. Philosophically and socially I was saved from becoming an apologist for the Soviet Union. I now had an explanation of why the Soviet experiment didn’t work. Initially, The Communist Manifesto is very beautiful. Just like the Declaration of Independence. It was a visionary statement.

Rubens: And what did this group have to say about a Jewish state?

Linn: We all aspired to create a secular state for both people, with equal rights for everyone. This was our platform.

Rubens: Did you work when you were living with your brother?

Linn: Yes. I had a good job. Because of my back problem I could not do heavy physical work, so I became an assistant in the laboratory of another agricultural school next to Tel Aviv, which provided a more protected environment climatically. In 1944 I got a job as a teacher of school gardening at an elementary school in Tel Aviv.

Rubens: Tell me about the school.

Linn: It was an elementary school for children ages six to fourteen. It was a school for working families, whose children needed a hot meal at lunchtime and that’s why we grew vegetables, to supply the kitchen. The school was called Educational Institute of the North.

My brother also introduced me to Alexander S. Neill, who was the founder of the free school Summerhill in Scotland, which had a big impact on education. Neill emphasized the importance of self-regulation in education. Reading his book, I wished that my father had been like him, because what was important to him in a school was that the children were happy. A lot of the children came from unhappy backgrounds, yet, when
they were at the school and getting support for themselves, they regained health. They
didn’t even have to go to take classes because Neill felt it was up to the teacher to be
inspiring. In fact, right now I’m working on community gardens in Berkeley with a
neighbor who is a landscape contractor. Many of his family members went to
Summerhill. His father didn’t learn to read until fourteen or fifteen, but became later on
the physician of Neill. The students at Summerhill excelled in their own hobbies. Doing
what they really liked enabled them to also pass tests in other subjects they were not so
interested in. I was very impressed with the self-governance that Summerhill
established where everybody has one vote, including Neill. The children were able to
run the school democratically. Though Summerhill emphasized freedom, destructive
behavior was controlled. One of Neill’s books was called Freedom, not License! [A. S.

Becoming familiar with Neill’s educational approach helped me a lot with being a
teacher at the elementary school. I remember, especially in the upper grades—seventh
and eighth grade—some of the students were very unruly—really destructive, in many
ways. But I made a special point to spend time with them, and realized that they had all
kinds of problems to deal with. These were the ones who later on ended up becoming
my most ardent assistants, and spent many hours way beyond the school classes
working with me in the garden. This, in many ways, was thanks to Neill who had this
wonderful approach to education. Instead of being punitive, we need time to understand
what goes on with a troubled child, and provide some support and understanding. This
knowledge helped me a lot to make the jump, because I didn’t go to regular teacher
training. I had only taken special workshops on education.

My brother introduced to me another educator who gave me guidance, Harry
Obermeyer in Tel Aviv. In many ways this was my whole learning strategy. I always
made a point: How can I inform myself? Not necessarily only through traditional
channels of education.

My brother also introduced me to the work of Wilhelm Reich, a psychoanalyst who had
worked very closely with Freud, conducting Freud’s seminars on sexuality. He realized
how sexual repression pits us against ourselves, because sexuality is one of our most
powerful drives. Being a progressive psychoanalyst, Reich created clinics for youth and
working people, advocating planned parenthood. He also promoted settings where
teenagers could enjoy their sexual privacy. Reich also started a movement called Sex-
Pol, short for Sexual Politics, primarily for young people, which grew to 50,000
members.

Reich felt that if you affirm adolescent sexuality, it would lead to eradication of early
childhood trauma. He later on got away from that perspective because a lot of these
50,000 people ended up in the Hitler Youth Movement. Hitler’s youth movement was
also getting young people into nature, going camping. Reich ended up working much
more with infants, with pregnant women, and with little children, trusting that human
beings, at birth, are a wonderful coherent cosmic particle, that you have to learn how to
allow to unfold.

Since we were in our late teens and early twenties, his affirmation of sexuality was
tremendously meaningful to us. We also started to understand sexual repression as a
powerful political strategy that disempowers people, causing them to lose confidence in themselves and become socially subservient.

Rubens: Did your mother or father talk about Freud? You said you didn’t remember.

Linn: My mother was still a prude; she was raised in the Victorian era. When I was a young child she told me to leave my hands on top of the blanket, presumably to stop me from masturbating. Later on, in my adolescence she told me I was entering a dangerous age, without telling me what the danger was all about. I guess she meant that I could get girls pregnant. However, I really admired her openness. When I brought her Reich’s books, she read them to stay in contact with me. She really made an effort when I introduced her to a girlfriend who stayed overnight. She really struggled, and it wasn’t easy for her.

Rubens: Did your brother also introduce Reich’s work to the cell?

Linn: Yes. Reich as a psychoanalyst made us aware through his writing of our own childhood trauma. We all felt encouraged to go into therapy. I went into therapy partly to get rid of some of my early childhood hang-ups and partly to become more rational in my political work. I had become aware that in our political movement people argued a lot. People did not listen to one another. Their arguments became a power and ego battle. I was really confused about the lack of rationality and how much one had to adhere to dogma and to party lines. There was so much infighting in the political movement, I wanted to be more rational. So many of us went into treatment.

Rubens: What kind of treatment?

Linn: It was with a German psychoanalyst in Tel Aviv, Walter Hoppe, who became familiar with Reich’s new approach to psychoanalysis, which was called character analysis. Character Analysis was the name of one of Reich’s books.

Rubens: Was this an analysis where you laid on the couch?

Linn: You lay on a couch, right. But what Reich did, it was very interesting. Reich’s character analysis did not focus on symptoms, but dealt with the total character expression. It was much more holistic. Ultimately it generated Gestalt therapy, and the Esalen Institute, because Paul Goodman and Fritz Perls had been patients of Reich.

Rubens: You’re lying on the couch, how often, and how are you paying?

Linn: I was going three times a week, five pounds per session, so it was more than half my salary. I also moved in together with a young lady, and got married to her, because the owner of the house, a rabbi, found out that we were not married and wanted to throw us out. So at twenty I got married to a really wonderful young woman. Her name was Judka.

Rubens: Where was she from?

Linn: She was born in Bratislava. She also escaped the Nazis and was a member of the cell. I will always remember a dream I had. I was standing in Akko, a city at the end of Haifa
Bay. It was a fortified town, an old historic town at the water’s edge. I remember standing on some rock outcroppings under a red flag in a deep embrace with this young lady.

Rubens: What language were you speaking to each other?

Linn: Hebrew. My German was very rusty.

Rubens: Okay. So, you’re in analysis when you’re married to this young woman.

Linn: Yes. Judka also underwent analysis with Hoppe, which helped both of us a lot. Reich wrote various other books, which we studied, such as *The Sexual Revolution* and *The Function of the Orgasm*. The book that had the greatest meaning to us was called *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. Reich compared the brown fascism of Germany with the red fascism of the Soviet Union, and he explained that in both cases, the people who carried the movement were not so much the workers but the lower middle class. The lower middle class in Germany were shopkeepers, small entrepreneurs who spent a lot of time at home exercising authority as heads of the household, while the workers were away from home at the assembly line. In the Soviet Union, Stalin deliberately drew on the conservative peasantry and made it the basis of the big fatherland and national chauvinism. But these people were also very cruel. So, on one hand they were at the bottom of the social ladder, being afraid. At the same time, they became also staff sergeants who were brutal and didn’t mind at all to do all the terrible things the leaders made them do, like in Nazi Germany. They were the ones who were the cruel guards in concentration camps. In the Soviet Union, they were the ones who killed off the twenty million people that Stalin had persecuted. The book deepened our understanding of what happened in these social movements that affected people’s lives so deeply. *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* is a really important book to read because it is a social critique that is very relevant today.

Rubens: Reich was having a big influence on you. You’re reading him, and you’re in analysis and you’re working.

Linn: Then my experience in teaching school gardening and having to deal with different age groups made me realize I really need to know something more about personality development. My own experience with Nazi trauma always made me wonder how’s it possible for sophisticated people to all of a sudden become so degenerate. The more I probed it, the more curious I became about psychology. I wanted to study psychology. I wanted to know what is human nature really all about. So I decided to study psychology and go to Switzerland.

Rubens: Why Switzerland? How were you drawn there?

Linn: My back injury still hurt a lot, and one of my doctors got me entry to a physical therapy research center in Zürich, Switzerland. Once there, I changed my visa from a patient to student and started to study in Zürich at the Institute for Applied Psychology.

When I studied psychology and became familiar with Freidians, with Adlerians, with Jungians, and many other schools of thought, I realized that I’m attracted to those theories that have a more positive view of human nature. I amassed a lot of information
about theories of human nature, especially those scientists and philosophers who think human nature is really beautiful.

Rubens: Tell me about some of these people and their thoughts?

Linn: Some organized religions believe that human nature is imbued with original sin and can’t be trusted to be rational; that we need discipline. Behavioral scientists like Konrad Lorenz and others also believe that human nature is endowed with an innate aggressiveness; that the hunter in early societies assured survival. According to Freud, human existence is like walking on a tightrope. If you repress too much, you become a neurotic, and if you do not harness your atavistic drives, you become a delinquent. He had a pessimistic outlook on human future which he described in his book, *Civilization and Discontent*.

At the other end of the spectrum, Ashley Montagu, a social anthropologist, argues strongly against Freud’s theory that there’s a built-in death instinct in human nature. Montagu’s research led him to understand that it was cooperation among members of a species that assured survival. Reich and Neill also believed that human nature is innately very coherent and rational. Reich also believed that healthy human beings should be able to establish a self-regulating society, but only if the womb had been a healthy environment and people had learned how to raise children correctly.

In the fall of 2003 in Luxembourg, the first conference on matriarchies took place. Presenters emphasized that matriarchies were inherently peaceful, caring and cooperative societies that existed for thousands of years before patriarchy evolved. Patriarchies, to this very day, are hierarchical and aggressive competitive societies. I feel much closer to those scientists and philosophers who can trust human nature at birth. To establish scientifically that human nature is not innately aggressive is very important today because with all the warring that goes on worldwide it can easily be interpreted that human nature is innately aggressive. If human nature at its core is rational, survival of the human race is much more likely.

Rubens: Coming back to your psychology studies in Zürich.

Linn: In addition to studying at the institute, I took special courses at the University of Basel with Dr. Heinrich Meng, who was a colleague of Freud. I also went into training analysis with the head of the Swiss Psychoanalytic Association, Dr. Sorenson, and after graduating from that school, the Swiss Psychoanalytic Association qualified me to practice psychoanalysis under supervision. I graduated in 1948.

Rubens: When you left therapy in Tel Aviv, were you signed off, or was the thought that you were going to continue more of it?

Linn: My psychoanalyst in Tel Aviv ended my treatment since he thought I completed it successfully. I wanted to become a therapist, believing I could contribute more to social transformation helping people to overcome their personal problems so they would behave more rationally.

Reich’s evaluation of his political experience produced a new perspective in which he emphasized what he called “the biological miscalculation in the human struggle for
freedom.” He felt that political movements, progressive movements, underestimate how deeply social systems are anchored in people’s character structure. You’re not only repressed by economic and political systems, but by the whole emotional impact that repressive systems, especially sex-negating societies have. Their influence is deeply anchored in people’s character structures. So many politicians, when they get up on a platform, promise all kind of things but rarely deliver. Reich calls them “freedom peddlers.” Reich criticized liberals who to him are often freedom peddlers because they don’t take into account how difficult it is to bring about social transformation. This rude awakening to the irrational dynamics of politics was for me another shattered dream.

In fact, in addition to the freedom peddling that Reich wrote about, he felt that liberal parties never knew how to deal with what he calls the “emotional plague.” Emotional plague occurs in people who have a lot of energy that is misdirected and expressed in violent outbursts. Many fanatic movements that are tremendously destructive exhibit this. I’m sure we all went to a lot of public gatherings where someone took over the microphone by force and nobody was able to control them. We don’t know how to deal with blatant violent behavior.

Rubens: Tell me more about your rude awakening.

Linn: The fact that political movements don’t really assess how tedious it is to outgrow one’s hang-ups really kills off and undermines so many wonderful attempts at social transformation. You saw it with Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia who inspired a social movement that freed people from Soviet repression only to end up in in-fighting and factionalism, splitting Czechoslovakia into two separate states. It always starts out wonderful when, in a new surge of energy, people try to create better social conditions, before they become betrayed or disintegrate. You see it over and over again throughout history.

Disillusioned with politics, Reich came out with a whole new concept he called “work democracy.” He believed that one can trust only those people who have spent a lifetime, and have a track record of doing life-supportive work, because they have competency. But a politician can go from one party to the other without any qualifications, just satisfying ego needs and money greed. Look what we have today.

Rubens: What did you do being disillusioned with politics?

Linn: I decided to focus on inner work rather than on political work. My whole attempt to become a psychologist was motivated by my desire to contribute to social transformation as a therapist, by adding my own little drop of water to make the world a better place. Working with people therapeutically, helping people overcome their own problems, that’s what I transitioned to then.

Rubens: And is there anything you particularly want to say about Meng? [Heinrich Meng, a follower of Freud who helped to popularize psychoanalysis, taught at the University of Basel. Karl traveled there regularly from Zürich to attend his seminars.]

Linn: Meng introduced me to a lot of people in the United States. The seminars I attended were those on propaganda and mental health. Propaganda always intrigued me because Goebbels was so successful in brainwashing a whole German people who were
considered cultured and sophisticated. I also had seminars with Anna Freud and August Aichhorn, who was the first psychoanalyst to work with delinquents. He wrote a book that was translated called *Wayward Youth*.

Rubens: What was Anna Freud like? What course did you take?

Linn: She was in Lausanne to give a seminar. I still remember that she talked about a parent who came to her complaining about a child. Anna Freud saw all the members of the family except the child, and the child improved considerably. [laughter]

Rubens: What conclusion did you draw?

Linn: I think you need to take an inventory of the impacts people have on children’s life, especially parents and relatives.

Rubens: Was she intimidating?

Linn: No, she was very human. Whenever I meet really profound people, they end up being very simple and very human. The way they speak, they don’t use super-duper language. They really communicate. Anna Freud was very humble. I’ll mention some other mentors in my life, too, that I met later on. You can really tell greatness by their humility. Those people experience themselves, really, as an instrument. Something comes through them that allows them to serve. They don’t take any personal credit. They’re curious, they’re open. Aichhorn was wonderful, too. When I visited him at his hotel, he came with his funny nightcap and a mischievous smile, and I knew why he was effective with teenagers—because he could always outdo them in their own tricks. I enjoyed meeting him.

Rubens: And your fellow students, were they particularly interesting?

Linn: I had a wonderful time. I really excelled, and was able to finish the course of study earlier than one would ordinarily. The institute even engaged me to be a research assistant, and paid me because I had hardly had any financial resources. I had to get it from different agencies to study and stay alive. The director of the institute, Dr. Hans Biäsch, and I developed a wonderful rapport. He was once a forester. He walked with great resilience in a classroom back and forth as though he were walking on a bed of moss in the forest and as if in his fast pace he was trying to catch up with the ideas that were gushing out of him.

Rubens: Did you come with your wife?

Linn: No, no. We divorced after two and a half years.

Rubens: What did your family think about this development in your life?

Linn: They knew that I wanted to study psychology but nothing else. I didn’t communicate my ideas and thoughts with other people in Palestine because they were too controversial. It was a very small country, and I felt really isolated which made me ill with ongoing stomach problems.
Rubens: So, in contrast, here in Switzerland you were just interacting with people rewardingly.

Linn: Since Switzerland was not as affected by the war as other countries that were in shambles, it became a center for a lot of young people trying to reflect: what can be learned from the war. We all asked ourselves, “How can we prevent its recurrence?” I joined in a group of people from many countries. The first evening when everyone introduced themselves, one attractive young girl spoke up and said, “I’m only from Switzerland.” Rosemary was her name, and she became a girlfriend of mine. She was an artist.

This tremendous intellectual fervor in Switzerland introduced me to anarchism. Anarchists didn’t believe as Trotskyists did, in centralized governments. Anarchism, unlike how it’s popularly known today, had nothing to do with bomb throwing, though some anarchists do that. But philosophically anarchism is based on a trust in natural wholesomeness. They believe we need a social system organized in such a way that it doesn’t impose unnecessary restrictions on life. Anarchists trust that people should be able to govern themselves through self-regulation as Neill had applied it to education.

I became familiar with the writings of some anarchists, especially with the seminal book *Mutual Aid*, written by Prince Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin was a scientist who researched animal and human behavior, concluding that cooperation, not aggression, is a most essential survival dynamic for animals as well as people. Kropotkin abhorred violence and wrote a condemning letter to Vladimir Lenin, chastising him for using violence in his revolutionary strategies.

Anarchists believe that people should get resources from society to live decently irrespective of their work contribution. This requires a deep trust in people’s sense of responsibility and rationality. What in fact happens in today’s societies is that greed, ego and power craving flares up because of childhood traumas. Since transformation as anarchists envisioned can come about only if people are not neurotic, Reich also considered them to be freedom peddlers.

To Reich, Lenin was also a freedom peddler. He emphasized that the dictatorship of the Soviets was supposed to be only a transition phase, that by the time more and more people became involved and familiar with administration, people should have had enough experience to be able to govern themselves. Instead, the Soviet Union became a highly centralized dictatorial government. Reich would even consider Trotsky a freedom peddler because he trusted workers in industrialized countries who had a higher level of social consciousness. But even in these countries a lot of factional infighting occurred. This is the political dynamic Reich characterizes as “the biological miscalculation in the human struggle for freedom.” These social movements did not take into account deeply enough people’s impairment.

Rubens: And had you by then also abandoned Trotskyism?

Linn: Yes. I had an experience that sealed my connection with the movement. I went to visit a Trotskyist leader in Switzerland who was supposed to give a talk that night about human freedom. On his way out the door his little five-year-old hung onto him and wouldn’t let go. You know what he did? He pushed him into a closet. I could really see...
the discrepancy between what one can talk about and one’s emotional state of being. That’s why I felt inner work was so important.

While I studied at the institute I stayed in contact with people who were in touch with Reich’s work. I visited the family of Theodore Wolf in Zürich. Wolf was a co-worker of Reich who lived in the United States and translated his books into English. Reich had just left Scandinavia for the United States. He became much more aware of the psychosomatic interconnection and developed a body-oriented therapy.

Rubens: What’s the relationship between anarchism and Reichianism?

Linn: Reich had nothing to do with anarchism, but I came to the United States because of him.

In one of Neill’s books he said that he spent twenty years in psychoanalysis that didn’t help him with his stubbornness. Neill said that when he went to Reich for treatment of his stiff-neckedness and Reich loosened his neck muscle, Neill consequently became less stubborn. Reich realized that treating people only through verbal exchanges didn’t go deep enough. You had to loosen up the rigidities in people’s musculature, which Reich called “muscular armoring.”

So I came to this country in ‘48. I wanted to come for two and a half years to undergo Reichian therapy. I didn’t plan on staying any longer here, because I didn’t think much of American materialism.

Rubens: Reichian therapy wasn’t available in Switzerland?

Linn: No, it wasn’t. He just trained a few people in New York. He had just begun developing this kind of therapy.

Rubens: And did you have the name of someone?

Linn: I was lucky being able to attend a week-long workshop with Alexander S. Neill when he came to the United States three weeks after I arrived. It was held at the Hamilton Free School in Sheffield, Connecticut.

There were many free schools around that were inspired by Neill. Neill never wrote about the fact that he had such a strong presence and personality that any kid would stand to attention ten feet from him. He didn’t have to be a disciplinarian. He was wonderfully supportive of his kids. He showed there was a potential for healing if you find yourself in more supportive conditions. A lot of his students regressed when they went back for a vacation to their family environment.

Rubens: Did you know this was happening, or was this coincidental?

Linn: I must have known. Somebody told me. I met a whole bunch of Reichian therapists and patients, and then, through them, I joined the Committee for Self-Regulation. The Committee for Self-Regulation was organized by one co-worker of Reich. Her name was Lois Wyvell, a wonderful mature woman. The meetings were guided by Reichian therapists. The focus of the committee was on sexual liberation. We wrote articles about
it. In order not to dilute our treatment, we were asked not to share much about our own therapies with each other. They knew about my interest in Reich’s work, and invited me to join the committee.

Rubens: So, at some point, does it dawn on you that you would stay in the United States?

Linn: I realized that Reich’s body-oriented therapy would last much longer than two and a half years. After a series of menial jobs, I ended up finding a very challenging position to help establish a private school the Reece School, for disturbed children. Professor Heinrich Meng from Basel introduced me to another person who became a mentor to me, Lawrence K. Frank. Frank and his wife Mary shared a household in Greenwich Village in New York City with Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, and that’s why Margaret Mead could travel all over the world—because the Franks took care of her daughter, Mary Catherine, who wrote about it in her book, *With a Daughter’s Eye*.

Frank knew Ellen Reece who was the director of the Downtown Community School that Margaret Mead’s daughter attended. Reece wanted to start a school for disturbed children, and I helped her establish that school. I became a teacher, therapist, organizer, interviewing people, setting up curriculum, doing everything. And I was there for two and a half years when we had fourteen students. Later the school grew to seventy students.

The school was located at East Ninety-third Street in Manhattan. I introduced plants and pets. It was horticultural therapy, to get kids more connected to living things. I converted the basement into a workshop with a platform we could crank up so we could use it many different ways. I took the students on daily walks to the neighborhood parks. Many of the children were very brilliant, but emotionally disturbed. While teaching at the Reece School, I started my own private practice in child analysis and opened an office on Ninety-seventh Street and Fifth Avenue. Edith Enteman was my supervising psychoanalyst.

Rubens: That’s a pretty good location.

Linn: Excellent location. I started work with these children, who came from very rich backgrounds.

Rubens: You’re working with them or their parents, too?

Linn: I consulted with the parents who had very busy social schedules, encouraging them to have more contact with their children. In one family, every child had their own analyst, and there was a coordinating analyst, too. During the summer months, I was an in-house therapist, with a young child of a family that rented a huge building on the Marshall Fields estate in Lloyd Harbor, Long Island. When my patient’s mother wanted to take her son for a walk, he asked her if she’d gotten permission from his governess.

Rubens: Now, were your students your first clients, or did word of mouth spread? How did you get these patients?

Linn: My students were not my patients. I did not want to confuse roles. But since the parents of my students at school were happy with my work, they became a source for
references. Also, my supervising psychoanalyst referred patients to me. The students at the Reece School came to the school through the contacts that Ellen Reece had developed over her many years as a well-known educator.

Rubens: How long did you practice child analysis?

Linn: Undergoing body-oriented Reichian therapy while conducting my private practice and working at the Reece School created growing conflicts for me.

The body-oriented therapy was so much more engaging to me than just talking about problems, because you feel your energy blocks and your energy flow. You give expression to your own intense emotion, and you press against the boundary of your capability of emotional expression to the point that you almost faint. We are made to be so shrunk in the intensity of the scope of our emotional experience because our parents never let us express our anger, or don’t give us enough love. I will always be infinitely grateful to Reichian therapy because nobody can take these experiences away from me. In verbal therapy I often talked myself into some state of being healed, but that wasn’t really deeply anchored or validated by my own body experiences.

Rubens: How did you resolve the conflict?

Linn: As the Reichian therapy got deeper and deeper hold of me, I really wanted to let myself fall apart. I felt more and more burdened by being responsible, both for my students at the Reece School, and my own patients. I only knew I couldn’t tolerate it any more. So I quit. I quit my private practice and also quit being at the school. Becoming more aware of the psychosomatic interconnections of illness I realized that, in order for me to continue my therapeutic work, I had to study medicine. I became more aware of my patients’ body expression. I so much wanted to touch them and relieve them of their tension, but I didn’t dare because I wasn’t trained to do so.

But, to study medicine, I felt I would need a lot of money, which I didn’t have. Also I have the same problem as my father did with blood—to this very day. So this was not a possibility. I only knew one thing for sure, not to do this anymore. I didn’t know what to do next.

I went to a public library and looked at a dictionary of vocational titles and started at A, B, C, came to L, and saw descriptions of landscape gardeners, landscape architects. I thought, I was once a landscape architect, maybe I should to that again. Because now I knew nature in a different sense, having taken my kids to the park, having spent summers in summer camps, I realized how important my contact with nature was, and I experienced nature as a healing environment. So, I decided to go back into landscape architecture as a healing profession. My first landscape job was for my second Reichian therapist who lived in the suburbs. I looked at this landscape and made some suggestions. He said, “Why don’t you do something about it?” [laughter]

Rubens: How was your personal life at this time?

Linn: In 1950 I met another woman who became the mother of my child, Mark. Anita was a singer. Having given up my well-remunerated positions, I had to give up my fancy apartment, and moved into her cold-water flat with the bathtub in the kitchen. I fixed it
up really nicely, ripping the plaster off of the brick walls and creating a fireplace. I also helped friends remodel their apartments. Reichian therapy also made me realize that I want to express myself creatively and not only analyze other people’s problems.

Rubens: Where did you learn English? In Switzerland?

Linn: No, I took some courses in Palestine.

Rubens: And then, what was the language that you used in Switzerland?

Linn: German. And I had to refresh my German.

Rubens: How long were you in Reichian therapy?

Linn: Quite a few years. I connected with different Reichian therapists in New York City and saw other Reichian therapists when I moved to different cities. In New York City I also enrolled in the graduate department of psychology at the New School for Social Research.

Rubens: What did you do at the New School?

Linn: I really felt at home in the New School because there were a lot of European refugees out of Germany on the faculty and the student body was very mature, composed of many war veterans. I studied there from 1949 to 1956. The focus of the curriculum was Gestalt psychology.

I was intrigued with courses on the psychology of art given by Rudolf Arnheim, who wrote a book on the psychology of perception. We became also good friends. I also had courses with Wolfgang Köhler, one of the founders of Gestalt psychology. His co-founder Max Wertheimer just died before I enrolled.

Gestalt therapists always argued with the behaviorists, who have a much more mechanical understanding of perception. The Gestalt therapists felt that the human body is much more mysteriously integrated in a holistic way. For instance, behaviorists always explained that the image on your retina is what you see. Actually, what you see grows out a very complex process in your visual cortex that produces an image. They also used optical illusions to prove their point.

Rubens: And how did you find a therapist?

Linn: I went initially to a therapist, Chester Rafael, who was too rough on me. The next one was the reverse, and I really opened up to him. His name was Allan Cott.

Rubens: Did Rafael when you left make you feel that you’re escaping? You know, that you’re not facing up to things, or is it understood that you choose different therapists?

Linn: Rafael said right at the beginning, “Look, let’s try for six weeks.” Then we talked about it, and he referred me to Cott who he said would suit me better.

Rubens: Yes. Where was Reich based when he came to the U.S.?
Linn: He was first in Forest Hills, Queens, and then he moved to Maine.

Rubens: And why is it that you didn’t see him?

Linn: Because I was a patient, I didn’t want to impose on his time. Since he did a lot of research and trained therapists, I felt like I wanted to get through my own therapy and then might want to visit him. But I met in seminars most of the people that he had trained.
Interview 3: January 5, 2004

Rubens: The early 1950s seems to have been a watershed for you. You married in 1951. You have a child, and you stopped working as a therapist.

Linn: The child came later. Mark was born in 1957. In a sense I am still working as a therapist now. I spend a lot of time in conflict resolution, building neighborhood community by creating and operating community garden commons. The only difference is that instead of having the therapeutic process take place face to face between a therapist and a patient, I am triangulating my relationship. Which means that I put an object between another person and myself, such as a community garden. Working on something concrete, people’s conflicting relationships can be worked out. I feel more comfortable in this sort of situation.

Rubens: Yes. Let’s get a kind of historical framework of what you’re going to do. You re-enter landscape architecture as a healing profession.

Linn: I think I told you that I went to the public library to look at books of vocational titles, investigating potential professions. I didn’t know what to do; I just knew what I didn’t want to do.

Rubens: Yes, yes, you came to “landscape.”

Linn: Coming to the letter “L.” It might have been like that spiritual practice, what do you call it?

Rubens: The I Ching?

Linn: Like divining for water. I divined for a vocation.

Rubens: Did you then think of it as having some kind of spiritual guidance?

Linn: The fourteen generations of rabbis I come from might have an influence on me. I have a certain affinity to people who are deeply involved in spirituality. They take my comments seriously, often much to my surprise.

I also thought of the Dr. Doolittle children’s books by Hugh Lofting. I had a whole bunch of them. Before the Nazis ransacked the house, I moved them from the back row of books to the front, being afraid they would think I was hiding them since they had a red cover. I knew that red made them crazy. I remember that when Dr. Doolittle wanted to go on a trip he would close his eyes, and all the animals would observe as he opened the atlas. He’d put his pencil down wherever the book opened, and that’s where he would go. That’s what I thought of when I stumbled on “L.”

My childhood was deeply impacted by two intensely experienced realms. Having been raised on the Immenhof, nature became a source of inspiration and healing. The other influential experience from my childhood was the sudden and rampant assault of Nazi persecution. Coping with these destructive, violent social forces, beyond my immediate
control, sowed the seed of my political awakening. My mother always felt badly towards me, because she said it’s just a passing fad, and since she misjudged these political circumstances, she felt guilty that she didn’t assess the situation correctly to protect me, her only child. After giving up my therapeutic career, during which I had hoped to contribute to the personal healing of my patients, to contribute to more harmonious contact with themselves and with others, as an antidote to alienation and totalitarianism, I returned to nature. This is the chapter that we’re focused on now.

I decided to enter landscape architecture as a healing profession. Immersed in the creation and use of open spaces, we would be exposed to the invigorating powers of nature. Landscape architecture, I believe, has a unique contribution to make towards the maturation of society. Now I want to read you something.

Rubens: Tell me what you’re reading from.

Linn: At the 1986 annual meeting of the American Society of Landscape Architects, I organized three workshops on the Emerging Landscape of Peace. These sessions were transcribed and edited and published in a book by Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR). What I want to read you now from page 91–92 is a summary of a panel discussion to which I invited Ian McHarg, Lawrence Halprin, Paul Friedberg, Dan Kiley, and Allan Gussow.

Rubens: My only concern is that you’re talking about something that happens twenty years later.

Linn: This is quite true. But what landscape architecture meant to me then, it also means to me now. The statement also reflects my growing awareness of nature’s disarming impact, an understanding that was generated by my involvement with Reichian body-oriented therapy.

Rubens: Okay.

Linn: [reading:]

Landscape architects have a unique contribution to make to the growth of society. Ours is the only design profession that bridges nature and civilization, art and science, biology and technology, heart and intellect in its aspiration to create a humane habitat for the unfolding of people’s potential in the care and management of nature. There’s something that we landscape architects have in common. We love nature. Our openness and sense of connectedness with nature are our most precious, profound common denominator. In natural settings, especially in the presence of powerful, majestic landscapes, we experience our humanness more fully. We cannot help but forget our petty grievances in the presence of the dome of stars. We stop clenching our teeth, and we breathe deeply the cool air of towering forests. Our flow of protoplasm resonates with the surging of the ocean, making us all feel humble and ennobled, being part of a larger universe.

This is a self-correcting dynamic inherent in the life of a landscape architect to enable us to live our lives a little more healthfully, mentally and physically, in contrast to those whose work exposes them only to the hustle and bustle of
cities. With nature bringing out the best in us, we should be a bit saner, and
nature’s cleansing, restoring, and healing energies should enable us to re-enter
so-called civilized society with a clearer vision.

What I meant to say is that landscape architects work in two realms. They work in
society and they work in nature. So potentially, there’s a built-in self-correcting
dynamic inherent in this profession.

When I staged a national meeting of landscape architectural educators for The National
Council of Instructors of Landscape Architecture in 1960, I had hoped to be able to
conduct the conference on Star Island, off the coast of New Hampshire at a retreat
center. I envisioned that the presence of only rocks, water, and sky would enable us to
make deeper contact with ourselves and each other. Unfortunately, the space was
unavailable, and we conducted the meeting on the campus of the University of
Massachusetts. I invited some of my colleagues from University of Pennsylvania and
guest lecturers who had been invited by Ian McHarg and had become friends of mine.
One was Francis Woidich, a medical doctor who explored the impact of subtle energies.
He told us that the reason we can take a deep breath in a forest is because, as trees
evaporate they charge the atmosphere with negative ions. The negative ionization opens
up your thorax. On the other hand cars and so on charge the atmosphere with positive
ions, which brings about a constriction.

Shortly after the NCILA meeting I gave a talk to the annual meeting of the American
Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City. I
shared with my audience the information about ionization. After my talk, the public
relations agent of the American Nurseryman’s Association came up to me and said he
would like to know more about the physiological processes because it would help him
to sell more trees.

In my teaching and practice I tried to adopt bioenergetic criteria as guidelines for
designs of the physical environment. So, this was one example of landscape architecture
as a healing profession based on what occurs physiologically.

Rubens: Were you literally writing about these ideas then?
Linn: In 1960 I wrote an article “Ecology of Cities: Are We Making Space for Consumers
Only?” that came out in *Landscape Architecture*.

Rubens: Let’s go back to your decision to re-enter landscape architecture.
Linn: I gave it a lot of thought, what landscape architecture means. As I came out of Reichian
therapy, I realized the impact of nature on myself and on others, and therefore realized
that landscape architecture could be a healing profession.

Rubens: What did you literally do? Tell me.
Linn: Changing a profession was a tremendous transition. I had to really understand its
significance. I talked earlier about the concept of work democracy that Reich
developed, which concluded that, rather than putting all your faith in politics, one
should put one’s faith much more in life-constructive work. I realized that landscape
architecture, working in nature, creating healing open spaces, was a wonderful work-democratic activity. That’s what I believed then. So, not only did I come in with a new understanding of the energetic and healing aspect of landscape architecture, but also the sociopolitical aspect, namely considering landscape architecture as a work-democratic activity. Landscape architects should be able to make a solid contribution to a more humane society.

In the “Ecology of Cities” article I pointed out that through my involvement with Reich’s body-oriented therapy I became more and more aware of the healing and disarming aspect of nature. Nature enables people to be less guarded, more relaxed, more open to themselves and to others. So, when I talk about “disarming,” I mean exactly that. Like “he’s a disarming person,” a charming person, one who puts you at ease, makes you relax, allows you to take a deeper breath.

Landscape architecture provided another possible strategy for social transformation, creating another antidote to totalitarianism. I experience my life as a calling to make the world a better place.

Rubens: By the way, it’s the 1950s in the U.S. Do you have any sense of the politics of the U.S. at that point? Are you responding to the Cold War? McCarthy’s going to come on a little bit later. I mean, are you perceiving totalitarianism in the U.S.?

Linn: When I entered the New School for Social Research in 1949, we studied the work Kurt Levin, a sociologist who compared the American way of life with the European way of life. He discovered that Americans are very friendly, invite you to their home, but they don’t really mean it. In Europe, people take more time, so you can really trust more a growing friendship. I remember riding on the subway on the Third Avenue line in New York City since I lived right next to it when I moved into Anita’s apartment. The train went from Harlem to the Bowery, where the homeless people lived. So poor people rode the train from Harlem to the Bowery. I saw two kinds of facial expression. The poor people looked tremendously pained, you can see the impact of a tough life. And then above those haggard faces, on rows of advertisements, faces smiled and laughed. For my courses in sociology I cut out little vignettes from the New Yorker cartoons, about the consumer conditioning in the United States.

In the dining hall of the New School there was a large Diego Rivera painting. According to how vicious McCarthy was at a particular time, a curtain would be pulled over a section of the painting to cover the image of Lenin. When McCarthy was less threatening, the administration of the school would pull the curtain back to make Lenin visible. That’s how we could read the political barometer of the New School administration.

Rubens: What was your status in the U.S.?

Linn: I was a legal immigrant. I became a citizen in 1955.

Rubens: Let’s get back to your choosing landscape architecture as a profession.

Linn: I was talking about the political and philosophical context within which I experience landscape architecture, which I was about to enter. All the different levels, the healing,
political, physiological, that I just mentioned solidified my own motivation to choose that profession. It grounded me. I wasn’t haphazardly picking something out of the book of vocational titles. I tried to really understand the significance of landscape architecture.

Rubens: How did you actually start?

Linn: Since I was eager to re-enter landscape architecture, I answered an ad in the *New York Times* looking for a landscape architect. I found out that it was a landscape contractor who did large landscape installations in public housing. At that time I earned $15 an hour from my analytical sessions, which was a lot of money then. Here, I earned $35 for six days a week of long, long hours. This man turned out to be a very unethical contractor. Instead of soil, he put straw around the roots of trees and wrapped them in burlap to make them look like they had soil. When I asked him, “What is that about?” He said, “Well, that’s the way they do it in America.”

Rubens: Was it cheaper to use the straw than the dirt?

Linn: He tried to save money, yes. On Christmas Eve, he fired me because he closed his business during the winter and went to Florida. And he actually pocketed my Social Security withholdings. He lived on Crook Avenue, which I felt was a very appropriate name for the street! [laughs] I will always remember that. His name was Krutschman. Based on that experience, I looked for more reputable employment. I was referred to Clara Coffey. She was one of the grande dames of landscape architecture, and became my mentor and my friend. A very straightforward woman. I dedicated my [currently unpublished] book *Landscapes Revisited: Did My Clients Dreams Come True?* to her.

Rubens: She was known?

Linn: She was well known. She had a phenomenal knowledge of plants, and taught me much about plants used by landscape architects in this region. I also spent a long summer at Harvard in a crash course on ecology with Stanley White, who was a well-known educator in landscape architecture.

Clara Coffey suggested that, since I liked not only design but also constructing spaces, I contact Wadley and Smythe, which was the most prestigious florist in New York City and also had a landscape department. They were looking for a landscape architect and hired me. I worked primarily in the landscape department.

Rubens: Oh, so you got a job with them?

Linn: I got a job with them, not only designing but also maintaining existing and constructing new landscapes.

Rubens: You didn’t really go any time without working. I mean, you worked for the contractor and then you came to Wadley and Smythe?

Linn: Right. I had to have a job to secure a livelihood.

Rubens: And what were you literally doing?
Linn: I did a lot of things. I did landscape installation, and also landscape maintenance.

Rubens: Was this for homes or for offices?

Linn: For homes and apartment houses. I also made floral decoration for racetracks, weddings, and funerals. I constructed Christmas wreaths; they had to be sprayed with fire retardants. Making wreaths from prickly holly leaves and then using the fire retardant would hurt. But I liked physical work and I was taken seriously by the workers. I didn’t tell them that I had just come out of being a psychoanalyst. I simply worked.

Rubens: How big a firm was it, roughly?

Linn: We had a big firm doing the floral decorations. A couple of dozen people. They also had greenhouses. Mr. Peterson was in charge of the landscape department, and I learned a lot from him. He retired in his late age and handed over the landscape department to me. Shortly thereafter, Wadley and Smythe was sold to a new owner who wanted to get rid of the landscape department, so I took it over with their blessing.

For my apartment I paid $22.48 on Fifty-sixth Street, next to Third Avenue. It was three blocks away from Sutton Place, which was the fanciest area in New York City. Through Wadley and Smythe’s I had a lot of contact with rich people whose landscapes I maintained and for whom I designed new landscapes. I got involved, just like I did through the Reece School, and my supervising psychoanalyst, with wealthy clients from the upper-middle class and upper-upper class.

Rubens: Tell me just a little bit of what it meant to take over this division. Did you literally set up a business?

Linn: Yes, I set up a business.

Rubens: Did you incorporate?

Linn: Yeah, I had a design-and-build business called Horticultural Associates.

Rubens: How did you learn the business aspect of it?

Linn: I had friends in the landscape industry with whom I met who told me what to charge. At Wadley and Smythe, Mr. Peterson was a very good educator. I associated initially with Patrick McKenna, establishing our firm called Horticultural Associates. He was more involved in horticulture, and I was more involved in the design and client contact.

I didn’t call myself a landscape architect because landscape architects, at that time, were not allowed to charge for construction and planting. They were only allowed to make money out of their design fees, to protect their clients. This changed years later when in the sixties, a lot of landscape architects worked for developers.

Rubens: So when is this, ‘52?

Linn: Yes, the business started in 1952.
Rubens: And so are you getting some pretty well-to-do clients?

Linn: Yes, very well-to-do clients. All down Fifth Avenue, I created and rehabilitated roof gardens and landscapes around apartment buildings. The first big residence I worked on, with Clara Coffey advising me on plants, was the residence of Dr. Irving Selikoff in Ridgewood, New Jersey. He was a famous physician and researcher who exposed the cancer-producing effect of asbestos. Today a whole research lab at Mt. Sinai hospital in New York City is named after him.

Rubens: So you have a knack for business, too. Is that right?

Linn: Apparently. Yes.

Rubens: I mean, you had a payroll you had to meet.

Linn: I had a wonderful crew, and a really motley crew. One guy came out of prison, who years later came back to my office and said, “Karl, I had to see you because you were really nice to me, but I took $20 from you.” So I thanked him very much, but I didn’t have enough presence of mind to ask him for the $20 [laughs], so he just left with his guilt released.

Rubens: Sounds like you’re working pretty hard.

Linn: I worked very hard, and I had a lot of clients. I did very elaborate work for private residences in the country and city.

Rubens: Did your lifestyle change at all while you were doing this?

Linn: Anita and I still lived in her cheap apartment. She earned money singing on the television shows with Sid Caesar and Walt Whitman.

Rubens: I was going to ask you if you had a television. I don’t know why I was going to ask you that.

Linn: Yes, we did, but we didn’t watch it much because there was a lot of music at home. Anita had a wonderful voice and always invited musicians to play with.

Rubens: Tell me more about your work constructing landscapes.

Linn: It was very important for me to always supervise my work in the field. When planting a tree I would turn it around many times so one would see the structure of the branch in the most exciting way. Clients would often say, “It’s good enough, Karl.” Then I asked myself, “Good enough for whom?” The landscape plans do not specify how to face trees.

Many times I came to buildings that were newly built and you could see all the excavation very close to the house. I always pushed the soil as far back as possible so that the water would not seep into the foundations. I had to create a swale away from the foundation. In so doing, I’d often uncover rock outcroppings, which you couldn’t see. If landscape architects do not supervise the work in the field, if you only execute it by
plans, you might have to blast these rock outcroppings, instead of making a rock garden out of them.

In my crew I had a very mature African American man from Harlem, Paul Jacobs. Another young man who had just come out of a mental hospital, created dynamic pavement patterns out of flagstones. I always appreciated my crew’s effort. They were very loyal. We had an incredibly good relationship with each other.

Rubens: How many workers were in your crew?
Linn: I had a crew of five or six people.

Rubens: Did you also do planting indoors?
Linn: Because I spent a dozen years in the Middle East, I felt an affinity to sub-tropical, tropical vegetation. Ordinarily, one would be more attached to the vegetation you grew up with, but maybe the Nazis put a big damper on it, because I feel much more at home here on the West Coast than on the East Coast. Indoor plantings in offices, showrooms and in private living rooms enabled me to provide year-round employment.

Rubens: Did you do much traveling to reach your projects?
Linn: Yes, I did a lot of traveling along the East Coast, in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. To reach projects that were more remote, I even became a third co-owner of a small plane, but the plane was parked in Far Rockaway [in Queens], which was quite a distance from our flat. After a few lessons, while making a landing, I did a nosedive. After that I didn’t quite trust myself and decided not to continue.

I never publicized myself, but I got a lot of work through word of mouth. When I didn’t have enough projects of my own designs, in order to keep my crew going, I started to bid on plans conceived by other designers. But, I hated it. Because to win a bid, you have to sharpen your pencil and come up with a low bid. So all of a sudden, it just became economics. But many clients trusted me. They gave me money for the work I put into it. I didn’t really like to do that bidding. It was always hard for me to estimate the time it would take to do the work.

One client, an elderly woman, asked me to work over the weekend with my crew, paying even for overtime because she had a big party. So we really worked hard. She had a little birdbath that I adjusted, and she wouldn’t pay me. She said the birds couldn’t find the birdbath because I buried it too deep. I spent as much money in legal fees as she owed me, but I won the case. This made me always work on contracts that were signed and sealed. So I learned as I went along. It wasn’t always easy.

Then another job came my way. The Motel on the Mountain. It was a sixty-acre mountain in Suffern, New York, about thirty miles from New York City. I was introduced to the job by a young man, David H. Engel. He came to see me because he wanted to study landscape architecture. When I asked him if he had any experience, he said he had none. He was a business administrator. He said, “The only thing I’ve grown are the vegetables in the back yard at my parents’ house.” He also told me that he was a
Japanese interpreter during the Korean War, which prompted me to suggest that he go
to Japan to study landscape architecture, because the Japanese designers make sketches
and spend a lot of time constructing the landscape, placing each rock and plant with
great care.

Rubens: Were you reading about Japanese gardens then at the time?

Linn: No. So Engel took my advice. He came back half a year later, when he got a scholarship
to go to Japan. He returned year and a half later having written a book about Japanese
gardening called *Japanese Gardens for Today*. Then he came back and specialized in
Japanese gardens for the rich. He came to visit me one day, and I told him about my
dilemma of having to bid on other people’s projects. He said, “I know a Japanese
architect who just started a job designing the Motel on the Mountain on a sixty-acre
mountain.” His name was Junzo Yoshimura.

So I went to see him and the three co-owners of the motel. One of them was Bob
Schwartz, a writer. When he was in Japan, he got excited about these nice places
situated on hills next to traffic intersections. So he looked for a hill next to a conversion
of traffic intersections.

Yoshimura liked what I had to say, and so did Bob Schwartz, who later on became an
owner of a retreat center. So he was kind of a spiritual person and we hit it off. I became
landscape architect-in-residence and was able to hire a crew of twelve people and not
pay them out of my own pocket. Then I gave up my contracting business. I gave it to
Naphtali Rosenfeld, who was my second partner. He was also a Nazi refugee from
Germany and a landscape contractor. So I was absolutely delighted with the chance to
work on the motel.

Rubens: Let me ask you just a few questions. I don’t know how to pronounce his name: Junzo
Yoshimura, who was the architect for the Motel on the Mountain. It seems to me there
was a kind of synergy between you two. Was he someone who was very influential, if
you look back at that time?

Linn: I don’t think he was very influential, but in many ways I sensed an affinity for Japanese
approach to articulate the landscape. To me it’s still today a very satisfying arrangement
where the Japanese landscape designers pay much attention to detail, to natural
elements, and spatial organization. In their landscape design stepping stones, plants and
rocks are easily discernible, and at the same time the design is very complex because
they’re relating the elements in the garden to the larger landscape. There’s a lot of
subtlety in their compositions, a lot of care, a lot of concern, which was very appealing
to me.

Rubens: Did you have to move?

Linn: No, I lived in New York. [Eventually though] I found a wonderful place that I bought
five minutes from the Motel, on the Ramapo Mountain Ridge. I bought thirty-two acres,
in Mahwah, New Jersey, five minutes from the motel. One had to drive up a steep
incline, way up, and all of a sudden you could see stone terraces and a big swimming
pool out of natural stone, and a spring with trickling water. I did not even go into the
house before telling the real estate agent that I wanted to buy it. It belonged to the vice
president of the American Cyanamid Company, but he had to sell it because of a bad knee.

Rubens: Would you call this rural, or was it suburban? How would you characterize it?

Linn: No, it was all woods in a mountainous terrain. I could have bought fifty more acres but didn’t. When they put a highway through it, I would have been a multi-multi-multi-millionaire if I’d kept it.

Rubens: So you moved.

Linn: No, I kept my apartment in the city. I tore the patched-up building [at Mahwah] down and had a new one designed. I added a nice room on top of the garage, with a big window, cork tile floor and a bathroom, like a second story. So I was able to live there. We also put in a new drain field and cesspool.

I had a really wonderful time working on the motel, because I didn’t have to worry about payroll. Yoshimura designed a sequence of motel units all linked together with a covered walkway. He also designed and built a beautiful Japanese restaurant. I learned a lot from Yoshimura. I placed big boulders in sight line of the mountain on the horizon, connecting the landscape of the motel to the larger landscape. I exposed a lot of rock outcroppings and put moss in the cracks. They had a landscape contractor before, who had tried to imitate Japanese landscape by just putting some stepping-stones on top of soil. So my approximation of the Japanese vernacular pleased Yoshimura a lot. Except when I moved huge boulders with a bulldozer, sometimes the blade would scratch the rock, so he took me aside and said, “I’m going to tell you a story. There’s a tradition in Japan, very rich people, as a wedding present, give to their friend a huge boulder, wrapping it all in silk. A lot of men carry this rock. Can’t you be more careful in moving the large rocks?”

We had to do a lot of stonework using existing stone. I went to an employment agency and there was an Italian-speaking person who was trying to find employment for his son-in-law who had just arrived in the country. He interpreted when I took them to the motel, and I explained the work to the son-in-law. They were so excited about the opportunity to work with stone and appreciated my sense of the craft that goes into the building of stone walls. I will always remember the musical name of the son-in-law, Jacomo Biando. The father-in-law said, “Look, I’ve retired, but you so much appreciate stone work, I’ll work for you.” So both of them did wonderful stonework.

Bob Schwartz, the owner, really liked our work, but his two business partners, once the motel and restaurant became a success, tried to save money. I thought I would be there five years, but after one year, they terminated my employment. However, things have happened to the motel since. It became a red light district [a haven for prostitution]. People from nearby town of Suffern burned down some hotel units. The last time I visited there, there was an ugly Japanese restaurant, really gauche, that replaced the beautiful handcrafted restaurant Yoshimura had designed and built.

So I sold my New Jersey place. It was 1956. My wife came back from Europe and said, “Look, let’s start a family.” So she became pregnant. Then in ’57 we moved to another
apartment in New York. It was a very nice, sunny apartment on Seventieth Street and Broadway, not far from Lincoln Center, a place where we could raise our child.

Having given up my landscape contracting business to do only landscape architecture, I opened another office on Thirty-fourth Street and Third Avenue. The first office I had was opposite my apartment on Fifty-sixth Street when a neighbor moved out, also for $22.48. At that time I still had a suburban station wagon for moving plants and equipment. I had to pay $35 for a garage, more than for my apartment.

I was really excited about my work when I would go early in the morning along the West Side Highway, along the Hudson River towards my landscape projects scattered in the countryside. My lanes were free of cars. I spent all day long with plants, sunshine, and fresh air and finally in the evening after I was really tired, I was ready for the excitement of cultural life in the city, and the glistening lights of Manhattan. I would go back along the highway, seeing the lights magically reflected in the Hudson River. My lanes were again free of traffic, but on the other side of the highway, people returning to the suburbs after work, were bumper-to-bumper, reaching home when it was dark. I felt I had the best of both worlds.

Rubens: What other projects did you have after you left Motel on the Mountain?

Linn: I worked on the Four Seasons Restaurant and the Seagram Building in New York City, and on projects that well-known architects invited me to participate in. Some landscape architects, such as Thomas Church, who lived on the West Coast, asked me to be his associate. Since a particular client did not like Church's design I ended up being landscape architect for the project.

Rubens: How did that connection come about between Church and you?

Linn: I don't remember, but my work became well known. In 1958 I attended for the first time a meeting of the American Society of Landscape Architect. I became a member at the society at that time and was the 160th landscape architect certified by the state of New York. New York was the first state in the U.S.A. to certify landscape architects.

Rubens: What made you want to become licensed?

Linn: Well, you're not allowed to practice landscape architecture otherwise.

Rubens: But you had practiced before as a designer and a builder.

Linn: Yes, I called myself only a landscape designer. As a landscape architect, though, my role changed. I could no longer participate physically. At first I would tell the crew of contractors, when I didn't like the way they were grading the soil, but their foremen wouldn't let me interfere with their men. So I felt really frustrated. I looked at soil as a plastic medium, and I was very fond of participating physically in fine grading. I usually developed a very cooperative relationship with bulldozer operators who, when they saw my plan, thought I was crazy. But then they really got into it. I was able to get the bulldozers to cut an inch of soil. Their blade became my extended sculpting tool. They got all excited about their accomplishments, sculpting the soil imaginatively.
They did wonderful work. I even called my business Land Sculptors Inc. But when I
couldn’t do this anymore and my only contact with the earth was drawing with the sharp
point of a pencil, I sought another tactile outlet and started to sculpt with grog, a
granular textured clay. I took sculpting courses with live models, and I want to go back
to it after I’ve finished my writing. I really enjoyed it a lot.

Rubens: Tell me about the course at Harvard, though. Was that a turning point? Was there
someone there that you worked with?

Linn: It was Stanley White, a highly regarded professor of landscape architecture. He was the
brother of E. B. White, the author.

Rubens: What was the philosophy or the orientation of the course?

Linn: It was a summer-long course in ecology. He was a wonderful teacher with whom we
climbed Mt. Washington, and visited the Connecticut Valley. He explained the ecology
of the larger landscape and we went around with a magnifying glass identifying plants.
Stanley White enjoyed the music Anita played on the piano. I was delighted that she
was able to join me at the seminar. I became good friends with Charles Harris, now a
professor emeritus at Harvard University School of Design, who also took the course at
that time.

Rubens: Did you become Land Sculptors Inc?

Linn: For a little while, until I gave the contracting up and called my private practice Karl
Linn Landscape Architect.

Rubens: Did you become friends with other landscape architects?

Linn: Initially I deliberately worked alone without contact with other landscape architects so I
could discover my own creativity. After a while I got together with other landscape
architects, like Edward Bye, Junior; Paul Friedberg; and Conrad Hammerman. We
looked at each other’s projects. We were all at the beginning of our careers. When I
came to the West Coast in the early sixties, Lawrence Halprin threw a welcoming party
for me. The magazine Progressive Architecture at that time in the 1960s published a
long article about landscape architecture written by Halprin, James Rose, and myself.

Rubens: Are there any people that are particularly influencing you more than others, or that you
feel more affinity with?

Linn: There were two architects who had a tremendous impact on me and deepened my
understanding of the designed human habitat. One was Louis I. Kahn, who was also on
the faculty of the Department of Architecture at Penn. He became a mentor and a close
friend. He had an uncanny talent to connect with people in a deep way. People felt
deeply understood by him in terms of their potential and craving to realize this
potential. He transferred this talent to his contact with clients, always asking them what
they wanted to become. In this way Kahn’s architecture becomes a cradle for authentic
growth.
Kahn emphasized that there are basic universal institutions that correspond to the different needs of human beings, such as the institutions of learning, of work, residency, and worship, et cetera. As an example, he talked about the institution of education. He envisioned the earliest form of education being an old man who sat under a tree and talked about his life. Those who listened to his wisdom satisfied their innate curiosity. When it rained and someone put a cloth over their heads, this became the first school building. Now, unfortunately, teachers often do not inspire. Kahn also suggested that the most important learning spaces in school buildings are the hallways where spontaneous meetings occur among students and between students and faculty.

The faculty and especially Dean Perkins were quite apprehensive about my taking students out of the classroom and into inner-city neighborhoods. Knowing that I was also a psychologist, they thought I was confusing social work with the fine arts. I have here a letter that Kahn wrote to the dean, that was read at a faculty meeting. The letter supports my work as reinvigorating the tradition of apprenticeship. In his introduction he said,

Since the faculty meeting in which I tried to express my feeling about the work of Karl Linn, I planned to write you about my reaction to his work. I hope that these few sentences say a little more clearly what I feel.

The professions of art, architecture, planning and landscape architecture give character and environment to the institutions of man. As these institutions mature and encompass new responsibilities, and even become new institutions, the schools and the practice of these professions of the fine arts must feel these changes because these institutions are in a sense the measure of a way of life.

The other architect who had a profound influence on architecture and myself was Aldo van Eyck, from Holland. He was a member of Team Ten, an international group of architects who challenged the International School of Architecture dominated by Mies van der Rohe, whose mechanistic and industrialized approach created regimented buildings that looked the same the world over. Van Eyck was deeply moved by the indigenous and highly complex and sophisticated architecture of the Dogon people in Mali, North Africa. He generated a worldwide interest among architects in the beautiful and functional architecture that indigenous people create. Van Eyck, who was a visiting professor at Penn, became both a mentor and a special friend to me. He accompanied me on a field trip when I took students to New York City. He refused to go into the Seagram Building, a prime example of Mies van der Rohe’s architecture, because he felt that one should be careful to limit the assaults on one’s senses. Aldo also emphasized that like any creature, all human beings have an innate talent in creating their own dwelling. He encouraged active participation in the creation of one’s own habitat. In 1979, being a member of search committee for honorary Ph.D. candidates of the Department of Architecture at New Jersey Institute of Technology, I succeeded in making Aldo van Eyck a candidate. I want to read from an excerpt of the speech he made at his investiture on May 25, 1979. He said,

It is in the nature of all human species, all people, you see, to be able to deal with environments, hence also to fashion the spaces they require, adequately and beautifully. The way all people are given to communicate with each other
adequately and beautifully through language—speech, that other gift which, like making spaces, belongs to our primordial equipment.

Philosophically I also liked James C. Rose. He lived not far from one of my jobs. He was spiritually inclined and his designs were subtle. His own buildings had a Japanese style. He became a good friend. I also appreciate Larry Halprin’s work a lot. What I liked about him was also how he worked with his wife, Anna Halprin, the choreographer. She’s very well known. He developed a whole approach where he records people’s spatial experiences. He developed a whole notation system of spatial experience. Just like you have a musical notation and Laban’s dance notation. When you want to design places of welcome, you could connote the desired experience of welcome.

Rubens: Did you learn of his work through *Progressive Architecture*?

Linn: I also read his books and we met at conferences. Contemporary landscape architects were a small group and we all knew each other. Larry was also Jewish and had spent time in Palestine.

Rubens: Are the American Society of Landscape Architects conferences important to you too? Are these places where you meet, talk, and network?

Linn: Yes. In 1958, at the annual meeting of American Society of Landscape Architects, I met Ian McHarg, who was chairperson of landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. He invited me to join the faculty. My work had become known by this time. Then I spent a whole year deliberating because it wasn’t easy to get my office started, and I was reluctant to let it go.

Rubens: There was a big recession in 1957, were you having trouble getting jobs?

Linn: No, I didn’t at all. My work was exciting technically. I worked on the Seagram Building with Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson. To create mounds of ivy on the fifth floor roof opposite the executive suites I had to come up with a lightweight soil mixture. Then I had a job in Toronto, a very extravagant job creating an extensive roof garden and a sculptural entrance walk to a high-rise building owned by my clients. The Four Season Restaurant project was a pacesetter of interior landscape architecture. All these jobs were technically very exciting, and it was hard for me to let my business go.

Rubens: Mies van der Rohe was such a giant in his field. Were you intimidated working with him?

Linn: No. Famous people never intimidate me; they’re just people. Though I came from an economically secure background, I grew up in a family where intellectual and spiritual concerns really dominated. Wealth doesn’t impress me. When I worked as a psychoanalyst-in-residence at Marshall Field’s estate, I had a chauffeur driving me to town. One day he drove me back to Manhattan. At that time I still had the cheap apartment in Greenwich Village—for $29 a month. I asked him to stop in front of Schrafft’s [a landmark luncheon restaurant and soda fountain in New York] because I wanted to have a cup of coffee. I had just come from a little outing at Marshall Field’s estate, where Marshall Field himself showed us the first Polaroid camera. We all wore
very casual clothes, and they wouldn’t let me into Schrafts without a jacket. And here the chauffeur was waiting outside. [laughs] So it was funny. I enjoy being able to go up and down the ladder of social hierarchies.

Rubens: Did you actually meet Mies van der Rohe?

Linn: He just was a consulting architect. I saw him at some of our conferences. I had more contact with Philip Johnson, who’s also well known, who invited me to his house, and I stayed overnight in his Little Pavilion.

Rubens: Do you have observations that you want to make about Mies van der Rohe or Philip Johnson?

Linn: Philip Johnson installed some very delicate iodized chains in front of the windows at the restaurant. They were right above the heater so they ended up rippling upward in flowing waves as heat went up. When someone first pointed that out to him he was furious because it was unintentional. Actually, the waves in the chains reinforced aesthetically the pond in the middle of the restaurant, and when many other people complimented him on the idea, he took full credit for it. [laughs]

When I stayed at his famous glass house, Johnson told me that birds would constantly hit the glass panes and die. He had to put up a whole different lighting system to keep birds away from the windows.

I found out that Johnson was a Nazi supporter and it really bothered me a lot. I found this out later, otherwise it would have been difficult for me to work with him. Also Mies van der Rohe was one of the signatories of important people who supported Hitler, which was also a fact that I found out more recently.

Rubens: So working with them was okay because you didn’t know?

Linn: I had a good time with them. There was another professional team member, Richard Kelly. He was the lighting consultant for the Four Seasons Restaurant. He had invited me for supper a couple of times and during the evening he transformed his apartment into a lighting demonstration. His seat was next to a control box and he would turn on and off different lighting. He lit up a whole wall of pin lights that looked like stars.

Rubens: Were you working with lighting in your landscapes as well?

Linn: I had to provide optimum lighting conditions, especially for interior planting. I worked with Dr. Wesley Davidson, who was a plant physiologist at Rutgers University. We did a lot of research. Though we installed adequate lighting for geraniums, they always died on us. We couldn’t understand it. Then it turned out they suffered from all the cigarette smoke. So we introduced an air-purifying system in the air conditioning system, which helped the plants, and customers too. Plants became, really, health indicators.

Dr. Davidson was also my consultant on a roof garden in Toronto, coming up with a technical innovation. We put heat coils in the bottom of the raised plant boxes. Under normal soil conditions, water comes from the subsoil into the roots through capillary action. When you have raised boxes, the soil freezes and shrinks, tearing the fibrous
roots. The heat coils kept it a degree above freezing. From the technical point of view my landscape architectural practice was very exciting.

When Ian McHarg invited me to join the faculty, he also asked me to come to the university to listen to students’ reviews. Then I realized the issues they were dealing with were to me much more intriguing because they had to do with social issues, human issues, not only technical issues. After a long deliberation, I decided to join the Department of Landscape Architecture in 1959 and opened another office in Philadelphia. I also kept my New York office going for two years to finish the jobs. I hired some people from my New York office, including Robert Nichols who had redesigned Washington Square in New York City. I would travel to New York once a week to review what was done. I finally closed all my private practice work in 1962.

Rubens: How did you prepare to teach?

Linn: My preparation consisted in part of a reevaluation of ten years of private practice in landscape architecture in service of private, corporate, and institutional clientele. I went back to my clients every five years or so to see what happened to the landscapes I designed. My initial intent in re-entering landscape architecture was to create a healing environment for my clients and myself. I never took into account the economic ramifications that my clients got richer each year, which meant that I ended up creating primarily landscapes of affluence. This really undermined my sense of social purpose, because my whole history was involved in trying to contribute to a just society. These landscapes of affluence were antithetical to my values of egalitarianism and nonviolence.

One of my clients, William Pahlmann was a famous interior designer who worked on the Four Seasons. He had the house on his estate remodeled. He asked me to transform his landscape so he could accommodate large parties. We exposed huge boulders which flanked the descending walkways that we created, leading to a large pavilion where he would entertain his guests at night. For his housewarming party Pahlmann intended to entertain a who’s who crowd from the interior decorating world along with his wealthy clients. We scattered objets d’art around the landscape so in a sense it became a showcase for expensive art pieces and sculptural large plants. I went to nurseries with overgrown plants to find specimens that had a nice sculptural quality.

I realized that what I catered to was an aesthetic of extravagance and isolation. I also realized that I was contributing to the consumer conditioning, a subject I went into more deeply with my students. Large specimen plants that you see growing in arboreta and on large estates can hog all the air and sunshine. When I saw a large holly tree in an arboretum, it reminded me of a king with a large potbelly. Such an aesthetic of indulgence cannot help but reinforce social hierarchy. More ecologically oriented arboreta now create plant groupings that express a more natural situation in which plants interact with each other and the sunshine. One might call this an ecological aesthetics.

Paradoxically, although I questioned my work from a social justice point of view, I nevertheless enjoyed it. I imported marble from Italy. I appreciated the handcrafted stonework that Jacomo Biando and his father-in-law did at Motel on the Mountain, infusing the stonework with a human touch. During those years there was a whole
reaction against impersonal assembly-line products. People paid a premium for handcrafted objects. Initially I applied this approach to environmental craft to the landscapes of affluence I created. When I started to work in inner-city neighborhoods, a lot of unemployed people participated in the construction of neighborhood commons. These commons had a high aesthetic quality because they were handcrafted. During those days I also hoped that those handcrafted commons would inspire people who would come to visit from the rich suburbs to emulate them. Sidewalks made by hand out of bricks or mosaics are infinitely more attractive than the concrete that is so prevalent in the suburbs.

When I created the Four Seasons Restaurant planting, this was the biggest interior planting installation done by anybody. Since then a lot of others were created, but it was the first. I tried to create a very humane environment by having people sit under a canopy of trees and also benefit from the negative ionization from the trees. Yet the patrons who dined at the Four Seasons were rich people who have an economic stranglehold on the world.

Rubens: Did you have ongoing contact with the Four Seasons Restaurant?

Linn: In 1999, *Vanity Fair* magazine invited me to come to New York because they were about to publish an article about the Four Seasons Restaurant fortieth anniversary. They wanted to take a picture of all the people who had created the restaurant. I had a lot of contact during my visit with co-owner Alex von Bidder. Alex was also deeply involved with an international men’s organization that mentors teenagers in trouble. His deep involvement in this organization blew my mind. Alex has a big heart and compassion for young people. Encountering him made me realize again how complex people are and how easy it is to dismiss people once we label them. Each time you meet a person it’s like opening a new novel. I’m always excited to draw people out and read the pages when people talk about their lives.

Rubens: You mentioned that they introduced artificial plants. That must have been a big disappointment.

Linn: I was appalled. At one point they introduced mummified trees that had been saturated in formaldehyde—a very expensive process.

Rubens: Yes, “embalmed” is the word you use.

Linn: Embalmed. Exactly.

Since architect Phyllis Lambert, a member of the Bronfman family who had inspired the creation of the Seagram Building, had also complained about the artificial plants, Alex asked me to consult with him on the planting. Having given up my private practice in landscape architect years ago and having worked since only as a volunteer, I was unsure what to charge. I went to see Lawrence Halprin who suggested I should charge $250 per hour, which I did. I contacted various interior landscape contractors and landscape architects who specialized in the installations of large interior plantings, who submitted various proposals.

Rubens: Do you have any other critiques of your work?
Linn: In addition to creating landscapes of affluence, I was also bothered by ignoring mental health considerations in my work. Since I spent the day supervising the installation of the landscape, I spent much time with women and their children while the men were away at work. Reflecting on nuclear family living, I realized the hardship it imposes on women and children. I also realized that the clients who had contact with me in designing residential landscapes were the men, the breadwinners. Consequently, I didn’t design any neighborhood meeting places, no benches for women to sit and share experiences. I realized that neither women nor young people were active participants in the design of their own landscape. Based on these experiences, I changed my strategy and became known as one of the fathers of participatory design.

Rubens: Your participatory design work is going to take place in Philadelphia, at Penn?

Linn: Right. This led to my creating neighborhood commons through participatory design. In reevaluating my private practice, I remember a project where unfortunately I didn’t establish a deep enough dialogue with my client. One of my wealthy clients wanted a very mature-looking landscape, so I specified bigger plants than I would have ordinarily done and anticipated singling plants out once they got too crowded. When the landscape contractor installed the plants, I found a huge white azalea in one section of the landscape. I thought initially that the plant was a gift to the owner from the contractor. I tried to subdue the profusion of glaring white blossoms by pulling it between some mountain laurel. Each time I came back, the azalea was out in front again. After some repeats my client took me aside and said, “Karl, I want to show you something.” He took me to the basement of his new building and showed me a cherry wood table and chairs. He said, “This is the only thing I took with me from my old life. It was a big move for me in my middle fifties to move into a contemporary home that I had designed that enabled me to also display my [collection of] art work.” Then he took me outside and said, “See this azalea? It was given to me as a wedding present many years ago, can’t you give it a prominent place?” I realized then that my dialogue with my clients wasn’t deep enough.

I also felt badly that I often catered to the more superficial concerns of my clients.

Based on these experiences, when I started to teach, I gave an exercise to my students to design a home and landscape for themselves. Much to my students’ surprise the houses and landscapes they designed were very different from what they would design for a client. Many of my students were graduate students who already worked in architectural offices. Their upwardly mobile clients requested from my students to design prestigious homes like those advertised in magazines. The students unfortunately catered to their clients’ need for conspicuous consumption. In designing the landscapes and homes for themselves, the students drew much more on memories of their childhood and the affinity they felt for the landscapes they were raised in.

Apart from not establishing a deep enough dialogue with clients, architects and landscape architects often imbue their designs with their own preferences. Asking students to design the landscape and building of their choice I hoped would prevent them from projecting their own preferences on their clients. In his autobiography, Quest for Life, Ian McHarg wrote about this exercise. He noted how important it is for us to
find out what we like, rather than [unconsciously] giving to the clients the landscape that we prefer for ourselves.

I had another problem when I reflected on my private practice. Not only did I create landscapes without sociability settings for adults and children, meaning without commons, but each year as my clients got richer and got bigger estates, I created more and more fences and hedges that isolated families.

Rubens: Did you have any work or reflection on Levittown, or those kinds of developments that were taking place?

Linn: Yes. A lot of my clients’ locations were similar. Levittown today is different. The trees are bigger and people changed the houses. But in those days, they looked like cookie cutters. I remember creating a landscape in a Levittown-like development in New Rochelle. There was a big lawn in front of the house sloping precipitously toward the sidewalk. The house was surrounded by foundation plantings, which I hate, because when you look out of your window you don’t see them, and then they always get brown against the wall because there’s no air circulation. I decided I would terrace the lawn and put the foundation plants next to the sidewalk. The different levels provided my clients with many outdoor living rooms. Years later when I went back to look at the landscape, many other houses on the block had done the same thing. I had started a whole new trend.

In another project I used the excavation of a foundation of a building to make little mounds between trees, making the landscape looked much more sculptural. But at the end of the property on the other side of the fence one was struck by the contrast of the flatness of the neighboring landscape. I realized that in many ways I was really creating artificial stage settings. In other projects where I used a lot of plants at the property line to make the landscape look as if they blended into the larger landscape, I was really only creating green stage sets.

I became aware that often the invisible borders of property ownership make a great deal of difference. I had one residence on the Main Line of Philadelphia. He was a very nice client, and I’d just finished the planting, all of a sudden I got an emergency call from him. “Karl, Karl, Karl! My neighbor just put a swimming pool right up against my property line and I have no more privacy. They can look right into my swimming pool.” I had to dig the trees out. I added a hundred cubic yards of soil, and replanted the trees on the newly established slope to create a new protective green wall.

My client in Toronto, where I had created a roof garden on the thirteenth floor, called me one day. “Guess what happened, Karl.” He had this big terrace overlooking the campus of the University of Toronto, like [it was] his own garden. All of a sudden, the university started to build a high-rise building, higher and higher and higher. When the thirteenth floor was built, he lost his privacy. I had to add a new planting screen [to restore privacy]. It is really an illusion that we can isolate ourselves, even at lofty heights. The same client, for whom I had created a sculptural wall flanking their entrance walkway, called me in despair on another occasion. He said that somebody had mis-measured the property boundary by a foot and a half and he was being forced to tear the wall down.
When I looked through my portfolio of photographs of the landscapes I had created, I realized that they were devoid of people. There was only one job where I have pictures of a little girl in the play area I designed at her family’s house. During the fifties and early sixties, the environmental design professions looked at the spaces they created as sculptures. Even Philip Johnson and Mies van der Rohe deplored that once people move in, they spoil the “look” of the spaces they [the architect] had envisioned. I knew a well-known architect who designed many highly publicized residential homes who, when his clients went away for the weekend, would come with a truck full of furniture, and replace his clients’ decor before photographing the interior. These photos were then handed to the magazines.

This means these architects had a whole confused perspective about what architecture means. They didn’t realize that architecture is a social art, not just a sculptural creation. Environmental designers have to create spaces to accommodate people, spaces that support human beings in the unfolding of their own potential, both intellectual and emotional.

I became more and more sensitive to the idea that architecture is really a very unique social art, and so is landscape architecture. That you work with clients to create optimal spaces that accommodate the way people grow in maturity and unfold their creativity. I referred to the suburbs, where I created landscapes, as “green deserts” because there were no places for human interaction. They were designed to accommodate cars, not people. There were no places that provided opportunities for neighbors to meet each other. This was the beginning of my awareness that commons were missing. When I created neighborhood commons in Washington D.C., I received a letter from a woman from a very rich suburban neighborhood in Maryland. It said, “We have everything. We have enough recreation with lawns and trees, but no amenities for people to make contact with each other.”

These are some of the main points of my reevaluation of my work when I joined the University of Pennsylvania. Often neither my clients nor their architect thought about the aging process, so many of my clients, when they aged, lived in huge empty houses with the children no longer at home. You could hear the emptiness as you moved through the house. Your footsteps resonated in the emptiness of the space. These concerns made me add the byline “Did my client’s dreams come true?” to the title of my manuscript *Landscapes Revisited*.

Rubens: Can you summarize the results of your reevaluation of your private practice?

Linn: Yes. In reviewing my projects, I realized that I could categorize them as five different types. One type were landscapes that aged with grace. These were usually residential landscapes that were very well taken care of by my clients whose personal relations with each other was usually very loving. So both the landscapes and the people aged with grace. They usually simplified the maintenance to make it physically more manageable. Projects that aged with grace often also included creative refinements. For example, one client added a ladder to their roof so they could enjoy a wonderful view of the distant Manhattan skyline.

In revisiting my projects, I also experienced the bond that had grown between my clients and myself. You don’t experience that kind of bond with people if you haven’t
seen them for a long time, but once you reconnect, then all of a sudden you realize there was a real connection despite the fact that people had lost their hair, or aged, or were handicapped.

A second category were landscapes that suffered neglect. In residential landscapes, the neglect was usually the result of couples not getting along with one another. Sometimes they invested a lot of money in a new home hoping it would reinforce and improve their relationship. My sense is that it may have been better to spend the money on therapy.

Rubens: Do you say this because you as a therapist were attuned to it?

Linn: Maybe. I remember a client who had a lot of sculptures for whom I designed a landscape that functioned as an outdoor gallery. After the divorce, he left the house to his wife. She was very angry and surrounded the property with a big fence, inside of which were really fierce dogs. The truncated pedestals of the sculptures looked like bodies without heads. The trees were neglected and overgrown. It was very painful to see.

A third category was landscapes affected by wear and tear. Some landscapes suffered because they weren’t well maintained. When damage occurred, it was not repaired.

A fourth category was landscapes that suffered from mistakes, such as roof gardens that leaked because of faulty construction of the building.

The fifth category was landscapes that were destroyed—usually commercial landscapes. I never knew what would happen to them because they were much more exposed to change than the residential ones. The Motel on the Mountain was the worst of such experiences. It was completely transformed from beautiful, delicately designed motel units and a Japanese restaurant to a huge ugly commercialized Japanese restaurant. It was very painful for me to see. Often clients who had sold their factories would advise me not to visit the site. They thought it would be too painful for me to see the destruction of the landscape that I had created.

These are in retrospect my reflections on my work.

Rubens: Okay. When you joined the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania in 1959, was this a graduate program?

Linn: Yes. There were only two full-time faculty members: Ian McHarg and myself. I conducted the first-year studio, and McHarg the second. A studio meets twelve hours per week, and students are supposed to spend twice as much time on their studio work, which means thirty-six hours. It’s a main course, besides seminars and lectures. Many of the students that I still have contact with are from that year. Roger Osbaldeston, who was at my eightieth birthday event, was one of those students. They were all graduate students who went to Penn, not only to further their careers but to learn to become more socially responsible designers, which paralleled my own search at that time.

This was the beginning of the resurgence of social concern that created the Peace Corps. During the fifties, people were in a period of self-indulgence. Then people realized they wanted to do something more with their lives. There was a new social awakening that
started in the late fifties into the early sixties that affected my students, who were then very challenged and pleased that I engaged them in much more socially relevant exercises.

One person whom I met again was Lawrence K. Frank, who had introduced me to Ellen Reece. Ian McHarg had invited him to the University of Pennsylvania to give a talk as part of a television lecture series called “The House We Live In.” I was delighted to see him. When I expressed my concern for the hardship of nuclear family living, he told me about the life of the rural American families that lived as an extended family. The extended family was emotionally much more supportive than the nuclear family because there were a lot of adults and a lot of children around who kept each other company. When the rural American family moved to the cities, the extended family began to fall apart. Senior citizens were piled together in elderly homes, while relatives were spread out in separate homes and child-rearing families were isolated in individual homes. When I started to teach at Penn this was very much on my mind: How can I contribute to extended family living now, in an urban environment? The university was right in the middle of Philadelphia surrounded by low-income, inner-city people of color communities that were mostly single-parent families, lacking support even more than the suburban nuclear family.

Lawrence K. Frank suggested I should go and visit Radburn in Fairlawn, New Jersey, which was designed by Clarence Stein in 1928. It was an ordinary subdivision, but it was so designed that it separated pedestrians from vehicular traffic, through pedestrian underpasses. It also provided private and common spaces for its residents.

Rubens: That was something that Rex Tugwell was very excited about during the New Deal. He wanted to do these green park cities.

Linn: In Radburn they had private yards and also common areas. I took my students to visit Radburn and we saw that parents didn’t have to worry about their children getting in the streets. There were continuous green walkways and networks of common areas accessible without any vehicular traffic. It was also reassuring to see grown-ups congregate in the common spaces, which one rarely sees in suburbs. Suburbs often didn’t have sidewalks, and you would only see cars.

Rubens: Do you want to say any more about the projects you created in your private practice?

Linn: I’d like to say more about my clients’ relationship to me as their landscape architect. For example, my clients in Toronto would call me for advice about every little thing that happened. Although I enjoyed the personal acclaim, and also the fact that they paid me a lot of money for my counsel, I tried hard to find local resources for them, which would be more easily accessible and more economical for them.

Their boasting about having engaged a prestigious landscape architect also helped me to get more rich clients. Consequently, I was put on a pedestal. Although it might have diminished my earnings, I tried hard to get myself off the pedestal. I was much more eager to develop meaningful relationships with my clients and engage in deep dialogue. I once had a woman client, who had just come out of a mental hospital. She handed me a police whistle and said, “Mr. Linn, if you need me, blow the whistle.” I replied, “If I need you, I’ll come on tip-toe to find you.” Later her psychoanalyst asked to meet with
me because he felt that my involving her in the landscape design had helped to solidify her health.

My connection with him, Dr. Joseph Peters, led to my later being able to rent a country place in Collegeville, Pennsylvania, in the middle of Evansburg State Forest that I kept for many, many years, from 1972 to 1986. I rented it from the state.

Not far from the park, a nuclear power plant had been erected, which needed a large body of water for its operation. The plan was to flood a large section of the state park, which contained many historic buildings. Joe became active in mobilizing local residents and succeeded in preventing the land from being flooded. Recruiting restoration-minded people to occupy all the buildings in the threatened area, he asked me one day whether I would like to rent a historic building in the middle of a state park. I chose a small beautifully proportioned two-story stone building. Both the building and the overgrown surrounding landscape needed a lot of work, but the initial rent was only $25 a month. It was a beautiful natural setting next to a gushing creek.

Rubens: Can you mention some other architects with whom you worked or who influenced you?

Linn: I also worked closely with a very creative architect, George Nelson, who involved me in many landscape projects for buildings his firm designed. He was also known internationally as a pacesetter in interior and furniture design. George also created exhibits, such as the American pavilion at the World’s Fair in the Soviet Union. We became good friends. He even asked me to help him with his own landscape, but he had a whole different approach to the job. He said, “Let’s only do this section now and then work on it together. Because I can’t grasp everything.” He had an instinct for participatory design.

In many ways Charles Eames was also a mentor to me, although I didn’t work directly with him. I had contact with him and visited the Eamery, his large workshop space in Santa Monica. I interacted with him at conferences. I particularly remember a conference at Princeton, which was by invitation only. I appreciated his design philosophy that he expressed poetically for the building program he developed at the College of the Immaculate Heart in Los Angeles.

We want a college that will shelter those within it on the sad days as well as the gay days—A system of buildings that will not be embarrassed by a complete change of program—A structure that can be scotch-taped, nailed into, thumb-tacked, and still not lose its dignity—Spaces that will welcome and enhance teaching machines as well as celebrations and pageants—Materials that will not tend to become shoddy and will still show a response to care. One would hope that the experience of the buildings would be so natural that the question of their having been designed could never come up.

Rubens: What a wonderful story.

Linn: The year 1958 was a very important year for consolidating my thinking. All the material I just recounted was background for a new phase where I finally found a way to pull together my various interests and concerns into a creative synthesis.
Rubens: It sounds like that was a watershed for you.

Linn: I applied my insights to my teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, where I developed a holistic and community design-and-build service education program in landscape architecture, which I’m still doing today.

Rubens: Penn was also a very yeasty place—with its pioneering American Civilization Department.

Linn: The Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture and Planning at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Fine Arts was a vibrant intellectual center whose faculty were highly regarded professionals. Louis I. Kahn was the most inspiring teacher, who later was considered one of the great architects of the century.

Robert Venturi and his wife, Denise Scott Brown, who had an office right next to mine, were pacesetters in their unique approach to architecture. Aldo Giurgola and Tim Vreeland were also highly respected members of the faculty. Tim also ended up working with me on the neighborhood commons.

Rubens: Is Tim Vreeland a relation of the *Vogue* editor?

Linn: Yes. He is her son.

Paul Davidoff was teaching in the planning department at that time. He coined the phrase “advocacy planning” since he defended the rights of low-income and people-of-color communities. Last, but not least, Ian McHarg, chairman of the Department of Landscape Architecture, was another prominent member of the faculty.

Rubens: Was there any joint landscape architect/architect program, or were they separate?

Linn: They were separate, but there were also joint projects. The School of Fine Arts also embraced planning and art.

Rubens: There were only two of you in the landscape architecture department.

Linn: There were only two of us full-time. George E. Patton was a part-time visiting lecturer, and Dr. John M. Fogg, the director of the arboretum, was also a lecturer. Over the years McHarg expanded the faculty significantly, engaging many scientists, who provided the underpinnings for ecological planning.

Rubens: Did any women come on board? Later on, did the program expand?

Linn: Yes, later on there were quite a few women. Anne Spirn became department chair.

Rubens: Right. So while you were teaching, did you engage in other professional activities?

Linn: During my first year of teaching, I not only consolidated my ideas, but I also tried to present them to the profession at large. I organized a national meeting of educators of landscape architecture (NCILA), which I mentioned earlier, in collaboration with R. H. Otto from the University of Massachusetts and John C. Fulkerson from the Rhode
Island School of Design. I gave the keynote address called “Landscapes for Survival.” I tried to provide a new philosophical and theoretical underpinning for the profession.

In addition to Francis Woidich, M.D., whom I mentioned earlier, I invited several pace setting professionals and authors. Among them were Ian McHarg, who had barely begun his ecological work, planner E. A. Gutkind, ecologist Paul B. Sears, and literary critic Morse Peckham. Louis Kahn arrived in the middle of the night on his way back from a conference in Washington, D.C. These people were either members of the faculty at Penn or visiting lecturers invited by Ian McHarg with whom I developed ongoing relationships. They either presented papers or gave talks. I remember vividly Kahn’s talk about creativity in architecture. He divided the process into three phases. In the first phase the architect envisions a form that has no specific dimension. In the second phase, considering all the technical requirements, the shape of the building assumes very definite dimensions. In the third phase, unless there are aspects of your building that are immeasurable, you have not created a work of art.

At the conference, Woidich, besides talking about negative and positive ionization, which I mentioned earlier, talked about organic clocks, the manner in which creatures respond to the cycle of seasons even when they are removed from their original environment. To connect with nature I organized an outing to a nearby mountaintop where Morse Peckham read poetry by Wallace Stevens.

In his book *Cosmic Superimposition*, Reich shows how deeply human beings are connected to nature. He talks about the common functioning principle that prevails in all natural systems. In the aurora borealis we see the galactic superimposition of two energy systems, which is echoed in the human love embrace. To explore such universal depths of connectedness in us, which are so rooted in our origin, a new discipline—called ecopsychology—has emerged. However, its practitioners have not gone as deep as Reich did in his speculative thinking and work on cosmic superimposition.

Since the sheer mention of Reich’s name evokes such conflicting reactions by people who think of him as an extraordinary genius and others who dismiss him as a charlatan, I was delighted to run across a book published recently in 2003, *Wilhelm Reich, Psychoanalyst and Radical Naturalist*, [Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York] by psychoanalyst Robert S. Corrington. In it he asserts that Reich was creating a new philosophy. Let me read to you from the book jacket.

Robert S. Corrington offers the first thorough reconsideration of the great and maligned psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich’s life and work since Reich’s death in 1957…. In this transfixing psychobiography, Corrington illuminates the themes and obsessions that unify Reich’s work and reports on Reich’s fascinating, unrelenting one-man quest to probe the ultimate structures of self, world, and cosmos.

I’d like to read to you a summary of Corrington’s perspective on Reich later in the book.

Rubens: Okay.

Linn: Corrington writes,
It is my conviction that Reich provided an extremely important component for what a sexually liberated life-philosophy would look like. I will also argue that in such works as his *Ether, God and Devil*, and *Cosmic Superimposition*, written mostly in English in the early 1950s, Reich was creating his own version of an ecstatic naturalist and universalistic religion. (pp.10–11)

Rubens: And when you were at Penn you had contact with Lewis Mumford, right?

Linn: He sent a paper to the NCILA conference in 1960.

Being deeply concerned about the nuclear arms race between the U.S. and the USSR, Mumford started to recruit people, including myself, to SANE, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. He spent many hours with me talking about the threat of the nuclear arms race. He was also very supportive of my work building neighborhood commons and came to visit our first commons, the Melon Commons. I received a letter from him in December 1961, in which he wrote,

I am delighted with the vigorous way you are challenging current clichés in recreation and park design, not only in theory but in practice. If we survive the infamous assaults our leaders have projected against both nature and man, I can plainly see, in the work you are doing at the school, the fresh shoots that will flower in a new age.
Interview 4: January 14, 2004

Rubens: This is our fourth interview. One of the things I noticed was that it was a very transitional interview last week, because we went from you being a private school teacher, psychoanalyst, and a Reichian patient, and a landscape architect with a private practice that was really growing. Just when that’s happening, you’re asked to join the landscape architecture department of the University of Pennsylvania, which is really quite a shift in direction. You spent a year evaluating what it was you had been doing as a landscape architect. Later you wrote a book about your private practice.

Linn: The book you refer to is entitled Landscapes Revisited with the subtitle Did My Clients’ Dreams Come True?

Rubens: When did you put it together?

Linn: About five years ago. I haven’t published it yet. Because my most significant work, Building Commons and Community, really started in the late fifties. If I had had the time to put the book together in the sixties, it would have been a very appropriate era or decade to publish it. Now there’s been four decades since then, and landscape architecture has gone in a much more ecological direction. The way I wrote it was interesting because I have half-a-century perspective on my work. I went back every five or ten years and that’s why I said in the byline, “Did my clients’ dreams come true?” I could really see how we as landscape architects or architects aligned ourselves with their own projection into the future. Sometimes much to their detriment.

Once Building Commons and Community is published, publishers may be more interested in Landscapes Revisited. The video documentary A Lot in Common, about the creation and use of the Peralta Community Garden, has already been shown in more than forty U.S. cities. These showings should also help create a more receptive climate for Building Commons and Community and, as a spillover, for Landscapes Revisited.

Rubens: When you conducted your private practice in landscape architecture, your writing becomes more prolific. Projects that you’ve done appeared in magazines, journals, and newspapers.

Linn: I hired a young man named Ray Smith, who became my secretary. He had a real knack for writing and later became an editor and then chief editor of Progressive Architecture. He did a lot of writing about my projects and helped me a lot with writing reports.

Rubens: Oh! Have I ever asked you, what are you reading at the time? Are you reading Progressive Architecture? Your work is being discussed in House Beautiful and Interiors and Progressive Architecture. Are you reading people that are influential to you?

Linn: Well, I’ll tell you. Initially, when I started my own re-entry into landscape architecture, I deliberately didn’t read. Because I didn’t want to be influenced by anybody. I wanted to see what I had in myself. Once I got my own bearing, I started to read a lot.
When I attended the first meeting of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the keynote speaker was J. B. Jackson, a well-known geographer, who became a friend of mine. He challenged landscape architects to rise above the preoccupation with designing for leisure-time activities. His words reflected my own concerns with consumer conditioning and conspicuous consumption and instilled in me a sense of promise and hope for the profession. He urged us to impart to people the spiritual value of being in the natural environment in the midst of growing things. It was an important challenge.

In 1960, I gave a talk to an annual meeting of the American Society of Landscape Architects at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, which I mentioned previously. It was called “Space as a Social Force: Are We Creating Spaces for Consumers Only?” I implied that we should create places for human beings. I will tell you more about the reading that I did in relationship to consumer conditioning when we discuss landscape architecture in the service of peace.

Rubens: You mention in your unpublished autobiography that you were invited by universities to lecture and review student work. Where else besides Penn did you talk to students?

Linn: I was invited by many universities, but giving workshops to members of Federation of Garden Clubs was very special. This most likely has a lot to do with my mother and sister and all the women who worked on the farm where I grew up. I really felt comfortable [with them] and appreciated their sensitivity and creativity. These women were wonderful gardeners, but they felt amateurish about it because they perceived landscape architects as superior professionals. They didn’t pay tribute to their own competence. The Garden Club ladies had a much wiser and more profound appreciation of plant life [than most landscape architects]. I expressed this to them in my workshops and encouraged them to value their own understanding and skill. I received wonderful responses letting me know that they felt understood and reinforced.

In the same vein, when I organized the annual meeting of NCILA on the campus of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, our meeting place was next to a greenhouse. I never saw a single student of landscape architecture going into that greenhouse. In the late fifties and early sixties, Thomas Church put his stamp on landscape aesthetics. He used a lot of hard pavements around his amoeba-shaped swimming pools. These students who came from a nurseryman background and were embarrassed about the calluses on their hands much preferred to use triangles and T-squares and working with concrete rather than plants. It appeared to be more prestigious to be an architect than a person who was related to the plant world. Not until the late sixties did an emerging ecological awareness of the workings of natural systems begin to motivate some students to shift from the study of architecture to landscape architecture.

Rubens: This is such a prolific time for you, a very exciting time. Philip Johnson seems to be continuously recommending you to people. Even in 1961 IBM has you do the landscape for their building at the Seattle World’s Fair.

Linn: The architects and I got a design prize for the project.

Rubens: So this is while you are at Penn.
Linn: Yes, I was in the middle of work and had to keep two offices going in New York and Philadelphia.

Rubens: Let’s step back for a minute and look at the progression of phases in your life. I’d like to hear your overview on your life path up to this point.

Linn: Well, thinking about my life in preparation for the oral history, my evolution seemed to consist of five phases. One was the roots and uprooting of childhood in Germany. We covered that. The second one was youthful pioneering in Palestine. The third one was a stage of education and exploration. Then, finally, in the late 1940s I started to establish myself professionally, by developing a private practice in child psychoanalysis and later a private practice in landscape architecture. The fifth and most significant phase, which started in 1958 and continues to this very day, I call the creative synthesis.

I also recognized in my life’s patterns five major threads or interests. The first is nature and ecology. The second is political theory and action. The third is environmental design and aesthetics. The fourth is education and teaching. And the fifth is psychological and spiritual concerns.

In this period of creative synthesis, I begin to pull together all five threads. From 1958, I felt free to express my concerns and observations, and I started to talk about and write about them.

Rubens: So you’re weaning away from your private and corporate patronage and beginning to teach.

Linn: To teach at Penn, I moved to Philadelphia and found a house in Wayne, Pennsylvania. It was an old farmhouse, at the edge of the Main Line that expanded the suburban belt around Philadelphia, an hour from Philadelphia. I always wanted to be close to nature. It was a very humble farmhouse that had big fields around it, and two rows of dogwood trees that led to the house. My son, who was then maybe two, called them “whoo whoo trees.” From dogwood, you know, like a dog, “whoo whoo.”

Rubens: Oh, woof, woof. Yes. That’s wonderful.

Linn: This was 1959. At that time I spent a lot of time developing the curriculum and working with students, which made it very difficult for my wife, Anita, to take care of our child because there were no other children nearby. We found a wonderful playschool, the Charlestown Playschool, where I met with Paul Hogan whose children were also there at that time. He mobilized parents to create play equipment and I involved parents in clearing the surrounding woods and making them more accessible. As often as possible I took Mark with me on field trips with students. What motivated me to build play equipment was not only for the children in the neighborhood, but also Mark. He really enjoyed playing with the neighborhood kids.

Rubens: What kind of program did you develop at Penn?

Linn: In developing a holistic education program in landscape architecture, I was eager to connect with the students on three spheres of engagement. One was student as artist and
philosopher, second was student as craftsperson, and third was student as socially responsible landscape architect.

To start out with addressing the students as creative artists and philosophers: We all develop a philosophy of life that affects our experiences and actions. I encouraged students to become conscious of their underlying assumptions and hopefully, in so doing, to reveal their biases and prejudices. We shared the writings of many artists’ reflections on their creative processes. To help students relax as they worked on designs I introduced relaxing bioenergetic techniques. I told them, “Dancers have warming-up exercises. So do actors. When a designer goes to be creative, if you’re holding your breath, or if your toes are cramped, how do you expect to express yourself?” You have to be really aware of your body.

I will always remember Richard Durling, an artist who worked with an acetylene torch carving the most intricate hairline designs on tin cans. He developed a meditative practice to get the disturbing energy out of his system by making practice cuts on other tin cans until he could be still enough to work on the final can. Richard gave a demonstration at the Creative Recycling Workshop I put together with my students from MIT, Massachusetts College of Arts, and Harvard for the 1972 Boston Flower Show. In our pavilion we conducted thirty-six workshops, and displayed plant containers made of recycled materials such as Richard’s tin cans. We were the only exhibit that people queued up for throughout the entire flower show. I will always remember one lady exclaiming after looking over the ingenious recycled contraptions, “I can do that too!”

As part of engaging students as creative artists, I gave them an exercise called “My Secret Garden.” Their task was to design their own home landscape to help them avoid projecting their own preferences on their clients. In our faculty publication I said, “Finding their secret garden will help them to discover the landscape of others. In designing their dream house and landscape their awareness of genus loci [the spirit of a place] will imbue the rocks, rivers, and plants of childhood with new meaning.”

Since I have lived in many different countries, I have never gotten to know one tree or the folklore of one area in depth. Though I deplore missing such a connection, I feel at home in the world wherever I can touch the earth.

Addressing the students as artists, I tried to focus on the sense of care that artists imbue their work with. As budding artists, I tried to expand their sense of caring to plants. I filled the studio with plants, by getting a whole truckload of plants from the contractor we chose for the Four Seasons through a bidding process, Everett Conklin, who was also a good friend of mine. The studio all of a sudden became a plant laboratory and students had to take care of plants, learning how to control temperature, humidity, and light. To me, being a caretaker is a noble profession.

The emerging understanding of ecology, which was the focus of the Department of Landscape Architecture, became an important topic in my discussions with students. I experience ecology as an integrating science because it takes into account the sum total of factors that determine the survival of a living community of creatures. To deepen students’ theoretical understanding, ecology became an essential aspect of our discussions. In my discussions with students, I tried to suggest that we can transpose an
ecology of plants to an ecology of human beings, by applying Justus von Liebig’s Law of the Minimum. It states that the trace element that is deficient determines the survival of the plant, irrespective of other abundance. In applying this law to the survival of the human race, we asked, what then is the deficient trace element that affects human survival? We came to the conclusion that existing social systems are too competitive and generate too much aggression that cannot be assimilated constructively. This generates ongoing warfare with ever-increasing means of mass destruction, having made military production worldwide the most extensive industry.

As a landscape architect and psychologist, I tried to look at health as a basic criteria to aspire towards in our design of human habitats. Usually, the medical profession focuses on sickness rather than health, and often psychiatrists practice triple standards. In the morning these physicians often go to low-income areas trying to encourage young people to stay in school and work hard. The same physicians in the afternoon treat neurotic well-to-do clients who they are trying to loosen up. Then, in the evening the doctors go “slumming” in Harlem. One of the lecturers who came to Penn was Dr. Leonard Duhl, with whom I have a lifelong friendship. He told us about the Peckham Medical Research Center in England that studied health rather than sickness.

Rubens: You said there were three spheres of engagement.

Linn: Next was student as craftsperson. In one of our studio exercises we designed a landscape construction workshop on campus in which we thought of displaying different kinds of soil from sand to heavy clay. In this way students could see and touch and understand more clearly the plasticity of different kinds of soil. Such understanding of soil as a plastic medium would help them in grading landscapes, which landscape architects accomplish only through two-dimensional topographic representations.

Finally I tried to engage students in the community design and build service education program as socially responsible landscape architects. I took students into inner city neighborhoods, bringing the services of landscape architects to communities that otherwise couldn’t afford them. Motivated by social justice concerns, working with the inner-city neighborhoods would be more socially responsible than working with affluent clients.

I had finally found my domain with the development of the community design and build education service program at Penn, and later in the establishment of community design service centers in various cities. In this context I could both design and get my hands dirty, which I couldn’t do as a landscape architect. I mentioned before that I had always been bothered by being financially responsible for my employees. Working with volunteers eliminated this concern.

I had felt uncomfortable with the ownership issues related to private property, but I enjoyed working on tax-delinquent property, which became community-managed property, building the first neighborhood commons in Philadelphia. Working with hardly any money, I was also able to explore the development of an environmental craft technology, creatively recycling salvageable building material.
The questions that were raised by the re-evaluation of my private practice in landscape architecture became topics of study in my courses and led to my development of a holistic education program in landscape architecture.

Rubens: How was it, being a member of the faculty?

Linn: I would like to share with you my experience being at Penn participating in design juries, where faculty members and invited professionals sit down and review students’ work. In these juries I had the opportunity to foster students’ sense of their own creativity.

Rubens: Yes.

Linn: Jury sessions were appropriately referred to as “juries,” because many of the visiting critics were very unfair and condescending to students. Often I challenged very brilliant students who did sloppy submissions, saying, “You should really honor your special gift in making carefully executed presentations. Since your presentation might be controversial, those who review your work might use your sloppiness as an excuse to dismiss it.”

Some faculty members and jurors were really cutting the students down. Paul Rudolph, a well-known architect, once invited me to review his students’ work at Yale University. During the jury I challenged him and walked out because he was so cruel. I know how fragile we all are, especially young students trying to express themselves. Their being slapped down was very upsetting to me.

Rubens: What kind of projects did students work on?

Linn: This was a time when students designed urban renewal projects. As jurors we were towering over the models like giants, and the people were the size of ants. Consequently it was possible for architects and landscape architects to design these alienating urban renewal projects because they’d never viewed them from eye level, how people would really experience the spaces.

Rubens: Did you work on any urban renewal projects?

Linn: Yes. I consulted with an architectural firm in Philadelphia that worked on the Eastwick Housing Project. Various architectural firms competed by making a presentation to the planning commission, including Constantinos A. Doxiadis. His firm designs cities all over the world. He said to the planning commission, “Look, I fly over the areas that I’m designing so I have an overview. All you guys are much too pedestrian; you just walk down the sidewalks.”

If I had been on the selection committee, I would have disqualified him, because once you have an aerial perspective, you don’t really understand how people experience space intimately. If you walk down the sidewalk, you experience people and how they use spaces. Doxiadis just reinforced what I realized we did during juries when we hovered over the designs like big giants.
Rubens: You showed me the John Fitchway Plaza urban renewal project you designed for Trenton, New Jersey. I never saw anything that was so pleasant.

Linn: I deliberately included a lot of trees and water to create a much more humane, soothing and healing environment. The plaza was to be at the center of the town.

Rubens: I meant to ask you, did you do the drawing here of the Fitchway Plaza and some of the other drawings, or did you have technicians?

Linn: I did some, but not all.

Rubens: This is something that you have to learn how to do?

Linn: Yes. I feel much more at home presenting three-dimensional models, which I often did. It also helped my clients understand the design better. Molding the topography with plastilene satisfied my love of sculpting the earth. I wish I was an exquisite renderer, but I am not. One can’t be good at everything.

Rubens: Besides your critique of urban renewal projects, what was your perspective about the work of contemporary architects you had contact with?

Linn: Gradually I developed a bioenergetic theory of landscape architecture in dialogue with my students. From this perspective I deplored Frank Lloyd Wright and Philip Johnson’s approaches to architecture. They couldn’t stand it when people moved into the building that they designed and “mess up” the spaces they envisioned. They have a whole different sense of architecture. They consider buildings and open spaces to be sculptures rather than stage sets for living. Spaces should be flexible enough to accommodate all different kinds of experiences, as Charles Eames so eloquently described in his statement for the College of the Immaculate Heart [which I read for you last time].

I had a lifelong friendship with Dr. Francis Woidich, whom I mentioned earlier. He was a visiting lecturer at Penn and a speaker that I invited to the NCILA conference. I had mentioned that he studied the negative ionization of trees that helped people to breathe deeply. Woidich introduced me to Olga Worrall, who was an amazing person. She was a highly respected psychic who made herself available to researchers from many universities. She was also very effective in treating cancer. I have a whole book about Olga Worrall. She told me about events in my life that she could only have known psychically. Rather than starting with the structure of the space and then adding people in, one should start with the human beings’ energy field and then expand it out to the building walls. I created landscapes for two buildings designed by a very sensitive architect. One building he designed for a stocky, very robust owner for whom he created very solidly enclosed spaces. The other client was very delicate, and would walk gently through his rooms. For him, the architect created a house surrounded with big walls of glass windows and doors. I conjectured that if his first client was in the glass house, he would often bump into and maybe even break the panes. In Islamic architecture, gateways and doors to buildings are curvilinear to accommodate the form of the human body and its aura. I’ve always been interested in subtle energy implications in the creation of human habitat.

Rubens: Did you continue studying the subtle energy interactions between plants and people?
Linn: I engaged my students at Penn and MIT in such studies. One of the people whose writings I always introduced in our studies was Chandra Bose, who was an internationally known botanist based in India. He became very famous in England. He did subtle energy research on plants and studied the consciousness of plants. My friend Dr. Woidich also introduced me to Cleve Backster. Backster trained police officers in lie detection. One day, he was sitting alone in his office with his polygraph and he said to himself, “I wonder how the polygraph would respond if I tear a leaf of a plant, or threaten it.” It was a philodendron. After he attached the polygraph to the plant, he lit a match, and the pointer went off the scale. This changed his life. He then developed a whole laboratory to test and check out the energy exchange between plants and people.

In the 1970s when I was teaching at MIT, I invited Cleve Backster to give a school-wide demonstration of his work. He asked me for a little mouse which later on became my pet and I called it Oscar. He wanted to see if the plant would respond to the scream of the mouse when I held it up by its tail. Whether it did or not, I don’t remember. I did this for my students who all had plants at home, and had a spiritual connection to plants. I tried to balance the impact of MIT’s emphasis on engineering and science that could easily undermine the students’ sensitivity. There’s an organization today centered in Virginia called People-Plant Relationships that focuses on this research. I gave a talk to one of their annual meetings about my work on the Healthy Cities Commons that I designed at the Hilton Hotel in San Francisco in 1993. I told them about the research I made available to participants about the air-purifying capabilities of the large trees I brought in to surround the commons.

Rubens: Did anyone challenge you about this? Did they say, “This seems a little far-fetched?”

Linn: I don’t remember. These people I mention became well known. Bose was a highly acclaimed botanist in terms of Western science. Woidich was a well-known physician, grounded in Western science. Backster worked for the police department. You can’t dismiss them that easily.

I also mentioned Wilhelm Reich’s work and tried to apply his insights into bioenergetic processes to the design of human habitat. In his later years Reich came up with another speculation about the roots of human armoring: What makes human beings so unique is our power of consciousness. No animal can reflect on their own beingness, but in reflecting on ourselves we often become the object of our own observation. If you push it too far, you’re threatened with depersonalization. That’s why it’s scary to go to that depth, and only very strong people like many artists can dare to probe their depths. In so doing, many have become borderline cases. Reich always mentioned that if a centipede became aware of its sixty-fourth leg, it couldn’t move. [laughs]

Consequently, there’s an occupational hazard of being human because we are afraid of our depths. A mental hygiene, or creative hygiene practice is for us to be aware of how important it is for us to relax, to make contact with our own depths, to breathe deeply, not to clench our teeth. I hoped that Reich’s speculations would deepen the students’ understanding of the creative process.

Rubens: So you’re talking about this to your students?
Linn: I give them specific exercises to show these bioenergetic connections. As an introduction to my study of handwriting analysis during my psychology studies in Switzerland, the professor asked us to close our eyes, get ten pieces of paper that we numbered, and express various emotions spontaneously. He emphasized that we connect with the feeling of the emotion and not to intellectualize about it. He asked us to express patience, haste, love, anger, among others. Then he copied on the blackboard the expressions that many others had drawn. We could all see that downward-oriented lines expressed sadness, upward-curling lines expressed happiness. Haste was kind of slanted forward, caution backward. Anger was expressed with angularity and pressure. Circular lines usually connoted love. Then all of a sudden we could look at our own handwriting and detect the graphic expression of dominant emotions. We call a weeping willow a weeping willow, because its branches droop. You wouldn’t call it a laughing willow. Its proximity to water is an important but different story. I also taught a lot of plant identification courses in the arboretum during summer. I had students lie on their backs and look into the canopy of a tree to see how the foliage would form a certain kind of bower, where students could discern the light-penetrating quality of the foliage. Usually architects draw silhouettes of trees in front of a building without capturing their space-defining quality.

Spaces should be designed for certain experiences, such as a door evoking an experience of welcome, as Aldo van Eyck had mentioned, the quality of the vestibule should be like an overture, an introduction to the house, while the bedroom should be a sacred place. In organizing the subspaces of a building or open space, they have to be in a proper experiential sequence.

I tried to make students aware of the reciprocal relationships that exist among the development of character structures, social structures, and environmental structures. I called them isomorphic relationships, intimating that there is a similarity in structure among the three.

When an infant gets scared, it arches back and holds its breath. If an intimidating or non-loving condition persists throughout one’s life, a person will develop this posture permanently, with the chest out, head back, and constricted breathing. You can see how soldiers’ uniforms coerce the wearer to have their belly in, chest and chin out. This regimented posture will help them be less afraid to kill or be killed. Clothing has an immense impact on us because it’s our most intimate designed environment. My mother liked the writings of poet Peter Jacobsen because he understood that women want to be loved, rather than being shown off in restrictive Victorian gowns.

You can look at the physical environment as a concentric extension of our clothing. The streets function as aqueducts for the movement of human protoplasm. Their layout determines our experience in cities. Consequently, if streets are lined up in a gridiron pattern, they contribute to regimentation of society. I know the Egyptians used gridiron street layouts to control slaves. Emperors imposed radial street patterns by plowing through dense neighborhoods of poor people in order to control them militarily. Paris is a notorious example of this.

At MIT I did a lot of anthropological work comparing societies that were more cooperative and more peaceful to those that were more aggressive. The more peaceful primitive societies, like the Bushmen, laid out their habitats in circles with a commons
in the middle, while the more aggressive had radial arrangements culminating at an imposing structure belonging to the chief or religious leader.

A good friend of mine, Paul Ritter, a planner and author who resides now in Western Australia, drew heavily on Reich’s work. He found that when you blindfold a person and tell them to walk, they walk in circles rather than in straight lines. Ritter developed bioenergetic guidelines for planning, including the layout of highways, which he describes in his book, *Planning for Man and Motor*. He even aligned roads to be more harmonious with human natural movement. In my article, “Ecology of Cities,” I alluded to the fact that we should design cities that are as consistent with natural human movement as possible.

Rubens: Is all of this jelling in this period?

Linn: The theoretical underpinning of my work, what I aspire to, is the disarming of the structures of our designed physical environment by creating spaces that are inspiring and relaxing and put people more at ease. I hope that the disarming of environmental structures contributes to the disarming of character structures, namely personality structures, and social structures. One can see that there are isomorphic relationships, similarities, in the development of character structures, social structures, and environmental structures. People cooped up in huge complexes of regimented apartment buildings are more apt to accept the regimentation of the social structures of armies.

Rubens: Are there other fundamental social concerns you shared with your students?

Linn: Yes. Since society really finds itself at the crossroads as more and more people are moving to the cities, into mass societies, they can either develop community or collectives.

Martin Buber in his book *Between Man and Man* describes poetically both alternatives. In a collective dynamic, such as in the military, people just march next to each other as anonymous members. Or in sporting events, people just sit passively as spectators or are glued to television screens. But in community, people have an awareness of one another, which Buber calls the “I and thou” relationship. The challenge that we face, especially in designing cities for people yet to come, is how do we nurture community even in a mass society? That’s a big challenge, because the regimentation of society can lead us to the suicide of the human race. We have to decentralize power, including the power of city governments, and nurture neighborhood governments, to bring decision-making closer to the people.

Rubens: So, are you seeing any examples of this taking place? There’s the Freedom Rides and the beginning of the civil rights movement. I don’t know what kind of mass movement you’re beginning to see in Philadelphia.

Linn: In 1969 my son Mark, who was eleven, took me to Woodstock where hundreds of thousands of people gathered in a very democratic ambiance. Masses of people who meet in protest demonstrations interact with each other in a mutually supportive way.
Teaching at Penn enabled me to witness the vast deterioration of many inner-city neighborhoods and led me to pay a visit to Mayor Richardson Dilworth. I suggested to him that he invite famous jazz players to lead masses of people in a clean-up effort of the piles of debris that had accumulated in the neighborhoods, and plant gardens in their place. I told the mayor about a book called *Patrick Geddes in India*. When Patrick Geddes, the British planner, was in India, people pointed at him. When he inquired why, they said, “You’re the man who brought the plague.” So he went to the Maharajah and suggested to him, “Unlike other years when the Maharajah would visit a certain section of the city, this year, let us set up a ceremony for you to go to every street that has been cleaned.” Special floats were constructed for this occasion. The first float carried a big rat sculpture with mosquitoes on it, representing the rats that brought the plague to Indore. Other floats had trees, and the last one distributed candies to the children. Geddes made citizens aware that the plague really came about through unsanitary conditions.

Another example of a democratic mass participatory event was in the late 1960s. It was after the riots in East Harlem that burned a lot of buildings. The late Monsignor Robert Fox of the archdiocese in New York City walked in a celebratory procession through the neighborhood to mobilize residents for a clean-up. He mobilized 50,000 people, including 5,000 people from the suburbs. Employees from the city also participated by establishing workshops in the streets to board up burned-out buildings. Fox also engaged the residents in cleaning out garbage-filled basements and transformed them into sociability settings, while volunteers from the suburbs painted the facades of buildings. Fox was able to do this because he had spent many years working with the local Hispanic neighborhoods, making residents proud of their unique cultural backgrounds as they tried to assimilate into American culture. It was a tremendous effort.

Another example took place in Australia. It was called Greening Australia and tried to counter the massive desertification that had taken place. They equipped high schools with greenhouses to grow plants and mobilized the business community in their effort to re-vegetate the land.

There’s another growing mass movement initiated by the Bioneers that brings together more and more people in yearly conferences to share with each other life-sustaining projects the world over. These projects present sustaining efforts in many areas such as energy, health, food, and it’s very inspiring. You don’t see much about it in the newspapers, but if you really take an inventory, there are incredible efforts going on everywhere.

Staging mass participatory democratic events as celebration of community should overshadow the misleading appeal and glorification of militarism.

**Rubens:** You had mentioned consumer conditioning earlier as an issue of deep concern.

**Linn:** I was deeply concerned about consumer conditioning, which is mainly brought about through advertising. I could never really grasp how Hitler and Goebbels could be so effective in their propaganda in swaying a whole nation of Germans, known for their high level of aesthetic and intellectual consciousness. When I studied psychology with Heinrich Meng in Switzerland, I took a course on propaganda. I also spent a whole
week with Ernest Dichter, the psychoanalyst who put Madison Avenue on the map. I challenged him. I said, “Look, you made your money, you’re very successful, can’t you use your uncanny sensitivity to influence people subliminally by helping us in our campaign to end the nuclear arms race?”

Rubens: How is it you spent a week with him? Where was it?

Linn: It was on the Hudson River, in his private home.

Rubens: He took you in.

Linn: I guess I had somebody to introduce me. In fact, we had a wonderful time. He said, “Karl, I don’t feel guilty at all about what I’m doing. I’m helping Americans to free themselves from the vestiges of Victorian upbringing, to enjoy life, to buy things!” At the end he asked me if I would do some consulting with him.

Rubens: You didn’t make a dent?

Linn: No, but we had a nice relationship. It was an interesting discussion. I will always remember that.

Rubens: Is it important to comment on the personality of McHarg? Was he an imperious kind of person?

Linn: He was a real typical Scots gentleman. He had a very powerful presence. He could challenge the Corps of Army Engineers and make them change their ways.

Rubens: Did he have a Scottish accent?

Linn: Yes. He could pull it out when necessary. He was also very resourceful. He was able to interview the most amazing range of spiritual leaders, scientists, and intellectuals for the syndicated television show, “The House We Live In.”

Rubens: At Penn?

Linn: Right. That’s why I had a chance to meet a lot of special people with whom I developed my own friendships.

Rubens: Did he have a private practice at the same time?

Linn: He had a private landscape architecture practice, initially. Then he got together the planner David Wallace and my student William Roberts to established the firm Wallace, Roberts & McHarg. He had a big contract with the Shah of Iran, and when the Shah was thrown out, his partner threw him out because of the debt he incurred. He ended up with a private practice. He gave many lectures during which he would pace up and down the stage, smoking constantly, as he talked about clean air! [laughs]

Rubens: But he stayed at Penn the whole time?
Linn: No, he retired early. But he had some relationship to Penn all the time. He bought an extravagant place in the upper middle-class section in the countryside near Philadelphia, inundated with racehorses. Earlier in his life his wife died of leukemia, which was a hard blow for him and his two children. Then he married again and had another child. Since McHarg focused on the ecology of the larger region, while I concentrated on the intimate neighborhood environment where people lived their daily lives, we had a nice complementary relationship. In his autobiography, *Quest for Life*, he wrote nicely about me as one of the most important teachers that he had encountered.

Rubens: I read the autobiography of McHarg, and I was reminded that Roger Montgomery also got into Harvard, seemingly unusually. He did not have an architectural degree, he was older. Harvard seemed eager to take unusual people. Do you think that is true. McHarg is particularly saying his class at Harvard was something extraordinary. Nothing like that could happen today, would it?

Linn: Today is quite different. In many ways that also applies to me. Because it’s much less prevalent right now, but at one point you could get licensed as an architect or as a landscape architect based on the actual work that you produced, and if you spent enough years doing so. I think the architect needed to have twelve years of practice, without necessarily having earned a degree at the university.

Rubens: The other point is that McHarg says that because of his experience at Harvard, he was very eager to replicate that experience at Penn, both in who he hired and the students. He said that he reviewed the students and took people who were not necessarily the typical profile of having graduated as an architect.

Linn: This is very true. Some students had an art background. Because he attracted an international student body, the department almost functioned like a social service agency. McHarg would get money for foreign students to study, and get them visas to come here. He spent an inordinate amount of time to make it possible for students from foreign countries to come here and study.
Interview 5: January 19, 2004

Rubens: Today we were going to look at the community design-and-build service education program in landscape architecture that you developed at Penn.

Linn: We attracted an international student body at a time in the late fifties, early sixties, where the Peace Corps spirit had permeated youth the world over. The students, who came to us were all graduate students who had already worked in architectural and landscape architectural offices and didn’t enter our program just to advance their career. They wanted to find an opportunity to be able to contribute, through their skills, to the betterment of society. The students in fact were eager to be guided in their work by a sense of social responsibility.

Rubens: Why did they come to Penn?

Linn: The word spread that McHarg had established a very vital program. So they came from all over the world.

Rubens: How did you start?

Linn: I proceeded very systematically involving students in becoming actively involved in an authentic way in transforming the physical environment they were related to, which was the campus. When I saw a bulldozer appear right in front of our studio without us being involved, I challenged the university administration and was able to get George Patton, who was a visiting landscape architect, to become a member of the University planning committee.

In the spring of 1960 I got students involved in the design and construction of the Easter flower show in Rittenhouse Park in downtown Philadelphia. The park was frequented like Central Park in New York. Students who were willing gave up their Easter vacation to work on the flower show. We worked with the director of the Fairmount Parks Commission, William H. Noble, Jr., who made a greenhouse available, where we forced a lot of flowers into bloom, even a weeping cherry tree. We put lilies in wooden barrels in the ponds and made two arbors with bamboo mats where visitors could help themselves to coffee. It was an absolutely extraordinary lush display of flowers. Unfortunately, I didn’t get enough help from Mr. Noble, and my students really got anxious when access to the greenhouse was delayed. When a friend of mine met Mr. Noble on another occasion and told him that I had moved to Washington, Mr. Noble replied, “I hope it’s the state of Washington.” [laughs]

Another project was Powelton Village, a neighborhood located adjacent to the campus. It was one of the very few interracial communities. I got students involved and got to know neighbors, and spent a lot of evening hours to help them to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. Students also designed a schoolyard and conceived and painted a colorful mural at the school. We also supported neighbors in their effort to stop the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University, a nearby engineering campus, from expanding into the neighborhood. Walter Thabit, founder of Planners for
Equal Opportunity, and Paul Davidoff also consulted with the residents of Powelton Village.

Rubens: Where were the students living?

Linn: Many of them lived in Powelton Village because it was very close and reasonably priced.

The next studio project introduced us to North Philadelphia, a neighborhood inhabited by poor people of color and single-parent families. We met Dr. Eugene Jones, director of Heritage House, who introduced us to many people in North Philadelphia. Dr. Jones had a contagious theatrical flair. He organized a yearly cotillion for 5,000 African American people who got all dressed up for the occasion. He had a unique way of making contact with small children. He would tell them that there were ghosts in the basement of the next buildings, and the kids would say there are no such things as ghosts. As he turned his head to listen more intently, their eyes got bigger and bigger showing that they believed him after all.

During our visits to Heritage House we also transformed their backyard into a welcoming commons. During those visits I also had a chance to get to know Carl Anthony, a tall and lanky young man, who was a member of Heritage House.

We also spent a lot of time in a reconnaissance, just walking through streets, talking to people, and meeting with the people that were recommended to us, such as ministers, heads of settlement houses or social service agencies. We saw that a lot of people sat on stoops and had chairs on the sidewalks. There were musicians on the sidewalk, kids played pavement games, and a lot of kids played on the street in front of cars. Mothers were very anxious about the safety of their children because there was no place where children could play in safety. Parks and playgrounds were either completely absent from low-income neighborhoods or too far removed. Since the heads of households were women, it was very hard for them to get several children of different ages to a faraway park or playground. We also saw a lot of men hanging around bars who looked broken down, having really suffered the brunt of racial discrimination. We also saw a lot of teenagers hanging around street corners.

There were also many empty lots, back alleys and backyards shaded by Ailanthus trees. We were also shocked seeing large urban-renewal demolition projects tearing down attractive brick buildings. We then created a traveling exhibit called SOS, Save Open Space, showing how people in these neighborhoods live.

Rubens: Was this a photographic exhibit?

Linn: Yes. It also had a lot of writing.

Rubens: And your students did this?

Linn: Yes, my students put this wonderful exhibit together.

Rubens: There was an extensive literature that came during the 1960s about urban renewal.
Linn: I knew the sociologist Herbert J. Gans. In his book *Urban Villagers*, he documented the destruction of an ethnic Italian neighborhood in Boston. The demolition of low-income ethnic neighborhoods in U.S. cities made room for the development of large-scale urban renewal projects.

Rubens: That redevelopment had done that?

Linn: Red-lining the neighborhoods paved the way for urban renewal. Since absentee owners didn’t have the money to fix or maintain their buildings, many owners arsoned their own buildings to get insurance money for their properties. Many other houses were empty and unsafe and vacant lots were full of junk.

Rubens: Got it.

Linn: Partly because of my own experience with racial discrimination, I felt it was very important for my students to meet face to face with the African Americans who lived in these neighborhoods. I will always remember a statement that Lewis Mumford made in his introduction to the book *Patrick Geddes in India*, which I told you about.

Rubens: Yes. We talked about the floats.

Linn: In his introduction, Mumford said how important it is not to hold on to dogma, but through direct contact to cultivate relationships with people. I hoped that the direct contact of my primarily white students with people of color would help to overcome their racial apprehension. Among my students I had only two black students.

Rubens: Were the black students international students or American?

Linn: They were Americans. I had other foreign students. At times when my students met with black people, they became anxious and behaved like super-professionals to compensate. I told them they acted inappropriately because they should have presented themselves as students who were eager to learn. People of color are apprehensive that some professional who comes down the pike has a profit motive in mind and wants to talk people into something. But students are completely neutral since they just came there to learn. Neighborhood residents, especially mothers and grandmothers would have been delighted to educate them if they felt that the students were eager to learn. Neighborhood residents were also apprehensive because a lot of students and professors come to them with cameras and tape recorders, using the information they gather for papers and presentations while the residents are left empty-handed. I suggested to some neighborhoods that they should cordon off their area with rope and charge for entrance. In another instance I urged universities to pay neighborhood professionals, who were professionals just by virtue of living in the neighborhood, if they are being interviewed by professors and students.

Rubens: It seems very unusual that there would be African American students in the program.

Linn: Yes. I remember a couple of them came from the middle class. They also had difficulties connecting with low-income residents.

Rubens: That’s exactly what I was asking.
Linn: We tried to find a way of responding to the needs expressed by residents, namely, the need for safe places for their children to play. The question was how could we extend landscape architecture to be of service to the people who could not afford it? This was the point of departure that motivated me to start a program of community design-and-build service to low-income communities. It was also a reaction to my dismay that as a landscape architect I ended up creating primarily landscapes of affluence.

Rubens: Was this phrase yours: community design-and-build service education?

Linn: Yes. Low-income residents challenged us to develop a system that makes the creation of open spaces affordable and possible. We knew that there were a lot of unemployed men, a lot of kids hanging around always wanting to do something, and teenagers congregating at street corners. There were also gangs that we wanted to make contact with. In fact, Lawrence K. Frank, when he came to visit, told me “Get a hold of gang members, especially the gang leaders, because they’re really the energy center of the neighborhood. It’s very important to bring about the self-help participation of residents so that people don’t continue to be patronized by social service agencies or settlement houses that are usually self-serving and eager to keep their staff employed.”

Rubens: Where did you get the construction materials?

Linn: We saw lots of building materials in the demolitions sites. There were bricks, marble steps, and flagstones from sidewalks. I worked out a special arrangement with the urban renewal authority to use these materials before buildings slated for demolition were destroyed.

One afternoon, on a cold wintry day we stumbled on a local Quaker social service agency, the Friends Neighborhood Guild. They had rehabilitated a few houses. We met with the director, Francis Bosworth, who told us that they were about to build a playground. We asked them to show us the site. It was considered one of the worst slum areas in North Philadelphia, on Melon Street. The site had an undulating terrain and he wanted to come in with a bulldozer and flatten it out.

The Friends Neighborhood Guild helped the city to pass a new law that enabled the city to re-acquire tax-delinquent properties if monies could be found for outstanding liens, taxes, and interests. The Friends Neighborhood Guild got some money from an anonymous foundation and bought twelve parcels. This was supposed to be the beginning of the playground.

We asked ourselves, how can we make this not just an ordinary playground, but also a place for senior citizens, adults, and kids that would help to reintegrate the neighborhood community? Gradually the concept of a commons evolved. We wanted to create an open space facility that was accessible, a doorstep facility right within the block, so people can easily reach it. We wanted to create a commons where people of all ages could be in each other’s presence but not in each other’s way.

It became a real intricate design challenge. How do you create a small open space that has many different sub-spaces for different uses? It was a unique challenge because there was a reverse ratio in relation to the size of the open space and the complexity of its use and the proximity to places of residence. The further away the space is from a
neighborhood, the more simple the design because the space serves primarily one purpose, like a big ball field or big park. But the closer the space is to the neighborhood, the more complex the use of the space. Many different ages of people are using it day, evening, weekends, and work days, it’s a much more complex challenge.

Rubens: Did you have any historical model that you were looking to?

Linn: One historical model was Radburn.

Rubens: But I meant even more really historical, when you think about how cities are used such as Sienna or Madrid.

Linn: The open spaces you refer to in these cities are plazas in the center of the city, that don’t necessarily attract local residents.

Rubens: Did you do any social service survey? Did you find out at all what people specifically said?

Linn: Yes, we did. But we did not connect with residents as social workers who identify these neighborhoods as problem areas. The inner-city neighborhoods at that time were officially designated “gray areas,” and labeled as troubled areas. We were looking for physical and human resources.

Rubens: Did you envision each neighborhood block having a commons?

Linn: Since the neighborhood block is a repeating unit, it is a prototype. You can even look at high-rise buildings as repeatable units. Margaret Mead suggested that if one apartment in each high-rise building would be reserved for common use, it would overcome a lot of alienation and enmity among people that are cooped up in their own little apartments. The same thing applies to neighborhood blocks. I thought maybe we should come out with a different planning strategy: one lot per block. If you use every vacant lot for infill housing, even for affordable housing, you undermine and jeopardize the potential of developing neighborhood community.

I drew on my experience in the suburbs where the core family existence was physically and emotionally very burdensome. I felt that to develop extended family living, not based on blood relationship, but on mutual aid, on friendship, and on intergenerational support, was even more important in the inner city. Women of color who ran the household in these inner cities were even more in need of supportive neighborhood community than the lonely women in the suburbs. Once we became more familiar with their way of life, we realized that they were already using mutual aid to help them to survive economic and social adversities.

Rubens: So let’s stick exactly with the story. You’re surveying and the Friends are able to get the parcels of land.

Linn: We took a community resource inventory, like John McKnight developed more recently. We wanted to find out what skills people had, what tools they had in their basement. Based on the availability of resources, we then tried to articulate a design that people could implement. Since there were a lot of bricks lying around, we found a retired
mason, who taught the students and other volunteers how to construct with brick. We never went into these neighborhoods as do-gooders. We were also impressed by their energy, especially of the women who were very powerful. There was a lot of laughter, which you never saw in the white suburbs.

Rubens: What else impressed you about those communities?

Linn: To me, black people are cultural pioneers by bringing jazz, which grew out of their own existential reality, to the world community. So instead of looking at people of color as being culturally deprived, to us they were people who had enriched the cultural life of human society. There was greater aliveness in these neighborhoods, except for the defeated men who hung around bars.

We found in the slums evidence of native architectural genius and man-made spaces that were created out of need. We saw all these little rooms added to the buildings that made the blocks look like terrace architecture. They were exciting in their rhythm and discouraging because of the poverty. We also saw children dangling like Tarzans from ropes on branches. Unsupervised play was a vivid antidote to an over-designed playground. We also saw kids improvising by transforming junk into imaginative play objects. They jumped from dilapidated cars and played on roofs jumping from one roof to the other.

Rubens: That’s somewhat like this children’s adventure playground here in Berkeley.

Linn: Exactly. It’s all an adventure playground.

Rubens: Were there any markets or hangout spots in this area?

Linn: There were a lot of corner stores that were owned by Jews who charged an arm and a leg for their merchandise. Being a Jew, I was embarrassed about it. Many of these stores were targets of arson. There were no markets around at that time.

Rubens: Were there any other projects that provided common spaces?

Linn: A church had initiated the creation of an inner court in their block. All the residences in the block tore out their backyard fences to create a common yard. They took segments of the fence and put them between buildings, creating a safe commons.

Once they got involved in this neighborhood designing the commons, students spent many more hours than they had to for university purposes. Reflecting on these experiences, I wrote about them in the catalog of the School of Fine Arts:

Students of landscape architecture served as the catalytic agent working with people to improve their neighborhood today. This fills the gap in the planning process where foresight is projected to the future. But there’s no future if the present remains barren. Students working directly with communities in need are moved by the urgencies of life. The urgencies of existence are badly needed corrective design forces. We have lost sight of our true client, the human being, by giving lip service to the consumers.
What is our true province? We designers of space should only supply the vessels into which the life stream can flow. Let us not construct rigidly placed furniture or clever benches without backs. People in action regain their pride and confidence out of visible accomplishment and will themselves become creative partners supplying the continual social design process with new renewed vitality.

Rubens: You’re challenging the prevalent approach to environmental design.

Linn: When neighborhoods become gentrified and people have expendable income, they generate streets full of fancy shops that display expensive objects and useless knick-knacks. A display of opulence is always distasteful because it is available because of exploitation. Such merchandise is not grounded in the existential reality of people whose daily struggle is to survive. This is the trouble with architecture or landscape architecture whose patrons are rich people or corporations. It is not accidental that indigenous architecture the world over still provides inspiration to environmental designers.

Rubens: Let’s get back to the story.

Linn: Francis Bosworth introduced us to the West Poplar Civic League, which was a league of local residents. The league accepted our offer to work with the residents on the design of Melon Commons. The secretary of the league, Mrs. Bernice Miles, who had twelve children, took charge of the design process. Talking with neighbors, we envisioned the commons to be composed of a sitting area, a neighborhood park, a playground for small children, and a stage for teenagers.

Rubens: Were you going to use the land that the Guild had already amassed?

Linn: Yes, we did. The Guild was a white organization that invited ministers from black churches and representatives from welfare organizations to co-sponsor the project. We engaged in a participatory design process, paying attention to people’s concerns. We wanted to use the marble steps, but people were afraid they’d be too slippery. We worked out a compromise and agreed to put them in and score them if they were too slippery. The students designed a big lookout tower that people felt was too dangerous, so it was eliminated.

Since I knew that artists and craftspeople were much more adept at improvising with recycled materials, I decided to connect my class with students of environmental design from the Philadelphia College of Art. William Perry was the instructor of that division. The art students were much more adept at using the recycled materials and made imaginative models of the commons. They had a sensuous contact with the material, but they were not as sophisticated in assessing urban spaces, so there was a real reciprocal contribution between the two groups of students. The architecture students imparted a sense of urban space and how to place things in it, and the students of arts and crafts were able to show ingenious things that you can make out of recycled material. Since we had to use recycled building material, my students, who were architects and landscape architects, were really ill at ease. They had never improvised with salvaged materials. They always used new materials from Sweets catalog that merchandised prefabricated building components.
Rubens: But the Philadelphia College of Art students. Would they literally meet with the Penn students?

Linn: Yes, with my students. Here is a photo of the two groups of students during a design review for Melon Commons. This is the late Michael Laurie who was a student of mine in 1960. He became the chair of landscape architecture at UC Berkeley. This is Dr. Eugene Jones, director of Heritage House. This is Roger Clemence, a student of mine. These are students from the Philadelphia College of Art, whose names I forget, and this is myself.

Rubens: We have to include this picture in the oral history project. What year is this again?

Linn: Spring 1960. That’s the way I began to develop a labor-intensive environmental craft technology.

Rubens: Had you persuaded the neighborhood groups that they didn’t need to bulldoze?

Linn: We got a bulldozer from the city to remove the junk and debris, but we directed it to save our earth mound. The hill became a tour de force. Kids made all kinds of contraptions and used them to roll down and play King of the Mountain.

Rubens: How would you describe the size of area? Was it an acre, a half-acre?

Linn: We started with twelve parcels, and as more buildings were demolished, the commons expanded to almost half a block.

Rubens: How did people get along working together?

Linn: The participatory design process was much different than my experience in the suburbs where the breadwinner determined all the designs and it ended up with no benches for women and no play areas for children. In the first phase students and neighbors shared in the envisioning of a commons. In the second phase of participatory planning and design, everyone became focused and more specific in their designs. The third phase was the self-help construction that neighbors and students got involved in.

When Lawrence K. Frank came to visit the project while it was in construction, he said it reminded him of the old American tradition of barn raising. Because barn raising connotes not only the accomplishment of a building a barn, but the building of a sense of community as people work together. Whenever I mention the word, people smile, because it’s an American tradition that people are really proud of. It brought people together because a farmer couldn’t do it by himself. He had to reach out to his neighbors. The joint sense of accomplishment is really what made the difference. There was always a big festive meal after they finished the construction of the barn.

What barn raising really celebrates is not only the physical accomplishment of building a barn but the nurturing of a growing sense of community and the experience of interdependence. We can talk about building community ad nauseam, but unless people really experience a need of each other, it doesn’t happen.

Rubens: So what happened? How long did construction take?
Linn: We worked with local residents, students, and volunteers, and even bought an old jalopy for the youth gang who became our official scavengers. They felt very proud of the manly work they were doing. They brought marble steps and bricks to the site. It took four shoulders of able-bodied young people to lift one marble step. It was unimportant that they were black or white because everybody who lifted the step was grateful to the other three holding up their part. It became an experience of interdependence. If you generate a vision within which each person finds his own place, then it becomes a wonderful orchestration of energies and skills. When you see the old Mennonites erecting barns, you see all these people standing on these different beams joining them together. It looks as if the people are notes on musical bars, making music together.

How can we conceive a structure in the context of which many people participate? In orchestras you can have a thousand violinists that don’t compete with each other but bring out the virtuosity in each. This process leads to mass democratic participation that we talked about earlier.

Rubens: Tell me how many people were involved, though. How many gang members? How many Guild? How many of these black women like Bernice Miles? How many people were involved?

Linn: Initially we started small, and there were always dozens of kids around. There were also a lot of women for whom the physical work was hard so we tried to recruit men.

Rubens: And these gang people, were they particularly present, or just occasionally?

Linn: No, the gang was in and out. I remember I was once arrested when I came to protect teenagers playing drums on the sidewalk. The police were trying to chase them away and I interceded. I ended up being interviewed. When I challenged the officer by saying, “Don’t touch me and don’t talk to me that way,” they pushed me into the police car. When I tried to explain to them that we were building a neighborhood commons, they didn’t get it and took me to the station. One of our volunteers who taught at the university drove behind the police wagon in his white convertible Jaguar and explained to the station that I was a professor at the university, and they promptly released me. Then the kids played the drums in the commons and their music became work songs.

Participation gradually grew. We drew on fraternities and Scouts and kids from religious organizations. The most helpful thing was a group of white Quaker summer campers who came for six weeks. The Friends Neighborhood Guild sponsored their participation. They did a lot of work.

Rubens: This was summer of 1960?

Linn: Yes it was. At the end of the Quaker summer work, the commons was dedicated. There was a big celebration. The Department of License and Inspection, the public agency responsible for keeping lots cleaned, gave us citations signed by Mayor Dilworth.

Thereafter I went to the mayor, who being so excited about our work allocated $148,000 to create a city program. He always gave me what I asked for. He told me to work with the redevelopment coordinator if I needed a truck or topsoil or city equipment. At that time, other agencies were interested in what we were doing, but my students had limited
time, only one term. Then I decided to create the first nonprofit corporation, which was called Neighborhood Renewal Corps. Paul Hogan, who had become our volunteer construction supervisor, was very gifted in the creative recycling of salvaged building material, like making a horse out of a telephone poles and building a merry-go-round out of a cable reel that turned around on a 2-inch pipe on ball bearings.

Rubens: Were you able to salvage a lot of material?

Linn: In addition to bricks, marble steps and flagstones, we developed a strategy to preserve the inherent structure of the material. We preserved the form of the cable reel, transforming it into a merry-go-round. Students discovered a huge pile of concrete cylinders used for testing the strength of concrete. They found a way to put two rows of cylinders together and then made a top to form an elaborate bench. This process can be called an eolithic process. This word refers to the Stone Age. An eolith [eo means dawn or earliest; lithos means stone] is one of the oldest known tools. When Native Americans looked for stones for spearheads, they would pick stones that were already very close to the shape they needed, requiring less chipping to get a sharp point. So we found materials that had a usable form and gave them a new function.

Rubens: So within six months, what was there to be seen?

Linn: A lot. The marble step amphitheater was built for theatrical performances. On one side the steps led to a patio area created using flagstones salvaged from sidewalks. Here we planted large trees and made a place for grown-ups and families to relax. A nurseryman gave us the trees, and the gang members were challenged to go to the nursery and dig out the trees and learn about wrapping the ball of soil with burlap. It was really manly work. Then they had to get the trees off the truck and put them in the ground. Between the steps and the stage we created a large area covered with woodchips where children played games. There were also sandboxes in close proximity to the patio so grown-ups could watch.

At that time I heard about Milton Shapp, who had an electronic business and had apparently originated the Peace Corps. When he was in the Soviet Union, he heard about kids being sent to Africa, and found out the Soviet Union had an international peace corps. Then he seated himself next to Robert Kennedy in the airplane and told him about it.

Rubens: But say it for the record. Had you met Milton Shapp by then?

Linn: I wrote to him, then he came to see the place and I said, “Look, there’s so much demand now from other neighborhood organizations, we need to create a nonprofit corporation.” And Paul Hogan, who volunteered to do this work and was a contractor, said, “Karl, if you find me some money, I’ll give up my business and work with you full time.” So I needed money for Paul Hogan and a part-time secretary. I never took a cent, because I was still employed at university. That was the beginning of the Neighborhood Renewal Corps. Milton Shapp became our first president. Later on, he became twice governor of the state of Pennsylvania. Thanks to Shapp, who had good relations with corporations and city agencies, the telephone company came with a mechanized auger to dig tree pits. It would have been very difficult to excavate the pits by hand because the ground still had old building foundations in it.
Unfortunately, students didn’t really generate the kind of a design that was practical enough. After they left, a few other colleagues and myself incorporated many of the students’ ideas and pulled a plan together that the neighbors accepted.

Rubens: Did the city contribute money, too?

Linn: No, the city didn’t contribute money at all. But Mayor Dilworth allocated money for future programs. Once I started to get the Neighborhood Renewal Corps organized, I recruited volunteer professionals, many from Louis Kahn’s office. Though his employees found a unique challenge working on Kahn’s designs, they didn’t have any contact with the clients. David Rothstein went on half-time because he got heavily involved in designing a commons for Clara Baldwin Settlement House in North Philadelphia. Clara Baldwin was a highly respected neighborhood leader. David got so involved and made wonderful contact with the neighbors who ended up celebrating his birthday in the commons. He discovered an old ASPCA granite horse trough and got permission from the city to install it in the commons as a fountain. Paul Hogan was instrumental in bringing this about. Other architects from Kahn’s office volunteered, designing other commons in Philadelphia.

We ended up creating six neighborhood commons in different places. Horton Commons was another one in North Philadelphia. Another commons was created at a church on Forty-second Street and Pine. They approached me because they wanted a grassy area along the sidewalk in front of the church surrounded by a low privet hedge. I suggested that the $1,500 they allocated they should give to the Friends Neighborhood Guild for training young people who could construct the commons, which in fact they did. The young people learned to lay out brick pavement in intricate patterns, plant trees, and installed another horse trough fountain.

Rubens: How did you connect with people or agencies to create these commons?

Linn: By word of mouth. Both private and public agencies liked our work and referred neighborhoods to us.

Rubens: But it was the job of this Neighborhood Renewal Corps to then raise the money for the other neighborhood commons?

Linn: Neighborhood Renewal Corps only offered design and construction assistance to neighborhood organizations. We made a lot of grant applications to expand our staff. We applied for funding to juvenile delinquency programs in Washington since to us youth and youth leadership was really a critical element in the neighborhood. We then tried to expand the Neighborhood Renewal Corps to not only designing and constructing commons but incorporating cultural enrichment. We tried to do this because settlement houses were so unsuccessful in engaging young people, especially gang members. Then we ran into problems.

Rubens: What kind of problems?

Linn: The Friends Neighborhood Guild, like other social service agencies, were really not effective in getting youth involved. They were moralizing, being embarrassed about the delinquent young people who went in and out of prison. I got some money to engage a
friend, Robert Sickinger, who became Man of the Year by starting voluntary theaters in Chicago, in Hull House, a famous settlement house. He had this kind of energy that he could talk to and inspire young people. He then set up cultural events at the Melon Commons. Then Bosworth challenged me. He said, “Look, as long as you stick to your own domain and do design and construction assistance, it’s fine. But once you get into the culture, then you trespass into what we’re supposed to do.”

Rubens: And “we” is who?

Linn: “We” is the social service agencies and settlement houses. Fortunately, after talking to Bosworth, he hired Christopher Speeth, a good friend of mine who had developed the Philadelphia Children’s Theatre. Speeth built a twenty-foot Trojan horse with kids, and put it right in the Melon Commons. He got kids so involved in Greek drama they printed out poems on little sheets of paper and sold them for a penny a poem. So this already helped the Friends Neighborhood Guild to develop a more viable relationship with the neighborhood.

There were still components missing. We didn’t only want to work with children and women and settlement house programs because we were eager to involve mature adults who were participating in the civil rights movement. The commons became also a place where people could stand and take a stand. So we made contact with CORE, Congress of Racial Equality, but unfortunately, in those days they were more concerned with creating equal employment opportunity than with community control of neighborhood territory.

Rubens: Let me get an historical perspective. Are you being asked to consult, by then, in other cities?

Linn: People always told me, “Karl, what you do is absolutely wonderful, but you do the work of three people and it could never be replicated.” What I really wanted to do is develop a system that was replicable. Therefore, when I gave a talk in Washington, D.C., to the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, I accepted their invitation to come to Washington to start another community design center. In Philadelphia, we called it Neighborhood Renewal Corps, inspired by the spirit of the Peace Corps. In Washington we called the organization Neighborhood Commons Nonprofit Corporation.

I asked for a leave of absence from Penn, and I got a nice letter from the dean, who encouraged me to explore this work more and then bring it design schools of higher learning. This was in the fall of 1962. Paul Hogan became the director of Neighborhood Renewal Corps, and I shuttled back and forth every week or every other week from Washington to Philadelphia.

Rubens: How did Neighborhood Renewal Corps work out?

Linn: Initially Milton Shapp was president, Paul Hogan was construction coordinator, and I was executive director. One weekend a big article appeared in the local paper, “An Idea Takes Shape.” It was a full spread in a weekend magazine, but there was no mention of any social service agency that we had worked with. Francis Bosworth from the Friends Neighborhood Guild called me and said, “You really violated our agreements to respect the contribution of other agencies. You want to hog all the prestige for Neighborhood
Renewal Corps.” So I went to Milton who told me he had been interviewed and had no control over the writing. Then I found out it wasn’t a journalist but Shapp’s public relations firm that wrote the article. I was mad and severed my relationship with Milton Shapp. My move was not politically savvy, but I couldn’t compromise beyond a certain point because I felt it was unethical, and I asked Milton to resign and consequently lost the political support and connection he had provided. I realized that he had basically used us as a stepping-stone for his campaign to become governor. The title of the article, “An Idea Takes Shape,” really can be read like Shapp took the idea, which would have been more telling.

I lost my political support and connection for another reason, too. Mayor Dilworth was running for governor. When he was still mayor, I asked him to let me work with the development coordinator, who could connect me with the Department of Licensing and Inspection and many other agencies, especially those that work with youth. Licensing and Inspection was only concerned with keeping lots clean, but it doesn’t really nurture neighborhood community life. If neighbors posted complaints on the walls surrounding the vacant lots, they would lose the use of it.

But Dilworth resigned, and the new mayor, James Tate, had the Department of Licensing and Inspection administer the programs for which Dilworth had allocated money. It was called the Land Utilization Program and had labor crews that put up fences and built mini-parks. The mini-parks deviated completely from our own vision. They also got money from corporate donors whose names appeared on fancy signs on fences at the parks. The vest-pocket parks were usually initiated by politically ambitious women. The parks had very little broad-based community support, so they were either fenced in or they were destroyed.

Rubens: What did you do, having lost your support?

Linn: Then I asked the Junior Chamber of Commerce to take over the management of the Neighborhood Renewal Corps. They were very excited about it, but they also couldn’t get enough support from the city government. Since the land utilization program at that time built vest-pocket parks all over the town, in many ways we could consider the work of the Neighborhood Renewal Corps a success. We were only a pilot demonstration project, hoping that the city would take the program over. Unfortunately, they didn’t do it in a really viable way.

Rubens: They took over one aspect of it but not the spirit of it.

Linn: Right. I also had other visions. I worked very closely with the innovative planner Peter von Dresser. He encouraged neighborhood renewal to develop community-based, decentralized, local economies. We hoped to develop economic viability in the neighborhood.

Rubens: How did you expect to develop local economics?

Linn: We envisioned creating a physical environment of high aesthetic quality. Since there were a lot of unemployed men and teenagers, we hoped to develop a labor-intensive environmental craft technology. When I went to Europe that summer, I saw in Germany and several Italian cities pavements made out of little stones of different colors that
created intricate mosaics. A year later I saw Gaudi’s work in Barcelona. He created the most intricate, colorful designs with crockery or broken plates. This gave me a sense of the incredible richness that’s possible. I began to look at the neighborhood we worked in as a potential showcase for labor-intensive production. We had a lot of bricks, and we didn’t have money for machines, but we did have a lot of unemployed people. How much nicer it is to have a sidewalk made out of bricks than out of concrete.

Working with salvaged building material such as flagstones, we could never anticipate the exact dimensions of the salvaged flagstones, some of which were actually broken. In creating the patio with flagstones we filled in the holes with bricks. This opened a whole new aesthetic vista to me. We created an open-structured composition, never knowing how the composition would turn out ultimately. Composer John Cage called it “planned indeterminacy.” When my students tried to create an interesting design, resorting to studied casualness, it didn’t come off at all because one could detect their intent. When we put together marble steps and flagstone and brick, we came up with these incredible unexpected design nuances. So we looked at our neighborhood as a potential showcase to which we could invite people from the suburbs to see the beautiful pavements. We anticipated that the economically well-off suburbanites would be inspired and would invite the neighborhood craftspeople to create beautiful pavements in the suburbs.

Rubens: But did you say that your students didn’t always connect well with the people in the neighborhood?

Linn: You’re right. Sometimes students created beautiful objects that didn’t last. Students from the Philadelphia College of Art created a beautiful bench out of recycled concrete cones. It was too fragile and couldn’t withstand the intense energy of the youngsters.

Rubens: What was the most critical stumbling block you encountered in creating the commons?

Linn: Although people are yearning for community, they are not accustomed to living in it. We were all raised in a highly competitive, individualistic society. Our greatest challenge was to develop processes that would “awaken the commons.” The awakening of the commons meant you would get people in contact with their own yearning for community or their own memory of it. Unless people deeply experience their need for community, then you don’t build really lasting commons.

Yet Neighborhood Renewal Corps focused on rendering technical assistance in the design and construction of commons. We never wanted to be responsible for motivating people. That was the work of settlement houses, churches, and neighborhood organizations for whom we helped to create commons.

Rubens: What did you do about the lack of motivation?

Linn: When we established the second community design center, the Neighborhood Commons Nonprofit Corporation of Washington, D.C., we worked out a contractual agreement with sponsoring agencies, such as churches, neighborhood organizations, and public agencies. But the sponsoring agencies had difficulty motivating people deeply enough to generate the awakening of the commons.
In Washington, we worked closely with Reverend William Baxter, who lost his church because of the expansion of the Capitol building. All of a sudden he had a congregation without a building. He realized how difficult it was for him to keep his congregation together without a physical edifice.

Baxter wrote a letter to me that I also have here. He evaluates the work of Neighborhood Commons organizations. I will read from it.

I feel that the Neighborhood Commons is providing an opportunity for the testing of the vitality of any neighborhood group. If they want to find out who they are, let them take this responsibility. It is my opinion that this is essentially a religious question, and if I am correct, the answer will be that these groups will fall down on this responsibility. This is not your fault but the fault of the group losing touch with its own ground, a general problem of our whole society, I think. Unless the group, for its own life’s sake, lives into the possibility of “the meeting place,” it will falter and fall, most churches first of all. This is the concern of my life.

To reverse the process of rugged individualism is very tedious and very time-consuming. We have to constantly nurture the growing sense of community. What it means is to enjoy the growing sense of community but also to assume the responsibility for it.

Felton Earls, who conducted the most well-financed research on neighborhoods, discovered that the improvement of the physical environment in run-down neighborhoods did not contribute to the growth of community in those areas. Community spirit developed only when more meaningful contact among residents was established.

Rubens: I don’t get a sense of what you’re doing in Washington.

Linn: I’ll tell you. The committee to bring Karl Linn to Washington got money from the Agnes Meyer Foundation for me to establish a Neighborhood Commons Corporation in Washington. The money was channeled through the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, whose director, Fritz Gutheim, was eager to sponsor the project. Fritz helped me put together a very powerful board. He recruited the vice president of Howard University and other politically and economically prominent people. An incredible board! Including my friend, Unitarian minister James Reeb, who was later killed in Selma—he was a Freedom Rider.

Rubens: Did this whole board literally meet?

Linn: Yes. We had bylaws, we met regularly. We formed all kinds of committees. For instance, a design committee chaired by Ken Cooper, a well-known architect. Robert Nash, the president of an organization of minority architects, was another board member. We had a racially well-integrated board.

Rubens: Did you have to get approval from local design organizations?
Linn: I got the approval of the American Institute of Architects and the American Society of Landscape Architects, who encouraged their members to volunteer, ensuring that working with Neighborhood Commons would not be in competition with their practice. I also had to work it out with unions, because unions were always concerned that union jobs were being lost. I told them we would establish a precedent of a more enriched environment of a heightened aesthetic quality that would generate more union employment in the long run.

Rubens: What were the Neighborhood Commons projects you worked on in Washington?

Linn: Our first commons was for Sts. Paul and Augustine Church. Father Gino Baroni was a workers’ priest. He initially pointed to a vacant lot across the street from the parish as a potential site for a commons. I turned him around, suggesting that commons for many different purposes could be built on the open spaces surrounding the parish. We did this, including an amphitheater in the backyard, since teenagers expressed a strong desire for a dance floor. The renderings of the amphitheater got everyone excited. With much enthusiasm, teenagers started to excavate the area. But after a while they ran out of steam, and I often found myself alone with a couple volunteers continuing the excavation. We still managed to finish the amphitheater, creating terraced seating in a circular formation that in fact was used intensely.

But, I realized that our renderings had been misleading because they didn’t express the tremendous amount of effort it would take to create it. If teenagers approached me with this idea now, I would start with a temporary plywood floor. If they used it a lot, we could bring some logs to surround it with seating. If the dancing continued, we could bring salvaged boards and connect the logs, adding other rows of logs like an amphitheater. If after a year the dancing had become an established ritual, we could then take the boards and use them as forms for concrete. One should never use concrete before an activity has cemented itself.

Rubens: How many commons did you work on in Washington?

Linn: We worked on about six neighborhood commons in different locations, but we were much more systematic going about it. For instance, we took a city-wide land-bank inventory. We searched for and listed all the potential sources of public land. For instance, there was one neighborhood commons in northwest Washington that was sponsored by a neighborhood organization called Neighborhood Inc. Its members owned private homes surrounding an empty lot with a little road around it. Neighbors thought it belonged to an absentee landlord, but our land-bank inventory revealed that it was once a decentralized playground run by the D.C. Department of Recreation. What a wonderful opportunity for us to build a neighborhood commons there! So we got a lot of people together, volunteer designers, and came up with a design that neighbors began to construct.

We also worked on a neighborhood commons project in the Carrolsburg public housing project, working closely with the Housing Authority and meeting with Walter Washington, who later became mayor of Washington, D.C. We also conducted research and had engaged a graduate student as our research assistant, looking into the demographics of the residents. As we became more familiar with the people who lived around the courtyard, we began to develop the designs for the commons. They told us
they didn’t like to go to the Carrolsburg project recreation center because it was too formal and the activities were administered by bureaucratically inclined staff. They felt as though they needed to get dressed up to go there. We suggested that maybe the basements of the buildings surrounding the courtyards could be transformed into sociability settings. They would be easier to access, especially for the elderly who were physically handicapped. They liked the idea, and we helped them convert the basement apartments into places for sewing circles and casual socializing.

Then we worked on a big empty space for the Northwest Settlement House, another sponsoring agency, creating commons that included a large basketball field. We also collaborated with the regional parks service in creating a commons in a more affluent Afro-American community, Eastland Gardens. The residents wanted an attractive entrance to their neighborhood; but since they also liked to party and dance, we created a very shallow fountain where you could easily let the water out and dance with benches around. Washington’s famous diagonal grid created lots of small, unused triangular plots where the streets intersect. Neighborhood Commons of Washington, D.C., designed a prototype triangular commons but never built it.

Rubens: How did the commons fare in Washington?

Linn: What happened in Philadelphia was also true in Washington. As more and more vacant, unsafe houses were demolished and Melon Commons became bigger and bigger, residents approached the city Department of Recreation, saying, “Please help us maintain the commons.” But since the recreation department hadn’t initiated the commons, they didn’t want any part of it. The large area was too much for people to maintain since the energetic teens exerted a lot of wear and tear on the commons, and there were also gang fights. We had planted quite mature trees. Some of them were cut down by a gang.

Rubens: By gangs, did you say?

Linn: One day I saw ten kids sitting on the branches of a felled tree and ten other kids pulling them. I was partly laughing, seeing this ingenious contraption, and crying with my other eye for the death of the tree. It was hard for the residents to cope with poverty and unemployment. This was true in Washington, as in Philadelphia. Revisiting the commons in the various cities where we had created them, I was told about the increase in violence, killing, and drug addiction. People felt a greater and greater need for security. They were really anxious living under conditions that were hazardous to their lives. In response, some neighborhood organizations surrounded their commons with high fences. They were eager to control access, especially to safeguard their children.

Rubens: How long did Melon Commons survive?

Linn: There was a political factor that contributed to the destruction of Melon Commons. Mayor Tate installed Eve Asner in the mid-1960s as director of the new Land Utilization Program. In order to get all the credit for creating vest-pocket parks, she wanted to eradicate any remembrance of the work Neighborhood Renewal Corps had accomplished. She ordered Melon Commons bulldozed to the ground. The block became an empty parking lot for many years. Now there is a big high-rise senior citizen home surrounded by a big fence. But, new development of residential housing has taken
place all around the senior center. This commons would have been such a wonderful
place for people who live around there now.

We worked in the most complex social arena possible. If I had had my smarts about me,
I would have started an easier project initially. Wherever there was a larger percentage
of home ownership, there was also more caring and maintenance of the commons.
Commons that were located in urban renewal areas were not only destroyed, but the
people who had built them were forced to move so that their houses could be razed.

Rubens: The six commons in Philadelphia and six in Washington were built, weren’t they?

Linn: Yes, indeed, but some have fallen apart.

Rubens: You’re talking about the problems in retrospect. Surely in 1961 through 1963, it must
have been really enthralling, enlivening. It must have seemed like a real renewal.

Linn: The enthusiasm went up and down. Once we were up on top, a lot of volunteers
participated. When I lost political connection and had to find another sponsoring group,
then it ebbed down. When we got new support, participation went up again. Maybe I
made one mistake, but I’m not sure. If I had stayed in Philadelphia and not gone to
Washington, I could have stood right in front of the bulldozers and possibly prevented
Melon Commons from being destroyed, since I had cultivated many connections there.
This might have helped the work more than generating Neighborhood Commons
corporations in many other cities.

Rubens: Let’s get an overview of what happened.

Linn: Let me tell you about another project I created in Washington in 1962. We always had a
lot of participation on the part of young people, who were primarily of the white middle
class, whether they were in the Scout movement or fraternities. But young people from
low-income people of color communities were less enthusiastic about volunteering.
They wanted a job, a career, to develop a viable life for themselves. Consequently, Fritz
Gutheim and I developed a landscape technician training program that the Labor
Department financed. We got $160,000 through its Manpower Development and
Training Act. We ended up with fifty school dropouts between the ages of nineteen and
twenty-one, who enrolled in the year-long training program. We were able to get from
the district an old fireman training center five blocks from the Capitol for $100 a month.
Right on Capitol Hill. This was our training center. We had enough money to hire a
staff of ten people.

Rubens: How did you find these students?

Linn: Employment and other public agencies referred them to us. We hired a black
horticulturalist who became program director and a white landscape contractor who
also was a parachute jumper. He was a daring person and made good contact with our
students, many of whom were in and out of prisons and had families. The black director,
being an aspiring middle-class person, was embarrassed about the delinquent way of
life of the trainees.

Rubens: This is in 1962?
Linn: It took a year to develop the program and get the financing. So the actual training program began in 1963.

Rubens: You spent a lot of time in Washington, did you move to there?

Linn: Yes, indeed. At first I slept in a little office on H Street and then rented an apartment on New Hampshire Avenue.

Rubens: Had you decided by then to give up Penn?

Linn: I was still on a leave of absence. I really was delighted that I could concentrate on this work, learn from it and see what I could be applicable to the education of designers guided by concerns for social justice and mental health, which Dean Perkins from Penn suggested that I do.

Rubens: Coming back to the training program, how did it work out?

Linn: In many ways it was a great success. We even found employment opportunities for the trainees helping residents who moved into dilapidated housing surrounding the Capitol as the area became gentrified. They helped these residents in constructing their landscapes. We did not just train them in horticultural skills but masonry, carpentry and welding, which are all skills that are needed for the construction of urban open spaces. Unfortunately, the director of the program, whom I mentioned before, didn’t get along with trainees even though he was black. We ended up promoting the assistant director to director because he had such a good relationship with the trainees. Not surprisingly, the former director was all up in arms about it and created a very unpleasant racial issue out of it that made the federal government terminate the program a month early.

Rubens: What happened then?

Linn: Since the Neighborhood Commons of Washington, D.C., was unsuccessful in getting funding, I did consulting for the United Planning Organization (UPO) in Washington, D.C., in the fall of 1964. UPO was an umbrella organization administering all the poverty funds from the federal government. Building upon the experience of the training program, I explored career development in the labor-intensive landscape industry. I convened a conference in Washington bringing together leaders of nurserymen, arborists, and representatives from private and public organizations of the landscape industry. We came to the conclusion that young people who find employment, even briefly during the summer vacation, if they work in the industry, should have their experience recorded as accrual of job experience from which they can build a career. The employers would be obligated to conduct some service learning for the young people. We also realized that to better prepare the trainees for employment in the private sector, much of such training should take place first in the public sector in local park departments and city nurseries.

Rubens: Were you invited to any other cities?

Linn: Going back a couple of years, while I was establishing the Neighborhood Commons Corporation in Washington, D.C., in 1963, George Kostritsky, an architect in Baltimore, asked me to help him develop a neighborhood commons nonprofit corporation in
Baltimore. After a series of lectures and discussions with public and private agencies in Baltimore, the Junior League decided to sponsor the program. Long articles appeared in the Baltimore press about our projects in Washington and Philadelphia, and I succeeded with the help of high-ranking officials in Baltimore to inspire the program into being. Shortly thereafter, the mayor whom I had convinced lost an election, and I had to sell the idea to the new mayor, fortunately with success.

During the same year, 1963, Carl Anthony asked me to develop a Neighborhood Commons corporation in New York City, which was the fourth city. Carl Anthony, who was inspired by the Melon Commons when he was a member of Heritage House, asked me to consult with him on the development of a Neighborhood Commons program in New York. At the time he was attending Columbia University School of Architecture and was employed by the Harlem Education Project that was administered by the Northern Student Movement Coordinating Committee for Civil Rights (NSM). NSM adopted the Neighborhood Commons program. Peter Countrymen was the executive director and asked me to join their board. In a letter to me dated April 5, 1963, he explained the relevance of the work of the Neighborhood Renewal Corps to his program. I have it here. Let me read it to you.

I believe your neighborhood renewal projects have two primary values for our program. First, they represent for youth a concrete way in which they can act upon their environment, a way in which they can both release frustrations and channel creative energies into constructive work. The flexibility which your approach allows for individual freedom of expression and corporate decisions concerning form are important here. Secondly, the completed commons area provides the physical surroundings necessary to the development of community life in the depressed area. It is only when such life exists that youth will learn and experience what it means to be stable participants in the larger society. It is for these reasons that NSM considers its work with you in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington to be of great significance in our overall aims.

Attending meetings of volunteers who were articulate young middle-class black people and white people, I witnessed the intense interactions between them. It was hard for the white volunteers to deal with the anger and rage expressed by the black volunteers. Lew Anthony, Carl Anthony’s late brother, wrote in a letter that I was just given about his experiences of those days. He said,

There was a real gulf between us. As much as I admire the white volunteers for their dedication, they really didn’t understand our realities, they don’t understand how it feels to have experienced each day as a survival struggle. They came out of much more secure backgrounds, and consequently our perspective on life is completely different.

Rubens: What happened with these tensions?

Linn: Later on during the 1960s, Stokley Carmichael gave impetus to the formation of the black power movement.

Rubens: Was a commons ever built in New York City?
Linn: Carl motivated a lot of neighborhood residents to participate in cleaning up a debris-filled vacant lot on 147th Street in Harlem. He recruited three architects who had just graduated from Columbia who designed an elaborate commons with a gigantic barbecue. Our design committee of Neighborhood Commons Corporation of Washington, D.C., gave them our blessing. We didn’t challenge the fact that people had to dig deep trenches for the foundation, especially for the barbecue, because we were so impressed with the design. The heavy labor overtaxed the energies of the residents before they could enjoy the commons. In retrospect, I believe the architects designed the monumental barbecue more for their own edification than for the residents’ benefit and we overlooked it because members of the design review committee didn’t know any better at that time. This was in 1963. They should have started out with a half steel-drum on the first evening of construction, roasting a pig to celebrate their accomplishments.

The fifth neighborhood commons nonprofit corporation was established in Chicago, Illinois, in 1964. Ronald Engel, a Unitarian minister at the Meadville Theological Seminary, invited me to contribute ideas for a memorial to James Reeb, whom as I mentioned before was killed in Selma. I had met Ron Engel before when he was an assistant minister to James Reeb in Washington, D.C., at a time when James had also joined the board of Neighborhood Commons of Washington, D.C.

Rubens: Was Ron Engel black?

Linn: No, he was white. Ron and another Unitarian minister, Neil Shadle, had started to open an office in the middle of the city challenging slumlords who charge exorbitant rents. Since I felt that Ron and his partner entered into domains they were completely ill-equipped to handle, I was worried for their lives, since the landlords they challenged were Mafia types.

I had long discussions with them in Chicago and suggested they should create a Center of Hope or Promise rather than a Center of Protest, because as spiritually inspiring people, they would be more effective in this capacity.

Rubens: Let me just get this clear. You’re being brought to Chicago by a minister to talk about a memorial to James Reeb.

Linn: Right. So I suggested that they should create meeting places in low-income neighborhoods where they could meet with neighbors and explore projects to improve their quality of life. Such a center could be called the Neighborhood Commons of Chicago, and they agreed. We had really meaningful discussions. Maybe it was the fourteen generations of rabbis who preceded me that enabled me to have profound religious discussions with them. I was always surprised that they took me seriously because I had no formal religious background.

Ron Engel also invited another colleague of mine whom I knew from Washington, Milton Kotler. Kotler was a fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies. He had sent me manuscripts that later on became a book on neighborhood government. He wanted to go back to an old Jeffersonian decentralized form of government and empower neighborhoods. He had a sense that neighbors can get together to govern themselves.
and make public officials from city hall come to them so that they can have more of a
voice in the political process.

Rubens: What else happened in Chicago?

Linn: Milton also had an impact on Ron and his partner. He suggested that Neighborhood
Commons of Chicago should generate local enterprises. Milton pushed the idea of
creating their own housing corporation administered by black people, which in fact they
did, creating Neighborhood Commons Housing Corporation that provided employment
and housing for the residents. It still exists today. Unfortunately, later on when the black
power movement took over, the white ministers had to move out of the neighborhood.

Rubens: Did you ever get a hand in designing anything in Chicago?

Linn: In Chicago, it was no longer just an open space. Neighborhood Commons Housing
Corporation created housing and supported the development of all kinds of local stores.

Rubens: But were you literally planning?

Linn: No. I just contributed to the dialogue. Neighborhood Commons of Chicago became a
memorial for James Reeb and focused primarily on the creation of a neighborhood-
housing corporation and the development of community among all those who
participated.

The perspective that Milton Kotler brought to the discussion was important to me since
he emphasized that to build democracy, it is essential to decentralize power. I remember
one of the volunteers from Boston David Bird, who co-founded BISON Associates. The
organization created a mobile unit they called the Center of Choice. It was a place
where people could come and express their concerns. They even brought the governor
there. People could express themselves on a computer terminal saying, we want this, we
want that. When David visited Melon Commons, he saw it as an incredible forum for
decentralized government where local residents could meet with public officials right in
their own neighborhood. So in our thinking, Melon Commons was not just a sitting area
or playground, but provided a forum. There was much more substantive, philosophical,
and strategic underpinning. Just like the perspective that Peter van Dressers brought to
our work, namely, the creation of local mini community-based economics, enriched our
neighborhood commons work.

Rubens: What were the other cities you worked in?

Linn: The sixth community design center was in Columbus, Ohio, in 1967. I was drawing on
the experience I had in other cities along the East Coast, where we developed growing
momentum in participatory design and self-help construction during spring, summer,
and fall. But, when it started to rain and get cold, the momentum died down. Since it
was important to maintain an ongoing momentum of citizen participation, I realized that
what we needed was a protected space, and I came up with the idea of creating an
indoor construction workshop in Columbus. Consequently, the organization was not
called a neighborhood commons but CUE—Columbus Urban Environmental
Workshop. I was co-sponsored by the local chapter of the American Institute of
Architects and the local chapter of the Junior Chamber of Commerce.
Rubens: Did someone from the local architectural firm get involved?

Linn: Very much indeed. The architect Mark Feinknopf provided much leadership to the
development of CUE. I also worked with students from the school of architecture at the
local university who were very excited. Mr. James Crozier, director of Columbus Urban
Renewal Authority, who had heard me give various talks, invited me consult with the
agency in the creation of environmental task teams of young people.

Rubens: When are we talking about now?

Linn: As I mentioned, 1967. This was also a time when the federal government handed out
big grants to cities. Residents were supposed to read through piles of application
documents for the grant applications. To me it was an incredible imposition on the
people in the neighborhood. To read these documents wasn’t easy. The government
should have spent money on taking people to visit innovative projects in other cities.
This could have inspired the residents because they would have been able to understand
how they function through direct experience, rather than having to read about it. Federal
funding was a mixed blessing that created jealousy between the paid residents and non-
paid residents.

Rubens: Did you actually create a construction workshop space?

Linn: Yes, we did. It was situated right on the border of downtown Columbus and the poverty
area. During inclement weather, CUE would prefabricate components for outdoor
furnishing that were assembled and installed during the spring.

Rubens: Did you create a workshop anywhere else?

Linn: Yes, we created a workshop in Washington in the landscape technician training program
center. One of our staff members was a wonderful sculptor who had the trainees make
marvelous sculptures out of recycled material. They created all kinds of intriguing
animals and were able to sell them in local galleries. We realized how important it is to
have a secure and weather-protected place for experimentation. Louis Kahn called such
places “sanctuaries for experimentation.” I considered them generators of community,
because people could spend time together year-round even when it rains. The
workshops became accumulators of creative energy.

Initially, the inspiration for a construction workshop came from Charles Blessing, a
planner who created such a place in Detroit, Michigan, where he rented a big industrial
building for artist workshops. The workshops also became showcases visited by local
residents. Some artists ended up being invited to work in local neighborhoods. Even
when artists only sketch vignettes of neighborhood life, people are curious and
congregate around the artist. This is again a triangulation. The artist creates a common
ground with other people. Artists can dramatically transform a neighborhood by
creating large murals. In this way artists are inspirational and effective catalysts of
community life. In fact, I became a member of an artist-in-residence program in New
York City. Other members of the group were the artist Allan Kaprow, who initiated
“happenings,” the artist Phyllis Yampolsky, who staged the first ethnic cultural events in
New York city parks when Thomas Hoving was park commissioner, and Mel Roman, a
therapist and artist.
Rubens: When was this that you worked with these artists?

Linn: I started in the early sixties. I am still in contact with most of them. We developed a kind of a roving team of friends who always come to each other’s assistance and keep track of each other.

Rubens: There was a mural movement that began in the sixties.

Linn: In fact, I was a member of committee of the city arts program that generated a lot of murals.

Rubens: What city?

Linn: New York City. Our committee selected artists and assisted them in developing a different approach to their work, to work with local communities. Ordinarily artists give tangible expression to their own ideas, but our artists had to learn to give tangible expressions to the hopes and concerns of the community that invited them to paint a mural in their neighborhood. In fact, Native Americans don’t have a word for “artist.” They call them “interpreters” and only those people who can express the deeply felt aspirations of a community are qualified to function as artists. These are usually the shamans. Unfortunately, during the later sixties, public funding was only funneled to well-known, established artists who projected their own imagery on murals.

Rubens: Did you ever return from your leave of absence from Penn?

Linn: No, I would give Neighborhood Commons courses through 1965. One of my black students became an employee of the Philadelphia Land Utilization Program and developed his own critical perspective on their work since they created vest-pocket parks not grounded in the community.

Rubens: Were there any other Neighborhood Commons projects that you worked on?

Linn: I have just enumerated the establishment of the different Neighborhood Commons nonprofit corporations in a chronological sequence. I only founded and directed the Neighborhood Renewal Corps of Philadelphia and the Neighborhood Commons nonprofit corporation of Washington, D.C. All the other projects I inspired into being.

Colleges and universities always served as staging grounds for community design service. Over the years I had been invited by many different colleges and universities to give talks to students. In most instances, the audience was very excited, and often community members and representatives of agencies were present and invited me to develop projects in their city. I was also eager to institutionalize community design service, hoping to incorporate it in the curricula of institutions of higher learning. As a member of a faculty I was also able to secure my livelihood. Now I want to present university-based projects. Having left Washington, D.C., at the end of 1964 I became a research professor and established a program in environmental arts at the Brooklyn Center of Long Island University in 1965–66.

Rubens: How did you get there?
Linn: William Birnbaum was the provost, and I knew him from the New School. He asked me to develop a master plan for the role of the university as a community catalyst. I hired a staff of people, including the architect Myron Goldfinger, who worked with me a decade earlier in my private practice. We met with local residents and representatives from public and private organizations, creating a sketchbook of ideas that portrayed in colorful images projects that would enrich the lives of the surrounding community. In a sense, we developed an extension program in the environmental arts. Inspired by the name of the School of Fine Arts at University of Pennsylvania, I called my program “Environmental Arts.” The name “Fine Arts” connoted catering mainly to consumer interests. I wanted the program to communicate more substantively with surrounding communities to strengthen their hopes and aspirations. In retrospect I realize that naming the program Environmental Arts was misleading because people always thought of it as a beautification program.

Not far from the neighborhood surrounding the college was Fort Green public housing, inhabited primarily by people of color. On the other side of Myrtle Avenue, above which existed the elevated subway structure, there were high-rise senior citizen homes occupied primarily by white people. The senior citizens started to organize the neighborhood to get rid of the Myrtle Avenue structure since the train had become obsolete. They were eager to install bright fluorescent lights flanking the broad avenue to create a glaring separation between whites and blacks since they were insecure about their neighbors.

I looked at this elevated structure and thought, “Gee, maybe we shouldn’t tear it down.” We made a lot of color renderings showing how the structure itself could provide opportunities for advertising the wares of the local stores flanking the structure. We designed the top of the subway structure as a “high walk.” Since there were no playgrounds or sitting areas nearby, we put some up [in our design] as part of the high walk. This also gave residents an overview of the area. We also suggested that the dilapidated Fort Green Park that had ornate stonework could become a setting for all kinds of cultural events. We also suggested that Long Island University, not being highly endowed to afford a fancy country retreat, should acquire a ferry boat as its retreat center, the “River Retreat,” because the East River was very close. We also suggested that a small street that linked the campus to the park could become a street university where kiosks could display educational material for the public. Since Martin Buber had just died, I named it the Buber Promenade. We made many other proposals as a result of constructive discussion with neighbors and agencies surrounding the campus. All the ideas became an exhibit called “A Sketchbook of Ideas,” and it was displayed on campus, as well as in Manhattan by the Architectural League. We also suggested that a small building adjacent to the university could become a wonderful construction workshop enabling students, faculty, and neighbors to develop outdoor amenities that would enrich people’s quality of life. Both the “Sketchbook of Ideas” and the workshop I had hoped would be helpful in initiating a community design-and-build service education program at the university. I invited Louis Kahn to help me articulate a community design-and-build service education program. I knew that he was very supportive of the idea that students of environmental design would benefit from serving an apprenticeship by being involved in the construction of spaces. Kahn spent a whole day with me and I have tapes of our conversation, which have also been transcribed.
Rubens: Are there any other community design service programs that you introduced to other schools of higher learning such as art schools that led to the building of commons?

Linn: Having had a very successful collaboration with students and faculty of Philadelphia College of Art working with their and my students on Melon Commons, I felt a real affinity working with artists young and old. I had written [an article] about our work in Philadelphia that was published in a journal for art educators. I gave a talk to a huge audience of Catholic art educators in Milwaukee accompanied by my son, who at that time was very involved in drawing imaginative sketches. Being the only child, literally hundreds of educators hovered over him marveling at his creations. I was also invited to participate in a workshop at New York University sponsored by the President’s Office of Science and Technology.

The chairman of Webster College, who heard me talk in Milwaukee, invited me to give a lecture and conduct a workshop. The Webster College Art Department, formerly a Catholic school outside of St. Louis, was known thereafter as an innovative education center, a “workshop for learning.” Yet the school buildings and grounds were never altered and looked rather forbidding. As in other colleges, the development and maintenance of the grounds and buildings was taken care of by the maintenance staff that is accountable to the administration without any faculty participation.

I gave a talk encouraging students and faculty to explore the development of an environmental arts program that would humanize their campus environment. Such a program could be an extension of their art program. Students and I looked over the campus and I involved them in converting a room overnight into a commons, putting burlap on the walls and creating a very welcoming setting. In the morning the students served breakfast to the president under a colorful canopy hung in the middle of the commons. They wanted to show her how important it was for students to have a commons. She later went on to become president of Hunter College in New York.

Students had gotten deeply involved working day and night creating the student commons out of an unused space. I connected especially with three students who had religious training before coming to Webster. In response to the effort, one of these three students, John Traversa, wrote a poetic statement. Here is an excerpt:

Life calls for much responsibility

Responsibility is our ability to respond

People want and need opportunities to respond

to the people and places they live with.

Passive response is not enough

Verbal response alone is not enough

People need multiple opportunities for active response-ability
that involves as much of our person as possible

To be for people, places need to answer the needs of the people

Places for people must let lips be tickled into smiling

Places must let people play

Play is people using joyfully their response-ability, saying Yes to life smiling

The three students also got so excited about the neighborhood commons projects that they contacted officials in St. Louis and arranged for me to have meetings with them. The official introduced us to a neighborhood that was eager to explore the building of a commons. It was sponsored by the Urban Renewal Authority of St. Louis and the neighborhood organization and consisted of five lots. The community came out with a whole newspaper that described the commons work in simple and poignant language, easily comprehensible to the residents. The article said, “Children playing together is a neighborhood commons. When neighbors sit together and talk, the place becomes a commons.” The students who were deeply spiritual also enabled the neighbors to awaken to the spirit of the commons in a very meaningful way.

The close bonding that developed between students and myself led them to visit me in New York. I was giving a talk in Central Park in a Design-In that took place in a very large tent. To demonstrate how important it is not to scatter broken glass in the soil, I got the students to get dressed up in parks department uniforms and demonstrated before the audience the need for wastebaskets. They smashed bottles on the cement most dramatically and threw the pieces into metal cans with the loud noise lasting quite a while. They also showed sketches of their idea of glass-smashing targets that could provide good outlets for pent-up energies.

Rubens: Were there any other universities where you did similar work?

Linn: Syracuse University School of Architecture, which also had a landscape architecture program, invited me to give a talk. One of their faculty, David Dobereiner, had heard about my work through an enthusiastic student, and got me invited. The students were excited about the neighborhood commons work, especially a student organization called SPEED that was critical of the [school’s] curricula. They were eager to get involved. Mark Hawkins was one of the leaders of SPEED who ended up becoming a lifelong friend.

After my talk, Robert Bartell from the planning department and Bob Reiman, professor of landscape architecture, suggested that I work with them to submit a proposal for a national competition for socially relevant educational programs that was to be funded by the Pittsburgh Glass Foundation. I won the competition for the School of Architecture with the proposal to develop a one-year program where students of architecture and landscape architecture would be working with special staff and neighbors to create a commons in a neighborhood. I was delighted to do so because the
program institutionalized community design-and-build service as part of the curriculum.

Rubens: Did you have to give them a physical design exercise?

Linn: Yes, but initially it was just a program. We called it the Neighborhood Environment Program and hired a director. I served as a consultant. This was 1967. The neighbors were eager to have a playground so David Dobereiner worked with the students and challenged them to design components and assembly systems for play equipment and outdoor furnishings that could be easily rearranged to meet changing needs. Helen Safa, an anthropologist, evaluated the program. Unfortunately, we had problems with the program director. Neighbors complained about his inability to maintain the high level of inspiration that I was able to elicit. Worse, he often threw a wet blanket on students’ spirits during his meetings with them.

In addition to the Neighborhood Environment Program, I also became a community resource consultant to the Syracuse Model City Program called Crusade for Opportunity. Ben Zimmerman was the director. He became intrigued with my process of conceptually restructuring an issue, converting a liability into an asset. I again emphasized that one should not look at people of color as culturally deprived. After all, they are cultural pioneers. They brought jazz to our lives. They were able to create it out of their own existential reality, which was very painful. Their music struck a resonance for people the world over.

Being intrigued with my philosophy, Ben Zimmerman engaged Scott Carlson to interview me. The interview was transcribed and Scott developed a position paper for Crusade for Opportunity about my community-building strategies.

In addition to the federally financed poverty program, Crusade for Opportunity, there was a competing federal poverty program in Syracuse inspired by Saul Alinsky. He was considered the “the federally paid rabble-rouser.” The two federal programs competed with each other like two cigarette brands made by the same company. I really didn’t like Alinsky’s approach because he was only interested in organizing protests as a way of empowering people. The issues were of less concern to him. Alinsky roused neighborhood residents, including teenagers saying they don’t need a neighborhood commons. I had a chance to meet with these teenagers and explained to them that a neighborhood commons is a place for everyone, including them. I asked them to come to a community-wide meeting to discuss the neighborhood commons idea, which had become controversial because of Alinsky. At the meeting, the teenagers got up and said, “We want a place where we can meet. We want a place where we can meet with little kids and grown-ups.” The adults in the audiences said they didn’t want to fight their own kids and endorsed the neighborhood commons idea.

Alinsky also challenged the federal government politically, which ultimately caused them to withdraw their funding from his program. Since he had recruited the most intelligent, courageous, and active young people who all of a sudden found themselves without sources of income, his approach helped to undermine the significant neighborhood leadership. Alinsky’s dogmatic approach reminded me of Mumford’s statement about how important it is for us to focus on fresh observation, really making intimate contact with people instead of throwing out slogans.
In 1967 I also made the acquaintance George Wylie, president of the National Welfare Program. With the same conceptual restructuring I suggested to him that it would be really helpful if people could help those on welfare look at their check as their first guaranteed income instead of feeling demeaned by a “handout” and drinking it down. Pooling their welfare checks together, they could establish food cooperatives and other programs that would contribute to economic self-reliance. Automation had already replaced a lot of labor so there were a lot of superfluous people without regular employment. Jerry Rifkin, in his book *The End of Work*, focuses on this issue. George and his wife Rita had become good friends of mine. I was deeply saddened when I heard that George had drowned.

Rubens: So are you saying that you were also consulting on a range of social services?

Linn: Right. I want to share the community mental health programs I was consulting with. In fact, recently I mentioned my involvement to Leonard Duhl when we had lunch together. We knew the same kind of people, such as Mel Roman, whom I mentioned earlier as an artist-in-residence. Mel was also a therapist at Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx. For a short time I consulted with him on creating more hospitable waiting rooms for the patients that should be equipped with games for children. I also provided more extensive consultation to the Temple University mental health program in Philadelphia.

Rubens: What was the program all about?

Linn: The mental health program in Philadelphia focused on the area that was declared to become a Model City Program, since Temple University was right in the middle of North Philadelphia, the target area. I felt that a mental health program could be instrumental in establishing guidelines for creating a healthy environment that would also stabilize people’s health. Unfortunately, mental health usually focuses on sickness. The mental health program was housed in a little residential building, which I envisioned becoming a welcoming place with a kitchen and coffee pot boiling. The center hired neighborhood residents who had won the trust of other residents and had established themselves as leaders. Unfortunately, to bolster their ego as mental health professionals, they got themselves all dressed in white smocks, which immediately alienated them from other residents. To make things worse, the center’s administrators brought in a huge Formica boardroom table and installed fluorescent lights, creating a very alienating ambience. They also established a satellite mental health station in a public housing project at the end of a hallway painted a bilious green. The consulting room was at the end of this hallway, past an isolation room. Residents shunned the clinic because it was such an offensive and alienating place.

That’s why I’m so interested also in the work of Ivan Illich, who constantly challenges the institutionalization of human endeavors. The prevailing health care organizations are not really caring for people. People are just patients administered by a large bureaucracy.

Rubens: Did you do any other consulting?
Linn: Yes, indeed. I consulted with housing authorities, the President’s Council on Natural Beauty, with Native American tribes, and various others, including the Girl Scouts.

Rubens: What did you do with the Girl Scouts?

Linn: A landscape architect in Boston who was also very active with the Girl Scouts organization asked me to consult with him. They were concerned about diminishing membership. As a response they thought of coming out with new uniforms. Studying the history of the Girl Scouts, I realized that their founder was a great advocate of nature, which could provide a solid basis for the Girl Scouts’ movement to promote an ecological agenda. I also felt the growing feminist movement could give Girl Scouts a leading role in humanizing society and making it more caring and nurturing. Since women are very adept at resolving conflict among their children, they should play a significant role in governments’ efforts in peacemaking among nations. Elise Boulding, a well-known peace activist and academic at Dartmouth College, made this point in a lecture I heard. I thought that the daughters of these women, the Girl Scouts, must have learned a lot from their mothers and could be very productive in other conflict resolution efforts.

I ended up staging the annual meeting of the East Coast Girl Scouts in New Haven, having different groups of Scouts discussing different aspects of these challenging topics. A spotlight shined on the discussion tables. We also decorated the big ballroom transforming it into an uplifting meeting place. Here again it was an example of conceptual restructuring of the understanding of a situation.

Rubens: Tell me also about your consulting with Native Americans.

Linn: A colleague of mine who became a member of the faculty at a Navajo college in Arizona asked me to consult with the tribe on outdoor recreation. I attended a tribal meeting when a Native American representative of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., visited the tribe urging them to develop the reservation for public recreation. Many tribe members supported the idea, saying that they travel for recreational purposes, so others should be just as welcome to travel to the reservation for recreation. The Red Power Indians wanted no part of it. They felt invaded enough by whites and anticipated with horror that white people would be roaming around with cameras taking pictures of their private life in the hogans. I suggested that they should cordon off the entry to the reservations with marine rope and charge entry. The fees would enable them to train members of the tribe as anthropological guides who would accompany visitors in such a way that it wouldn’t impose upon or violate their lives. Unfortunately, I don’t remember what ultimately happened.

Rubens: Was this the only tribe you worked with?

Linn: No. I was also asked to be a consultant to Peter van Dresser, whom I mentioned earlier, who had been asked by the American Friends to consult with the Seneca in New York State. They were about to be relocated because a dam was to be built. Before my visit I consulted with anthropologist Stanley Diamond at the New School for Social Research in New York City, who told me that the Seneca had built most of the skyscrapers in New York since they suffer less from fear of heights than white people, because the women carry their babies for a long time. Knowing of the caring contact with their children, I
suggested that Native Americans establish International Children’s Camps in the different bioregions of the U.S. They could impart their profound ecological wisdom to the young people. I knew how excited the German youth had been, including myself, reading endless books about Native Americans. For white families to surrender the care of their children to the Native Americans would be an emotional and tangible act of restitution.

Peter and I also suggested that as a source of income the Seneca could take over the management of the local forests.

Rubens: It sounds very interesting.

Linn: When I visited the homes of the Seneca families I saw in each building a long display of long branches that had sharp points. They made these spear-like sticks for what they called “Snow Snake” games. The spears were carefully prepared and rubbed with special wax many times. A horse would pull a big log behind it to make a groove in the snow, and the spear holders would compete with each other who could slide [their spear] the furthest down the groove. As the spear rushed down the path it would quiver like a snake. The Seneca were as excited about the game as Americans are about baseball. I suggested they could present their games on a national or international level as a highly valued sport activity.

Rubens: What other organizations did you consult with?

Linn: I became a member of the board of New York City’s Parks and Playgrounds Council, a nonprofit corporation.

Rubens: How did that come about?

Linn: Being in New York, I was interested in people and organizations that developed playgrounds, and people considered me an expert.

Rubens: When did you move up to New York from Washington?

Linn: 1966. I lived in Brooklyn Heights, a very old area with a lot of fancy brick houses, not far from the campus [Brooklyn campus of Long Island University (LIU)]. I lived on a street next to the promenade that overlooked Manhattan. I rented a room in a really dilapidated hotel, the Standish Arms. It was on the twelfth floor and you could just see over the buildings on the other side of the street flanking the promenade, to the Statue of Liberty and the East River in Manhattan with all the boats. I had lousy parties, because as soon as people arrived, they were always glued to the windows!

Rubens: What did you do as a member of the council?

Linn: Some board members suggested that we could help kids from Harlem who needed to improve their grades. They wanted to start a 3R program—reading, writing, arithmetic, which I felt was very cruel. Kids spend nine months or ten months sitting in a schoolroom. I suggested engaging them theatrically in a learning process, because if somebody can communicate with them meaningfully, they would be motivated and learn inadvertently. I had experienced this with Chris Speeth who had created the
children’s theater in Philadelphia. I checked out various theatrical groups and saw a performance of the Bread and Puppet Theater with Peter Schumann and was very intrigued. He captured people’s imagination with the large puppets and masks at the time when the Vietnam War was raging. I was moved by his powerful antiwar message.

Rubens: Did you manage to work with the Bread and Puppet Theater?

Linn: Yes. Shirley Chesney, a member of the council, developed a program proposal that was funded with $15,000 from the New York City parks department, administered at that time by Thomas Hoving. We hired a community liaison person, and established a workshop in the South Bronx in which Peter and kids from the neighborhood created huge puppets portraying the slumlords. The theatrical production, called “The Sky is Falling,” focused on themes that dealt with people’s reality. Part of the performance was also a Tom and Jerry show that fascinated the kids. Peter also took the kids to a clay pit in New Jersey and took the clay to the workshop to make the form for a big crocodile head. They attached a long, long colorful fabric body carried by the 200 feet of the 100 kids underneath it. Accompanied by a lot of musical instruments, pots and pans, it went from street to street announcing the performances. All of a sudden the streets became theatre, as people looked out of their windows, [which were] like balconies. Our community liaison person organized the performances in five boroughs. They must have played in front of 10,000 people altogether.

Rubens: How are you supporting yourself during this time?

Linn: I was still employed by LIU. During the time I wasn’t associated with universities, I was either paid for my travels or received some remuneration from my consulting work. Since I tried to keep track of the development of neighborhood commons in different cities, I often traveled at my own expense and was usually in a precarious financial situation. At the same time I was working on a grant application to the van Ameringen Foundation, which was interested in community mental health. I wrote a long, moving application and was told that, for the first time, the members of the board took an application home. The people who had mentioned the foundation to me suggested I ask for $5,000. I ended up receiving $55,000 as a creative development grant to help me in pursuing my work.

Rubens: What did you do with the money?

Linn: To receive the money I needed a sponsoring agency and entertained various choices.

Rubens: What were your options?

Linn: At that time I also had started to work with Frank Reisman, who was the son-in-law of Judge Mary Conway Kohler, who had been a juvenile judge. Mary Kohler was very supportive of the neighborhood commons work since we engaged young people and were eager to assist them in career development. She had established a whole national organization that supported young people in administering community enterprises. Frank Reisman had established a center that focused on paraprofessional training primarily of disenfranchised young people. We wrote an article together and I was tempted to have his center be the recipient of the grant so that we could write a book together.
Rubens: Did you end up channeling the money to the center?

Linn: No. One of the volunteers, William Porter, who had worked in Lou Kahn’s office and became actively involved in Neighborhood Renewal Corps as a volunteer architect had begun to teach at MIT. He eventually became dean of the School of Architecture. Having maintained contact with many volunteers, he invited me to come for an interview and introduced me to a gathering of faculty members.

Rubens: Did they offer you a job?

Linn: Yes, they did. What impressed me most is that I saw in the School of Architecture that students had broken through cinder block walls and created their own personalized study spaces. They created platforms, walkways, stairs to the different levels, and a coffee lounge. I thought that if students were able to assert themselves to that extent, maybe I could find a niche here and have a chance to work with students and faculty in molding their surroundings to better accommodate their needs.

The second reason I decided to accept the position was that towards the middle 1960s, Stokely Carmichael had become an influential advocate of black power. It had become less and less comfortable for me and other white people to work in black neighborhoods. Though some people knew me, I didn’t want to impose myself on the black community. I also thought that working in a primarily white middle-class student community would authenticate our work. It’s hard for people of color in slum areas to use recycled material for things like adventure playgrounds, because they are surrounded by broken-down things. In contrast, affluent neighborhoods love the adventure playgrounds because they were bored with the assembly line-fabricated play equipment. I thought that I could experiment in the college environment and make something that people from the low-income neighborhoods could come and see and determine if it was relevant to them. Students of the School of Education at Harvard University created a yurt that they erected through self-help in very little time. Seeing adventure playgrounds or weird-looking yurts in a more affluent community or on a university campus might take away the stigmas people from low-income neighborhoods might have associated with them.

I was also very eager to conduct a national survey of neighborhood commons and vest pocket parks in the different cities where I had worked along the East Coast. I thought that the funding would help me to visit the projects, interviewing neighborhood residents young and old, designers, community organizers, and representatives of public agencies and foundations. I was delighted that MIT’s Division of Sponsored Research was willing to accept the grant. In addition, I became an associate professor at the School of Architecture and Urban Planning.

Rubens: Besides the survey, did you teach?

Linn: Yes. I taught several different courses which I will discuss later on after mentioning the national survey.
Rubens: What about the survey of neighborhood commons that you said you wanted to conduct?

Linn: I spent the first year and a half at MIT from 1968 to ‘69 going along the East Coast from Washington, D.C., to Boston, where I had built neighborhood commons. I went with a photographer, Nanine Clay Greene, who was the wife of Grady Clay, the editor of *Landscape Architecture* magazine. The Clays had invited me to give a talk in Louisville in the early 1960s and Grady published articles in *Landscape Architecture* about my work. We not only visited the different people involved but we also organized a conference on neighborhood commons and urban open space in Washington, D.C., in 1969. It was sponsored by the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). Five thousand dollars from the ASLA Foundation made it possible for neighborhood residents to participate. They paid for teenagers and adults to participate in the conference and also for their hotels. Usually only professionals can afford to attend conferences.

Rubens: What was it called?


Rubens: Tell me about the conference, how you staged it.

Linn: Rather than writing a book about our eighteen-month survey of neighborhood commons and vest-pocket parks, I decided to stage the conference with Nanine. I realized that the people whom I had met who were the critical players in the creation, especially of vest-pocket parks, provided important insights. They had learned a lot from their mistakes. Unfortunately, attractive photographs of their finished work served as examples to many communities and towns across the country, devoid of their critical appraisal. The federal government had spent a great deal of money on vest pocket parks to the chagrin of neighborhood residents especially in inner-city communities, who were not adequately involved in the creation of vest-pocket parks.

The conference would be a culminating event in my decade-long effort to assist the American Society of Landscape Architects in becoming more socially responsible. The Potomac chapter of the ASLA that I met with decided to sponsor the conference. Having analyzed the complexity in the creation of urban open spaces, we singled out the critical role-playing decision makers. Since the conference had become a most significant review of my effort in making the ASLA more responsive to low-income urban people-of-color communities, I prepared myself for this interview and want to quote from an article I wrote in the MIT publication called *Research*.

Rubens: Go ahead. The conference was an important event.

Linn: More specifically, the groupings of people that we invited were

1. Residents and organizers
2. Students, educators, and researchers

3. Practicing professionals—advocacy planners, architects, landscape architects, and others

4. Representatives of municipal, state, and federal agencies

5. Representatives of nonprofit organizations.

It was our intention not to preconceive specific topics. We hoped the interactions and encounters of the role players would generate insightful discussions and encounters. We also decided to have the participants meet in different groupings. Let me quote again.

1. Those with similar roles, but from different cities;

2. By lot, mixed groups with equal distribution of roles;

3. All representatives of each area in a city–wide context;

4. An arena for the most forceful exponents of points of view who we hoped would dramatize the issues through their discussion in front of the entire assembly.

About 140 people participated in the conference. I had personally invited about eighty of them. I knew these people well, appreciating how difficult it was, especially for people of color, who struggled to keep open lines of communication and tried hard to prevent racial polarization. Mr. Theodore Osmundson, president of the ASLA at the time, chaired the conference. I appreciated his support to broaden the base of landscape architectural service to include inner-city neighborhoods. Again, I would like to quote from the article.

Rubens: Okay.

Linn: He said,

The American Society of Landscape Architects was, to all intents and purposes, a gentlemen’s club in the truest sense of the word.

Let me excerpt statements from a few other significant leaders, whose work as environmental designers was guided by social justice concerns. This is from Carl Anthony, founder of the black students’ program in architecture at Columbia University:

Many of the so-called grassroots leaders have developed a level of professional competence which outmatches the expertise of so-called professionals. The failure of vest-pocket parks should be carefully studied in order to avoid the gimmickry proposals, which are not rooted in the real needs of the people. The ASLA should use its prestige to encourage schools of architecture, planning and landscape architecture to recruit and provide financial aid for black students in these fields.
Walter Thabit, founder of Planners for Equal Opportunity said,

I think that more of ASLA membership is oriented outside the city area. I think that ASLA should conceive a division of inner-city practice.

Pierre Coursey, a teenage resident and founder of the club “Black Bohemia,” said,

Teenagers should be encouraged to become volunteer companions and/or research persons for architects. A simple, attractive packet of materials on “How to Become an Architect” should be developed for the use of 9th through 12th graders.

Elaine Waldeman, professor of Education at Long Island University, commented,

I think we are so hung up on seeing the official so-called education system as the only educational structure. The fact is more learning goes on outside the official school. Maybe if we identify their experience in a scientific fashion, it would be easier for established institutions to use it.

Ron Shiffman, an advocate planner and field director of the community program in Pratt Institute, New York wrote,

Demand the expansion of the Board of Trustees of the ASLA to include members of the black, Puerto Rican, and student communities.

Almira K. Coursey, a prominent [black] community leader in Brooklyn, New York, said,

Since throughout our society there is a greater awareness of the need for meaningful interaction of the lay consultant, the neighborhood leader, and the professional, we urge this national conference to incorporate as a functional, important adjunct to its organization the Neighborhood Resident Advisory Committee.

Rubens: How did landscape architects who were not at the conference respond to your work in general?

Linn: I was delighted to receive a statement from Lawrence Halprin, supporting my work. I’d like to read from it. He wrote,

I am supportive of Karl Linn’s work since I am convinced that a vast new upsurge in our country is underway which is focused on the betterment of our environment through the active participation and involvement of citizens whose lives are vitally affected in ghetto areas, city cores and areas ripe for renewal.

The problem with the creation of vest-pocket parks resulted from the lack of broad-based participation of neighborhood residents, the ultimate users of these neighborhood open spaces. By contrast, the neighborhood commons grew out of broad-based participation. We always asked ourselves, “Who is missing?” to be sure that all groups, especially teenagers, were part of the process.
Rubens: How do you feel about your challenge to the ASLA? Did you make a dent?

Linn: The Neighborhood Commons work inspired a lot of young landscape architects who either had been students of mine or who had become very familiar with the work of Neighborhood Commons. Many of them became teachers and chairs of departments of landscape architecture who I am sure inspired and involved their students in community design. Some of these people are Randolph Hester at UC Berkeley; Mark Francis at UC Davis; Jerome Diethelm at University of Oregon; the late Bill Rock at University of Toronto; and Walter Cudnohofsky, director of Conway School of Landscape Design, to mention a few. The late Michael Laurie, who was a student of mine in 1960 and later became chair of landscape architecture at UC Berkeley, had been actively involved in designing and constructing Melon Commons. Shortly thereafter he became a faculty member. He was also involved with the People’s Park and kept me informed of those affairs. Just a few months ago I gave a talk to students of Mark Francis at UC Davis, who introduced me, intimating that I personify the social conscience of the profession. Other people have made similar statements when introducing me at lectures, such as Jerome Diethelm, whom I’d like to quote. He said, “Karl Linn is a central force in landscape architecture’s intellectual and moral conscience.” I also have a quote from the United States Department of State from when I was invited to open an exhibit on participatory architecture in Paris on November 19, 1975.

Linn is considered “Father of American Participatory Architecture” by many academic colleagues and architectural and environmental experts of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Rubens: This seems to have been a high-water mark for you.

Linn: In 1983, Randolph Hester, professor of landscape architecture at UC Berkeley, and Mary Comerio, professor of architecture at UC Berkeley, conducted a survey of 130 practitioners and allied professionals who practiced community design.

Rubens: Their survey puts your work into a broader context. Can you be more specific about their survey? How did it come out?

Linn: OK, let me quote from the survey:

The political ferment of the 1960s produced new, alternative, professional practices in advocacy planning, participatory design, and technical assistance specifically focused on the needs of inner-city, low-income, and minority groups. In the early seventies there were about eighty community design centers in the United States.

Many on the survey listed each other as the people they considered most influential, but it was Chester Hartman, Karl Linn, Lawrence Halprin, ARCH, the Architects Renewal Committee for Harlem, Pratt Center in Brooklyn, and the Architects’ Workshop in Philadelphia that were seen as the trailblazers in the development of community design.

One of the questions Hester and Comerio asked was, “What is the theory that informs the work in community design?” In reading the summary of their survey I could really
identify and find similarities to my own ongoing efforts to develop a theoretical underpinning for community design. Hester and Comerio quoted C. West Churchman from his book, *The Systems Approach and Its Enemies*:

> To do a job, we must construct a theory of reality which will guide our observations, and which, in turn, will guide revision of the theory; but we must recognize that all our modeling and observation are based on a fundamental Weltanschaung, or worldview of the system.

Among the people who influenced those who responded to the survey were people who had also inspired me such as Jane Jacobs, Herbert Gans, Paulo Freire, Martin Luther King Jr., and Ivan Illich whom I have known well. (In 1972 Ivan invited me to give a lecture at his center in Cuernavaca, Mexico.)

Their survey made me realize again that my own understanding and work evolved in the context of ongoing dialogue with a lot of people who were engaged in community design. Albert Fein, in his “Report on the Profession of Landscape Architecture” in 1972, mentioned me with a handful of other landscape architects as having been trailblazers in community design.

**Rubens:** The sixties were a unique decade, but the political pendulum swung to much more conservative policies that must have affected community design.

**Linn:** In my initial teaching at Penn, I had a deep sense of promise of landscape architecture because as a profession it bridges nature and society. Benefiting from the cleansing impact of nature, I hoped would contribute to the maturation of its members. I realized that the curtailment of funding for social and environmental programs made it progressively more difficult for environmental designers to practice community design.

Also, unfortunately these days since computers have become the main vehicle of communication, landscape architects are more and more divorced from a direct relationship with nature and are not the effective social catalysts I had hoped they would be. Being guided in their work by ecological considerations often threatens their practice.

**Rubens:** What do you mean exactly?

**Linn:** In the late sixties I attended a meeting of landscape architects in Jacksonville, Florida, spending three days listening to speakers say how important it was to take ecological considerations into account. After the conference, Patrick Horsburgh, a very well-known environmentalist and honorary member of the ASLA, and myself were judges of a design competition of the Florida chapter of the ASLA. Most of the entries showed three-car garages surrounded by a lot of water-guzzling lawns, completely antithetical to ecological awareness and the growing concern about the diminishing water supply in Florida. We didn’t give a single citation to any of the entries because they were so oblivious to ecological concerns.

In an article in a German magazine *Garten und Landschaft*, I was interviewed in 1986, when I was a fellow of the German American Academic Exchange Service in Berlin. I suggested that maybe landscape architects who were trying to be consistently
supportive of ecological thinking might have to look for another source of income, like maybe owning a nursery. It’s really hard for landscape architects to be ecological pioneers because so much of their income depends on developers.

Rubens: How do you feel now about the ASLA and their relevance?

Linn: I wonder, maybe I should have instead spent more time with the Green Party that initiated programs of ecological sustainability, local enterprise, and grassroots participation.

Rubens: Besides conducting the survey and staging the conference, did you do any teaching? I asked you that before.

Linn: I taught a course on neighborhood commons. Sharing with my students our experiences and deeper understanding that developed from our national survey.

Rubens: Any other courses?

Linn: Three students were assigned to me as their master’s thesis advisor. They had started to work on an innovative school as an abstract exercise. As they got more and more alarmed about the Vietnam War and were trying to figure out how to escape to Canada, they literally were unable to continue working on their thesis and came to me with their quandary.

Rubens: How did you help them?

Linn: These three students were also the ones who had given leadership to personalizing their study spaces that had so intrigued me. Shortly after we had our meetings, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, and I suggested that we should create a memorial event. I had a sense that such a memorial would elicit broad-based responses on the part of students and faculty. But, it was a leap of faith.

Rubens: Did it really happen?

Linn: Yes, indeed. We succeeded in creating a very powerful memorial. Another professor (of architectural history), Henry Millon, joined us. We tried to create a physical environment that would enable students and faculty to express our sorrow, rage, guilt, remorse, frustration, and hopes. We created a small committee that worked over the weekend and presented a model to the administration that gave us some money to buy construction materials. Monday evening 250 volunteers from all departments met at the gymnasium and, to the sound of live music and hammers, created display and testimonial boards and modular components for booths. We divided into different teams. Some people enlarged photographs of King and the civil rights struggle, others teams prepared the text for the display boards, one student sketched a huge portrait of King, and many students cut out black flags. It was absolutely amazing.

Tuesday morning, the mourning environment was constructed right in front of MIT’s main building—the student union and Kresge Hall. The black flags were strung together and stretched above the area. I remember the testimonial boards were filled with people’s statements, which generated a lot of discussions. I remember one statement on
the testimonial board said that the flying black banners on the sad, windy day was really memorable.

The different booths housed different student organizations handing out literature concerned with racism. In the auditorium of Kresge Hall, panel discussions were conducted challenging MIT to get rid of its military research and devote its resources to the civil rights struggle. I fortunately bought 250 red geraniums and set them next to a freshly dug round bed, with trowels so that people could spontaneously plant the flowers. As the day went by, people stooped to dig, and a brilliant patch of red flowers grew on the green lawn. To me it was such an effective symbolic gesture: the redness of the flowers and the aliveness of the plant was such an appropriate symbol. The flowers were peaceful but spoke of the red stain of assassination.

Local newspapers reported extensively on our memorial exhibit and all participants and visitors were deeply touched. If MIT had planted beds of red geraniums each year thereafter, they ultimately would have earned the right for a permanent plaque. If they’d bought a plaque right off the bat, they wouldn’t have earned it. Meaningful environments evolve out of residues of celebration. In Europe you see how different eras are reflected in the architecture, just like a coral reef builds upon itself. If architecture doesn’t reflect the impact of time, climate, and use, it doesn’t become a setting that is organically related to the cycle of life.

Rubens: It sounds like the memorial was a really wonderful tribute. What happened with your master’s students?

Linn: Based on the successful staging of the King memorial and the impressive personalizing that students had done with their study spaces, I suggested to my three master’s students that their theses should be about humanizing the physical settings of the MIT environment. The faculty accepted our submission. With broad participation of other students, they made a little sitting area next to a vending machine and transformed the long impersonal hallways into a communication environment, displaying the research of scientists at MIT. Those successful community design-and-build efforts led to the development of the Community Projects Laboratory. Hans Harms was hired as a new faculty member to serve as its director. The laboratory continued to humanize the campus environment as well as rendering community design-and-build service to Boston’s low-income communities. I was delighted that I was able to contribute to the institutionalization of community design service education at MIT.

Rubens: Being a landscape architect, were you able to introduce subjects that were related to your profession?

Linn: I believe I mentioned earlier that I invited Cleve Backster to reinforce students’ spiritual relationship to the plant world. In my “Greening Indoor Spaces” course I also had students from Harvard. We visited each student’s home, becoming familiar with their active involvement in growing plants. Some of their kitchens literally looked like potting sheds. I also took students to local greenhouses to familiarize them with plants that one could grow indoors.

Rubens: Were you involved in any joint teaching efforts with other faculty?
Linn: Yes. I was asked to join an interdisciplinary team of educators in an experimental course called Concourse. The program was designed to humanize the teaching of sciences. The interdisciplinary team consisted of physicists, poetry and literature professors, others, and myself. I was surprised that the scientists were much more open-minded than the poetry and literature professors. I guess that to be a poetry or literature professor at MIT, known really as a scientific powerhouse, you had to be fairly conservative. We had about thirty students and seven faculty.

My contribution consisted of introducing community design-and-build service and the staging of Concourse weekend retreats. Since we occupied a penthouse on campus, we painted the walls to make our headquarters more welcoming. To nurture a growing sense of community among students and faculty I staged two weekend retreats where we shared food, music, and poetry. At the retreat in Farmingdale, a friend of mine conducted a clay workshop, and for meals the women students made flower garlands and filled the tables with bouquets and candles. At the Gloucester retreat we rented a big barn right on the ocean and the festive meals included fresh fish. The students even put on a play about the nuclear physicist Robert Oppenheimer. Since the retreat coincided with the Jewish holiday Sukkot, I talked about the lessons one can learn from the improvised shelter Jews created during their forty years travel through the desert. I emphasized how important it is for architects to create simple shelter, not to overdo it with monumental building. Most memorable, I remember taking students to the beach at four o’clock in the morning by moonlight. As we sat on huge boulders overlooking the ocean, we witnessed the magical rising of the sun glistening on the ocean waves. Students always referred to this excursion as a memorable experience that centered them and helped them to feel more peaceful.

Rubens: Were any of your courses open to the community at large?

Linn: I staged a course called the Open Forum on Human Ecology for two and a half years, every Tuesday evening, in association with MIT’s Community Projects Laboratory and Boston’s Society of Landscape Architects. I invited speakers and conducted panel discussions to provide a theoretical underpinning for the heightened social, environmental, and spiritual consciousness of the emerging counterculture. Many of the MIT students were part of this counterculture. They came from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds and had turned their back on the acquisition of material commodities. Their parents had indulged them with these things in childhood as a substitute for the love and affection they were too busy to provide. The students were exploring non-materialistic, cooperative, and communal ways of living. A deep spiritual upsurge motivated young people in their search for a more humane existence.

I had about thirty students who joined the course, eager to learn how to stage meaningful events. The evenings were advertised in local newspapers and attracted about hundred people from the city.

Rubens: Where did it take place?

Linn: Right at MIT. We met in a large room in the planning department that the students had prepared with tie-dyed cushions all over the floor to sit on. It was a potluck event, and I was amazed at the well-balanced and thoughtfully prepared dishes that people brought
to share. Music, poetry, and candlelight added to the ambiance. Later on I found out that Open Forum was voted the most effective dating service in the Boston area.

Rubens: Tell me about some of the people you invited and the topics that you covered.

Linn: The forum provided another opportunity for me to develop a theoretical underpinning for my community design-and-build service education for my primarily white middle-class students. I would like to go into more detail about the presentations, and having looked through my archive I would like to quote some of the lectures that were given.

Rubens: Go right ahead.

Linn: This is just to mention a few. [reading]

Hans Harms spoke about the Community Projects Laboratory.

John Lee Walker, president of the Boston Society of Landscape Architects, talked about the educational challenge of professional organizations.

Richard Hessdorfer, a research associate at MIT’s Urban Systems Laboratory, gave a talk called “Design of Responsive Environment.”

Jan Wampler, director of the Planning Design Group of Boston’s Redevelopment Authority, gave a lecture titled “An Orchestration of Experience: Frameworks for Participation.”

Helen D. Wallach, Associate Psychiatrist at MIT, gave a talk called “Character Development for Alternate Futures.”

Allen Leitman, director of the Early Childhood Education Study, spoke about the child, his environments, and education.

Joseph Brenner, director of the Cambridgeport Free Clinic, spoke on “The Place of Medicine in Social Struggle.”

Myron Sharaf, associate area director of Boston State Hospital, talked about the work of Wilhelm Reich.

Mathew Dumont, assistant commissioner for drug rehabilitation in Massachusetts, gave a talk titled “Youth, Fascism, and the Age of Aquarius: A New Perspective on Drug Abuse.”

We had a panel presentation called “Women’s Liberation in Perspective.”

A talk called “Heightening of Awareness” was given by renowned author and theologian Huston Smith and Minor White, a famous photographer.

The forum also showed a series of anthropological movies called “Imperative for Survival: Resolution of Conflict,” conducted by anthropologist Hans Guggenheim of the Unified Science Study Program. A couple of the movies were “The Feast:
Yanomamo, the Fierce People” by Tim Asch and “The Quarrel: Bushmen, the Harmless People” by John Marshall.

At the beginning and end of each term session I made a presentation providing an overview and a summation of the particular term series.

Rubens: Were you full-time at MIT?

Linn: Yes. I was full-time.

Rubens: Did you give courses that focused on the built environment?

Linn: I gave a course called Emerging Lifestyles and Their Habitats, focusing on the community of students that were eager to explore and become familiar with new lifestyles experiments. We visited free schools, cooperative enterprises, community based day-care centers, teenage dropout centers, extended family residences, and communes. We became aware of the structures of these places, of the new form of building that was emerging that housed these efforts. We noticed that most communal residences featured a lot of plants and peaceful spaces for meditation. Since these buildings were designed and built through community participation and little money, it provided clues for the creation of affordable physical environments. All of these new lifestyle experiments were very fragile both from an economic and emotional point of view since young people’s upbringings had not prepared them well for cooperative co-existence.

We began a local and national inventory and began to develop resource files and a reference library of emerging lifestyle experiments. To assist students in participating in the establishment of cooperative efforts, we tried to find out how existing communes and other cooperative enterprises made decisions and resolved legal, fiscal, and personal conflicts.

Rubens: Were there many communes in the Boston area at that time?

Linn: Ultimately there were many. Since young people were eager to learn about communal life, they visited the few existing communes, but their visits also disrupted the rhythm of those places. In fact, when one commune told a student that they would not accept visitors, the student felt so rejected by his peers that he committed suicide. Having developed contact with many commune members, some of us got together and decided to establish an umbrella organization called Beansprout. We had about a hundred communes, and we met then once a week at MIT in the same room that we used for the Open Forum. In addition to discussing urgent matters, we also divided into different affinity groups. Some focused more on free education, and others more on community gardening, and others more on sexual liberation, and on other themes. People who were eager to join a commune could then more easily meet with the groups they were attracted to, taking considerable pressure off of the communes who were overrun by visitors.

Beansprout also helped minors, as kind of substitute parents, to work out lease agreements with landlords who wouldn’t have otherwise rented apartments to these students. We also created a huge community garden. Since most communes had filled
their homes with plants, I also organized an indoor plant clinic for Beansprout that was well attended by people seeking help with ailing houseplants.

Rubens: You must have brought some insights into this whole process, having been a founder of a kibbutz, and living there.

Linn: In fact, to authenticate my own understanding of the counterculture, I felt really challenged to become a member of a commune. Ultimately I got together with people who had attended Beansprout meetings who were primarily educators. Some of the members had traveled all over the world and experienced themselves as global citizens. One woman was the daughter of a general, another woman the daughter of an admiral, and the other the daughter of a high-ranking man in the air force.

Rubens: Were they MIT students?

Linn: Most of them were not. This was my second experience in communal life. But it was difficult for me because I had the lease with the landlord, which put me in a different relationship to others. Being the oldest, I often took initiative and was criticized by my fellow commune members for being too assertive. I tried to sit on myself and limit my initiatives. After many group discussions during our weekly conflict resolution sessions, I was encouraged to be myself and assert myself as much as I want to. It was up to others to assert themselves as well since I never had restricted anyone.

Rubens: Were you considered far out at MIT, or were there people as socially conscious and experimental as you?

Linn: No, there were some people, such Kevin Lynch, who was a very respected planner, worldwide. He was very much opposed to the Vietnam War. Kevin looked very conservative with a very short haircut, in contrast to me who at that time had a large beard because I hated to shave and let it grow during one summer vacation. At that time I also had a very memorable experience going up a staircase to the second floor in a department store. As I ascended the steps I saw a man coming down with a smiling friendly face, as if he knew me. I extended my hand to him for a handshake just to realize I was standing opposite a huge mirror flanking the staircase. With much embarrassment, I dropped my hand. Since I hadn’t had the beard for very long, I hadn’t recognized myself!

Rubens: That must have been quite an experience. Was Kevin Lynch involved in communes?

Linn: Not at all, but he was very supportive of my work. Let me quote him.

Karl Linn’s teaching at MIT was an inspiration to great numbers of our students, and he drew many enthusiastic listeners from the community round about. His great skill lies in leading people to work together for common ends, while showing them the relevance of environment to the community, and how designers may securely connect their personal lives to their professional ones.

Noam Chomsky was also among the few who were vocal against the war. But he took the opposite position from most students and faculty who urged MIT to get rid of its military research. Chomsky said that we were fools because if we pressed the
government to take it out, they’d move it to a much more conservative state and we’d have much less control over what went on. Noam Chomsky, Kevin Lynch, a few other faculty members, and myself, often stood between the police force, heavily armed in riot gear, and the demonstrating student body, trying to negotiate peaceful solutions to their encounters.

Rubens: What was going on in the community around in MIT? Were you engaged in any gardens or commons?

Linn: I joined a team who developed a participatory planning methodology called Ecologue, encouraging different members of the Cambridgeport community located adjacent to MIT, to express their concerns about campus expansion into their neighborhood. We interviewed young and old people, men and women, family members and students, asking them how they felt about their neighborhood and what improvements they would like to see. Ecologue helped people realize that there were many conflicting interests that they had to work out by themselves and establish priorities. Ecologue ended up assisting the neighborhood in creating a truly representative leadership group.

Rubens: Was the confrontation between students and police an anti-war demonstration?

Linn: Yes, it was.

Rubens: Did you participate in any other anti-war demonstrations?

Linn: I was very concerned with the destruction of human life and environment that was taking place in Vietnam and could sympathize with the overwhelming anxiety that my students were experiencing being of draft age.

One day in Boston I saw a group of students walking around town in black coats and white masks, they were students of the Massachusetts College of Art. I felt it was an incredibly powerful gesture to mobilize people and demonstrate. I approached them and had a nice contact with them. They invited me to their college and asked me if I could suggest how they could celebrate the first Earth Day 1970 that was approaching. In looking around the buildings and open spaces, I suggested that they transform a big empty parking lot that wasn’t surfaced, and had heavy compacted soil. I thought they could make a peace garden. They got excited and many students dug up the soil and planted a garden. They installed a large lawn area and surrounded it with beds of colorful flowers. After the lawn was established, one of the students who became the voluntary caretaker mowed to grass to spell out the word “Peace.”

Rubens: So you were involved with these art students doing a peace garden.

Linn: Yes. I got more and more deeply involved with Mass. College of Art. One day a young man drove in in a fancy car and wanted to talk to me. He said, “Look, I just came from Children’s Hospital across the street and the doctor told me that my girlfriend, who was in a motorbike accident with me, is still in a coma and will not make it. Can I plant a flower for her in your garden?” It was a touching experience.

Some patients in the hospital across the street, looking at the garden, said, “Don’t put up a hedge, we want to see the garden. It’s the only green thing we can see.” So the garden
became a neighborhood commons. I realized the significance the peace garden had for people living in the area.

Rubens: Where was Mass. College located?

Linn: It was in Brookline, a section of Boston. There was much interest on the part of faculty in my work, bringing a social dimension to the practice of art. After making some presentations to the faculty, the president invited me to develop a whole new division, which I called again Environmental Arts.

Rubens: At this art college?

Linn: Yes, at Mass. College of Art. At a meeting with division heads, the president said he would like the seven heads, including myself, to take over the management of the school. I had become good friends with Jeremy Foss, chairman of the painting division, and Lowry Burgess, chairperson of art education, who later on became a MacArthur Fellow. After much soul-searching I accepted the invitation and gave up my tenure-track at MIT, going on part time there. That was a big move for me to take but I was intrigued with the challenge to be the head of a division that could develop a community design-and-build service program as a significant integral part of the program of a college. I was given a budget that enabled me to hire my architect friend of long standing, David Dobereiner, who needed a full-time job, and my friend, the architect Jan Wampler, as a lecturer. The salary needs of my two faculty members forced me initially to serve as department head on a half-time-basis, retaining also a half-time position at MIT.

Rubens: What is going on in your thinking? You’re giving up a prestigious school.

Linn: Yes, but I felt much more at home in the company of artists and art students than with my faculty members at MIT who were very ambitious in furthering their careers and indulged in competitive power games.

Both faculty and students and the many workshops at the college provided an exciting resource that I could draw on to conduct a community design-and-build service education program.

Rubens: What kind of projects did you get involved in?

Linn: First we created a workshop space for students that was very cheerful because it was surrounded by a lot of windows and adjacent to the peace garden. Jan Wampler worked with students on a greenhouse that was accessible from the workshop, facing the garden. Jan also worked with students in transforming the alienating cafeteria room into a welcoming place. David helped the students create modular units so that they could personalize their study spaces and created a second-floor loft where students could hang out. I involved students and faculty into converting a terrible dirty print shop into a student-faculty commons. It ended up being a very cheerful place filled with hanging plants, a cork tile floor, and special furniture designed and built by students. It also provided a meeting place for students and faculty to discuss the future of the college, as it was about to expand into new facilities.
The students really got the spirit of the program. I would like to quote a poem by a student, Carol Mitchell, which was published in the college newspaper, *Mass. Art Paper*.

It looks like dirty work.

It looks like free labor for our school.

It smells like manipulation by the powerful

Perhaps to you.

If so, you haven’t understood yet.

What does it really mean?

It means finding what is real for every one of us

What we need, what we want.

Abandonment of sterility

A new surrounding of warmth

Of comfort, of community.

But how does it happen?

It is a long slow process

A process whose main key is participation

An attitude of change

A change in attitude

To begin to do for ourselves what needs to be done

Not to expect things to be done for us.

If we want some comfort
We’ve got to build it
Anybody else would build their concept
Not ours
Cooperation and patience.
A new approach brings new problems
And unique solutions
And unique opportunities to learn
To grow
In every direction with everybody
Together helping each other
To learn to live
Here and now.

Jeremy Foss, whom I mentioned before, had a deep insight into the significance of the Environmental Art program. I learned a lot from his and other people’s insights that deepened my own understanding. He said,

Karl Linn opened up new attitudes not only toward art forms but about a moral relationship between the artist and his work; between the artist and his society. He presented an approach to art-making that widened the traditional creative process. He sought mutual instead of individual inspiration. He fostered the imagination of the community. I can’t think of any faculty during my eight-year tenure at the college who has had a greater impact.

Spending more and more time at the college, I also transferred the evening presentations of the Open Forum on Human Ecology to the Mass College of Art campus. A cooperative group of art students at the college had established their own graphics enterprise and volunteered to create a colorful poster advertising the forum. The poster was in great demand, ending up in many living rooms, and it was even featured in local magazines.

Rubens: Since you taught at both schools, did you have a chance to bring both sets of students as you did in Philadelphia?
Linn: I created a project for students of MIT, Mass. College, and Harvard, which we called the Creative Recycling Workshop, at the Boston Flower Show. These students and a lot of artist friends of mine met for a long time experimenting with recycled material that we transformed into plant containers. Each time we met we shared our creations, which in a sense were our presents. Our personal presence was reinforced by the presents we shared with each other. We created a wonderful pavilion at the flower show out of recycled materials in which we displayed our plant containers filled with plants. We also conducted thirty-six workshops during which visitors to the flower show were able to make terrariums, bottle gardens and dish gardens, and learn to make drinking glasses out of empty glass bottles, and many other things. Our exhibit was the only one that was constantly filled with people.

Rubens: What year was this?


Rubens: How many people attended the flower show?

Linn: About 150,000 people. We deliberately created the pavilion so that students, volunteers, and myself had a chance to interact with a lot of people and contribute to the heightening of their ecological awareness.

In a sense, we created a green room. I had learned that the name of the room in a theatre where actors meet the audience is the green room. So our little pavilion became a green room, because here our volunteers met with the audience. When I heard a visitor say, “I can do it too!” when looking at one of the recycled containers, this, to me, was the most rewarding experience.

Since I called our pavilion commons a green room, I realized that what I had been doing all along was staging Green Theater events. My concept of Green Theater is composed of three levels of greening. First, because the commons I created brought together social catalysts and audiences, they functioned as Green Rooms. Second, I used plants decoratively but also ceremonially and symbolically. For instance, if I was giving a talk in February, at the end of a dreary winter, I often brought in bunches of forsythia forced into bloom, since their bright yellow blossoms hastened the coming of spring. Third, I was trying to contribute to the heightening of social and ecological consciousness as Charles Reich discussed in his book *The Greening of America*, about the counterculture, what he called the greening of consciousness.

Rubens: What was the response of the visitors at the flower show?

Linn: We even got an award from the judges at the show.

Rubens: So now you’re making commons with a theatrical approach?

Linn: You’re right. Maybe I’m influenced by the generations of rabbis that preceded me, who worked with rituals and symbols. I was always creating commons as stage settings, infusing them with animated, meaningful activities and experiences. I considered myself functioning both as a designer-builder and animator. Even the ASLA workshop was staged as an “encounter forum.” Though the participants had many roles in their
everyday lives, we singled them out into certain roles according to different functions they would contribute to the making of urban open spaces. In the interactions with other groups they focused on their particular role. For instance, if the role they were assigned was “designer,” they were asked to only interact in that role.

Rubens: How long did you stay at Mass. College of Art?

Linn: Unfortunately, the president of the school, being a state school, was invested with a hierarchical authority that he started to exercise when the seven division heads challenged his authority. Despite his initial democratic gesture suggesting that the division heads administer, when conflicts developed, he asserted his dominance and terminated my employment. Years later, during the 1980s, when I gave a talk and workshop at the college, the president came out of the board room in front of me, having just been fired. I felt tempted to greet him, saying, it serves you right, but I decided to repress my petty impulse.

Rubens: What did you do then?

Linn: We celebrated my birthday party that year, 1972, with delicious food, candles, music, and good company. I was delighted that my friend the theologian Harvey Cox was able to come.

Suddenly someone screamed, “The house is on fire!” It took five fire engines on a freezing snowy night at midnight to subdue the fire.

Rubens: This is the commune.

Linn: The commune in Watertown.

Rubens: Was anyone hurt?

Linn: No. I tried to save my slides, and the police thought I was trying to save something else.

Rubens: Marijuana plants? [laughs]

Linn: [laughs] They wouldn’t let me out of the room. I must have lost 5 percent of my notes and archive and hired some students to help me de-barbecue the rest. So, the commune fell apart.

Rubens: So basically, you still have your half-time position at MIT, you were let go from Mass. College of Art. What do you do then?

Linn: Though my students cleaned up the worst of the burned notes, all my papers were still in a big mess and were damaged from being thrown out the window into the rainy, snowy night.

The editor of Landscape Architecture magazine, Grady Clay, and his wife, who both liked my work, invited me to come to Louisville to reassemble my archive. They lived in Louisville. Nanine was also interested in helping me put a book together.
Rubens: Is there a particular university there?

Linn: Yes, and I ended up with students from University of Louisville.

Linn: The Clays, especially Nanine’s family, were well established in Louisville. Her family were highly respected citizens. They knew everybody and provided a wonderful entry to everyone. In fact, I ended up living in a house that the mayor bought as a second house. It was empty and it had a turret, which became my bedroom. It overlooked the most beautiful street in Louisville, which had the little green strip in the middle. I came there in ‘72.

In addition to sorting out my papers with Nanine’s help, I started a city-wide feasibility study called the Community Through Environment Program to take an inventory of existing human and physical resources. This was at a time when Nixon had curtailed money for environmental and social programs. People were really very discouraged because it was an abrupt transition from the social programs that the federal government had financed earlier. Such a resource inventory I hoped could mobilize people to do things for themselves to improve their own environment, through self-help efforts. Rather than feeling discouraged by the lack of federal support, people would feel empowered by their own self-help accomplishments. It doesn’t mean that people shouldn’t put pressure on state and federal governments to get money. I got some money from the Humanities Council and local foundations.

Rubens: You were doing this yourself?

Linn: No. I worked closely with Nanine, Mark Hawkins, who was a student at Syracuse University, and Jamie Horowitz, an artist from Louisville.

Rubens: Did you have any students?

Linn: I mobilized a lot of students when I gave a series of six lectures at the university. The lectures took place in the Red Barn, a student hangout. For each lecture the students decorated the room and organized a potluck meal. Each cable reel table had flowers and candles, imbuing the space with a celebratory ambiance. After a few lectures, we planted flowers on campus surreptitiously under the darkness of night.

Rubens: Did Grady Clay teach at the university?

Linn: No, he was a journalist and editor of the Landscape Architecture magazine. The Clays split up and Nanine married a really well known architect Herb Greene and moved to Berkeley. So I have friends here whom I’ve known for more than forty years, including Carl Anthony.

Rubens: So you were doing this inventory in Louisville.

Linn: Right. I brought architects together to see if they would be willing to volunteer if a neighborhood organization wanted some help. I also talked to lawyers, city agencies, and people who had access to building material that could be recycled, landscape people, and other potential resource groups. Then I went to people in need. I went to neighborhood organizations, to senior citizens group, to student groups, et cetera. I gave
many, many talks addressing the resource groups and people in need of resources. Then, after one year, we brought them all together to a culminating brainstorming event.

Rubens: That was the words you used?

Linn: Yes. In the morning we organized people in focus groups. All the neighborhood people met as a group, the architects met, the lawyers, city agency people, the building supply people, or the green people. We met in a large room that we had fixed up, spending a few days taking plaster off brick walls. Every group’s cable reel tables were color-coded with colored balloons. So you’d see a table with green balloons, and that’s where the green people met.

Rubens: What convinced these people to engage in this?

Linn: I guess I inspired them and engaged them. I also had a group of university professors who participated in these meetings. In the afternoon, we conducted a “discover and match” session and mixed the people together. Each group had an architect, a lawyer, a neighborhood person, one from each. I’ll tell you one story I will always remember of one of those group meetings. A woman spoke up who said, “I’m the coordinator of a daycare center in the southern section of Louisville, and I’m always concerned that I can’t let the kids out during lunchtime because the daycare center is surrounded with asphalt that gets very sticky. If we had some shade, it would be wonderful.” Well, they all looked at each other and a man spoke up and said, “I happen to be a nurseryman. In back of my nursery I have big ash trees. They are too big to sell and take up a lot of space. If you can get hold of them, I would love to give them to you.” There was silence. Then another gentleman spoke up and said, “I was just nominated to become the director of Urban 4-H, and I’ve always tried to figure out how I can bring the rural background of this organization into the city. I’d be glad to take my teenagers to the nursery to dig the trees up and wrap them in burlap.” Now the trees were dug and people looked at each other. Then another gentleman spoke up and said, “I have no volunteers, I have no money, but as deputy director of public works, I’d be glad to come there with a truck with a tailgate and a winch and I would be glad to bring the trees to the school.” Then all the people looked at each other, and smiled because they had made a match. The same thing happened over and over again that day. It was very encouraging for a community to realize the resources it had that would enable them to improve their environment to suit their needs.

During all those years I had close contact with Mayor Harvey Sloane, in whose house I was living. He asked us to prepare a proposal for him that would describe in detail the Community Through Environment program that should bring about a new relationship between citizens and city agencies. For instance, the city could make available heavy equipment and tools that neighbors might not have access to. Harvey and his wife participated in the day-long brainstorming session. I had also invited Steve Carr, who had established an architectural practice together with Kevin Lynch and was also a teacher at MIT. He came to Louisville to explore the introduction of an Ecologue program that I told you about earlier. I also invited Paul Hogan, who talked about his Playgrounds for Free, showing imaginative play equipment from recycled materials. Elaine Waldman, the educator who had participated in the ASLA Washington Workshop, led everyone in a cooperative game.
Rubens: I am still baffled how you got all these people together.

Linn: Through the Clays I was able to meet with and get to know a lot of important people, but in addition, I developed a strategy to find out who the leaders were in the different groups, who had over the years developed trusting relationships with their neighbors and colleagues. So when I went to a neighborhood I asked, “Who’s the block leader?” Then I asked the block leader to invite their neighbors, which enabled me to speak to the neighbors in the living room of that leader. It was a trusted space because the neighborhood leader invited them, so they responded to me with open hearts and minds. They then would organize a larger meeting for me to talk to.

Rubens: Was the brainstorming event a success?

Linn: We had a wonderful response to the event that took place in January ‘75. Big newspaper articles appeared, and the mayor started to develop a neighborhood environment program in city hall. Unfortunately, he lost an election shortly thereafter. But the process had begun to institutionalize self-help efforts supported by city government. Though it was only a feasibility study, and there was no action taken on the match sessions, it raised people’s awareness of their own resources. When a hurricane came and knocked a lot of trees down, the neighbors got together through self-help effort and planted trees, saying they were inspired by the Community Through Environment program.

While conducting Community Through Environment, I spent a great deal of time with Nanine sorting out material and writing. Unfortunately, my work with her came to an abrupt halt when the Clays separated. Nanine was too pained by the separation to continue working with me. So I went back to Philadelphia to my country house in Collegeville in the middle of Evansburg State Park. [tape interruption]

Rubens: Okay. Where did we leave off, I mean, we need to anchor this in history. I believe you wanted to talk about Antioch, which comes before you go to New Jersey.

Linn: Even during my stay in Louisville, I was consulting on a national meeting sponsored by the Pinchot Institute of the United States Department of Forestry. I was helping stage a symposium for the summer of 1975 in Washington, D.C., called “Children, Nature and the City,” for which I created a temporary commons that I will talk about in greater detail later.

Being in Philadelphia, I made contact with the Human Services Program of Antioch College. I had visited Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, since it was known for its liberal education. I met its founder, Arthur Morgan, who had introduced the work-study program that was adopted thereafter by many schools of higher learning. I also met his son, who was a vocal advocate of cooperative grassroots enterprises, and stayed at his home. Antioch had also developed a range of satellite programs in various cities. The one in Philadelphia that I connected with was called Human Services. I was invited to join the core faculty.

Rubens: Who were the students?
Linn: They were of the working and lower-middle and middle class, who had a good sense of reality. Many of them were homemakers in their fifties and sixties who participated in the program that gave them up to two and a half years college credit for life experiences. They had to document their past learning experiences in what was called a Past Learning Petition. They did such extensive work documenting their lifelong learning that it looked like a Ph.D. thesis.

Cooking, for instance, was called Domestic Chemistry and they had to really analyze what was happening in their cooking process. Other courses focused on self-learning strategies. Many of the students were administrators in public and private agencies who learned to look at their job as a practicum and analyze how effective they were in their work and how they could learn to advance their career.

Rubens: But these weren’t welfare people?

Linn: Some of them were welfare people. Most of the student body were low-income people of color.

Rubens: What did you teach?

Linn: I taught two courses. One was Community Building. I focused on the building of community among students, trying to contribute to growing economic and social self-sufficiency. The other one was a community design-and-build service course through which I involved students in molding the physical surroundings at the school to better suit their needs.

Rubens: Where was the school?

Linn: The school was one whole floor of a high-rise building in North Philadelphia, on a main street.

Rubens: How did you improve the facilities?

Linn: Most of the learning took place on Saturdays, since they were working people. They had no access to decent food because there were only fast food joints and no grocery stores. I suggested that students organize potluck meals, especially on Saturdays for lunch, and converted one of the rooms into a “cable café” using old cable reels for tables covered with nice pieces of wood and red and white tablecloths. Students got used to preparing luscious, well-balanced potluck meals and enjoyed the cheerful atmosphere of the cable café with colorful vases of flowers that students brought to put on the tables. We organized “Green Thumb” workshops to assess students’ ailing houseplants. We turned the hallways into a gallery for the students’ work, and I helped the students produce a newsletter called Grassroots: the Antioch Community Newsletter. Since the students had difficulty paying for childcare, we equipped a room to serve as a daycare classroom for students interested in learning about early childhood education. I also helped them to develop cooperative enterprises such as a bookstore that made it easier and cheaper for them to acquire textbooks and other learning materials.
Since the administrators of the human services program were bureaucratically inclined black people, they often turned down students’ requests for funding, which motivated the students to check into the administrative expenses, including the salaries of the administrators. I empowered the students in doing so because after all, Antioch was supposed to be one of the most liberal colleges that encouraged student participation. Unfortunately, the administrators thought otherwise, and accused me of agitating students and causing conflict between students and administrators and fired me. I was very moved that a large group of primarily black students protested the firing, writing detailed and glorious statements about their appreciation of my teaching and guidance.

While teaching at Antioch College, I also gave a course at Drexel, which was right next to University of Pennsylvania. I called it Humanizing Professionalism. I invited many friends and other professionals who had been guided in their work by human and social concerns rather than by career ambitions. Drexel College was basically an engineering college, with a primarily male student body. It also conducted a home economics program for mostly women, presumably potential partners for the engineers. In my course I challenged the women to not only think of themselves as potential housewives but as potentially ecologically knowledgeable feminists who had much to contribute to making our society more caring.
Interview 7: February 2, 2004

Rubens: As I remember from our last interview, you just lost your job at Antioch College. What happened after that?

Linn: A good friend of mine, the architect Troy West, whom I had known for many years since he established a community design center in Pittsburgh in the sixties, suggested that I should apply for a teaching position at the School of Architecture at New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark, New Jersey.

Rubens: Did you do that?

Linn: Yes. After meeting with various faculty members and the dean of the School of Architecture, I was offered a position as associate professor. I was delighted to accept their offer because it seemed that I had prepared myself for a decade, working in inner-city low-income areas, to take on Newark. Newark was still dominated by evidence of the race riots. Residential areas were full of vacant lots that had been cleared of burned-down buildings. Rather than seeing the abundance of vacant lots as a detriment, I saw the possibility of using this land to cultivate community gardens and market farming. In fact, I wrote an article called “Newark: the Garden City of the Garden State,” that the local chapter of the Chamber of Commerce published in its magazine. I realized the city had lost a lot of population because of the shrinking blue-collar employment sector and would never reach the density that it once had.

Rubens: Was this true of the entire city?

Linn: No. Downtown Newark was called Newark Renaissance. Here a lot of high-rise buildings were constructed that could compete economically for office space use with Wall Street and Manhattan right across the Hudson River. Penn Railway Station was right in the middle of it. From the station you could take walkways one story above street level. People who came from Princeton or other suburbs for day jobs in corporate headquarters didn’t have to get their feet dirty or black in a black city. They all left the city to go home at four o’clock.

Rubens: What kind of students did NJIT attract?

Linn: It was a different kind of student body from the middle- or upper middle-class students that I had at MIT and Penn. They were much more career-oriented and wanted economic success in life. Many of the students were the first ones in their families to go to college. Since I was eager to work with inner-city neighborhoods, primarily inhabited by people of color, I ended up with many more black students in my class than any of the other faculty. Their involvement also made it easier for me to work with those neighborhoods. Their participation in my studios was not because of social concern, but there was no space available in the other classes that were full of white students learning to create prestigious architecture.

A student of mine at NJIT, Marty Hammer, who attended my eightieth birthday celebration, remarked that I had been the least popular faculty member among students
because I emphasized social justice and environmental sustainability. He characterized
the student population as the “Me Generation,” only interested in upward mobility.
Marty also said that it was known that once students joined my studios they developed
an extraordinary cooperative spirit, forming a design corps working on their community
projects way beyond the call of duty.

Rubens: Where was the school in relation to the city? What did the campus look like?

Linn: When I first started to teach there, the School of Architecture occupied a large industrial
building. Students, who came primarily from the surrounding suburbs, created their
own study niches, way beyond what the students did at MIT. They created common
spaces that had sofas and refrigerators and many of the students even slept there. I
supported it wholeheartedly. Then the dean got some $1.5 million and they converted
this whole wonderful personalized study space into a sterilized office space. Even
architectural review rooms were designed like boardrooms because the dean wanted to
help students to get accustomed to making presentations to corporations. So the whole
atmosphere stifled the students’ spirits.

Rubens: Were you able to do something about that atmosphere?

Linn: In teaching a course on indoor planting, I filled my whole studio with green plants. In a
sense the studio became a laboratory, which challenged students to take care of the
plants, learning about the limiting factors of light, temperature, and humidity.

Rubens: Did students want to do that?

Linn: They got quite excited about it. In fact they were willing to spend their whole Easter
vacation going on a weeklong trip to Puerto Rico with me to study the origin of the
tropical and subtropical plants. A well-known ecologist took us to a tropical rainforest.
We visited nurseries and landscape plantings on the island.

Rubens: Who paid for it?

Linn: They paid their own way. We were also able to get some funding from the school for
other expenses, such as the rental of a car.

Rubens: Did you ever take any of them up to the Four Seasons Restaurant?

Linn: Definitely. Part of the course also involved visits to many large-scale indoor plant
installations in New York City, such as the Ford Foundation and the Four Seasons
Restaurant. Visiting these projects enabled us to conduct a post-occupancy analysis to
see how these projects fared over time. Students were flabbergasted when they found
out the Four Seasons Restaurant owners decided to mummify some of the large plants.

Rubens: Did you also create open spaces with the students?

Linn: One semester I had students plant a bed of daffodils adjacent to the cafeteria. All of a
sudden there were flowers in the middle of the campus.

Rubens: Was there no landscaping?
Linn: There were just lawns and a few trees. When the daffodils came up next spring, they were the talk of the town and delighted students and faculty alike. When I came back a few years later, even the maintenance people got inspired to beautify the campus and had planted other flowers in the bed. Students also designed a parking area for a new dorm, with an attractive entrance walk, and it actually got built. The administration liked the students’ design, and we engaged a landscape architect to develop specification drawings.

Rubens: Did you work off-campus in Newark?

Linn: Adjacent to the campus was the Warren Street Elementary School. As a studio exercise I asked my students to transform the elementary school into a community school. The principles of a community school are really very challenging. Instead of closing the school buildings after school, a community school stays open in the afternoons, evenings, and on weekends. Different U.S. states have developed special branches of their departments of education that specialize in the administration of community schools. The extended hours are used for classes for the adult community, neighborhood meetings, or programs that deal with health, economics, parenting, and many other issues that affect the lives of residents. We even designed a community garden as part of the school. It wasn’t an ordinary studio exercise because both the school principal, the NJIT administration, private foundations, and representatives of Prudential Insurance Company that funded many projects in Newark, reviewed students’ work and they benefited a lot from their comments. My students also made a large model and presented it to the elementary school students.

Rubens: Did your studio focus on community service?

Linn: Developing a community design-and-build service education program, I spent quite a few years working with low-income people-of-color neighborhoods. We invited residents and staff from public and private agencies to participate in design review sessions. There are a few projects in particular that I want to mention. Tri-City Neighborhood organization asked us to create a commons out of an open space adjacent to their building. It was a shaded area. Students prepared all kinds of designs to make sure the yard was well drained and suggested various kinds of play equipment. I came up with an idea that the wooden fence surrounding the yard could become an outdoor easel. I thought that we could attach a large roll of newsprint vertically to the fence and wind it around with a crank handle to make an ongoing supply of paper. Since the building also housed preschool programs, teachers encouraged the children to make drawings on paper that they stretched across the fence. The neighbors liked this design and got some money from the local chamber of commerce to implement it.

In behalf of the Westside Development Corporation that had restored a lot of buildings that they helped people to acquire as part of their “Development Home Ownership Program,” my students designed a master open-space plan for the area. We prepared a whole document that they used as a blueprint for development. The students also developed open-space master plans for public housing projects.

Students also made a proposal for a “Recreation and Creation Center,” making a very attractive model showing how some dilapidated garages could be converted into stores for local artists and craftspeople. Adjacent to the workshops was a large cinderblock
building that students designed as a large construction workshop space. The buildings also surrounded a commons. We worked very closely with city agencies because the site was supposed to be dedicated to a young man, Lamont Hargrave, who had been killed. He was the son of Daisy Hargrave, a community leader and director of a[n adjacent] daycare center.

The community design-and-build service studio also designed a place of worship for the Essex Senior Citizen Home, the courtyard for Essex County’s Department of Parks and Recreation, and created a temporary Japanese pavilion for the Branchbrook Park Cherry Blossom Festival, which was popular with the area’s large Japanese population. Students transformed a park building into a pavilion within which demonstrations of Japanese flower arranging, calligraphy, and music took place. The workshops were visited by large numbers of people that were bused to the festival. As manager of the space, students could observe how well the spaces they created accommodated large audiences. In a sense, one could look at the creation of temporary commons as simulation environments.

Rubens: You know, what I’m coming to understand is that there really is a temporary quality that is integral to the idea of commons, because the land is often going to be used for something else eventually. It’s often against the tide of hope that we can improve something.

Linn: The temporary quality is really not integral to the creation of commons, but over the years I have created three kinds of commons, namely instant commons, temporary commons for special occasions, and more lasting commons. I would like to come back later on to the discussion of this spectrum of commons.

Rubens: Okay. Since the city was in such poor shape, besides your teaching did you have a chance to do some professional work as a landscape architect?

Linn: I am glad you asked. I became friends with a developer, Sanford Gallanter, whose business, Aspen Corporation, rehabilitated many dilapidated high-rise buildings with Section 8 housing financing from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. These buildings provided more affordable housing than the city government was able to create. Gallanter was also a lawyer who was very helpful in getting the first black mayor elected. He hired me to design open spaces around six buildings he had restored, which I did as well as supervising the construction. The cluster of housing was called Pueblo City. Gallanter made one adjacent vacant lot available to become a central commons for the housing complex. The commons was surrounded by a fence, but whoever wanted to use it for constructive purposes was given a key. My faculty colleagues at the School of Architecture were surprised that I didn’t object to the fence since they knew me as an advocate of free access to open spaces. I invited them to meet with the residents who upon their questioning the fence said, “Why don’t you leave your white liberalism at home. If you live in the jungle where drugs and prostitution dominate, you need to protect any constructive improvement. Once we are less despairing, we can take the fence down.”

Daisy Hargrave’s daycare center adjacent to the commons conducted many activities there. Children planted vegetables and flowers, had picnics and looked for Easter eggs. Mrs. Thomas, who had a house on the other side of the commons and had a music
school, conducted her graduation exercises in the commons complete with a piano, attended by students and large numbers of family members. The community kept the commons up, planting flowers each year.

Rubens: But what led the developer to believe in commons?

Linn: I had a lot of talks with him, since by that time I had developed a good relationship with him and his wife, who was an educator. I emphasized that unless there were usable open spaces attached to the housing, people wouldn’t get to know each other and develop a sense of community and make the places safer. At the same time, it was a leap of faith on their part. Gallanter came to my eightieth birthday party and in a statement to everyone at the party, he said that he learned from me that it’s not just good enough to create housing for people, but that they need common open spaces. He said that during the intervening years, that in all his projects there were common spaces. The Gallanters have moved to San Francisco, giving me a chance to renew and continue our friendship.

Rubens: Were your students involved at all in Pueblo Cities?

Linn: I got students together with the resident council once people had moved into the buildings. They assisted the residents in constructing outdoor furnishings and play equipment for the commons that I had designed for each building.

I realized that in order for neighbors to review student-generated designs, it would be difficult for them to come to the university, that we needed a space close by. We were able to create a satellite university-community design-and-construction workshop in the basement of a church located across from the central commons. It was in terrible shape, but both students and young people from the neighborhood who were enrolled in a youth training-and-employment summer program were involved in cleaning and painting the space. We called the satellite “Common Ground” and had many meetings with students presenting their work to neighbors. It became a welcoming place with a lot of cable reel tables and attractive lighting.

Various resource people also gave workshops at Common Ground including agricultural extension people from Rutgers University and Newark’s Community Gardening Program who helped residents in growing vegetables in the common areas surrounding the buildings.

Gallanter also hired me to develop an open-space master plan for a large area adjacent to the university called Neighborhoods of the University, within which a medical school and other institutions were located. Since it was a challenging project, I invited and engaged consultants, such as Paul Davidoff, Steve Carr, and Robin Moore, who were some members of my roving team.

Rubens: Did you do any other designs in your private practice?

Linn: Gallanter also asked me to develop a landscape plan for the new office building located next to Penn Station in downtown Newark. The building had a moat around it to let light into the basement floor that he had converted into offices. Rather than squeezing plants into the narrow moat, I suggested it should be covered with Plexiglas domes so that the
space could be used year-round as an extension of the offices. Gallanter liked the idea and had his architect create it. I filled the surrounding parking area with trees, proving to Gallanter that hardly any parking places had to be sacrificed. If you come to Newark by train, the parking lot has become the only highly visible green oasis amidst towering buildings of Newark’s Renaissance.

Years later when I went back to visit the project during the nineties, the building had been bought by a union and the area under the plexiglas had become a highly frequented restaurant, its ceiling letting natural light into the intimate space to eat. I was glad that my architectural contribution had turned out to be such a big success. At the same time, during this post occupancy analysis visit, I saw that the central commons of Pueblo City had been completely erased, with all the large trees and everything bulldozed. I found out that Gallanter had sold the management of his properties to a less caring owner. It was indeed a sad moment for me.

Across the street from the commons where there had been a large vacant lot and the dilapidated garages that the students had envisioned as the Creation and Recreation Center, a whole new housing development had been built. It’s a shame that the commons was erased because it would have served the tenants that moved into these new residential buildings.

On earlier visits to Pueblo City, I also saw that the church had been destroyed by the explosion of a gas tank that was right next to the basement that we had created Common Ground in. The explosion happened exactly one day, to the hour, after I had visited Common Ground, which had become the headquarters for a summer paraprofessional training-and-employment program for young people. All the tools and equipment were stored there.

I was delighted having had a chance to work with Aspen Corporation, having succeeded in having private enterprise adopt commons as a viable business approach. I had tried to saturate the particular area with mutually reinforcing community-based projects. The commons that were created around the buildings, the central commons, Common Ground, and the proposed Creation and Recreation Center would have supported each other. Unfortunately, forces beyond our control didn’t support the cluster for a lasting period.

**Rubens:** You must have really been sad that for the long run all your efforts were destroyed.

**Linn:** You’re right. It was very sad to see the destruction. But, I also know that those who participated in building and using the projects will always remember it as an empowering experience.

**Rubens:** Besides working with neighborhood groups, did you also render landscape architectural service to the city of Newark?

**Linn:** I also developed a contractual arrangement with Housing Development Rehabilitation Corporation (HDRC), a public/private organization that asked me to develop a large-scale creative recycling program of salvageable building material. Unfortunately, I left Newark before I could implement the program.
I also conducted a feasibility study for the city, funded by the Victoria Foundation, which had consistently funded my community-outreach programs. The funding went to NJIT’s sponsored research, with which I developed a very supportive relationship. We singled out an area in a run-down residential neighborhood of Newark that featured many vacant lots. Having visited New York City’s experiments covering large vacant areas with wildflowers, in sections where there were hardly any people left, I organized a field trip to New York for a Newark council member to show him those areas as an effort on my part to bring about a technology transfer. I hoped that Newark, with its large areas of vacant lots, would adopt the idea, coming back to my initial vision of Newark as the garden city of the Garden State. I could visualize the few buildings remaining in these areas surrounded by colorful blossoming wildflowers. Ultimately, some of the wildflower areas could be plowed under—they could be a cover crop of legumes turned under to enrich the soil and become an area for market farming; others would just enhance the looks of the city. In New York, unfortunately, the strategy of using wildflowers was just an effort to attract developers who in fact created suburban-like residential buildings in the midst of the South Bronx and Brooklyn. In Newark, though, which would never have such dense development I had hoped that the wildflower areas would become a network of green open spaces. I summarized my study in a publication called “From Rubble to Restoration,” published by the Urban Habitat Program of Earth Island Institute.

Rubens: You did a lot of work institutionalizing community design-and-build service learning at NJIT. How long were you there?

Linn: I retired early in 1986, to engage full-time as a volunteer in peace work and gave up my tenured position. It was indeed a very difficult decision since I lost 20 percent of my retirement social security allowance and gave up the financial security that a tenured position had awarded me. A few years before, the administration had felt reluctant to award me tenure because I hadn’t produced enough research papers, but I received my tenure because of broad-based community support. I was one of the few faculty members who rooted this white institution in the city, funneling its significant technological resources into the city, which was struggling for survival.

Upon my retirement I became the recipient of the institute’s 1986 Public and Institute Service Award. Can I read to you from the plaque?

Rubens: Go right ahead.

Linn: It says,

In recognition of his outstanding contributions to the beautification of cities, the vitalization of neighborhoods, the encouragement of community spirit, and the practice of learning through service.

Rubens: It’s a really a good statement. It summarizes your work well. I know you want to talk about your peace work, but we should save it for another session. Right now we should review our interviews to see if we skipped any important efforts.
Linn: You’re absolutely right. All along I wanted to talk about the creation of instant and temporary commons. I mentioned some of them in passing, but didn’t explain them thoroughly.

Rubens: What is your definition of a commons?

Linn: Let me quote to you my definition that has evolved from my work. This is from a book I am working on called *Building Commons and Community*.

Any place in which people assemble, indoors or outdoors, irrespective of the duration of its occupancy, can be considered a potential commons.

Sharing in the envisioning of what a supportive and uplifting meeting place might be can awaken people’s sense of being in community; it can re-awaken the commons.

People can stake their claim on a commons through instant transformation of spaces, barnraising and animating temporary settings for special occasions, or building lasting commons.

Rubens: You’re broadening the concept of what a commons is. Let’s start with some instant commons.

Linn: Since students’ participation in the creation of commons was limited to one school term, I was eager for them to have the experience of actually transforming spaces to make them more appealing and effective. Let me give you some examples.

At University of Louisville I was supposed to give a city-wide lecture. So, I inspected the lecture room and saw that the entire ceiling was flooded with fluorescent light, which is very unflattering, making people look like death warmed over. All the seats were immovable in rigid rows. Whenever possible, I move the chairs to a circle or u-shape so that people can make face-to-face contact with each other. I decided to bring along thirteen tripods to which I attached clip-on incandescent lights. Once the audience filled the lecture hall, I turned off the fluorescent lights and turned on the incandescent lights. Then I went back to the fluorescents and asked which one they liked better. They all exclaimed how much they liked the incandescent lights. It was an attempt on my part to provide some in-time learning.

In addition to lighting and seating, one can also change temperature and in so doing become an environmental manager. If there are a lot of empty seats in the front, I always ask the audience to come closer so I can make better eye contact with them. The spontaneous seating choices gives me a chance to see what the audience thinks of me.

When I come to schools to give a lecture and workshop, I always analyze the space in which I have to speak and engage students in a workshop, decorating the space with banners and flowers and modulating, if possible, the conditions I just mentioned.

Another memorable example was when I spent a week with students, before I was scheduled to give a talk at University of Oregon in Eugene. It was again a community design-and-build learning exercise. The students showed me the lecture room that
looked like an auditorium in a medical college. It was huge, with steep slopes of hundreds of seats. It looked like a mountain side. Just half an hour before the lecture, much to my surprise, I saw a bunch of my students come with long bamboo branches and since it was in May after the rainy season, they also brought rhododendron branches in full bloom. Before I knew it, they put the bamboo behind the seats and flowers in between and everybody who came in was given a candle, and it looked like a hillside glen with all these beautiful faces illumined by the candlelight and all these flowers and plants. This to me was a wonderful instant transformation of the space.

Rubens: Had you initiated this?

Linn: No. I just told them, you know, that one should celebrate the occasion when someone comes a long distance to give a lecture. We should always try to transform the time into a special occasion. Since the students had been involved in a weeklong community design-and-build service workshop, they seized on the opportunity to transform the lecture space.

A similar transformation took place when I traveled a good thousand miles because Ivan Illich had invited me to give a talk in Cuernavaca. A drab room was assigned to me. To transform it I got a big bouquet of flowers from the market. Their presence uplifted people’s spirits. It was an object lesson for the participants. Ivan had invited many people from all over the world and each of us was given a very limited period of time to share our work. I felt it that he was crowding the presentations too much. It would have been much better if the audience had a chance to become familiar with each lecturer’s work through reading about it and give them more time to interact with the lecturer after the talk. This would have provided an opportunity for more meaningful experience.

I already shared with you the creation of the temporary commons at MIT, namely the memorial for Dr. Martin Luther King. We transformed the space for a very special occasion. The creation of such temporary settings takes more effort and motivation than the instant transformation. They are also used for a longer period of time.

More recently, in 1993, I created a temporary commons for the First International Healthy Cities Conference that Leonard Duhl staged. I worked with about 110 volunteers who were doing work-trade for registration fees. As a member of the planning committee for the conference, I worked nine months on it.

Rubens: Where was this?

Linn: It took place at the Hilton Hotel in San Francisco. About 1,500 people from all over the world came. Since they were all involved in grassroots projects that improved people’s quality of life, we were eager to design the commons in such a way that the participants could display their projects. We also went around town to community art centers, inviting them to display their work. To increase interaction and human contact between the participants, we surrounded a 1,500-square-foot area with free-standing panels that served as display boards. Certain sections were feedback boards where people expressed their visions, and there were workshops where people could make prayer flags, and children were able to make rubbings of animal carvings and leaves. The commons itself was filled with round tables, and bouquets of flowers in tin cans.
decorated by the volunteers. There were lots of large trees and a profuse display of colorful flowers on the stage and around the commons. A large fountain contributed soothing sounds to the relaxing atmosphere of the commons. Many lectures and workshops were given throughout the week-long conference. My wife, Nicole, staged a workshop for teenagers, some of whom were able to express their concerns and hopes to the large audience.

Leonard, who travels world-wide meeting people who had attended the conference, is always being told that despite the informative lectures, the only thing people really remember was the commons. Because, he relates, people from all over the world could meet each other, eat good food, and listen to the music of performers onstage.

Since conferences usually take place in sterile and alienating buildings, it is important to bring in celebratory elements that reflect and inspire the energy of the audience. When people listen to inspiring talks in these institutional settings, they are being exposed to the sensory assaults of those regimented environments, which cannot help but diminish the valuable information that the lectures provide. It is especially important for conferences that involve low-income residents to show how uplifting spaces can be created on a small budget.

Rubens: So temporary commons are more elaborate, for larger events.

Linn: For special occasions, yes.

Rubens: Any other examples of temporary commons?

Linn: I think I mentioned it before, while I was still in Louisville, I was asked to join a planning team to stage the Symposium on Children, Nature, and the City. After expressing my hopes that we could stage the symposium as an inspiring event, I was asked to be the ceremonial manager and had the chance to transform a whole building into a celebratory environment. The symposium brought together a broad range of people such as park rangers, educators, and psychologists. There were also well-known panel members like humanistic geographer Yi Fu Tuan and Mayer Spivack, who, working out of the Harvard Medical School, spearheaded environmental design research. Roger Hart was there, he’s an environmental psychologist working world-wide on children’s environments. He brought eighteen children from Vermont. He had such a trusting relationship with these children during an eighteen-month research project that they would reveal their secret hiding places to him, which no other adult had ever seen. Margaret Mead was also speaking and myself. We all gave lectures.

I realized that despite the great difference between the attendees, underneath it all we shared a common denominator that I tried to express in a poetic statement. May I read it to you?

Rubens: Of course.

Linn: We all share

dreams and hopes
for children
and for children yet to be
and, caring, shall assemble
to recall the child within.

To gather for a symposium
on tender human growth
in this alarming age
of nature’s destruction
and nuclear peril
is an act of faith.
Joined in common fate
let us together
affirm and nurture life on earth.

The image we used on all the posters and letterhead depicted kids on a homemade river raft, pushing along the waters of the East River, like Mark Twain [characters]. The image had been generated for the Sketchbook of Ideas at Long Island University. Rather than trees or vegetation, the water is such a powerful image of strength and vitality.

Rubens: Where was the symposium held? Who sponsored it?

Linn: It was held in the C. H. Marvin Center at Washington University in Washington, D.C. We started planning in 1974; the symposium was in 1975. It was sponsored by the Pinchot Institute of Environmental Forestry Research, part of the Forest Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. Other supporters were the Department of Environmental Resources at Cook College at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, and the Department of Human Kinetics and Leisure Studies and School of Education of George Washington University.

I was able to engage a few artist friends who helped to decorate the entire building. We were loaned colorful banners made by children under the tutelage of Norman Laliberté, an artist well known for his illustrations of children’s books. The banners had been made for the fiftieth anniversary of the American Institute of Planners. I also borrowed large colorful plants from the greenhouse of the Capitol, which we sat on freestanding cardboard tubes and moved around. I also covered an outdoor area with a large colorful canopy for shaded gatherings. We used empty tire tubes and empty cardboard tubes for
children to play with. Artists made beautiful wall hangings with children by weaving together colorful thread, yarn, and ribbons. I even engaged a friend of mine who came from Boston to conduct yoga-like exercises, helping participants to relax after sitting for too long in lecture chairs. She became our bioenergetic monitor. One afternoon I scheduled an outing to Gallaudet College for the Deaf and had a big picnic of Middle Eastern food. I engaged the people who were developing “New Games” to involve the participants in cooperative games on the large expanses of lawn on the campus.

I learned [early on that] we were supposed to have food from a big food vending company. Fortunately, I knew the owner from being on the board of the Washington Center of Metropolitan Studies. Meeting with him I said, “We have an ecologically oriented audience, why not experiment with healthy food?” I convinced him that we should have food that’s much more traditional, along with a lot of organic food, beautifully displayed. I worked with a dietician for nine months and typed out each meal for a whole week. I remember on the last Friday at noon, there was dish called musgo. Musgo meant “must go,” the leftovers. I also hired a Brazilian guitarist whom I had heard play beautifully in a restaurant in Washington. He provided soothing and delightful background music to the meals.

Rubens: Now, you were an advisor to this?

Linn: I was a paid consultant. I was paid by Calvin Stillman who staged the conference. He was affiliated with Cook College. He said [later that] he [had] made one big mistake, which was that he did not engage me full-time, since initially he couldn’t quite grasp what I would do as ceremonial manager.

Rubens: Didn’t you mention the People’s Convention as a temporary commons?

Linn: Yes, I did. In 1980 I was asked by one of my colleagues at NJIT if I would be willing to volunteer my service for the People’s Convention that was supposed to meet in the South Bronx that summer. I was able to recruit a few volunteer designers and we submitted our plan to the local sponsoring organization, and they approved our ideas.

The participating organizations were very political and had difficulty reconciling their differences. A tremendous cooperative spirit was generated when I organized hundreds of volunteers who worked together to clean up a site filled with rubble from demolished buildings. Since the site had a steep slope, we had to level an area for a large tent to house a thousand delegates, and a commons for two thousand visitors, including places for camping tents, first aid tents, artwork, and little buildings used as headquarters by participating organizations. I got a little money to buy parachutes that formed sheltered areas for teach-ins. An artist friend, Hildreth York, from Rutgers, engaged people in painting a huge mural.

Part of the cleanup operation also involved salvaging broken bricks and lumber to build steps. Initially we had no tools and used our hands. A Hispanic union that was hosting the conference succeeding in getting us a bulldozer that enabled me to do the rough grading of the site. Finally I was able to get tools through the Green Guerilla Community Gardening organization that had contacted the Green Thumb Organization of New York City that helped build community gardens and was instrumental in creating the wildflower meadows. I was so delighted to be given hand tools that [while
swinging] a huge load of tools over my shoulder I pulled my sacroiliac out. Thereafter I was taken back and forth to the site in a makeshift ambulance and walked around on crutches. A photographer from Harlem asked if he could take a picture of me from behind so no one could tell I was a white person, because my crumpled posture was symbolic of the burden of racism that people of color are exposed to.

Adjacent to the campsite was a deep gully, a dry creek bed, where a lot of trees had grown, creating a park-like setting. Volunteers cleaned up the underbrush and made a green setting instantly available to the conference attendees.

Rubens: How big was this whole area?

Linn: I don’t really know. A few blocks. It was wedge-shaped and surrounded by empty six-story brick buildings with gaping holes of windows that looked like a neutron bomb had hit it, killing the inhabitants but leaving the building intact. In fact, that section of the South Bronx looked like a ghost town because residents had fled to the suburbs.

All these cooperative activities I believe helped the different political inclinations to resolve their differences and come up with a joint statement called the “Declaration of Charlotte Street.” The declaration complained that promises made to them by the government for new housing had never materialized. The motto of the conference was “Broken Promises.”

Years later when I visited the site, I realized that the city had taken advantage of the level terraces we had created for the Convention and begun the wildflower experiment that I mentioned earlier.

Rubens: Didn’t you say that you also taught abroad?

Linn: Indeed. The first time I revisited Germany was in 1961. I was eager to visit the Immenhof, which unfortunately at that time was part of East Germany, administered by a Communist regime. Because it would have taken a long time to get the proper visas, I wasn’t able to see my childhood home at that time. I was also eager to visit my brother Theo, who was in a hospital in Munich, having been run over by a motorbike that skipped the sidewalk where he was walking. I visited a school for landscape architects in Dahlem, Berlin, where my sister had attended. After I met with some faculty members, they asked me to give a talk.

Rubens: Was the talk in English or German?

Linn: Both. I had to refresh my German and made a few mistakes. I’ll always remember when I said Lehrlauf, which means neutral, instead of Lehrgang, which means curriculum. The students said I was right, that their curriculum really runs in neutral, we don’t really get anywhere.

I asked students if they would be willing to show me some of the urban open spaces in Berlin. They were absolutely delighted since no other professor had ever gone around with them casually.
One of the students, who was married, invited me to his home to share supper with him and some other students. After my visit to Berlin, I went to Munich to see my brother who was in the hospital. Much to my surprise, on a subsequent visit to the hospital, two students from Dahlem were waiting for me, eager to show me Munich, which they did. One of them, Adolph Hartner, was born there. Since they had hitchhiked to Munich, I gave them some money to take a plane back. A few days later in Berlin I was invited again to the Hartner family home for a big party they threw to greet me. When I asked Adolph and the female student who had accompanied him how their plane trip was, they smiled sheepishly and told me that they had hitchhiked back. They had taken the money to East Berlin where the East German mark was one-sixteenth of the West German mark and used the money to buy professional books for me, which was against the law and could have easily led to their imprisonment. I was deeply moved by their generosity.

Rubens: Did you ever go back to Berlin?

Linn: On this first visit in 1961 I also dropped by the department of landscape architecture and regional planning of Berlin’s Technical University, meeting the well-known landscape architect and educator Herman Mattern, who invited me to be a guest professor in the summer of 1962.

During my visits in 1961 I was inspired by all the small-scale, inviting open spaces filled with lush vegetation and comfortable sitting areas, scattered through the fabric of the cities. Seeing these gathering places contributed much to my interest in the building of commons. I was also intrigued with the intricate sidewalk pavement patterns made of small square stones of different colors. They inspired me to possibly use the same technique to heighten the aesthetic quality of urban environments in low-income areas. I also visited Italy and was most intrigued with the colorful mosaics embedded in public benches. On that occasion I also visited Danilo Dolci in Sicily. He had developed an international work crew designed to foster greater economic self-sufficiency of low-income villages. He was an architect who wrote the book *The Road to Palermo* recounting how he helped fisherman to find a more economic way to sell their catches. He also helped villagers establish irrigation systems. During the eighties I met Danilo in New York when he had become a famous poet.

Rubens: Okay, let’s go back to your visit to Germany in 1962.

Linn: I was guest professor at the Technical University in Berlin and introduced a community design-and-build service learning program, I had my students work closely with social service agencies that conducted youth programs. We met with young people and jointly designed the “Robinson Crusoe playground.” It was such a completely unknown educational event to link different disciplines together that a German newspaper carried a big article about it. Mattern and I also wrote a letter to Sargent Shriver, director of the Peace Corps, suggesting the establishment of an International Design Corps as a branch of the international Peace Corps. Mattern also arranged various lectures for me and invited a large professional audience both in Berlin and in Kassel, where he also taught.

My wife and son, who was five years old, came along on that trip and we decided to go to Spain. I was most eager to visit Gaudi’s work that had so intrigued me because of his rich, handcrafted buildings and open spaces. The first chance I got, I visited Parc de
Güell in Barcelona with its large commons surrounded by undulating benches covered with colorful mosaics made of broken crockery. I still wonder how he instructed the craftsmen to bring about such a consistently beautiful pattern. Upon leaving Parc de Güell, my son, charmed by the magical ornate embellishments, turned around and waving his hand said, “Goodbye, Fairyland!” This was such an appropriate summation.

Rubens: You were really involved. Did you go back to Berlin?

Linn: Yes. I returned to Berlin in 1986 and spent a lot of time there as a fellow of the German Academic Exchange Service, conducting research on self-help urban open-space development in five cities. At that time, being active in Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility, I also gave lectures and met with people in behalf of peace efforts that I would like to discuss in our next interview session when we will focus on creating places for peace-making.

Rubens: Have you visited any other foreign countries?

Linn: Feeling at home in tropical and subtropical vegetation, I visited Puerto Rico many times. Though I didn’t speak the language, I very much enjoyed contact with the local people who were extremely hospitable, generous, and outgoing. I was always touched by the tender eye contact that especially women exchange with each other. After all the eyes are the windows to our soul.

The contacts I made during these visits led to the invitation to teach a summer session at the school of architecture at University of Puerto Rico. Students and I visited suburban developments, which, much to my horror, featured gravel-covered spaces around buildings instead of plants. Since plants grow in profusion on that island it was considered déclassé to have plants. The less vegetation around your house, the more prestigious you were. I also took students to La Perla, a slum perched on the slopes of the Old City of San Juan, bordering the ocean and framed by the San Cristóbal Castle. Students who primarily came from the middle class never had the opportunity to interact with the population of La Perla, which was discussed in great detail in a book by anthropologist Oscar Lewis.

When I expressed my delight in the social life that took place in the plazas and placitas, students were much more ambivalent about them because American cities, which they emulate, do not feature them. In many discussions I emphasized that Americans actually have a lot to learn from the Puerto Rican way of life. They finally smiled with a sense of appreciation and dignity.

On another occasion I was a consultant to the Puerto Rican secretary of the Board of Education, suggesting the establishment of mobile units that could bring educational resources to communities in scattered and remote areas of the island. I always wanted to suggest that Puerto Rico establish a tourist office in New York City housed in a greenhouse-like, glass-domed garden setting focusing on the natural resources that attract tourists. Rather a drab office building that would emphasize the economic hardships of Puerto Rico, a lush setting would emphasize the unique resources of the island. My fondness for and familiarity with Puerto Rico encouraged me to take my students from NJIT to spend an Easter vacation there.
Rubens: So again, this is another conceptual reframing, it’s about transforming seeming liabilities into assets. Are there any other countries you visited that you would like to mention?

Linn: Yes. I also spent a great amount of time in different cities in Canada.

I was asked by students to give a talk at McGill University in Montreal. I remember most distinctly that I had a wonderful time with students who sent me comments about my lectures, and they took me climbing up a mountain in the town in freezing weather. The positive feedback and close rapport that evolved with students after I gave lectures happened most of the time. Attending a seminar on urbanism in Edmonton, I remember most vividly the tree-lined streets that led to the town, whose branches were covered with icicles glistening in the sun. It was like driving through a glass palace.

I was also invited to give a lecture and workshop at University of Manitoba by David Dobereiner, who was teaching there at the time. I brought together students of different disciplines such as architecture, landscape architecture, planning, and art—students who never had any contact with each other. As a result of the workshops, students painted collaborative murals along the underground walkways linking the buildings that were used because of the inclement weather. During the culminating evening of the workshop, representatives of the different disciplines discussed the merit of their collaboration in front of a large audience. There was a lively interaction between the panel members and the student audience.

At University of Guelph I was asked to give a lecture as part of a conference and also had to summarize the proceedings of the different lectures and workshops. I was able to do so because scouts were assigned to the different talks and debriefed me on the proceedings.

Rubens: What was your connection in Canada?

Linn: My most frequent visits to Canada were to Toronto where a close colleague of mine, the late Bill Rock, became chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Toronto. He thought highly of my work and even had students write a research paper about it. It was Bill who got me involved in the conference in Guelph. During more recent visits to Toronto during the eighties, I gave talks and workshops about places for peace-making which I will discuss in the next interview.

Rubens: Are we done with your travels abroad?

Linn: Except for Israel, where I was invited as a guest professor to teach at the Technion, Israel’s Institute of Technology, in 1987. I introduced a community design-and-build service learning program, having students work with a Jewish community that had emigrated from Morocco. They were treated like second-rate citizens because they didn’t emigrate from Europe. The students worked closely with the residents developing an open-space master plan for the village, linking it to the larger surrounding landscape. In another exercise students created a plan for an area in Kfar Ata, which featured rock outcroppings of archaeological significance.
Rubens: Since we are reviewing our past interviews, is there anything else you remember that you might have skipped?

Linn: I think I forgot to mention that there were two other cities in which I tried to develop neighborhood commons programs. One was in Boston where David Crane, a former member of the planning department at Penn, had started to work on an urban renewal plan for the city. David arranged a meeting for me with Ed Logue, the redevelopment, urban renewal coordinator in Boston. Ed was also the cousin of Paul Hogan, who worked with me in Philadelphia. Logue was considered the czar of urban renewal, who oversaw the large-scale demolition of ethnic urban villages, making room for new development.

Rubens: What were you doing with Ed Logue?

Linn: I was quite aware of what his agenda was, yet I suggested that neighborhood commons were an important amenity that would do much to generate a sense of community, especially as they would be part of urban renewal projects. As part of my effort I also gave a city-wide talk to a large audience in one of the most famous churches in Boston. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to mobilize resources fast enough and went to Washington, D.C., where they had generated some funding for my work.

Rubens: What was the other city?

Linn: The other city was Pittsburgh. I was invited by members of the Federated Garden Clubs, to whom I had given lectures, to explore the establishment of a Neighborhood Commons Corporation in Pittsburgh. In addition, Troy West, whom I mentioned, had already established a community design center there shortly after I founded the Neighborhood Renewal Corps. I realized the creation of another community design center would be redundant.

Rubens: What else did we miss?

Linn: I did not mention the creation of an experimental sitting area and playground in Greenwich Village in New York City, an idea I had submitted to the Smithsonian. Carl Anthony was also involved in the articulation of this project. There was a broad street flanked by vacant land leading from Washington Square in Manhattan, a few blocks south. The strip was called West Broadway. It was the residue of a highway that the parks commissioner Robert Moses tried to create, plowing right through Washington Square as a link to Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue, the main commercial thoroughfare. Greenwich Village citizens, composed of many artists and free thinkers, were up in arms and stopped Robert Moses in his tracks. They engaged Robert Nichols, a landscape architect whom I mentioned earlier helping me in my office when I joined Penn. Robert is married now to the poet Grace Paley. Robert was able to design Washington Square Park, which is now a highly frequented park.

South of it I suggested that some section of the vacant land flanking West Broadway could be developed as an experimental sitting area and playground in which different benches and seating arrangements and play equipment could be tested. Cameras could capture how suitable the furnishings and play equipment were. Being a research project, ongoing analysis would help to deepen the understanding of space use. Unlike other
industries, there is no research and development taking place in the environmental design disciplines. Though it was a good proposal, it never materialized, partly because I left the city for the West Coast.

This was just one proposal submitted to the Smithsonian. My main suggestion dealt with urging the Smithsonian to stage ceremonies for peace. I wrote an article for their magazine called “Cultivating Communities,” which I illustrated with a famous drawing of a little child planting flowers as a symbolic gesture of peace.

Rubens: In addition to specific programs that you might have forgotten to mention, are there any special insights you want to share?

Linn: I really want to go into more detail about my contact with Louis Kahn. He profoundly deepened my understanding of environmental design. I had glimpses [of understanding] that the acts of environmental planning, of architecture—designing spaces in buildings—or landscape architecture—designing open spaces—are acts of parenting and gardening. Parents have a good sense of the uniqueness of each of their offspring that they help to unfold. The same is true with gardeners who are aware of the innate growth potential of a plant for which they are trying to create an ecological niche that ensures its optimal growth and unfolding. Consequently, the aspiration of architecture and landscape architecture should be to create spaces that help those who will inhabit those spaces to unfold their true potential and their growth.

The trouble is that so many physical environments are created that accommodate only quantitative growth, more people, more cars, rather than accommodating organic growth and maturation. This is Kahn’s great contribution, that he was able to articulate poetically and incorporate in his buildings.

Rubens: How did he do that?

Linn: Kahn always talked about having a sense of becoming. He always probed what something wants to be, what does it want to become? We spend our lifetimes in search of what we sense we can be, in search of conditions that allow us to grow into what we have a sense of wanting to be. Parents who know their children well have a deep, intuitive perception of what this child wants to become. They create a niche for them, providing education for the child to become what it’s meant to become.

Rubens: How did he translate that specifically into architecture? You said design of architecture is an act of gardening.

Linn: Kahn really came into his own right after he turned sixty. He worked all over the world and being so spiritually attuned he struck a resonance in Asia, designing and building significant buildings in India and Bangladesh. Kahn told me that he designed one of his large governmental buildings in such a way that the officials of different levels of authority would inevitably cross paths. It was an effort on his part to subtly democratize the society.

Rubens: How much contact did you have with Kahn?
Linn: I met with Kahn at least once a year for a whole day at a time. We had a very unique friendship. You might remember that he arrived at midnight to give a talk to the National Council of Instructors of Landscape Architecture (NCILA) conference that I staged in 1960. He also met with young people upon my recommendation, including Carl Anthony and Mark Hawkins, because I felt that youth were perfect clients for him. Youth is that stage of unfolding and becoming. Working with existing traditional institutions, the sense of becoming is much more limited.

In his interactions Kahn uses a person as a sounding board. He always expressed his thoughts and in so doing clarified his thoughts. At the same time he had a deep sense of your own becoming, asking questions that forced you to reach more deeply into yourself. It is amazing the number of people he touched deeply. At his memorial the broadest range of people assembled, including taxi drivers who had taken him around, with whom he must have engaged in the same kind of conversation. I might have already talked about it to you.

Rubens: Had you seen anything that he had actually built?

Linn: Teaching at Penn I saw his famous medical center, and I went to New Haven to see his art gallery. At one point he also hired me to work on a landscape for an embassy he was designing for Angola. He designed the building in such a way that it had a natural air conditioning system.

Rubens: But were you translating into the idea of the commons.

Linn: What I tried to do in my teaching is to awaken the commons, since I sensed that there is a deep-seated desire for community that people are longing for. Consequently I developed participatory processes that got people together to envision, design, and build commons where people can easily meet.

You might remember that I gave my students an exercise that I called “My Secret Garden” or “Space Womb,” asking them to design their dream house and their dream landscape. They went through a process of connecting with what they wanted to become and what kind of space would accommodate that growth.

In a sense, designed spaces function like wombs. Some of the graduate students who had already been designing buildings or landscapes for clients realized that they were simply responding to clients’ needs for conspicuous consumption. The clients wanted to have the latest fashion in housing, portrayed in magazines. The students realized they should engage in much deeper dialogue with clients to enable the clients to connect with their deeper and more meaningful needs. Designers know they have really connected with the client’s sense of becoming when clients respond, “How did you know? I never told you what I really yearned for. I can really be myself in this space you created.”

Rubens: Did Kahn ever come to visit any of your commons?

Linn: Kahn was very much involved in Melon Commons and reported on it in the letter that I showed you.

Rubens: Did you share any other projects with him?
Linn: He came to Long Island University because I asked him to help me develop the Environmental Arts Program. He liked my emphasis on craftsmanship, that I tried to re-invite human hands into the refinement of the environment. Involving students not only in the design but especially the construction was very important to him, because he felt it was bringing back the relationship of master and apprentice, which was missing from schools of environmental design. We taped our conversations of the process and I had it transcribed and edited.

You might remember when I gave a workshop to the members of Federated Garden Clubs when I affirmed their common knowledge of plants and their love of nature. I received letters from them that they felt deeply understood. [reading]

He gave me a feeling for the earth and its beauty, and gave us a desire to continue to think and do. He made me feel the possible potential for doing things I had never dreamt I might do. His greatest contribution was uniting in spirit fifty-six women who hardly knew each other.

This means that I must have tapped into the common denominator that brought people together. Previously they might not even have been aware that they shared this commonality.

In conceptually restructuring a social problem and illuminating the potential, people really respond by feeling deeply understood. When I affirmed my Puerto Rican students’ rich cultural life rather than disenfranchised cultural laggards, or African Americans as artist pioneers rather than as welfare cases, they connected with their unique deep-rooted powers, feeling deeply understood.

You might remember Ben Zimmerman, director of the poverty program for people of color.

Rubens: Yes, in Syracuse.

Linn: He expressed his sense of what I was contributing. May I quote him?

Rubens: Go right ahead.

Linn: [reading]

To most people the phrase “the quality of life” means little or is a catchy phrase useful for public relations purposes. Mr. Linn, however, has not only devoted himself to exploring and implementing the concept, but has a very deep feeling of what the words can eventually come to mean. The essential task is to conceptualize the problem and point the direction of implementation of solution. Mr. Linn is one of the few people with whom I have worked who has the capacity, vision and experience to do both.

I kept track of these comments because they deepened my understanding of my own work.

Rubens: Were there any other aspects of your work that Kahn contributed to?
Linn: He was very supportive of our efforts to create construction workshops that initially we created to give year-long continuity to the work during inclement weather. We also thought the workshops would have depots for salvageable building material such as large stacks of brick. To go after bricks for each project is very inefficient.

I might repeat myself, but centers to us also provide a safe place for creative energy and the nurturing of community among participants. Remember the Common Ground, in the church basement, bringing neighbors and students together. At times I tell communities to start with a center instead of a commons because a center can generate many commons. After I told Kahn about these centers, he would exclaim how important it is to have these “sanctuaries for experimentation.”
Interview 8: February 8, 2004

Linn: Now we are finally ready to discuss my peace work.

Rubens: You mentioned in an earlier interview that you had first been introduced to this by Lewis Mumford when you were at Penn.

Linn: Yes. It was Lewis Mumford back in 1960, when he was a visiting professor at the School of Fine Arts.

Rubens: Tell me, how did Mumford encourage you?

Linn: He became like a mentor to me. I had a lot of personal contact with him. He was worried about the nuclear arms race between the U.S. and USSR, as John Kennedy was at that time.

Rubens: Was he specially involved in some organization such as SANE [The Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy]?

Linn: I don’t know, but he told me about SANE and suggested I contact Charles Price, who was on the faculty at Penn and a member of SANE.

Rubens: Should I know who Charles Price is?

Linn: I don’t remember what he taught. I also contacted the secretary of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), who suggested that each faculty member should look in their own field to see how their own disciplines contribute to war or to peace.

Rubens: Did you share with students your concern with the nuclear arms race?

Linn: I wrote a statement, “To All Concerned,” and got a lot of positive responses. Faculty colleagues, including McHarg, told me that they thought it was powerful writing.

Rubens: Besides Mumford, who else did you connect with that was also concerned about the arms race?

Linn: Besides Mumford, Margaret Mead was very vocal and talked about her concerns in speeches that I attended. In 1960 Lawrence K. Frank suggested that I read a book that had just come out by psychoanalyst Harold Searles called The Non-human Environment. Searles also suggested that we should focus on our disciplines to find out whether we inadvertently contribute to warmongering or to peace. Searles’s clinical findings led him to conclude that the intense consumer conditioning, often loaded with sex appeal that people are exposed to in our culture, contributes to an overidentification with commodities, with objects. Such an ego-invasion diminishes our ability to respond compassionately to other people. Children often get in trouble with their parents for putting a scratch on the fancy car. The angry response of the parent leaves a scratch on the child’s psyche that the parents pay less attention to than the scratch on the car.
Analyzing my own discipline of environmental design, I had a rude awakening that in fact it did contribute to desensitizing people to each other and to enemy-making. Since so many buildings and open spaces that architects and landscape architects create aspire to be prestige symbols to satisfy the client’s needs for conspicuous consumption, and the designer’s own ego gratification, environmental designers contribute to this ego-invasion and consequently contribute to war-making.

Rubens: How is that related to the nuclear arms race that you seem to be so concerned about?

Linn: I believe I had discussed this aspect of Searles’s work earlier when we talked about the deleterious impact of consumer conditioning. But Searles goes a step further in his findings. Since an overidentification with objects and the consequent ego-invasion is very scary, people are compelled to rationalize their fear, and through paranoid projection eagerly contribute to the production of nuclear weapons, which in fact are truly scary. In the same vein, Erich Fromm wrote a whole book called *To Have or to Be*. If “to have” becomes more important than “to be,” which our economic system instills in so many people, it distorts the experience of life into a very burdensome existence.

Rubens: How did you bring this into your work?

Linn: I hoped my emphasis on participatory community design-and-build service would contribute to people developing a sense of mastery over their physical environment, rather than being intimidated and a slave to it. Emphasizing the creative recycling of salvageable building material also made the creation of amenities more affordable and accessible.

Rubens: How did these concerns with peace affect your teaching?

Linn: In fact I became so deeply engrossed in peace work during the eighties because of the impact the nuclear arms race had on my students.

Rubens: How did it?

Linn: I realized that my students’ work had become more and more superficial.

Rubens: What accounts for that?

Linn: I asked them how they felt about the nuclear arms race. I distributed 2,500 questionnaires, not only to my students, but to students and professionals worldwide in the United States and Canada and Israel and Germany, asking students how they feel about the nuclear arms race. More than 50 percent didn’t think we would survive the year 2000, 30 percent gave avoidance responses, and 20 percent said they didn’t really pay attention to it.

Their work became very superficial and rationalized because they repressed their fear of a nuclear holocaust. In so doing they also put a lid on the free flow of their creativity and passion. Since it takes time for architects, landscape architects and planners to create spaces, they in a sense are creating spaces for the future. Planners often design cities for children yet to be born. Consequently, the future is a daily companion in the work of environmental designers. The loss of faith in the future is very hard for them to
reconcile with their work. With the advent of the nuclear age, the future can no longer be taken for granted. The occupational hazard of being an environmental designer is rooted in their need to deny and repress their fear of an uncertain future.

Rubens: Did you save those surveys?

Linn: I saved a lot of them.

Rubens: Now, you said you co-founded the national organization Architects, Designers, Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR) in ‘84.

Linn: Yes. But before that, I became a member of Architects for Social Responsibility (ASR) in New York City in ‘82.

Rubens: Yes. The local organization.

Linn: Yes. As a member of ASR, I developed various proposals for places for peacemaking.

One was the United Nations New York City Peace Forum Plaza that I submitted to ASR. ASR approved it and submitted it to the Year 2000 Commission of New York City to develop the area in front of the United Nations complex into a public peace forum. Physically, the United Nations exists as an institution apart from the teeming life of the city, and although the Department of Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations conducts an active educational outreach program, it is primarily aimed at diplomats and experts in international affairs and not at the general public. The space would become a year-round gathering place for people concerned with peace to stage peace events, artistic events, and ceremonies. The space would be equipped with many different kinds of communication hardware, like computers, for people to record their concerns, and areas for people to make their own peace imagery. There could even be a peace café with international food. The Peace Forum Plaza would function as an extension of the UN, bringing people from all over the world together. The plaza would be managed jointly by the UN, the City of New York, and academic and private peace organizations.

Robert Wagner, Jr., the son of the former mayor of New York, became very interested in this proposal. At one point I didn’t pursue it any further because I focused on other peace projects.

Rubens: What were these other proposals?

Linn: Another proposal was a cooperative peace center in New York, which would be a collective resource and meeting center for the various peace groups. It would be a place to share resources, unite forces. Equipped with meeting places, conference rooms, a reference library and office equipment such as computers, copy machines, and supplies, the center would provide a welcoming and cheerful place for volunteers who were coming after a long day of work, in contrast to the drab, impersonal office suites they were used to. As a place for people to drop by and get information, or to find out what’s happening, an uplifting atmosphere would facilitate spontaneous meeting and dialogue. An essential component would be food because sharing food is always a disarming experience. A cooperatively run restaurant/café could nurture solidarity. We even thought a hostel for out-of-towners could be part of the center.
I submitted the proposal also to Stewart Mott, a philanthropist who funded progressive causes. In fact, his foundation asked me to provide shelter for one week to César Chávez in my house in Cambridge, Massachusetts, during the late sixties when he underwent treatment. It was a unique opportunity to get to know him. He was a very pleasant person. His anger and rage was focused on the disenfranchisement of his people, unlike so many people involved in peace work who project their anger everywhere because of unresolved personality issues. My small house was filled with his nurse and several of his bodyguards.

Rubens: What an incredible opportunity to have had.

Linn: I also started a whole program involving students and practitioners in organizing charrettes to design gardens for peace making. Since teaching at NJIT, I had started to work closely with the community garden program, I also became familiar with the community garden movement in New York City such as the Green Guerillas and the Open Space Coalition. I proposed a new kind of teamwork to transpose community-gardens into peace gardens.

Rubens: Since gardens are already peaceful places, what do you do to make them peace gardens?

Linn: Let me read to you an excerpt of my proposal:

To transform and dedicate community gardens as neighborhood peace gardens at a time when the nuclear arms race threatens our survival presents a profound challenge to community gardeners, peace advocates and environmental designers. The participation of artists, educators, event makers, and members of the spiritual community promises to transform the experience and perception of gardening into symbolically meaningful celebrations of life and peace.

The time has come for community gardeners to experience themselves not only as nurturers of life but as ambassadors of peace. Infusing the peace movement with community gardeners will give it new vitality since the potential for global peace rests in the latent strength and living reality of grassroots communities the world over.

Rubens: Okay. Did you organize any events?

Linn: In ‘82, I put together a panel with Richard Hatch at the Graduate Center at City University on Forty-second Street in Manhattan, as part of a conference of social scientists dealing with nuclear war. I brought together highly respected environmental designers from all over the country, including Kevin Lynch, James Marston Fitch, Alan Gussow, Chester Hartman, and Walter Thabit, among others. We focused on two issues. Did environmental designers inadvertently contribute to warmongering, and what could we contribute to counteract the nuclear arms race. We drew on Harold Searles’s work a lot.

Kevin Lynch presented a research project he had conducted creating a detailed map in concentric circles, indicating how much damage a bomb would make in the area surrounding ground zero. A highly stimulating intellectual discourse took place at the conference.
Rubens: Are papers of people’s presentations in your archive?

Linn: I have many of them. We also began to form an organization called Environmental Designers for Nuclear Disarmament (EDND) because ASR was primarily recruiting architects and we wanted to include landscape architects, planners, and interior designers. The conference ended on the day of the Million Person March in Central Park, which we joined. Henry Arnold, a landscape architect and member of our founding group, helped to hold up our new EDND banner as we marched.

Rubens: You all marched together.

Linn: Yes. ASR members had their own banner too. I also started to develop a project for the Million Person March hoping that each person would have a chance to plant a flower so we could leave a life-affirming symbol behind. The vastness of that planting would give tangible evidence of the magnitude of the movement for nuclear disarmament. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to pull it off.

Sometime later I wrote to Yoko Ono suggesting to her that peace groves should be planted the world over in memory of John Lennon, who had a worldwide following. I thought people could plant a grove in their own area and it would be a wonderful place where people could meet and congregate, to contribute to a growing solidarity of a peace-affirmative movement. It would also make a healthier environment. Unfortunately she decided to spend a lot of money on one memorial in Central Park instead of taking the money and encouraging the mass planting of trees all over the world. That would have been a more meaningful and effective contribution to peace.

Rubens: What inspired you to plant trees for peace?

Linn: I was in Louisville and the daughter of a friend of mine was killed in a car accident. She had been a wonderful guitar player. I stood at the grave with a friend of mine. We both wanted to help somehow, instead of just standing there, and began shoveling soil on the casket. Standing next to the grave pit, I remembered having often stood next to tree pits. I wondered what would have happened if each of these people who came to the cemetery would have planted a tree in memory of Vicky, this young seventeen year old. They would have created a grove of trees where friends could come together in peace and celebrate life, being reminded of its fragileness. So that act of planting to me became a really important ceremonial act.

Rubens: You talked about that at MIT, when you planted the red geraniums as part of the Martin Luther King, Jr., memorial.

Linn: You’re right. We planted them in the same spirit.

Rubens: It sounds interesting. But let’s come back to Architects for Social Responsibility.

Linn: In 1984 I also worked with my colleagues of ASR to conduct a charrette at Columbia University School of Architecture. The task was to transform Manhattan’s Times Square into a peace plaza. We invited 100 students and faculty from nineteen schools of design on the East Coast to participate. The student designs were reviewed by prominent architects and landscape architects. I still remember one drawing of a huge...
white dove suspended over Times Square. We ended the review with a panel discussion and a visit to Cathedral St. John the Divine, listening to a special organ and flute recital given on our behalf.

On my way back from New York I read an article in the *New York Times* called “Atom War ‘Suicide Pills’ Backed” that deeply impacted me because it dramatized students’ fear. May I read to you from the article?

Rubens: Yes.

Linn: [reading]

Providence, R.I., Oct. 12- Undergraduates at Brown University have voted to ask its health service to stockpile “suicide pills” for use in case of nuclear war. The measure passed by a vote of 1,044 to 687 in a referendum held in conjunction with student elections Wednesday and Thursday. The university has refused to stockpile the pills, but organizers of the drive who put the measure on the ballot said their efforts were largely symbolic and educational.

Rubens: The kids must have been really scared.

Linn: Then in ‘84 four towns—Boston, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco—got together and formed ADPSR as a national organization. I started to give workshops designed to dissolve people’s denial of their fear of nuclear war and engage them in designing places for peacemaking.

Rubens: How did you do that?

Linn: I became a member of Interhelp, an international organization of psychotherapists. Joanna Macy was one the co-founders. She wrote a book called *Despair and Empowerment*, describing the workshops she conducted guiding people in awakening to the nuclear arms race. She created settings where people could express their fear. Once people had expressed their fear, they realized they weren’t alone in it. Then they became curious about what was really going on in the nuclear arms race and wanted to learn about it, gradually being compelled to become actively involved in stopping the nuclear arms race.

Rubens: Didn’t students get scared when confronted with these facts?

Linn: Rather than scaring students and practitioners, I tried to empower them and familiarize them with the growing worldwide movement of people involved in nuclear disarmament. I compiled a global survey of spaces designed for peace making, which I called “An Emerging Architecture of Peace.” The survey described open spaces for peace, peace centers, peace sanctuaries, peace communication environments, border peace parks, environmental peace art and ceremonial plantings for peace. The global movement in a sense expressed human beings universal “survival-will,” what Louis Kahn would have called an “existence-will.” Tapping into this shared experience provided a foundation for creating physical spaces that nurture cooperation and peace among people.
Rubens: I can see now how students got inspired, but did you find support from other landscape architects and architects themselves?

Linn: Yes. I got very positive responses. To mention a few, *Landscape Architecture* magazine published a statement by Garrett Eckbo, one of the founders of contemporary landscape architecture, who said,

\[\text{Congratulations on “Flashes From the Peace Front” (July/August ’85, Reports) and all honors to the many colleagues who are participating, and to Karl Linn for his central leadership in the movement for responsibility and peace.}\]

In October 1984, professors from the College of Environmental Design at UC Berkeley, Galen Crantz, Randolph Hester, and Michael Laurie, invited me to give a college-wide lecture that I called “Disarming Environments.” This was at the time when Michael Laurie, a former student of mine, was chairperson of the Department of Landscape Architecture there. I discussed Searles’s findings and urged students to get involved in creating places for peacemaking. After the lecture Laurie wrote a letter to Dean Richard Bender at the College of Environmental Design. I will read you part of it because he poignantly expressed his experience.

His message was complicated, but two themes became clear. First, he reminded us of the futility of architecture without peace, and that commitment to one requires a commitment to the other. It is an uncomfortable message, and not one that everyone wants to hear. Secondly, he told us about Architecture for Social Responsibility, now called Architects, Designers, Planners for Social Responsibility. This group is committed to increasing public awareness of the dangers of a nuclear holocaust and to protesting action and policies, which increase its likelihood. It has also been responsible for conducting student charettes. I’m not sure that I’ve ever heard such prolonged applause after any college lecture, as Karl Linn’s admittedly exhausting two-hour confrontation with reality and with ourselves.

I also gave a charette “Creating Places for Peace” with students of landscape architecture at UC Berkeley. I will always remember a sketch that three students presented as their suggestion for a peace park to be created in the Martin Luther King Jr. Park in downtown Berkeley. Their sketch showed a huge globe being held up by the outstretched hands of three human figures, balanced so precariously that it looked as if it would fall off at any moment. You couldn’t help but run towards it to hold it up. As you came close to the globe you could see the imprints of many hands. These students had mustered enough courage to come in contact with their own sense of life’s precariousness to create a powerful evocative form.

Rubens: You said “charette” a few times. I meant to ask you about it. What does it mean?

Linn: It means a design competition where you work day and night to come up with a scheme, under time pressure. The word comes from “chariots” because in the past in France, when architects submitted their plans for competition at the Beaux-Arts School, they ran after the chariot that carted them away to put the last touches on their drawings.
Rubens: Were students eager to find out more about the nuclear arms race and what they could do about it?

Linn: After my lecture at UC Berkeley, a few students approached me who were members of a committee working on a program for the upcoming annual meeting of the American Institute of Architectural Students to be held at the Moscone Center in 1985 in San Francisco. The said my lecture was very inspiring. They asked me to help them develop a peace program for their meeting. They said my philosophical and practical approach could strengthen the program of their convention. I worked with them on the three-day peace program, which they called “From Spark To Fire: An Emerging Architecture Of Peace.” Since I had just started my sabbatical, I was able to spend a lot of time on the West Coast.

I invited people who were at the forefront of the practice of an architecture of peace who shared their visions of a future without wars. Most notable was William Wahpepah, the highly respected director of the International Indian Treaty Council, who gave an eloquent talk about his sense of architecture that should be created out of a deep concern and love for life and the earth, not as it is being done, satisfying profit and ego cravings. During the convention Wahpepah conducted a trip to Alcatraz Island, a sacred place for Native Americans.

We also conducted a charrette for creating places for peacemaking that began with a centering and awakening session conducted by Rosa Lane and Margaret Pavel, members of Interhelp. After the centering session students participated in warm-up exercises by envisioning peaceful places they remembered from their childhood. Then the students were put in teams and challenged to design a peace park for downtown San Francisco. I remember one of the designs was a map of the world with tall poles placed on warring regions that cast a shadow on the surface of the earth.

In fact, one architect who attended the American Institute of Architects meeting that took place parallel to the students’ meeting was very impressed. May I quote?

Rubens: Okay. What are you reading from?

Linn: It’s an article I wrote called “An Emerging Architecture of Peace” for the AIAS publication.

During the closing session, John F. Hartray, Jr., one of the planners of the American Institute of Architects convention, in addressing the entire body of architects, exclaimed that the student program was the only event that addressed itself to the crucial issues of our times.

Rubens: While were you out here on the West Coast, did you talk to any other schools?

Linn: Following my lecture at Berkeley in the fall of 1984, I also gave a talk at the Department of Landscape Architecture at UC Davis. I must have inspired them, because they gave me a standing ovation. After my talk there, some students created a local organization, Environmental Designers for Social Responsibility. The students also ended up staging a big event, planting a redwood peace grove. I also gave talks and
conducted charrettes on places for peacemaking, organized by the Los Angeles chapter of ADPSR at Pomona State University and Los Angeles Institute of Architecture.

Rubens: So, Karl, your work is really responding to what’s going on in the world.

Linn: Since the arms race intensified with Reagan, who called the USSR an evil empire, I decided to intensify my own effort in behalf of peace. I asked for a one-term extension of my absence in 1986, having started to work with the local chapter of ADPSR planning a peace program for the annual meeting of the American Society of Landscape Architects that also took place at the Moscone Center. Out of many proposals that I submitted, we ended up with three workshops. One was given by Professor Arthur Rice, from the University of Washington at Seattle, who presented the U.S.-USSR Peace Park Project in Tashkent. It was a collaborative effort between citizens of the Soviet Union and former members of the Peace Corps. The second workshop featured Dr. John Gofman, an incorruptible physician who presented a chart indicating that one million people would be affected by the Chernobyl accident at a time that the Soviet Union said only thirty-six people were affected. The third workshop was a panel discussion of leaders of contemporary landscape architecture whom I had invited such as Ian McHarg, Lawrence Halprin, Paul Friedberg, Dan Kiley, and the artist Alan Gussow. The workshops were taped and transcribed and edited into a publication called *Emerging Landscapes of Peace*, published by ADPSR.

We also proposed that the ASLA should pledge to support a nuclear-free future. Sheryl Barton, a landscape architect who was the president of ASLA at that time, announced that the board of trustees by majority vote supported our efforts. This almost split the board of trustees, because some landscape architects earned their livelihood doing work around nuclear plants and military installations.

Rubens: Besides these peace programs, were you able to introduce your work in other professional conferences of landscape architects?

Linn: In preparation for each lecture I had students and practitioners decorate the lecture room with peace ribbons that I had carried with me. Each state in the union has a special collection of peace ribbons from the Peace Ribbon Project. The three-foot-by-eighteen inch pieces of cloth were beautifully embroidered by tens of thousands of women who held them all together in a circle around the Pentagon [in August of 1985 on the fortieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima]. In each state where I talked I borrowed them to create an instant transformation of a space, reinforcing the peace message I was transmitting.

I was also invited in 1985 to the Council of Educators of Landscape Architecture (CELA) that convened in Urbana, Illinois, at the University of Illinois. I again conducted a centering session with Interhelp and engaged students in charrettes creating places for peacemaking. I still remember vividly one student’s proposal. He came up with a building with a spiral walkway going toward the center. As you walked through, the walls displayed an exhibit of the history of mankind. When you got to the center there was a mirror and you saw your reflection. So it was about what we can learn from human history, forcing us to create alternatives to war, as a survival imperative.
I gave talks and conducted charettes at LABASH, the landscape architectural student conference at the University of Georgia in Athens in 1986; also at the Departments of Landscape Architecture at University of Oregon in Eugene and at Polytechnic State University in Pomona, California; Conway School of Landscape Design in Massachusetts, the School of Architecture at NJIT, Mass. College of Art in Boston, [and in Germany in] Berlin, Kassel, and Munich.

Rubens: So let’s summarize this. In this sense you are active as a leader of ADPSR and you’re traveling around the country to advocate the creation of places for peace.

Linn: I gave up my tenure at NJIT to assume the responsibility of becoming the chair of ADPSR’s Committee on Education, enabling me to volunteer full-time doing peace work. I was able to travel around and give all the lectures and workshops I just mentioned.

Rubens: Did you deal with the creation of commons in your peace work?

Linn: In a sense, all the places for peacemaking that we worked on were commons because they were designed to bring people together to work on this issue.

Rubens: So did anything get built? Were there any examples? You had these plans that came out that sound fascinating.

Linn: Our focus at that time was really on education and consciousness-raising and organizing. Since I worked primarily with students the time was limited to create permanent places for peace as we did at Mass. College of Art with the Peace Garden Commons. I managed to create a few temporary places for peacemaking, such as the Sunshine Dream Center at the Good Works Festival in memory of E. F. Schumacher. This was with students from NJIT at the Cathedral St. John the Divine in New York. The center was a simple outdoor space enclosed by heavy cardboard, and the roof was made from a section of parachute. Lots of people came inside the pavilion to make sketches of their sense of the future, ranging anywhere from a nuclear devastation to a sunny hopeful one. The drawings were hung from a clothesline exhibit so that people who came to this peace event could see them.

Rubens: Are there some that you remember that were more successful than others, these places for peace?

Linn: I also created a much more extensive temporary commons at the New York Hilton Hotel for a meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric Association (Ortho) in 1989. It was called the Peace Commons. We decorated one wall quickly with peace ribbons, and converted an area into a café where conference participants were able to purchase food from a decorated food bar and listen to live music as they sat around small tables decorated with vases of flowers. There were also a lot of art exhibits and feedback boards. I even brought in two huge AIDS quilts from San Francisco and used them to frame the entrance to the commons. I had created similar commons for two other Ortho annual meetings, in 1985 at the New York Hilton that also featured a lot of art exhibits, and 1987 at the San Francisco Hilton also with live music.
Each of those years Ortho asked me to contribute more as ceremonial manager. Unlike other associations of psychiatrists, members of Ortho were working in the trenches, working directly with health and social ills. Though the conference provided a significant learning for its members, I suggested the gathering should be staged as an uplifting celebration to counteract the burden of their daily work.

Most of the other designs produced came out of charettes, there wasn’t any building going on. We hoped they would inspire people to build places for peacemaking.

Rubens: Did you participate in any art-for-peace projects?

Linn: I participated in two traveling peace art projects conceived by Alan Gussow, the artist who was also a chair of the Friends of the Earth Foundation. He conceived the Shadow project. After the Hiroshima nuclear blast, the only remnants of some people were silhouettes of their bodies pressed into stone. Alan organized Shadow projects involving three hundred thousand people the world over. We cut out templates of different body positions that we traced out with white chalk on city sidewalks and streets during the night trying to avoid the police. I did that in New York City. Alan also conceived the Life Yards Project involving people to give form to inspiring peace symbols such as wooden peace doves carved out of recycled material or intricately carved trees.

Rubens: So, you’re still on extended leave of absence from NJIT at this point?

Linn: As I mentioned, I had asked for early retirement from NJIT at the end of the academic year of 1986. It was indeed a hard decision, but I don’t regret it.

In addition to giving lectures, centering sessions, and charettes, I also worked with Ben Rosenblum, an architect friend of mine and member of Los Angeles ADPSR, to develop a comprehensive peace curriculum for schools of environmental design and was formally adopted by ADPSR.

Rubens: You said in 1986 you become a German-American exchange fellow.

Linn: Yes, that’s true. In Germany I did three things. I did research in various towns on urban open spaces created through self-help efforts such as community gardens and small-scale commons. I also talked about the work of ADPSR. Since I was able to spend a longer time in Germany, I got a visa to East Germany so that I could visit the Immenhof.

Rubens: Where were you based? What university were you based at?

Linn: Primarily in Berlin at the Technical University of Berlin. I also went to Hanover, Munich, and Kassel.

Rubens: Did you speak in German?

Linn: Yes, in German.

Rubens: It came back to you easily?
Linn: Yes. I stumbled here and there, but still I’m quite fluent.

Rubens: Do you remember what you were specifically teaching in Germany?

Linn: I went around with students looking at the different open spaces created in the courtyards of housing projects through self-help efforts. I also conducted workshops and symposia on self-help open-space development. I did this together with other landscape architects whose work involved participatory design and self-help construction and who became good friends of mine.

Rubens: Okay, you enlisted the students.

Linn: One of the students invited me to a picnic at a community garden, which in Germany are called “Schrebergarten.” Families have their own plots on which they build elaborate bungalows, using them during weekends. They are very hierarchically organized and people are forced to keep their plots up meticulously. During the picnic the phone rang and the student went to answer it. She came back a while later and told us that she was just informed that her mother had committed suicide. I wondered if her mother had suffered from the taboo of not being able to share her experiences from during the Nazi regime.

I was also interested in ecologically sophisticated architecture that incorporated solar energy, gray-water purification systems using containers of hyacinths, and roof gardens. These innovations happened on what was called the 103rd Street block in Berlin.

I was also introduced in Berlin to a children’s city farm next to the Berlin Wall, created by the Communist regime to separate East and West Berlin. It had all kinds of animals, ranging from rabbits to horses, that neighbors and children took care of. It was the only neighborhood organization that I had encountered where teenagers played an active role. They took care of the horses. Each age group had fitting creatures to take care of. I also visited children’s city farms in Hanover and Munich. In many instances they were right next to adventure playgrounds that were actively used by neighborhood children who were very industrious in creating play spaces out of the salvaged building material that was delivered there by building contractors. In Hanover I also remember being taken to a new development that featured quite extensive green roofs, and in Munich I was asked to give a talk to Urbanes Wohnen, Urban Living, an organization that operated city-wide networks of community gardens. In Munich I also had a chance to give a presentation to a Department of Landscape Architecture in Weihenstephen, an outlying suburb of Munich. I also remember vividly when the director of the landscape architecture department in Kassel invited me to stay over at his house, which featured many ecologically friendly technologies.

Most dramatic was my visit to East Berlin, which students had organized to see some playgrounds that had very rudimentary natural elements such as sand, water, and boulders as natural elements. I was also taken to an exhibit of environmental projects, some critical of the Communist regime, showing the huge piles of waste from other countries that they got paid to store. Some of these controversial exhibits were eventually torn down by security people. The exhibit was sponsored by a progressive
church that also established a peace library that I was taken to. All these efforts were organized by a fledgling ecologically and socially conscious underground movement.

On my trip to East Berlin we were also accompanied by a research professor who had escaped East Germany. I will always remember the Berlin Wall. One of my students almost got arrested for taking photographs of the wall from the East Berlin side. Thanks to my American passport, he was set free. Most memorable were the memorials of flowers people placed on sidewalks where Germans were killed trying to flee East Germany. On subsequent visits to Germany when the wall was being torn down, I was able to get a piece of it to take home.

I summarized all these experiences in an extensive report that I submitted to DAAD, the German Academic Exchange Service, a copy of which I have in my archives.

Rubens: You say here in your outline that you visited your childhood home in East Germany for the first time.

Linn: That’s true, it had been forty-two years. On my way to the Immenhof farm, which was about an hour and a half from Berlin, I had to travel through the countryside of East Germany, which was under Communist control. As I traveled through village and town I saw buildings still pockmarked with bullet holes, unlike West Germany, which was rehabilitated. Traveling through East Germany was like traveling in a different era. There was no public advertising, only large red banners declaring the inevitable success of communism. I saw a lot of soldiers in uniforms and boots marching in formation. It looked like what I remembered the Nazis looking like. As I drove along I started to sing a song I haven’t sung for years, “Why did I have to leave my little town?” I started to cry. Feeling like a displaced person was still so keenly embedded in me.

When I finally came upon the village sign for Dessow, which I couldn’t locate in most books because the town was so small, I got out of the car to touch it and reassure myself that it was real. As I traveled through the village I finally saw the old schoolhouse and the church, and the pond where we skated in winter, and finally came closer to the farm, seeing a huge pine tree towering over the house. I met the peasants who had squatted there since the 1960s when the farmer who had bought it from us for very little money had escaped to West Germany. They were very hospitable, and I spent the next three days with them, meeting the family members at mealtimes. As I looked through the rooms of the house, they looked so much smaller than I remembered. All the fruit trees except one cherry tree had been uprooted because it was too labor-intensive to take care of them.

Rubens: Had the land been divided up?

Linn: On the contrary, the farm had become part of a large agricultural collective growing strawberries and asparagus instead. But the farmer was able to grow tomatoes and flower bulbs as a small private enterprise, augmenting his meager salary from the collective.

The farmer, Mr. Waldburger, agreed to help me locate some of my old schoolmates. It was quite an experience to meet them again. My closest friend, Arnold Probst, threw his arms around me and said, “Are you really Ulli?” which was my nickname. They
remembered us much more than we remembered them because nothing much went on in there. My friend said, “We enjoyed playing football together, but you were really not like us because you came from the middle class and we were peasants. You had fancy soccer boots, and we played barefoot. You had a bicycle; we did not.” So I realized how severe the race and class barriers were, being the only Jewish child of a middle-class family, while most of the other children were peasants whose mothers worked on the farm. Then Arnold also said, “We were so happy that you were able to escape in ’34, because a year later we and other farmers from small villages were summoned to a little town to watch a public spectacle. They had a young Jewish woman tied up in a carriage pulled by horse. They poured hot tar on her and stuck feathers to her.” This was early propaganda that Goebbels came out with to ridicule Jews, to make Germans experience them as subhuman.

Rubens: Did they have any kind of apology for their anti-Semitism, or for what had transpired in Germany?

Linn: The husband of one schoolmate sat quietly in the rear room, and I could hear him sobbing. His name was Bornmann, possibly related to the famous Nazi leader [Martin Bornmann]. He had lost the use of one hand, being shot at by a Russian soldier during the invasion by the Soviet Union. In the house I also saw a photograph taken at school. I was sitting in the first row with long hair and fancy clothes while all my schoolmates had short cropped hair and torn clothes.

Mr. Waldburger also introduced me to his nephew, another farmer, who complained how arrogant young Communist commissars were, who pretended to know everything and [rode] roughshod over farmers’ knowledge who had been doing this for generations. Waldburger and his nephew took me to the Grave of the Unknown Soldier. It was a place hidden in the woods where East Germans would plant flowers and the Communist Commissars would always pull them out. But they kept replanting them. Since the Communist regime would not let any German soldiers who died in the war have gravestones, this was a symbolic place for all the fallen soldiers. It became a real shrine. They also took me to another special place where they had planted an oak tree that they watered that day. Apparently a huge 300-year-old oak tree that had survived the Thirty-Year War had just died, and people came together and decided to plant a new oak tree in honor of the peace. Waldburger, being ecologically oriented, planted little willow trees branches to stabilize the banks of a creek. So there were all kinds of ecologically and socially constructive actions surreptitiously taking place under the repressive communist regime.

Rubens: How did you feel being in Germany again after having been forced to leave so abruptly?

Linn: I had difficulty relating to people my age or older, especially if they shed crocodile tears claiming they were critical of the Nazi regime. But I developed wonderful relationships with younger people, especially students who had a high degree of ecological and social consciousness. They were also very hospitable.

I remember earlier in 1961, when I came to Germany for the first time visiting my brother, I met a young man whose name was Max Baer (not the boxer) who fixed up a bombed-out building in 1945, out of which he created a refuge for hundreds of teenagers who had no place to live after the war. He said to me, “I remember when I
was a small child, I was riding once on a hay wagon and passing a group of Jews who
were being beaten by the Nazis as they were pushed along.” He said, “We were so
inculcated with propaganda from early days, that I really experienced the Jews as being
subhuman, not being part of us.” He asserted, “If you had been raised under the same
circumstances, you would have felt the same way.” I could relate to people who were
straightforward, I could really understand what they went through. Because of my
apprehension towards people my age, I couldn’t really live in Germany, unlike my
brother Theo, who was much older and didn’t want to leave Germany because he
wanted to join the underground. Fortunately, my father talked him out of it.

Rubens: What was your relationship with your students?

Linn: I had wonderful relationships and developed a lasting friendship with some of the
students. One of them came to visit me in the U.S. and I stayed with him in Berlin. He
was tremendously helpful in relation to my brother’s death. He drove five hours from
Berlin to Munich to help my nephew sort out my brother’s library. Right now he is
helping me to publish a book about my mother’s life and work.

Rubens: What about your peace work representing ADPSR?

Linn: I gave lectures, and especially one lecture to a very large audience in a famous building
called the Architects’ Building in Berlin, that I had transcribed and edited. I told this
audience about growing up on the Immenhof and how painful it was for me to be
persecuted by the Nazis and be forced to flee Germany. I told them also about my visit
to the farm. Though I didn’t condone Hitler’s regime, I tried to understand why Hitler
had inspired Germans so much. He provided work, housing, supported family life, and
restored their sense of dignity. I knew that the Versailles Treaty depressed Germany
economically in a very severe way.

Rubens: After World War I?

Linn: Yes.

After the lecture, people came to see me and said, “We never heard a Jew trying to
understand how Germans really felt.” There was a lot of vocal discussion, in this
audience of three generations of Germans, who are usually very polite in public events.
The students challenged their parents, some of whom were professional colleagues in
the audience and had been teenagers during the Nazi regime, to be open about it, to tell
them about their experiences during that time. There was a big taboo about talking
about those events. Their parents who lived with this taboo had difficulty in their own
lives being confronted and being straightforward in emotionally difficult situations.

When the war was over, the soldiers were criticized by their wives who had spent a
decade of being told that they will be victorious and all of a sudden had to pull together
the pieces after the bombardments. The soldiers were also criticized by their teenage
children, the parents in my audience, because they lost the war and because they were
just being critical teenagers. So the soldiers and the families just shut up and didn’t talk
about it. There was all this repressed emotion of painful experiences that it was taboo to
talk about. I suggested to the students that as grandchildren they had an easier
relationship with their grandparents, and it was important for them to open up the
dialogue so it wouldn’t be such a big secret that was feeding the emergence of neo-Nazism that was festering in Germany. The German psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich wrote a book about it called *The Inability to Mourn* (*Die Unfähigkeit zu Trauern*).

Rubens: What else were people talking about?

Linn: Some members of the audience emphasized that the emergence of the Nazi regime wasn’t only their fault because surrounding nations had acquiesced to Hitler, like Chamberlain in England. Others emphasized that people should look into themselves, because we all carry Nazism in ourselves too, because we all grew up under unsupportive conditions and are sitting on a lot of anger and rage.

Rubens: It’s amazing how revealing your audience was.

Linn: Their self-criticism reminded me of the work of Mary Kohlmann, a psychoanalyst and member of Psychoanalysts for Nuclear Disarmament, who lives in Washington, D.C. She feels that the nuclear family structure carries a lot of responsibility for the wars going on in the world. She notes that at first, parents dote on their children, treating them like princes and princesses, and then parents unexpectedly exercise the parental authority, which is tremendously humiliating to their children after they were doted on. Having grown up in a nuclear family, these children spend the rest of their lives in pursuit of that lost power. In an extended family there are many more children around, many more adults, and there’s not this focused relationship.

Rubens: Did you meet her at this period?

Linn: No, but I talked to her and she sent me some of her writing. Her work provided another underpinning for the work on neighborhood commons. We aspired to contribute to a new kind of extended family living, based not on blood relationships but on mutual aid and intergenerational support that would generate the growth of neighborhood community.

Rubens: Did you develop any special friendships with these people who came to you after the talk?

Linn: I remember most vividly the friendship that evolved with Julius Posener, a highly esteemed historian of architecture. He was held in as high esteem in Germany as Lewis Mumford is here. Besides him there were other well-known people in the audience who had created an alternative urban renewal authority for the people who squatted in about a thousand empty and damaged buildings after the war. I got to know them after the lecture, such as Volker von Tiedemann, with whom I am still in contact.

Rubens: Is there anything else we should talk about in relation to your work in the service of peace in Germany?

Linn: Besides giving lectures, I joined all kinds of peace demonstrations. I remember vividly weekend demonstrations at Wackersdorf, which was a place where a uranium-processing plant was being constructed. The massive protests stopped the project.
Rubens: Besides your visit to Germany, did you go to any other countries to do peace work?

Linn: In 1987 when I was invited to be a guest professor at the Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology, in Haifa, that I mentioned earlier, I also introduced my concern with the nuclear arms race to my students and in my lectures to the student body and faculty. Unlike any other audience, the response that I got from students and faculty was that “All you liberals are very naïve. The only thing that counts is power.” My students who constantly had to interrupt their studies to go on reserve duty didn’t at all want to get involved in the nuclear arms issue. I had brief encounters with a small group of people who were active in behalf of nuclear disarmament.

I also spent considerable time with courageous young Arabs and Jews who conducted a range of collaborative efforts restoring landscapes and homes. I also had a chance to visit the kibbutz I had co-founded, Maagan Michael. I met with one of the other co-founders, Jossi Cohen, one of the original thirty-five people. He took me around and then, as we came to the gate, I pointed to this Arab village up on a little hill, and I asked him, “Jossi, what kind of a relationship did you develop over the decades?” He said, “None.” His response took me by surprise because he, like the other initial members, were all from the middle class and quite liberal in their thinking. They were all well educated, too. If you develop non-relationships with your neighbors, it’s no surprise what is happening right now, namely ongoing bloodshed between Arabs and Jews.

Rubens: I guess the Intifada hadn’t happened yet.

Linn: You’re right, but before the Intifada Israelis had herded Palestinians into refugee camps under extremely repressive conditions, which sowed the seeds of the Intifada.

Rubens: What was that like, being back in [what is] now Israel?

Linn: My interest in teaching at the Technion had a lot to do with my desire to see my sister and her family.

Rubens: What city did your sister live in?

Linn: Right on the Haifa Bay in Kiryat Bialik. We talked [earlier] about how she was like my surrogate mother. Besides visiting my sister, I made contact with all different people I had been associated with.

Rubens: Were there any hopeful signs that could lead to peace?

Linn: On a small level, Al Haber, founder of Partners for Peace in the San Francisco Bay Area, who is also a master carpenter, created a beautiful round peace table which he wanted to take to Mt. Meggido, where the prophecies say the Rapture and Armageddon is supposed to happen. Al aspired to stage mass events there that would bring the feuding people together, to sit around the table exploring peace. He happened to visit Israel while I was there so I joined him on a trip to Mt. Meggido.

The most inspiring [experience] was my visit to Neve Shalom, the only settlement inhabited by Arabs and Jews. It was started by Father Bruno, a Jew who became a priest, and inspired people with his vision of peaceful coexistence. I happened to visit
there on a day when bands of musicians came from all over, including Jordan, performing to a large audience sitting on sloping hillsides facing the stage. It looked like Woodstock and all those who participated were inspired and left with great hope.
After my trip to Israel, I moved to Berkeley in the fall of ‘87 and shared a house with Carl Anthony. Carl had been involved in his second unsuccessful practice of architecture and planning. He always had a partner who was after money, and Carl was after vision. He was very pained by it, and really distraught. I helped him move all his cabinets out of his office into storage. I showed him a publication called *Emerging Landscapes of Peace*, which I mentioned earlier. It described the peace program I helped to organize at the annual meeting of the ASLA in 1986. I can imagine that the title of the book might have inspired Carl to title the book he is working on, “The Landscape of Freedom.”

Carl was impressed that I got *Emerging Landscapes of Peace* published and agreed to work with me on the peace program for the International Federation of Landscape Architects Congress (IFLA) that was to be held in Boston in 1988. We consolidated the papers that twenty-three people submitted before the conference into a book called *Places for Peace* that was also published by ADPSR. To imbue the atmosphere of the large lecture hall with the message of peace, we again covered an entire wall with peace ribbons. We developed our program in collaboration with the Washington chapter of the ASLA, which also included a ceremonial planting of a tree. People were given cups filled with mineral dust and scattered them around the tree ceremoniously. Thereafter, well-known poet and friend Catherine Spivak recited some of her moving poems.

When was *Places for Peace* published?

1989. Carl also worked with me on the expansion of a manuscript I had put together called “The Emerging Architecture of Peace.” I compiled a global survey of places for peace that involved various categories such as peace centers, peace sanctuaries, peace gardens, peace plantings, and peace art, just to name a few.

Did you do any other peace tree plantings?

We staged a ceremonial peace tree planting at the first international meeting on Tourism as a Force for Peace in Vancouver.

What was this Tourism as a Force for Peace conference all about?

Louis D’Amore, who lives in Montreal, organized this conference promoting ecotourism. The conference was chaired by the president of Iceland, a charming lady. I remember her saying that it was very appropriate for her to chair the conference because the island of Iceland grows by one inch east and west each year, meaning that she could help bridge the conflict between the U.S. and USSR.

And you were invited to speak.

I also urged Carl Anthony to attend, and we both gave a workshop.
I also had an opportunity to stage a ceremonial peace tree planting at the 1988 Annual meeting of the ASLA that convened in Seattle.

Rubens: Did you give any talks at that conference?

Linn: I conducted a panel of people who reported on significant mass tree plantings that were taking place in different parts of the world. I felt there is so much damage done to the environment that only participation of masses of people can rectify that damage. One of the panel members, who has been very active in involving children in tree planting efforts, had just come back from India, where she met women who called themselves the tree huggers. They prevented trees from being felled in northern India. It was a very important movement. Another panel member reported on the work of Wangari Maathai, and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya. She mobilized thousands of women to establish tree nurseries and plant masses of trees. She was arrested and physically assaulted many time, and is now a member of Kenya’s Congress.

I also realized that significant social change and peace can come about only through the democratic mass participation of people, such as the groups of people that assemble at [events like] Woodstock or at peace demonstrations. More often we are exposed to mass movements when people congregate as passive spectators at sporting events. At the extreme level we see many military formations and stampeding hordes of fanatics committing genocide.

The masses of people who have begun to participate in earth restoration work can become cadres, leading the way to mass democratic participation. We have to learn to stage such events as celebrations of community like large barnraising events that can overshadow the glamour of militarism. Militarism is so misleading because people wear fancy uniforms, but they should really be wearing rags dripping with blood. To restore the earth ceremonially would be an moral alternative to war.

Rubens: So you’re using these different conventions and symposiums and workshops to educate people about these mass movements that are taking place around the world.

Linn: Right. We have to raise consciousness so that we can develop a critical mass of people who are committed to the pursuit of peace. Unfortunately, people deny their fear of a nuclear holocaust yet we all have that anxiety deeply embedded inside of us. Today people are not even talking about it.

Rubens: How long were you involved with ADPSR?

Linn: I guess through ’89. At that time I refocused my work. It was a time in history that Europeans called “A.G.,” for “after Gorbachev”, as opposed to “B.G.,” “before Gorbachev.” Gorbachev succeeded in alleviating the intensity of the nuclear arms race, which motivated me to go back to my work that preceded the eighties, namely, working on creating commons and restoring inner-city neighborhoods.

I spent a year volunteering at Earth Island Institute and had contact with David Brower. I convinced him that he should broaden his concern not only on saving the wilderness but also doing something about the deteriorating inner-city neighborhoods. He helped me put a video together of slides of my neighborhood commons work, which we called
“Urban Barnraising.” He was very supportive. At that time I also realized that the
environmental movement was as lily-white as the peace movement. I challenged David
then to help open the environmental movement up to people of color, and that’s when I
introduced him to Carl Anthony. Ever since I knew Carl I observed that whenever he
spoke, he spoke thoughtfully and people listened to him. I had a sense of his leadership
potential.

Rubens: What year was this at Earth Island?

Linn: It was ‘88. There was an overlap with my work at ADPSR. Since Carl has also had an
oral history done with the Bancroft Library, I’d like to share my growing acquaintance
with him over the years.

Rubens: I think that’s a good idea.

Linn: I mentioned earlier that I met him in 1959 when he was a member of an African
American cultural center, Heritage House. He became intrigued with the construction of
Melon Commons and later attended Columbia School of Architecture. During that time
he was also active in the Harlem Education Project of the Northern Student Movement
Coordinating Committee for Civil Rights and asked me in 1963 to help him develop a
neighborhood commons project in New York.

Rubens: Yes. We discussed that.

Linn: Right. From time to time I would visit him in Berkeley when I came to the West Coast.
He moved here because he had joined the faculty of architecture at UC Berkeley.

Rubens: That’s how he came to the West Coast?

Linn: Yes. Now I would like to go into detail about the history of the Urban Habitat Program,
which Carl and I created.

Rubens: Okay.

Linn: In 1989 I went to a meeting in downtown Berkeley which Richard Register, founder of
Urban Ecology, had organized. He brought together many people to discuss the
development of Berkeley’s city center. Much to my surprise, there were no people of
color, maybe only one or two Chinese people. I told this to Carl, who wrote a
challenging letter to Richard. Richard responded, saying that he had tried to reach out,
informing people of color through flyers. He used the same method that planners of UC
Berkeley resorted to when they scheduled public meetings, which usually had very poor
attendance by people of color.

Rubens: How did Carl respond?

Linn: Carl said that people of color don’t respect being contacted through leaflets. Those who
are eager to communicate with people of color should come down in person so that
neighbors can get a good sense of who these people are by making personal contact.
Ruben: Let’s get back to the start of Urban Habitat?

Linn: Richard Register had organized the First International Ecocities conference in Berkeley in 1990. I conducted two workshops at the conference. One on community gardening, for which I brought together leaders from that movement from various cities in the U.S.; and another on Barnraising Community Through the Building of Neighborhood Commons, which involved Leonard Duhl who was one of the respondents. For this conference Carl recruited some African Americans to form a panel on Environmental Racism, including Victor Lewis, psychologist; Arthur Monroe, curator of the Oakland Museum; and Cordell Reagon, who was the ex-husband of the founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock. After the conference, members of the panel, and Eleanor Walden, a longtime progressive educator, and myself, got together to form an organization.

Rubens: What happened with this group?

Linn: Carl and I proposed to the board of Earth Island Institute, with the blessing of David Brower, chairman of the board, the establishment of a program that we called Urban Habitat. Its mission would be to develop multicultural environmental leadership. A little while later Carl asked me if I would be willing to let him be executive director of the program. I was delighted that he suggested it because as a person of color he would be effective in reaching out to his people. I decided to focus on introducing a multicultural perspective in the greening movement.

Coming to the West Coast, I was happy to find out that community garden organizations existed in the Bay Area. It was a great relief that I didn’t have to start another nonprofit corporation. I became a member of the board of the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners [SLUG] in 1989.

Rubens: How old an organization was that?

Linn: It was started some time in the mid-1980s, I believe. They worked in many different multicultural neighborhoods, and much to my surprise there was only one African American lady on the board, Catherine Sneed, who had developed the internationally known Horticulture Project at the San Francisco County Jail, with support from Sheriff Michael Hennessey.

Much to my dismay, on the quiet, a board member told me that grant foundations had told her that in order to have good relations with them, SLUG shouldn’t have too many people of color on the board, which absolutely flabbergasted me. Feeling isolated and unrepresented, Catherine left the board of SLUG shortly after I arrived.

Rubens: So how did you contribute to involving people of color in the greening movement?

Linn: When Mohammed Nuru, a landscape architect raised in Nigeria, applied for the executive director position at SLUG, I put my membership on the line, insisted that if they wanted me to stay, they had to hire him instead of another white person who had also applied. Since then, quite a few people of color joined the board.

Rubens: How effective was Mohammed Nuru?
Linn: He increased our annual budget from $350,000 to $6 million, creating training and employment opportunities for young people of color, many of whom were referred through the juvenile courts. Mohammed developed local economic enterprises, creating salad dressings and marmalades. He also established a demonstration farm in San Francisco that was equipped with a windmill and other ecological technologies. More recently Mayor Willie Brown hired him to become deputy director of public works. Mohammed considered the public works department to be racist because it was dominated by white people. So he played very rough and started hiring his own people. To secure their jobs, he pressured them to vote for one of the mayoral candidates.


Linn: Right. This got him in legal difficulty and led to SLUG’s closing for a while. There were also a lot of complaints that he misused some of the people [directing them] to clean up lots next to his own house.

Rubens: So I guess he overdid it.

Linn: It is amazing, though, how Mohammed succeeding in expanding the SLUG program. I guess to succeed in operating in a political arena you have to have the guts and the character structure to compete with people who are ruthless. This is unfortunate because once you get to the pinnacle you have walked over a lot of corpses.

Rubens: What was going on all this time at Urban Habitat?

Linn: Carl started to publish a highly effective magazine called *Race, Poverty, and the Environment*, which was distributed widely. Carl was also very successful in challenging foundations to incorporate social and environmental justice considerations in their funding strategies. Gradually, through many articles he had written and contacts he had made with leading people, Carl gained a national reputation as one of the leaders of the environmental justice movement. Carl spearheaded many programs, bringing together local and regional resources for socially equitable and sustainable regional development. Urban Habitat program developed strategies that would encourage investment in inner-city neighborhoods and counter the incentive that contributes to urban sprawl. He also promoted counter-gentrification strategies designed to stabilize multicultural and economically diverse urban neighborhoods.

Rubens: What was your role in Urban Habitat?

Linn: As a representative, Urban Habitat helped to create the People of Color Greening Network. It was very reassuring to finally have the experience of being a minority in a network dominated by people of color. For white people to be a minority represents a much truer ratio of the world population, because though people of color are constantly called minorities they really constitute the majority of the world population.

Rubens: What did the People of Color Greening network do?

Linn: As a group, we went to the different projects that each member was involved in and some of us also participated in community gardening conferences that were staged in the East Bay by Sibella Krauss. She asked me to involve people of color because the
San Francisco Foundation insisted that they would only help finance the conference if the organizers also involved people of color. Some of the participants planning the conference, including Mohammed Nuru and myself, later formed the East Bay Urban Gardeners (EBUG) organization. I also had a chance to involve the People of Color Greening Network in staging a community gardening workshop at Leonard Duhl’s Healthy Cities Conference in 1993. We formed a panel discussion with people of color involved in community gardening projects in various California cities.

Rubens: How long were you on the board of SLUG and EBUG?

Linn: I was at SLUG until ‘97, I think. I don’t quite remember when I resigned from EBUG’s board. Despite good intentions and endless meetings, EBUG only got involved in a few projects in Oakland and wasn’t able to sustain its efforts.

Rubens: How long were you with Urban Habitat?

Linn: I was there until 1993 when I started a whole new phase. Carl left Urban Habitat around 2000 or 2001 when he moved to New York and joined the Ford Foundation. He became very effective in developing funding strategies the world over, promoting social and environmental justice.

Rubens: What was this new phase?

Linn: In 1993 a surprise seventieth birthday party was launched for me, dedicating a dilapidated community garden in my name to acknowledge my lifelong service to community and peace. It was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it was a great honor to have a public place named after me. On the other hand, the garden was very disheveled, and I was unhappy with the way it looked. I knew I had to do something about it.

Rubens: What was the party like?

Linn: Much to my surprise, a good hundred friends had assembled, and a proclamation was handed to me by Mayor Loni Hancock and City Councilmember Linda Maio. Nicole composed songs that everyone sang while she played the keyboard. A lot of touching testimonials were expressed by my friends. In my response I also said that public spaces are usually named after people as memorials, which made me think of my own mortality. I said that I am sure all the love and good wishes would add years to my life. The party ended with a ceremonial planting of a Meyer lemon tree and a big picnic at nearby Cedar Rose Park.

Rubens: What was the name of the garden before?

Linn: It had no name. There was a sign that said “Community Garden, City of Berkeley.”

Rubens: Where was it located?

Linn: It was at the corner of Hopkins and Peralta Streets. It was opposite a house that Nicole’s late husband had lived in, so she knew there was a community garden that had no name. When another friend of ours, Michelle Steere, realized I was turning seventy, she came up with the idea, “Why don’t you find a piece of land or garden and get it named after
him?" Nicole, Michelle, Carl Anthony, and Michael Laurie kept it secret for half a year. They went to different commissions and neighbors and told them about my work. David Brower also wrote a letter in support of the naming. John Steere, Michelle’s husband, sold the idea to the commission, saying that if a dilapidated piece of land was named after me that I would fix it up. It was a time when the city was under public pressure to spend a million and a half-dollars from the PERS fund—Public Employment Retirement Service fund on park improvements. Different parks groups wrote proposals for the funding.

The opportunity to get funding initially energized Berkeley’s Partners for Parks, now a well-established nonprofit corporation in Berkeley. Each park submitted a proposal. The Karl Linn Community Garden was the only community garden that submitted a proposal. We wanted to add a commons to the garden to make it more accessible to the larger community. One park representative put an envelope under her city councilmember’s door saying that the community garden should not be funded because it’s not a park.

Rubens: You were working with Berkeley Partners for Parks?

Linn: I was a vice president in charge of community outreach. I also worked with a few members on establishing a mini-projects fund, suggesting that $50,000 should be allocated to small projects that neighbors can undertake for improving their parks. Small repairs were usually undertaken easily through out-of-pocket in upper and middle-class neighborhood parks, but in low-income areas, neither benches nor leaky faucets were repaired because people didn’t have the money. Public Works couldn’t deal with it because the scope was too small. In the following years and into the present, the city allocates new money for the mini-projects fund, which I have drawn on for many projects. It is an excellent public investment because it has generated significant self-help efforts.

Rubens: What did your community outreach consist of?

Linn: I made special contact with parks in people-of-color neighborhoods and was very concerned about homeless people. To prevent homeless people from hanging around in parks the City had begun to remove a lot of bushes for increased visibility. To make parks, safe from homeless people who might loiter, I suggested that rather than devegetating parks, we should look at parks as the last safety net for homeless people, the only place they can congregate in a peaceful environment. Rather than yanking shrubs out, the city should dispatch social service representatives to the parks to help the homeless with their various needs. Looking at parks in this way is another way of conceptual restructuring.

Rubens: Let’s go back to the Karl Linn Garden.

Linn: Fortunately, it wasn’t only me who felt unhappy with the looks of the garden. Linda Jewell, a professor of landscape architecture at UC Berkeley, who lived opposite the garden, was also upset. The two of us started to make a few sketches. After a short time Linda said she had to go back to teaching and asked me if she should offer a course for students, who would then be able to meet with neighbors to design the garden and
participate in building it. This was an opportunity students of environmental design rarely have.

We ended up with nine graduate students who worked with Linda and myself and neighbors, redesigning the garden. They used a workshop at the College of Environmental Design to build the handcrafted wood structure that framed the common area.

Rubens: Did the money come from the Partners for Parks?

Linn: No, the money came from the PERS fund. We got $10,000 for building materials. I was able to recruit AmeriCorps teams who worked along with students and neighbors in doing the construction. A nearby landscape contractor, Neil Collier, principal at Live Oak Landscape, had a business license and offered to purchase building material for us at wholesale prices. Neil was also very helpful in teaching the volunteers about construction.

Rubens: Had the garden been there a long time before it was named?

Linn: The garden was built by the city in the early eighties. The city had installed an irrigation system and a chain-link fence. It was part of the land that the city acquired through the acquisition of the Santa Fe Railroad right-of-way that goes through Berkeley.

Rubens: How long did it take to construct the commons and make the improvements at the garden?

Linn: In addition to the handcrafted trellis surrounding the commons that was built with recycled wood, we also built a caboose-like toolshed at the rear of the garden next to a small, run-down house. The students were guided by two master craftspeople, Scott Constable and Janice Sandeen. The commons was dedicated in the fall of ’95. We staged an elaborate event. Alice Waters of Chez Panisse contributed beautiful food, supplementing the harvest bounty that gardeners had produced.

Rubens: How did the Peralta and Northside gardens come about, where you took Katherine Cook and myself on a tour?

Linn: As we improved the Karl Linn Community Garden, a lot of people added their names to our waiting list. I saw across the street an empty lot, full of weeds and junk, and found out it belonged to BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit]. I started to challenge city government officials, especially council members, to see if they could get a lease to that lot. So Linda Maio, our council member, persevered and after about a year working on it with BART, got a lease to the land. This became the Peralta Community Garden and Northside Community Garden.

Rubens: How were the Peralta and Northside Gardens developed?

Linn: Linda [Maio] and I met with a few neighbors who came up with all kinds of suggestions. They wanted the community gardens to be more than just rows of plots. They wanted the gardens to have a real aesthetic appeal with works of art that would intermingle with the vegetation to enhance the enjoyment of the garden. I left New York
City at a time when a famous garden called the Garden of Eden had just been bulldozed to make room for housing. It was even written about in *National Geographic*. Its planting beds formed concentric circles. I envisioned that we could reincarnate the garden on the West Coast. Both Linda Jewell and her prodigy, landscape architect Meg Calkins, participated in the designs.

In addition to planting beds, we established a network of wheelchair-accessible pathways covered with a sand-like pavement of decomposed granite. Since the national statistics indicated that community gardeners are not only interested in growing food, but are also eager to socialize, we created several common spaces throughout the garden. The central commons of the Peralta Garden is a circular space surrounded by an undulating mosaic bench that looks like a snake, created by well-known sculptor Dmitry Grudsky who emigrated from the Soviet Union. Many other works of art have been created over the years, often with funding for building material coming from the mini-projects fund. In addition to planting beds and works of art, the gardens have become field stations to test and demonstrate eco-friendly technologies. The Peralta Garden features a bamboo arbor created through workshops conducted by architect Darrel DeBoer to demonstrate bamboo as a sustainable building material. The Peralta Community Garden also has a pond fed by a “Flowform” fountain that naturally purifies the water and is very beautifully shaped. The construction of the Peralta and Northside community gardens started in May 1997 with the help of two teams of AmeriCorps volunteers who helped with the construction of redwood frames for raised beds. The also helped make the pathways, frame the circular commons, and with the help of Neil Collier, installed the pipes, for the irrigation system. After they left, the gardeners who had staked their plots, worked tirelessly to finish the construction. The gardens also feature a collection of native California plantings. A section of the Peralta Garden is used to grow native California plants from seed to re-vegetate the adjacent Ohlone Greenway.

A big dedication took place on October 5, 1997. The mayor and members of the board of BART, other community leaders, and gardeners made comments. Adding a festive dimension to the celebration, Betsy Rose sang songs and dancer Carla DeSola choreographed a ceremonial spreading of mineral dust on the new plantings. Much to my dismay, the city proclaimed that day Karl Linn Day in Berkeley, an act that didn’t acknowledge the participation of so many people. To prevent such a recurrence, I actively participated in the preparation of future city declarations, spelling out in detail the names of the contributors.

**Rubens:** What about the Northside Community Garden?

**Linn:** The most ambitious self-help project, started in 1999, was the construction of a Cob toolshed in the Northside Community Garden. Architect John Fordice volunteered his weekends over a period of three years conducting workshops to build the shed. The building also has a living roof and a skylight. John named it “Troth,” derived from the word “betrothal,” while other people call it the “Tool Temple.” Cob is a technology that uses earth and straw, easily available building materials to build a strong structure. Other countries use this method with buildings often lasting centuries. We staged a large dedication ceremony for the toolshed with speakers and steel drum music. It was attended by about 300 people.
African American children from Oakland, enrolled in a summer art program sponsored by the East Bay Conservation Corps, created a mosaic sundial and several murals in the Northside Garden. In 1998, we created a huge event, a Showcase of Art and Eco-friendly Technologies, where local artists brought in seventy-five works of art for the show that was attended by 600 people over the weekend. The gardens have become a showcase for artists. BART helped to finance signage for the artwork made of hand-carved ceramic tile, elevating the aesthetic appeal of the garden to [that of] a garden gallery. Artists enjoy being able to show their work instead of storing them in their basements.

Rubens: Okay. Just to be clear, did you give up your position then at Urban Habitat?

Linn: Rather than working on policy as a member of various boards, I really wanted to build community open spaces as I had done in the early days of Neighborhood Renewal Corps, building neighborhood commons. I also realized that I might be more effective in communicating with people the urgent need to create accessible meeting places by building one. I gave up my position at SLUG, EBUG and Urban Habitat. Urban Habitat had moved to the Presidio, and later they moved to Oakland when Carl Anthony left.

Rubens: So you were saying that food comes out of these three community gardens. How much do they produce?

Linn: A few gardeners grow enough food for their families. For others their produce is a welcome supplement.

Rubens: Who harvests them?

Linn: Each person has their own plot that they harvest. During the fall when there are more tomatoes than they can consume, everyone gives the surplus to soup kitchens.

Rubens: How are the gardens organized?

Linn: Each garden has its own organization, its secretary, treasurer, and coordinator.

Rubens: Oh, really? I didn’t realize it was that elaborate.

Linn: Jointly with Berkeley’s Department of Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront we developed four pages of guidelines for the operation of community gardens in Berkeley. Some of the guidelines specify that pesticides can’t be used, that you can’t have high structures that would shade a neighbor’s plot, plot holders have to keep their gardens cultivated, they have to participate in work parties and go to meetings, and that the garden has to be kept open six hours a week so the public can visit. We have also recruited hosts to do this.

Rubens: How do you recruit?

Linn: We formed another organization called the Hopper Commons Association. “Hopper” is from the first three letters of Hopkins and Peralta. Hopper Commons Association is responsible for the common areas and informs gardeners of events that will take place. Hopper also recruits volunteer hosts. The more hosts we have, the more hours the
gardens can be open.
[Shortly before Karl died, Hopper Commons Association was transformed into Friends of the Westbrae Commons.]

Rubens: How do you handle it if more people want to have gardening space than is available?

Linn: We put them on a waiting list.

Rubens: Is there a certain tenure then?

Linn: Tenure is a big issue. A lot of commission members argue that plots should be evaluated and possibly reassigned to wait-listed people. I disagree because it takes seven years to make good soil, and people often spend a lot of money enriching their soil. National surveys also indicate that gardeners who have been there a long time stabilize the garden community. Rather than terminating their lease, the city should be delighted that a growing number of people are developing heightened consciousness and are eager to grow food close to home. The city should balance the acquisition of land and not only respond to requests for dog [runs] or ball parks.

Rubens: Are there any other issues you run into with city government?

Linn: Some city officials complain that gardens being fenced privatizes public property. I told them there are a lot of public spaces that have limited uses, like tennis courts and bowling greens. They might be open to everybody, but only a few people can use them. I also said it is a question of social equity. Why shouldn’t poorer people who have no access to protected land have the same security in growing food as middle-class people who can own houses and have fenced-in gardens? Historically, unwritten laws controlled the use of the commons, because people were dependent on the resources and their surrounding environment for their sustainability. Those who violated the unwritten laws were ostracized, a penalty worse than death. Over the centuries the commons were enclosed and privatized. Our community gardens are not being privatized but are under community control, which is a tiny step to reclaiming the commons. Now the city leaves us alone.

Rubens: One of the things I wanted to ask you is that you said in the early days of your commons movement, starting in Philadelphia, then as it spread, one of the problems was really their upkeep, the maintenance.

Linn: You’re absolutely right.

Rubens: It sounds like an administrative structure had not been established back then.

Linn: No. We in fact had established organizations such as the Neighborhood Renewal Corps that developed special contracts with neighborhood organizations to administer the construction and use of the commons. The difference between the early neighborhood commons and the community garden commons that have been very successful is that community gardens are already cared-for open spaces. It is not much of a stretch to take care of the common areas also.
It was basically my mistake with those early neighborhood commons because I came out of a landscape architectural practice and so I recruited a lot of landscape architects and architects in the designing and building. We all focused on creating the spatial structures first such as retaining walls, pavements, benches, and play structures and left the planting to the very end. The construction of these structures was exhausting for neighbors and since there were no plants to come and take care of every day, they didn’t bond enough with the commons. At the same time the recreation departments did not want to maintain the commons despite community requests, because they hadn’t initiated them.

Rubens: When you look back at it, I’d asked this earlier, was there just not that kind of consciousness of planting your own vegetables?

Linn: No, it was my fault. If I’d been smart enough then, I would have started immediately with creating space for community gardening.

Rubens: It also wasn’t in the public culture. When you think about it, the public culture had really been encouraged to buy frozen vegetables.

Linn: No, no! Community gardens have a long history going back to the victory gardens [during World War II]. In fact, going back to the late fifties Mrs. [Louise] Bush-Brown cultivated community gardens all over Philadelphia.

Rubens: Who was she?

Linn: Mrs. Bush-Brown wrote a book about her work. I had a lot of contact also with her. She beautified low-income neighborhoods involving residents in the construction of little flower boxes in front their windows, and putting soil in tires, which were planted with flowers. But she didn’t realize that in beautifying the neighborhoods she contributed to gentrification, because the absentee landlords increased the rents.

Rubens: I know you have other projects near the community gardens. Would you like to talk about those?

Linn: I helped to create Berkeley EcoHouse, the little house I talked about earlier next to the Karl Linn Community Garden. Neighbors and I were very concerned about the dilapidated building next to the Karl Linn Garden [when it came up for sale] and inquired of the owner how much he wanted for it. Neighbors were concerned about the lead paint and, being empty, that it could harbor illegal activities. We hoped to find some financial resources to buy the lot and expand our garden. In fact we assembled a few people, including Richard Register, Leonard Duhl, Sylvia McLaughlin, an important environmental leader; and a few others. Richard at that time saw the building as a potential Transfer Development Right example. He hoped that buildings next to gardens or creeks could eventually be eliminated by transferring their development rights, and increasing density in the city centers.

Rubens: This was a small residence?

Linn: Yes. The owner, whom I contacted, knowing that it was located on an oversize lot, wanted to sell it to a developer to build a large housing complex. Each time I finished a
community garden the price went up. I realized that we also had contributed to the
gentrification of the neighborhood. Though I have not had much contact with Urban
Habitat since I left, I had many discussions with Carl Anthony about gentrification.
Each time we built a garden the property prices of nearby buildings increased.

Rubens: What did Urban Habitat do about gentrification?

Linn: Being eager to conserve the multicultural composition and economic diversity of a
neighborhood, counter-gentrification strategies have to be pursued. Under Carl’s
guidance, Urban Habitat did a research project on such measures. Community gardens,
which enable neighbors to grow healthy food close to home, in fact contribute to
sustainability because it eases their expenses. But to stave off gentrification more
effectively, affordable housing and mass transit have to be pursued. This was very true
of the community that lives around the Karl Linn Community Garden. Many gardeners
live in low-income apartment housing across the street, without any outdoor space.
Community gardeners and artists have to realize that we are forerunners of
gentrification, because we can take an empty lot and make it flower, and all of a sudden
developers become interested. Or artists can paint a big mural and make a vacant lot
look wonderful. We have to assume the responsibility and become active in supporting
affordable housing, mass transit, and policy decisions that contribute to sustaining
diverse populations in neighborhoods.

Rubens: So how did you end up acquiring the house?

Linn: I was really concerned that we buy that house right away to prevent anyone else buying
it and putting a huge housing complex on it. So I contacted Linda Maio and we reached
out to twenty or so people in Berkeley who loaned us money to buy the house for
$190,000 plus $50,000 for repairs. They loaned the $240,000 to us for two years at 5
percent interest. The house was bought through a friendly real estate agent who found
an individual to buy it on a temporary basis until we could establish a nonprofit
corporation. All along I had thought of tearing the house down to expand the
community garden, but the people, especially the architects we recruited to look at the
building, suggested that the house should be restored and become an ecological
demonstration house. Knowing very little about solar technology, I felt very reluctant
when the others asked me to president of Berkeley EcoHouse. But, to keep the
momentum going, I accepted with trepidation.

In order to bring about the restoration, we recruited architects and contractors who
ultimately became members of the board. We fixed up the house to make it habitable
and rented it out to generate income for our interest payments. We used eco-friendly
materials and non-toxic building materials in restoring the house. We installed an on-
demand water heater, put natural linoleum on the bathroom floor, and we were able to
salvage some lumber from a house that was being torn down in Martinez. With $40,000
from the Petty Foundation we added twelve solar panels. The money was administered
by our first umbrella organization, the Northern California Land Trust, thanks to one of
our volunteers who was a co-founder of that organization.

Rubens: Who does “we” mean?
Linn: A group of interested people. All of the people involved in acquiring the house, restoring it and maintaining it, became members of a board. It took half a year for us to complete the paperwork to become a nonprofit in the state of California.

Rubens: Who rented it?

Linn: Different people. The first one was my stepdaughter and another woman who also had a young child. And then later on a young couple rented it. More recently two men were renting who helped develop our permaculture garden. We worked out an agreement with the tenants for Berkeley EcoHouse to have shared use of the living room as an office for twenty hours per week.

Rubens: Is that where the community garden association does its work, at EcoHouse?

Linn: We’re trying to use the EcoHouse as little as possible because people live there. But we’ve developed the garden into a permaculture garden and give a lot of workshops. A few years ago, Professor Randy Hester, who teaches landscape architecture at UC Berkeley, and David Arkin, who specializes in green architecture, engaged students of architecture and landscape architecture to build a solar garden shed. It’s a very interesting-looking building that houses the solar equipment. We also got money from the city for solar education, which enabled one of our people, Hal Aronson, to teach solar education at local public schools. Much to the delight of science teachers, who have started to incorporate solar engineering in their curriculum. Hal also trained high school students and engaged them in helping low-income dwellers make their homes more energy efficient.

Rubens: How did you administer EcoHouse?

Linn: It hasn’t been easy to administer EcoHouse fiscally or administratively. For the first three years I acted as a voluntary executive director, earning the reputation of being a nudge. It became too time consuming and I insisted that two of our board members become co-chairs, allowing me still to serve as president without having to worry about every detail. For a while we even got some money together to hire a part time executive director. After burnout of some of our members, especially the co-chairs who were burdened with the legal and fiscal issues, we decided to contact existing nonprofit organizations whose mission complemented that of EcoHouse, to take over administratively. We are negotiating with the Ecology Center for them to take over administration, at which point our board would become a committee of the Ecology Center.

Rubens: So what do you give as the birth date of EcoHouse?

Linn: We started in ‘99.

Rubens: How do you relate the purpose of EcoHouse to your interest in commons?

Linn: Even on the West Coast, it is difficult for community members to meet during inclement weather. Whenever gardeners have meetings, we meet in someone’s living room; that is often quite an imposition. We hope to add another floor to EcoHouse to create a comfortable gathering place, especially for the adjacent community gardeners.
and neighbors. In such a way EcoHouse can become a community center helping to consolidate the growth of community among gardeners and their neighborhood. In fact, I consider EcoHouse a unique demonstration in establishing a decentralized community center in a neighborhood. Usually community centers are housed in large buildings or in churches, but transforming a small residential building into a community center has to be respectful of the quality of a residential environment. To respect the peaceful atmosphere of residences next to the EcoHouse, we deliberately are making the main entrance from Peralta Street, [which is] a more commercial thoroughfare.

Rubens: How do you relate to your neighbors?

Linn: Since Leonard Duhl is also on the board of EcoHouse, he and I formed a subcommittee emphasizing how essential it is for us to develop a model neighborhood community. I envision Berkeley’s EcoHouse evolving spheres of influence as concentric circles. The inner circle is composed of the core group of people. We are learning to how to nurture cooperativeness, how to support each other, how resolve conflict and be straightforward in our communications with each other to prevent any gossip or behind-the-back communication. I guess drawing on my psychology background I usually get involved in resolving conflicts. The next larger circle would be our aspiration to elevate the quality of life in our surrounding neighborhood. We realized how important it is to build relationships with our neighbors. The third circle would involve community outreach beyond our immediate neighborhood.

Rubens: Tell me again, what is Leonard Duhl’s contribution?

Linn: He deepens the understanding of EcoHouse’s philosophy to become a model of the Healthy City Program he developed, bringing together not only people who are concerned with health, but others who are concerned with the environment, in fact with all aspects of living. He wants to transform the immediate neighborhood of EcoHouse into a model demonstration. Carl Anthony, who was a member of the board before he left for the Ford Foundation [in New York], emphasized another dimension of the EcoHouse vision. He said that the overall mission of EcoHouse should be community stability, to preserve the multicultural and economically diverse composition of the neighborhood.

Rubens: So you have done that under the sponsorship of EcoHouse?

Linn: We have just recruited another board member who is executive director of the Berkeley Boosters, who works with teenagers from multicultural communities in a mentor relationship with the police. Two of their groups of young people have already done some work in the two community gardens. Six-year-olds did some weeding in Peralta; seven- and eight-year-olds bagged up a lot of soil at the Northside Garden that we needed to store for repair of the Cob building.

Rubens: Did you want to tell me about some other projects?

Linn: Yes, there’s a fifth project in the cluster of mutually reinforcing community-based projects that have contributed to the heightening of the quality of life of the Westbrae neighborhood. In 1998 the Northern California Chapter of the ASLA [American Society of Landscape Architects] was eager to enter the three community gardens into a
centennial program. The society was about to celebrate its centennial in 1999, and one of their programs was to create 100 new open spaces or restore existing ones through the voluntary involvement of its members as a gift to the nation. They couldn’t enter the community gardens because the designs had already been done.

I looked at the Ohlone Greenway that runs parallel to the Peralta Community Garden along the BART tracks as a potential site. In passing, Linda Jewell suggested that maybe we could make the history of the neighborhood accessible to its citizens. In order to qualify for the centennial, I recruited landscape architects and architects to form an Ohlone Greenway Working Team. Lisa Caronna, a landscape architect who at that time was director of the Berkeley Department of Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront, assigned city landscape architect Brad Ricards to be the liaison to the project. We recruited other people and called the project Ohlone Greenway Natural and Cultural History Interpretive Exhibit.

We hoped to transform one section of the greenway that stretches between Peralta and Gilman Streets. We succeeded in developing schematic plans and submitted to the ASLA our designs, which became part of an exhibit at their 1999 annual meeting.

Rubens: Where was the exhibit?

Linn: In Boston. At the centennial. This was also an occasion when I became a fellow of the ASLA. Those who nominated me said it was a very belated honor.

Rubens: This is obviously an honor to become a fellow.

Linn: Yes.

Rubens: Did someone nominate you?

Linn: Yes. The Northern California Chapter. A letter of recommendation was written by John Roberts, a landscape architect in Berkeley whom I have known for many years. He was one of the twenty-three people I had invited to give a talk as part of our peace program at the 1988 IFLA congress in Boston. I also worked with him on the transformation of Crissy Field [in the Presidio in San Francisco] into a peace park that we explored for a few years after the 1986 ASLA meeting in San Francisco. I should have mentioned the Crissy Field park earlier when talking about places for peace making.

Rubens: What was the Ohlone Greenway originally part of?

Linn: It used to be the Santa Fe right-of-way, that’s where the train went.

Rubens: Who administers it?

Linn: The western half of the greenway belongs to BART and the eastern to the City of Berkeley. In fact, I got Linda Maio’s office, representing the city, and BART engineers together to install lighting, because many women were afraid to walk back from work at night. [Since the Greenway intersects the North Berkeley BART station and extends out from it, it is a convenient pathway for commuters.]
Rubens: What did you create?

Linn: Since 1998 the working team met every other week. To be thorough in preparing the text and images that were to be publicly displayed, we worked closely with anthropologist Holly Alonso from the Hacienda Peralta Association, and the Berkeley Historical Society, conducting oral history interviews with residents. Knowing that the exhibits would involve a lot of signage, I was fortunate to meet an architect who specializes in signage, Jack Appleyard. Through his expertise he succeeded to create effective and lasting signage for public display.

The first exhibit to go up was the Peralta Gateway Pier, which is an adobe-like structure with images and text about the Peralta period. A little bench extends from it that has inlaid tiles with Mexican symbolism, which kids did in an art program. The children were quite talented and showed the effects of having studied for several years with Jennifer Burke, the artist who coordinated their work.

Rubens: This must have cost a lot of money.

Linn: Indeed it did. BART had become very fond of the Peralta and Northside Community Gardens, in fact I was asked by the director of its real estate division, Desha Hill, to make the gardens available for picnics for her staff. I hoped they could contribute to funding the installations that would take place on their property. Desha also extended the city’s lease to the community gardens to include the Ohlone Greenway. I also seized on the opportunity when BART informed me that they were hosting a national meeting of organizations conducting different transportation systems. I urged them to help finance the completion of the installations so they would be finished [in time] for the convention. Much to my delight they gave us considerable funding for the art projects through their Art for BART program administered by Laura Timothy. Over the years I enjoyed my growing friendship with BART’s administrators, including Michael Healy who just retired and was their public relations officer for years. We even got money from BART’s chief engineer James Dunn for a new rebar fence for the Peralta Community Garden, replacing the chain link and barbed wire fence that had surrounded the site for decades. On parting, James Dunn said, “The rebar fence will complete the garden aesthetically”—a concern that one would rarely hear from a chief engineer.

Rubens: What were the other exhibits like?

Linn: The second exhibit is the Agricultural Exhibit, reflecting the agricultural period. We chose a location at the cul-de-sac of Northside Street as it connects with the Greenway. We thought the three existing ornamental pear trees would make a comfortable shaded sitting area.

Rubens: How did you represent the agricultural period?

Linn: One of our working team members, Ted Vorster, saw historical photographs of the area when there were just a few houses and cows were roaming in the streets. He suggested that cow sculptures could represent that period. Our team liked the idea and rallied around it, supporting Ted in his leadership role. We contacted Amy Blackstone, who had created the wonderful Sunflower Gate for the Peralta Community Garden, got some money from BART and another foundation to finance the creation of four steel cow
sculptures. Amy created four unique silhouettes of cows, each with a distinct personality. We were so impressed that we named them Elsie, Kali, Lakshmi, and Ferdinand. Ferdinand looks longingly at Elsie. In fact, when we built it, a little girl picked up a little tin can that we used for something, went to Elsie and started to milk her. [laughs] Since we had involved neighbors all along, showing them our designs and asking for their comments, we were delighted to see that one day they had decorated the cows hanging cowbells with ribbons around their necks. It was a reassuring act showing that the neighbors had taken the installations on as their own. In addition to the cows we also installed real tractor seats that swivel, supported by spider-like rebar legs created by sculptor David Friedheim.

Rubens: I know there is a big mural also.

Linn: You’re right. Closer to Gilman Street there is a seventy-two-foot long mural, six-foot high, that we call “From Elk Tracks to BART Tracks.” It shows the different transportation systems over the years from pre-Spanish settlement times to present. It’s very vibrant and beautiful. It has become a learning tool for children with parents and teachers using it to explain the history of the area. We got money from the Civic Arts Commission mini-projects fund, and a lot of money from BART which enabled artist Alan Leon to engage six other muralists to work on the project collaboratively. The mural ended up being painted on fire-resistant cement panels that were attached to BART’s retaining wall. It was a lengthy process to get permission to use the wall after trying many other locations and options such as the large wall of a privately owned business.

Rubens: It’s amazing that you got all that money together.

Linn: Since it was the last funding that Art for BART was able to make available because of their fiscal crisis, I decided to stage a large dedication event to show BART’s higher-ups how effective their program was as a public relations community outreach effort. For the dedication, Mayor Shirley Dean cut the ribbon. A county commissioner, a BART board member, Linda Maio and many others were there.

Rubens: Are there any other exhibits on the Greenway?

Linn: Since our interpretive exhibit also emphasized the natural history of the area I was delighted that Carole Bennett Simmons, who had inspired the native California plantings in the Peralta Community Garden, developed an organization called CHIA. It stands for California Habitat Indigenous Activists, and chia is [also] the name of a native California plant. The group decided to re-vegetate the Ohlone Greenway with seedlings grown from seeds harvested in the Peralta Community Garden. Carole also recruited David Drummond, a linguist who speaks six Native American languages and has a profound knowledge of how Native Americans used the plants for food and medicine. David conducts monthly workshops and both he and Carole generate a growing membership that gets together with much enthusiasm. I am delighted that new initiatives have been generated without any participation on my part. Though I would have liked to learn much about native California plants, I just couldn’t find the time to delve into it.

Rubens: Are there any other exhibits that you have planned?
Linn: Yes. The Ohlone People’s Exhibit. When I first began to explore the creation of the interpretive exhibit I contacted Malcolm Margolin, author of the book *The Ohlone Way*. He had spent decades working closely with Native Americans. In taking him to the site, he initially said he was too busy to get involved in any other projects, but after we talked for a while, he said he couldn’t refuse to get involved. I thought at first that we should start with an Ohlone People’s exhibit, but realized that since it was a neighborhood-based project we should start with something that related to the immediate neighbors who had been involved in the various projects. Where the Greenway picks up on Peralta Street is really the point where the gardens and EcoHouse converge.

Rubens: So how did you go creating the Ohlone People’s exhibit?

Linn: I set up a meeting with the Ohlone Greenway working team members and Malcolm Margolin, who suggested that we hire Native American art consultant Janeen Antoine to help us navigate through the complexity of different Native American groups that would need to be contacted in an appropriate way. Fortunately, BART was willing to provide some seed money to hire Janeen.

Our team members met twice a month to develop the design. We visited Coyote Hills Regional Park [in Fremont], with its reconstructed Ohlone village, and Bev Ortiz, the naturalist there, who put us in touch with Ohlone people.

Fran Segal, who is an artist and eco-psychologist and created the multicolored slate mural at the Peralta Community Garden, came up with various sketches and ended up proposing a sculptural bench. The sculpture has a tall back featuring Native American symbols from an Ohlone creation story and traditional basketry designs. It also has abalone shells to represent the shell mounds that used to be found in this area.

The BEA-FEW Foundation that has since changed its name to the Open Circle Foundation and had given us funding for the Agricultural Exhibit, financed the bench. We were able to get the money from Berkeley’s mini-projects fund for the landscape planting of native California plants, including a large live oak tree and two boulders, symbolizing grinding stones.

Rubens: How did Native Americans participate?

Linn: To be sure that the exhibit would be the result of a collaborative effort between Native American artists and others, Janeen introduced us to L. Frank Manriquez, a highly acclaimed Native American artist, who is also deeply involved in Native American linguistic studies. L. Frank submitted a sketch of a hairpin similar to those worn by men and women in their headdresses for ceremonial dances.

At a party I met Richard Seals, a metal quality control engineer who became intrigued with interpreting L. Frank’s design and creating a sculpture of a hairpin. Richard introduced me to his friend Daryl Rush, a master craftsman who made his well-equipped workshop available for the creation of the hairpin. Berkeley’s deputy director of Public Works, Patrick Keilch, gave us a fourteen-foot-tall lamppost to function as the stem for the feathers, according to L. Frank’s specifications. Much to my amazement, to push the limits of creativity, Richard insisted the post be turned upside down with the
narrow part at the bottom, representing hairpins more accurately. To anchor the narrow part required engineering calculations which one of the gardeners, Suresh Acharya, who is an engineer, worked out. To push the creative challenge even further, Richard wanted the hairpin to be at a slant to look more like the angle of the traditional hairpins as worn in the hair. Once installed, I want to be sure that the signage will explain that the tilt of the post is deliberate and reassure people that it is not falling over.

Rubens: It's amazing that all these people are doing this work.

Linn: Initially Richard wanted $16,500 for the work, but once he understood that everyone was volunteering their efforts he asked only for $1,500 for the cost of material. Visiting the workshop, I witnessed him spending several hours creating two large straight feathers and several other arching feathers all out of stainless steel strips. To test his feathers Richard brought the hairpin to the site in a truck, driving proudly down the road with his creation, as the rays of the sun illuminated the stainless steel plume with a glistening sparkle.

Rubens: I guess that just about covers the work on the Greenway?

Linn: Yes. Except when we first developed sketches that we submitted to the ASLA Centennial celebration they included drawings of a *placita* to be created at the northern section of the Greenway bordering Gilman Street. One of our members architect Andrea Montalbano made attractive drawings of the placita. Next door to that proposed site, at the corner of the greenway and Gilman Street, is a building owned by Carl Lasagna, who was interested in turning the corner store of the building into a café. He was responding to a suggestion by someone who wanted to rent the place and was inspired by the community gardens that had energized the neighborhood. Right now Carl Lasagna is working with an architectural firm to create the coffee shop that opens out onto an elevated terrace next to the Greenway. Their plans have already been submitted for review to different commissions. The nearby New Leaf Gallery, an outdoor art gallery that had given money for the fountain in the Peralta Community Garden will display some of their artwork under the BART structure. I was delighted that the installation of the interpretive exhibit has reached further into the community to inspire local businesses to animate that section of the Greenway.

Rubens: That's an amazing achievement to have developed all that in ten years. And you continue to give lectures and speak about your work.

Linn: Yes. I’m going to do it next Tuesday at UC Berkeley. Leonard wants me to speak to his class on sustainability.

Rubens: And you were up in Davis a couple of weeks ago.

Linn: Right. I spoke with landscape architect students at UC Davis.

Rubens: What are you going to do now?
Linn: I have begun a process of letting go, creating a Cluster Council, an umbrella organization for the seven projects. It is composed of representatives from the Ohlone Working Team, Berkeley EcoHouse, the three community gardens, Hopper Commons Association, and CHIA. I prepared for them a detailed contact list of all the resource people I work with. I want to be sure that people can take care of things if they break or have emergencies or if they need to get things done with the city or BART. At present all these contacts have been in my address books and not really well known to everyone involved.

Rubens: So the cluster brings together all these projects?

Linn: Yes. They will each inform each other about what’s going on and contribute to a newsletter we have started to work on. Right now the only news of our projects is mentioned in Berkeley’s Community Gardening Collaborative (BCGC) newsletter.

Rubens: How is BCGC related to it?

Linn: It’s the umbrella organization for Berkeley’s community gardens. It is important for gardeners to know that they get fiscal support from the city for a city-wide community garden coordinator and that they have to be able to effectively compete with other budget demands coming from constituencies wanting to develop ball fields, for example. BCGC is responsible for developing a strong grassroots support so when necessary many people can attend city council meetings. Right now each year we have to spend a lot of time developing a proposal to get the city to keep funding our city-wide community garden coordinator so we are trying to get the position funded as a line item in the budget, just like Oakland does. Oakland gives $50,000 a year for a coordinator and operations.

Rubens: I’m wondering if there are statewide, or regional community gardening associations?

Linn: Yes, there’s the national American Community Gardening Association (ACGA). I gave a keynote address at their annual meeting in Salt Lake City in 2001, reminding people that we are not only growing plants but also growing community. I am amazed at the growing sophistication the ACGA has developed over the years. They have published books that guide local community garden associations in developing a growing sense of community among their members.

Rubens: Do you have anything to do with the formation of the American Community Garden Association?

Linn: Yes. I’m a member. I gave a talk at the first meeting of the association in New York City in 1979. They consider me a grandfather of the movement.

The ACGA is sponsoring my film right now.

Rubens: Tell me about the film.

Linn: The producer Rick Bacigalupi spent seven years filming and editing the design and construction of the Peralta Community Garden. It’s called A Lot in Common and has received high acclaim and [was] even [awarded] first place in different film festivals. It
Rubens: What is the most demanding challenge you have faced in your work?

Linn: I realized that focusing on the construction of neighborhood commons that architects and landscape architects are accustomed to did not consolidate enough sense of community among participants. Often the work was very exhausting. It is so important to “awaken the commons,” meaning to connect with the latent yearning for community that all of us share that doesn’t just involve building or restoration of the physical area. We should have spent much more time in many instances on nurturing human interactions and personal contact.

These insights are consistent with the research findings of Dr. Felton Earls, a professor of human behavior and development at Harvard School of Public Health, whom I mentioned earlier [in the fifth interview]. He has conducted a very well financed research project, so far of $51 million. Let me read to you from his article.

The point of intervention is not to clean up neighborhoods but to work on its collective efficacy. The cleanup should be based on community action, not on a work crew coming from the outside. Indeed, cities that sow community gardens may reap a harvest of not only kale and tomatoes but safer neighborhood and healthier children.

Rubens: What is this article?


Rubens: Let me play the devil’s advocate here though. All of this growing of community sounds like such an intense effort that requires a huge amount of labor, of attention, and of love.

Linn: You’re right. It takes a lot of caring. Since we all volunteer, nobody twists your arm. If people get tired and want to cut back on their work we have to be understanding and support them. It’s important for people to know their own limits. I always urge people not to overstretch themselves. Having grown up in a society that encourages competitiveness, growing community is a very gradual process of growing participation, of sharing responsibility, and enjoying the benefits of being a member of a community. Voluntary participation in community gardens makes them a laboratory in practicing cooperation because if you step on somebody else’s toe you have to work that out, which is not true in any employment situation. People swallow a lot of indignation because they need to survive, because they need their paycheck. In order to volunteer, people need to be motivated, they need to feel cared for, they need to be acknowledged, they need to have open communication with each other. This is how you develop community.

Rubens: I get your point.

Linn: We can also look at community gardens as significant social experiments that bring together the advantages of capitalism and communism. Capitalism emphasizes personal initiative. In its extreme, unfortunately, it degenerates into unrestrained devouring free
enterprise. Communism squelches personal initiative to the extent that it degenerates into a slave labor camp, as in the case of the Soviet Union. In its ideal form communism encourages communal efforts. In a community garden, gardeners get great satisfaction out of cultivating their own plot, satisfying their individual initiatives, while, at the same time, they engage in cooperative communal actions.

Rubens: What has been most rewarding to you in your work?

Linn: Witnessing people’s voluntary participation and commitment in working together to create the various projects gives me glimpses of hope for the survival of the human race. Despite all the indignities that we have all suffered and the defensive layers we have accumulated, under supportive conditions people are able to connect with their loving and giving core. Besides securing a livelihood, we are all so eager to contribute to the common good. An incredible outpouring of care, of concern, of love, and creativity has flowed as we work together cooperatively. Let me quote a statement I had made years ago that really sums it up.

Being in witness to the growth of community as people work together in a common effort has been a ray of hope to me, a glimpse of human and social potential in a world besieged by violence and wars.

[End of Interview]