**ELEANOR CHIN**

**BEGINNING OF VIDEOTAPE 1**

I think going to work at the museum was one of the seminal moments in my life. And like everything, it just sort of happened almost as if by accident. But there’s no such thing as by accident, I believe anymore. I was meant to be there and I feel very fortunate that I was meant to be there. You know, it’s funny how things happen because of relationships in life. And I ended up at the museum because of a relationship that I had with Suzanne LeBlanc. So she and I had been friends since college. She worked at the museum. And I had been working at a hospital and I’d been saying, “Oh, you know, I’ve been here for a long time. I feel like I need a change.” And I’d been saying that for months. And finally one day she said, “I think you should come to the museum and do an internship”. So I did. I quite my full-time job, went to work as an intern for three months. And lo and behold, Suzanne’s wisdom of timing showed itself. Because at the end of my three-month internship, a job opened up. And it just happened to be the perfect job for me. Because it was floor manager for the Visitors' Center. And I didn’t have a college degree. I didn’t have a content specialty. I couldn’t have been a developer. But I was the perfect person to be the floor manager at the time because it just fit my skills so well. And I just feel blessed that I was able to work so closely with Elaine and Janet and Suzanne and Natalie. They were a very important part of my growth and development.

I think business coaching is often about helping people navigate change. And it’s about helping people tap into their strengths and their own capacities.

MIKE: ...had to teach me to do all the work in between the sessions we had. So I did all the homework and [inaudible] did the research. And yet when they had to teach me to do the analysis and –

That’s coaching. Before it was popular or called that.

MIKE: I guess. Although I had a very good coach in high school for swimming and most of that stuff for him [inaudible].

[STARTING FROM THE BEGINNING – HAD TO MOVE BECAUSE OF NOISE FROM WIND]

So how I ended up at the museum is an interesting story because it, like so much of my life at the museum, it stemmed from relationships. I had been friends with Suzanne LeBlanc, who was the manager at the museum at the time for, I don’t know, ten years at that point. And we had been in college together and I had had a kind of rocky relationship with formal learning. So I had left college once, at that point, and I was coming back to go to college again. But I wasn’t quite ready. So I was still working. And Suzanne said to me, “Well, how is your job going?” And I was really getting tired of my job at the hospital. I had learned everything that I could learn. I was working as a medical secretary. And I loved it. I actually loved it because I learned a lot about medicine. But I had been there for seven years so it was time for me to move on. And Suzanne knew that, and she said, “Well, I think it might be time for you to come to work at the museum”. And I said, “Well, what would I do there?” And she said, “Well, you could be an intern”. And I thought, okay, it’s a step into the abyss. I don’t know what this internship is about, but I like Suzanne and she wouldn’t steer me wrong. And so I went and I worked for three months as an intern working with people on the floor, working with the public. And I loved it. I totally loved it. And then at the end of three months – of course it paid nothing. So one might question my logic. But I’ve never let that be a hindrance to me, what jobs pay. So Suzanne turned out to be really prophetic in watching out for me, because at the end of the three months, lo and behold, a job opened up at the museum and it turned out to be the perfect job for me. It was as floor manager for the whole Visitors' Center. And because I had just come from my hospital job as a coordinator, I think that helped me to get the job. And all along the way in my museum career, my **administrative skills** really played a big role. Because I wasn’t an educator, I didn’t have a subject matter specialty – at least I didn’t think I did at the time. And it turned out that I did, when I looked back on it, because my specialty was administrative. And so I was able to do a lot of things because I was one of the few sort of administrator-only people. So I took on a lot of different projects. I was able to grow a lot. And it was the most seminal job experience I’ve ever had. Which I ended up there for 22 years. So apparently I was getting a lot out of it.

And I think in terms of **relationships**, that they came to play again for me in the team that I ended up working with as a floor manager. I felt so blessed to be working in the same office as Elaine Gurian and Janet Kamien and Suzanne LeBlanc, of course, my dear friend, and Natalie [Valdez]. I felt like we were the team to beat. We just were very personally connected, as well as professionally in sync. And I think that that was a hallmark of what made the museum different from other places that I’ve worked is that there was a whole-cloth quality to it, that you didn’t have to leave your personal self outside and just bring your professional self to work. It was all okay. And that sense of authenticity, I think, really came from the leadership of you, Mike, and Elaine. There was an incredible permission to be yourself and to be all that you could be. So that was my first experience in working in a tight-knit team. And I drew a lot of lessons from that which I took to all of my other jobs, because I continued to work in management and in leadership and all of the lessons that I learned kept showing up for me. There was an incredible quality about the relationships that not only allowed you to be yourself, but you felt an incredible sense of respect given to you and therefore you gave it. So there was a lot of mutual respect. I didn’t feel at all minimized or marginalized because I wasn’t an educator. And I didn’t even have a college degree at that point. I felt like what I had to offer was valuable.

And I think the other amazing thing in terms of relationships is that there was an incredible **fluidity of roles** there, that even though you were the manager of the Visitors' Center, if you felt like you wanted to develop a little exhibit case you could come up with the idea and ask about it. And there was incredible **permission to take risk** and to fail. Which goes hand in hand with taking risk. The permission to fail, I think, was incredibly liberating and something that I tried to replicate in other jobs. But I didn’t always find it. It was a rare moment.

In terms of relationships, I really think that there was an incredible attention to nurturing the rituals that bonded people together. Like, I remember Elaine’s rose ceremony. Which, like of like when your parents drag out your baby pictures, people always moaned and groaned, “Okay, it’s the rose ceremony time”. But it’s also the thing that if it doesn’t happen, people say “Wait! What about the rose ceremony?” And the rose ceremony was merely Elaine’s way of naming a ritual of acknowledging everybody who worked on an exhibit or who participated in a program. And we would have at the opening of this exhibit or program there would always be the speeches. And that was Elaine’s version of her speech is that she would name everybody who worked on the project, she would give them a special acknowledgement of their particular contribution, and then she would hand them a rose. And there would always be a lot of cheers and big hugs and kisses for each person. So it was long and drawn out and wacky and funny and entertaining. And it was a real landmark for me of how you acknowledge people. And how important rituals are. It wasn’t just acknowledgement, it was that, oh, everybody knew what the rose ceremony was just because it had a name. And also she used to do something called The Best Camper in the Bunk. Do you remember that? When we would reopen again after September of being closed, there was a wonderful ritual of a celebration of being open again, and everything we had done to fix up the museum. And so the Best Camper in the Bunk Award was just, you know, it was a laugh because it sort of harkened back to your days at camp, and it was silly and wonderful. So those rituals were important, I think, in terms of building relationships.

And I think the **permission to fail,** I remember being asked to take on things that I thought were big for me, you know, like starting an income-producing program. Like one of the first income-producing programs at the museum, which was overnights. And Elaine charging me with that and my saying, “You know, I’m not sure I know how to do this”. And she’d say, “Oh, you do, you do”. She never gave me any information about how, she just said I did, I did, and showed me that she believed in me. And so I went off and I would figure it out and I would come back to her with questions. And I would say, “You know, is this how it’s done? I’m doing this. Do you think this is right?” And she’d say, “See, I told you you knew how to do it”. So it was this incredible sense of unconditional acceptance and permission to make mistakes. And she knew that we would recover from those mistakes and that we would recover ourselves from those mistakes. So that was incredibly liberating for a young professional like me and I think I grew very fast in that really fertile ground.

I also am struck, too, when I think back on the museum on what a positive learning environment it was. And it strikes me now as I’m about to study positive psychology. And part of positive psychology is about positive institutions. And it makes me think, again, of the museum as a place that was incredibly – not just positive in the sense of happy-go-lucky, it wasn’t all peaches and roses, a really bad mixing of metaphors. But it wasn’t just rosy and perfect all the time. What it was, was building on people’s strengths. Elaine and you must have seen that I had the capacity to be a good administrator. And so that it what I was allowed to do. And I saw other people do that, and I then learned how to empower people myself to be that way. So building on people’s strengths and accepting failure, moving on, learning from it, those are all, to me, a mark of positive institutions. And I’ve gained a lot of powerful learning from that that I’ve taken into my life as well as my work. **[pp 3-5 – 5:25 min, and continued on pp 9-10]**

You know, I probably supervised over 100 people in my career at the museum. I can’t even count them all. [PHONE RINGS]

So I probably supervised over 100 people in my career at the museum. And it’s one of the things I’m most proud of that I took the lessons that I gleaned from Elaine and Janet and you and Suzanne and I applied them to the people that I supervised. And I feel like it was a whole sort of learning loop the whole time, that I was learning stuff from them and I was helping them to learn. And it’s sort of the reason why I’m doing what I do today professionally, which is that I’m a life and business coach. Because I always took the position that it wasn’t so much about supervision. It was about figuring out what it was that this person needed to learn that they hadn’t learned, and then figuring out what was their best way of learning it. And that’s how I saw my job as a supervisor and manager. And I just loved that part of my job so much that when it came time for me to figure out what I wanted to do next most recently, I realized that of all of the things I’ve ever done, supervising people was the thing that felt most natural to me. And I love the give and take to the learning part. I’ll give you an example of something that I learned from somebody that I supervised once was Dennis Kane. Do you remember Dennis Kane? He was a wonderful floor manager. Very casual about his approach and just fun-loving, well-liked. And very competent. And I remember, you know, part of managing the people on the floor was getting them back in time from lunch. Because we were on this tight schedule and if you didn’t come back then the rotation was all mixed up and someone else couldn’t go to lunch. And I watched one day the way Dennis handled that. He was just so natural. Somebody came back late from lunch, he just breezed by them and said, “Oh, you’re just about five minutes late, just watch it next time. Hope you had a great lunch”, and just kept on going. And it was very – I realized, oh my god, it was full of non-judgment, it was totally just factual, and expressed the need rather than any judgment. And I learned that lesson so deeply from him. Because I used to agonize over, oh, how should I say this to this person so that they won’t be offended, or that I’m not sounding like I’m angry at them, but I really am. You know? But from Dennis I got really a whole perspective of it isn’t about the person, it’s just about the need.

Dennis is one of the neatest people I know. We’re still friends. Dennis has gone on to be a kindergarten teachers for many years in Hollis, New Hampshire. And the stories about him, I know he must have gotten some of this from the Children's Museum because he was also an intern there, as was his wife Janet. And they both went on to be teachers. And I’ve heard stories that Dennis as a kindergarten teacher that he would have all the kids line up and he would take off their shoes and they would step into a bucket of paint and then step on paper after they came out of the paint. And then at the other end he had a bucket of water. So that’s the kind of kindergarten teacher that Dennis became from working at the Children's Museum. Those kids were incredibly lucky to have him. And they still are. He’s still doing it.

I think working with Janet Kamien, Elaine, Natalie and Suzanne was mostly about having fun. It sounds like we didn’t do any work, but we did a lot of work. But it was also about having fun. We laughed. That’s the thing I remember is we laughed, we kidded each other. We took our work seriously but we didn’t take each other seriously. We didn’t take ourselves seriously, or too seriously. And it was part of the whole cloth of working and being at the museum was that it was fun because you enjoyed what you were doing, you enjoyed the people. And it was deeply engrained in the value system, I realize many years after. At the time it just was a blast to be there. And as I went on to study management in later years I realized that that was all intentional. It was woven into the fabric of the value system of the museum. And working at the museum, I realize now as a life coach, was just as much about being as it was about doing. It was as much about who you were as a person, how you treated other people, what you valued, as it was about what you did. And I think that that’s the quality that I try to bring to all of my work these days. That you can’t really divorce the person, the whole person, from the job that the person does. And Janet was incredibly smart. She could smoke a cigarette and take notes and tell jokes and sing songs all at the same time. So there were always wonderful role models to look up to. Natalie [Valdez] was one of the most amazing people I have ever known. She had this incredible capacity to empathize with people and be kind and be careful. But she also had a pistol of a temper. And she would come into the office and just throw something on a desk and practically, you know, she wouldn’t swear but it was her version of swearing, like “Gosh darn it!” And it was full of emotion. And I think that was what was wonderful about working here was that emotions weren’t a dirty thing. They were just part of everyday life and accepted. So I learned from Natalie that you could be kind of very contradictory. You could bring the very contradictory sides of yourself to a job. And she was just so competent. People really adored her and appreciated the work that she did. And she really was the perfect person to do what she was doing. Because she was the head of the intern program. And she was – to have all these young people, I realize now as an older manager, to have all these young people come through there – we hired 20 people every three months, all around the ages of 18 to 27. That’s a pretty seminal time in a person’s life. And to have them exposed to the kind of nurturing supervision that Natalie would give them, to have them exposed to the kind of intelligence and creative thought that Elaine and Janet represented, and to have them exposed to the passion of social justice issues like that Suzanne brought to the team was just an incredible education for them. And I think it showed, because many of them went away and came back. And I still see many of them today. And I think in terms of my own supervision, I’m pretty proud of the fact that every administrative assistant that I ever had there I am still in touch with, about four of them. And they have become a part of my life. One of them lived in my house for eight years, Lisa Sankowski. Another one now lives in New York with her child and my daughter babysits for her. Another one now lives in California and I talk to her and I’m helping her start a children’s museum in her community. So I’m incredibly honored to have known young people like that at critical times and have played a role in their growth and development. And I think it really speaks to the kind of environment that the museum was that there was this fluidity of roles that you could be not only a manager and a developer but you could be a friend and a supervisor at the same time. And I know that today in business that’s a big no-no. And I’ve encountered that myself where as a supervisor if you have lunch with somebody on your team and don’t have lunch with someone else, that’s not cool because you’re kind of showing favoritism. But at the museum it was all okay because there was the sense that – let me think what was it about. It wasn’t about a limited resource that people had to fight for that you had to fight for your boss’ attention or anything. There was a sense of abundance. There was enough here for everyone. An so there wasn’t a lot of tension. I remember being friends with a floor manager by the name of Paul [Burt]. He was a fantastic floor manager and he lived right around the corner from me and we hung out together. I was friends with Suzanne. I was friends with Janet. We were invited to Elaine’s house for all of her significant gatherings. There was just this sort of really fluid sense of personal and professional which I have not found that easily in other places. And I think it was part of the magic of the museum that it opened up all of our creativity and our thinking that there was this comfort level, this positivity, this acceptance. And it made the place just alive with ideas and energy and emotion. It was just a very special place.

[AUDIOTAPE REPEATS ITSELF]

Natalie was always, to most people it was Natalie and Ted, the names sort of strung together. And I knew Natalie and so I knew Natalie and Ted as separate people. But most people knew them as Natalie and Ted. And that’s because as a couple they were like the museum family. They lived on the museum grounds. Ted was the caretaker for the building and he and Natalie were given a house on the grounds of the museum. Well, you know, that wasn’t such a perk because it meant that every time the alarm went off in the middle of the night Ted had to take care of it. And Ted had to shovel all the snow. And when Ted couldn’t do it, Natalie did it. So it was like they were almost like a mother and father of the museum. **[continued from p 5]** Ted was not your usual maintenance person by any stretch of the imagination. He always gave you, along with what you needed, whether it was a broom or a hand with a lock, he always gave you a piece of advice. So the learning never stopped there. And Ted’s way of giving advice was also charming, because he would always give the advice with a story. So he’d always tell you a story and then give you the advice and then fix the thing that you wanted him to fix. But you knew it was all in a very loving way. Even when he was yelling at you. And Ted could yell at you at time. It was his way of teaching you. And Natalie, he and Natalie were very careful, I think they learned to be careful over the years about the separation of their work life and their private life because it could bleed so easily. The boundaries were very fluid there at the museum, and I think you were smart if you were aware of that and protected them. So everybody respected that aspect of Ted and Natalie’s life. And Ted and Natalie made it easy to respect because they weren’t harsh about it. They were just very matter of fact. “No, that’s our house. No, that’s not the museum, that’s our house over there.” I don’t think I ever went into their house in all the years that I knew them. As close as I was to Natalie, I never went into their house. And again, I stayed in touch with them over the years. And after Natalie died I stayed in touch with Ted for a number of years. And he lives nearby.

MIKE: What about their kids?

You know, Ted and Natalie had two sons. And I was connected to one of those sons in an odd way, which is that a woman who I graduated with from Girls’ Latin ended up marrying Brian, Natalie and Ted’s son. And I think the wonderful thing about Natalie and Ted’s sons is that they grew up in the museum as museum brats, so to speak, but they weren’t bratty at all. And they then had their children who they brought to the museum. I think Brian who two young kids and Natalie was so proud of them. So I’d love to know where those grown kids are these days.

MIKE: We’ve got to get them back, Ted and the kids, and talk with them. You mentioned in a very glancing way the business, for example, Suzanne’s commitment to social justice and that being part of the role of the museum and everything else. What about those issues of values that went beyond let’s say the community that you were creating in the lives within the museums but the values that the museum was committing itself more broadly. Are there examples of that?

I think one of the important things about the museum that I learned after the fact, I didn’t have a name for it back then, but when I took management courses I realized that the museum epitomized two key concepts that became really popular in management. One of them was transformational leadership and the other one is being **a learning organization.** I think the museum so epitomized what Peter Senge meant by being a learning organization. And by that I mean that it’s an organization that really thinks of itself as part of a much bigger context, that it’s grounded in social values, moral values. And to that end we always felt like we were part of something much bigger than the museum. We were always a part of the community that we are in and leading the neighborhood and the larger City of Boston as well as the state and the world, that we were, as workers there, were constantly aware of there being a much bigger picture outside of ourselves. **[pp 9-10 - 2:00 min]** And the neighborhood stuff was really cool in that it showed up naturally on our doorstep and we embraced it. And it showed up in the form of **neighborhood kids**. I feel incredibly blessed to have worked at the museum at a time when it was located in a neighborhood, the same neighborhood that I live in now. And by neighborhood I mean it was a neighborhood of families that lived in houses around the museum. And that was a mixed blessing because the kids would show up on our doorstep. And we figured out after a while that kids who showed up there regularly showed up for a reason. There was something that they wanted or needed or felt like the museum was giving them. And that sort of was brought home to me by my friend Suzanne LeBlanc, my dear friend, who is the godmother of my child. Because she always gravitated towards troubled adolescents. And so I decided that when I had a child that I was going to make Suzanne my godmother so that when my daughter became an adolescent she could go live with Suzanne. But getting back to the museum, Suzanne’s appreciation for these kids that would show up on our doorstep really influenced me. As the floor manager I might have more readily overlooked their good qualities or their needs because they really caused a lot of ~~a~~ havoc. They would steal stuff and they would break things and they would just be hanging out in places doing things that you didn’t want them to do. But I came to appreciate them as people, as fully realized people, not these kids who just showed up and caused havoc. We got to know their lives. We got to know their families, where they lived. When these kids would stick around and no[t] go home, sometimes we’d walk them home because we knew they lived around the corner. And it was just a safe haven for those kids to be. And I think it was a safe haven for us as workers there because it felt more like a whole family. There were these kids who were part of the museum family. We were there to serve kids. But these were the real kids that showed up as a part of our family. So that was incredibly cool thing and just a gift. I remember seeing some of these kids grow up into amazing people. And ironically, when we moved to Museum Wharf, we thought, oh, part of the trauma of moving to Museum Wharf was, oh, now we’ve lost the neighborhood. There aren’t any families that live around Museum Wharf, so we’ll never have this cool cadre of kids hanging out here. Well, they showed up anyway. They learned how to take the T. And they didn’t just show up from Jamaica Plain. They showed up from West Roxbury, Roxbury, Cambridge. They figured out how to find their way to us. And I think that’s such a testament to the kind of place it was. And Suzanne was very instrumental in making a home for those kids there at the museum. She really institutionalized the whole concept of making these kids part of the family. And Elaine, too, creating the Junior Volunteer cadre, and creating the Kids at Risk program. All of those were so much a fabric of our lives and our work. We all enveloped those kids like they were part of our responsibility. They weren’t just Suzanne’s kids. They stole from me and they stole from her and they also came home with me and came home with her. And so for the good and the bad we all became a family together.

There’s one kid, in particular, who seemed very needy because he was at the museum a lot. And he followed us from, he was one of the kids that followed us from Jamaica Plain to Museum Wharf. And he just was around so much we just made him work, right? And he was around for so many years that he kind of grew up there. And we saw him go through some really rough and crazy times. He used to take – he was very fond of keys, and I was the one that carried the most keys. So I was a target for, if my keys were missing I knew who had them. Tony had them. And Tony was also one of the people who we got involved – actually, I should say, I got involved through Suzanne in Tony’s life. And it turned out he was a little bit of a kleptomaniac because he once stole an MBTA bus. And he didn’t have a license but somehow he had learned how to drive. So he got in this bus that was idling and not staffed and he just started driving it. And the funny thing was that he not only drove it, but he picked up passengers. He drove the route. And we laugh about it to this day, but when you think back on it, there was such a need there crying out to be productive. And if he didn’t have the museum that need would have really not found a place. So we put him to work at the museum. And he was great. He was a hard worker. I don’t know what happened to Tony, but I know that in his time at the museum he was very well cared for by a lot of people there.

MIKE: What about kids who might have had their museum lives started – before your time, I’m thinking about the Fitzgeralds or any of those people who ended up working at the museum and not just casual jobs.

Who else besides Mike?

MIKE: [Inaudible], they didn’t stay as long times. She had a told in administrative offices.

Yeah, she was the switchboard operator for a long time. Yeah, there were those kids who came before I did as junior volunteers. It didn’t just happen when I arrived, but that program had been going on for a long time. And I wasn’t even aware that some of the employees that I was colleagues with had been junior volunteers and actually lived at the museum, grew up at the museum, and then continued to work at the museum in some pretty responsible, key roles. And the interesting thing is that two of those people went on to marry other museum staff. And so this sort of continuation of the museum family, I think, Mike Fitzgerald ended up marrying the head of the Museum Wharf building manager, Debbie Greenberg. And Mike was there even when I left. I was there for 22 years. So when you think of the fact that he probably was there from infancy on, he must have been there for well over 35 years, but he was only about 35 himself. And I think the museum was that kind of place that people could grow up there and not be bored. When I tell people today that I was there for 22 years, they sort of gasp. From the retrospective of today it sounds like a really long time, 22 years. But I always say, “Yes, but I never had the same job for more than two years in a row.” I might have had the same title, but I never had the same job for more than two years. So I was able to constantly do different things and add different things to my job. So it was good for a person who had a short attention span.

**[END OF VIDEOTAPE 1]**

**[BEGINNING OF VIDEOTAPE 2]**

So another thing that I wanted to talk about was the sense of **transparency in communications.** And I guess by transparency I mean honesty, that there was a sense of honesty, authenticity and transparency about the way in which you communication management decisions to staff. And I remember many instances where we would spend as much time figuring out the way we would communicate something as we did to figure out the decision itself. And that’s not to say that we belabored it. There was just a care given to the ways that things were communicated that I appreciated and I learned a lot from. Because personally, I realize now that I’m an internal processor. So my instinct as a manager would have been to shape this information until it was a nice little pearl of wisdom and then share it with the staff. But what I learned instead was that you don’t waste time. You need to tell people as quickly as you can about things that are affecting their lives. And of course that doesn’t mean that you tell them everything. But you tell them as much as truth as makes sense for them to know. And I was really struck with the sense that at a certain time in the museum’s history – and I think this is sort of an artifact of it being a smaller place – salaries were known. And I know that that sounds today like it’s a crazy, wild thing. But, in fact, it was incredibly powerful as a manager for me to hold myself accountable to knowing that this information is not secret. And it made me be accountable for the kind of decisions that I would make in terms of equity and parity and it really helped me to think long and hard about why I was making certain decisions.

And when I say “I”, that’s kind of a misnomer, because I always felt like I was surrounded by the team. **The Team.** Which was Elaine’s team. And this is another thing that I learned from Elaine’s management style is how to work in a team. We had team meetings every week and everybody was empowered to bring their issues to the table, get the best wisdom from everybody else, understand what everybody else is doing and how you fit into it. It was my first exposure to team-based management. And there was a sense of camaraderie and collectiveness that that team structure built that I continue to carry through all of my management experience.

The team would get together every week and we wouldn’t just do management issues. We talked about a lot of things. And one of the things we did was that these kids that came in through the door every day, the neighborhood kids, they would bring some of their issues with them. And sometimes we were really kind of befuddled about how to handle them because not a lot of us had child psychology in our backgrounds. So Elaine brought in a child psychologist who met with us every – I think it was every week, but it might have been every other week or maybe.... Anyways, it was pretty regularly. And he would talk to us about what kinds of issues we were facing with these kids who were the junior volunteers or the neighborhood kids. And we got such a lesson in child psychology about how to handle these kids responsibly. And I was very touched and impressed that the museum would spend the money to have a psychologist come in every week to work with the floor staff. And that just to me said tons about what kind of an investment the museum was willing to put into not only its staff but the kids that were coming through the door and the how much the kids that were coming through the door were seen as as valuable as the paying patrons. And this psychologist who came, he was the perfect person. His name was Marty Norman. And he had a wonderful sense of the neighborhood as well as child psychology in general because his practice was in the community. And so he was able to help us understand the systems all the way from family to the larger community systems in which these kids operated – the schools, the neighborhoods – and the kids of supports they had outside of the museum, or didn’t have. And so, again, it was just another opportunity to learn something that wasn’t necessarily a part of my job. But it became a part of my job. We all took ownership of those kids and we did it as a team.

I think that the team that Elaine created had incredible benefits to the running of the place and to us as individual managers. And I think that the double-edged sword – there’s a double-edged sword to everything, like there’s a yin and yang. And I think the dark side of having such a close-knit team was that in places where there wasn’t a close-knit team, in other departments, people would look at us as sort of being this funny group of people who were kind of a little too close. I guess you might call it a sort of clique factor. But in fact I think it was just as sense of they saw how much we enjoyed each other’s company and how well we worked together and other people wanted that, too. And I think we didn’t exclude people, we just were a functioning team. So that as we went out and did our work with other parts of the museum we would create little functioning project teams or groups. But I think still people saw that core team of Elaine’s as being very tight and very strong. And I think mostly for the good but some people wish they had that.

I think being a part of such a closely-knit team helped us to create rituals that maybe then spread, became museum rituals, that we sort of incubated little ideas without our team. I’m trying to think of an example. Maybe just our regular team meetings. People always knew, without fail, that we were having a team meeting. And I think maybe that was a function of Elaine’s being in management team, and that we knew in our Visitors' Center team, that there was always a manager’s meeting. And so it just sort of reinforced a sense that this was how you did your work. You did it collaboratively. And maybe – I can’t think of anything specific as an example of how it might have been replicated in other parts of the museum. But I think the spirit, certainly the spirit that was created within our team I truly believe was spread around the museum in terms of the kind of playfulness and collegiality and friendship that a team comes to stand for. I’m really not that aware of specifics where people thought of the team as a negative, although I’m sure that there were.

I think the notion of team was more concrete and structured within the team that I was in, Elaine’s team. But when I think about it, in fact the principles of working in a team not only came down to us from the upper management level, but as we continued to do our work we did it in a team-like fashion, whether we called it a team or a working group. It was a moment of learning on this team meetings how to run a team project. And so I think, I know I took that on to other projects that I did in the way in which I did my work. And I know that, for instance, when Janet ran D&P, that was how D&P was run, that it was a teamwork, team project. And I know that part of working in a team is sharing communications, giving people equal air time, making sure that all the voices in the room are heard. Those are very important concepts to me these days in my own management. There’s a sense of empowerment of the individual through working in a team, and the sense of collegiality that we’re all part of a bigger mission. And it’s an opportunity to help the people in the team see what’s happening from all the different parts of – you know, we would be parts of other teams, for instance. Janet would bring in what was happening in D&P. Elaine would bring in what was happening at the manager level. So it was like a spoke in a wheel. And as I went on in my career at the museum, I later formed a cross-functional team that was centered on the visitor experience. And I don’t think I could have done that without the many years of team experience. But it was really cool. Because what we did was we brought in – we looked at every point of the visitor experience and who interacted with the visitor at those points, and brought all of those people from different departments together in a weekly meeting. So it was the museum shop, it was membership, it was Museum Wharf, the housekeeping, the operations, the interpreters, everybody who had any contact with the visitor, we brought them together in a weekly meeting. And that was very powerful because it broke down those silos of all the different departments and really reunited everybody around the theme of the visitor. And at the time that I did it, it was not a very common thing to have cross-functional teams. And I learned that from being in Elaine’s team.

**Creativity Came from a Structural Foundation** I think the only other thing I really want to comment on is just **[continued from p 10]** I’ve never since had an experience working as a manager where I felt so creative, that the museum was a place that just unleashed mine own creativity and everybody else’s. I think it was that sense of **permission to take risks,** permission to fail, that really helped me be more expansive in my thinking and to allow others to be more expansive in their thinking. So creativity doesn’t take just one form of being the person who designs or develops the exhibit. Creativity to me can take any form that I want it to. So I’ve carried that forward, too, in my management.

So the museum was kind of a seminal place for me in that it was the best of all worlds in terms of the amount of structure, the amount of creativity, the amount of freedom, the amount of sort of underpinnings. And I think that the freedom and the creativity, I learned, have to come from some very firm underpinnings. **A real foundation.** And it wasn’t apparent on the surface because we were playful and creative and inventive and all those wonderful things. But underneath it all there was a real philosophy that kind of knit everything together. And I think it’s what made the museum different, that everybody was – **it was a collective mission**. And there was no question, from the newest intern to the person who had been there the longest, there was no question what our collective mission was. I used to say that the hardest question I had to answer when I picked up the phone was “May I speak to your Education Department?” Because I would have to say, “We don’t have an Education Department”. And then I would think, well, that sounds like we don’t do education. So then I would say, “Everybody is part of the Education Department here”. Because we all were a part of that mission and we knew it, in everything that we did. So I think that collectivity was part of the underpinning. And I think that I’ve come to understand in years since what a lot of thought went into the management structure. Team meeting just didn’t arise out of the blue or out of Elaine’s fantasy. There was a management team and that cascaded down to the Exhibit Center team and the Design and Production team. And these structures were kind of invisible in a sense that the structure itself didn’t overwhelm the work that we did, that the work was the most important think but it was enabled by these structures that we had.

And I think part of the structure, I would credit the communication system, that there was always a clear sense from management – meaning you and Elaine and Pat and Phyl – of how decisions would get communicated. And today I could get a job as a consultant writing communication plans for large organizations because I understood from the museum how you needed to communicate to people in ways that help them to understand the bigger picture, help them to understand their place in it, anticipated and answered the questions that they might have.

And just how to be open and as transparent as possible. And that was always very intentional, that process. It was never willy-nilly. I remember in moments of crisis, either fiscal or some kind of other crisis, we would gather together and say, “Okay, how are we going to communicate this to the staff?” And we would look at every part of it. Who is being left out? Who’s not here today that might not hear? How can we communicate that to them? Who’s going to be most affected? How do we need to communicate that to them in a different way? I’m just amazed when I’m in organizations today that don’t understand that you need to look at all those aspects of communication.

So there were a lot of underpinnings, sort of a sense of collective mission, a sense of management philosophy, a sense of how we wanted to be as an institution, not just what we wanted to do. And all of those structures and underpinnings I went on to read about in my management literature when I took management at college. So I realized the museum was way ahead of its time in terms of its management philosophy and approach. Transformational leadership was already a part of what I had learned at the museum. The museum was already a learning organization. It knew how to learn as an organization, not just as a group of individuals. And that’s a really complex, hard thing to do. And we just took it all for granted because it happened for us who were there. But only in retrospect do we realize how hard it was. **[pp 17-19 - 4:00 min]**

MIKE: Anything else that you feel you should talk about?

No. Just that I’m incredibly grateful to have had that experience in my life and that it will affect me and all my clients and all my family, all the lessons I’ve learned from the museum are going out into the universe and making lots of little organizational children.

**[END OF RECORDING]**