

Note: Recorded by Rob DeBirk for the Utah Environmentalist Oral History Project of the American West Center, this retrospect may serve as institutional memory for TreeUtah and TreeLink – nonprofit organizations I developed while an editor at The Salt Lake Tribune – with deep gratitude to indispensable staff, board, thousands of volunteers and countless supporters who sustained the organizations and carried the torch forward. -p2
Tucson, AZ

TreeUtah and TreeLink

The Founder's Retrospect

By Pepper Provenzano

Whoever said it would be easy? Call it serendipity or too many coincidences. I call it kismet. But if you want to affect change on a wide scale with a nonprofit organization, to change a paradigm, to produce long-term impact, a power base has to back you as the grass roots embrace your mission. We worked from the bottom up AND the top down.

The ethos of urban and community forestry is epitomized in that acorn: Think globally and act locally. Harvard ecologist E.O. Wilson said the No. 1 threat to plant and animal life is the loss of habitat. If that's true, what is to become of the urbanized habitat of the majority of people, our greatest resource?

I started a career in journalism as a copy editor and ascended to copy chief, then World Desk editor at The Salt Lake Tribune. That career lasted from 1980 to 2000. During that same time I created two successful environmental nonprofit organizations, TreeUtah and TreeLink.

In the winter of 1987-88 my wife Denise and I were raising two small children in our starter home on 800 South Street in Salt Lake City. The Tribune pay was paltry so we struggled financially, but I took great pride in my work as an impartial, ethical journalist with a calling, and it was my responsibility to present the best overall view of news with fair representation of both sides of controversial issues. Then I found a higher calling.

This story begins with a wish offered up to the heavens, a prayer if you prefer to call it so. Late one particularly cold night in early February I had, in retrospect, what may have been an epiphany. I stepped out onto our front porch and, sitting at the top of the steps, I lit a cigarette (a habit I would soon drop at the urging of our firstborn) and I offered a wish up to the heavens. I vividly recall thinking "there must be more" and asking God and the heavens to grant me a passion to fuel an undeniable drive in me for a greater good, whatever that might be. I wished for something to motivate me, to shake off the winter and, not unlike spring, to be reborn, something to be passionate about. I begged the universe to point me in the right direction.

I did not have an "aha" moment at the time, but the next morning, almost precisely at 7 a.m., there was a knock at the front door. Two men from the city forester's street-tree crew asked me to move our car in order to cut down two old green ash trees under the massive power lines in front of our little bungalow. This was our first home, our starter

home, a tiny do-it-yourselfer, a classic two-bedroom California bungalow built in the 1920s.

And that is when the seed of a second calling was germinated. I felt an anger surge inside of me, rising slowly in my early morning awakening, and that anger began to boil into something closer to fury. "Wait," I said. "This cannot happen."

I grabbed our phone and called the city forester, who soon appeared on our doorstep. What began as an adversarial relationship with City Forester Jim Schwab morphed in time into something different, a more calm discussion of the condition of the city forest. I learned that our city forester was, in his own words, "little more than a mortician" with a \$500,000 budget to care for the entire "city forest." He told me how that forest, for the most part, had been planted by Mormon pioneers from the time of their arrival in the 1800s through the early 20th century. The core of the problem, he explained, was that the two green ash trees in front of our home were classic examples of the problem: the majority of the city forest was "over-mature and in the declining years."

"Well I don't know about you," I said, "but when I'm over-mature and in my declining years, I hope I'm not cut down prematurely and ground out of existence."

The two old trees were more than three feet in diameter. Each lay under power lines like two great chalices, their branches wrapped around the power lines. "They're becoming infected with bores. As they grow weak they will become hazardous," he explained. The city had federal funds through the power company to cut them down, which would save the cost of annual trimming (for the power company).

"Don't homeowners get the common courtesy of notification when these valuable assets are scheduled to be ripped out?" I asked. Schwab admitted the error of not providing notification, pulled his crew off the street and gave me a two-week moratorium for further discussion. In the following week I gathered opinions from several experts. When I spoke to the city forestry board, I was ready. The trees had "a good 20 years of healthy life in them," according to authorities from the University of Utah and the Utah Nursery Association. But there was another twist in the road that I had not anticipated.

While working at the Salt Lake Tribune one night, I came across a story about a nonprofit organization called The Twin Cities Tree Trust that garnered corporate sponsors and grants to plant and care for the "urban forest" (a term that was becoming increasingly clear. As Schwab said, "No, it's not an oxymoron.") and to teach environmental stewardship skills to under-privileged youths, which I found fascinating. When I suggested to the city forestry board that Salt Lake City should start a similar urban forestry nonprofit organization, a woman named Mary Pat Matheson stood up and said, "You're exactly right, and you are the one who should start it." I have blessed and cursed her ever since. Mary Pat eventually became an outstanding trustee on the board of TreeUtah. She went on to become executive director of the Red Butte Garden Arboretum, expanding that into an extraordinary venue. Some years later, she took charge of the Atlanta Botanical Garden.

By this point my dialogue with the city forester began to evolve from adversarial to a "how-can-I-help" mode. I wrote an editorial urging citizens to become aware of the plight of the city forest and to step forward as citizens and take responsibility for their local environment to augment the paltry city budget for trees. (see stories in the ISA Journal of Arboriculture, American Forests Magazine, The Salt Lake Tribune and TreeLink.org). At that point I began to ask the question "What if." What if someone started such a nonprofit in Salt Lake City for Utah? The follow-up question was always the same: "Is this something you would want to help?" I visited former Gov. Calvin Rampton and then Gov. Scott Matheson, and then Salt Lake Tribune Publisher Jerry O'Brien. I made many more appointments, sitting down with local Gardner Advertising, and Lee Mitchell, then president of the National Nursery Association and Salt Lake City Mayor Palmer DePaulis. Each and every one responded in some variation of the same way: "Yes. This is a good idea. How can I help?"

Frankly, I was astonished and energized by 100% positive feedback.

TreeUtah sprouted, so to speak, in that winter of 1987 – 88 with that knock on the door. I refused to move our car so the city forestry crew could cut down the two 75-year-old green ash trees in front of our property. Those trees reduced the loud noise and dust of traffic on our very busy street. Two weeks later I addressed the city forestry board and asked for and received a reprieve on the plans to remove the old trees between 700 East and 1300 East after I received a second opinion that the trees had another good 20 years of life left in them.

(Note story below from TreeLink website, 2002. Please forgive any repetition.)

SAVED BY A TREE

(OR HOW I SAVED MY ASH)

By Pepper Provenzano

It's hard to believe it's been 15 years since a city crew knocked on our front door and asked me to kindly move our car so they could remove the 75-year-old green ash tree in front of our home.

That old tree had a history, and the repercussions of that day have reverberated 15 years into the future - to this day - in the lives of our family, our city, and beyond. It all makes sense now, as though it were more than serendipity. Maybe kismet. But who can predict how things evolve?



Denise and Pepper in 1996.

And that was our starter house on a busy street in Salt Lake City, a broken down fixer upper with two old floor heaters, but our first home nevertheless, that we learned to love with years of sweat equity as a young couple with two small children struggling for a foothold in life.

It was so cold the night before, and I remember how we snuggled beneath the covers and the sound of the single-pane windows jiggling as the winter bluffed its last bluster, the season giving

way as early spring asserted itself.

There is a melancholy that seems to surface this time of year, as we hold out for warmer weather when the buds form on the branches, and this night was especially so for me. While I practice no formal religion, I have deep spiritual convictions, and on that particular night I gave thanks for the simple blessings of good health and good humor. And I wished for something more, something to motivate me to shake off the winter and, not unlike spring, to be reborn. Something to be passionate about.

Of course I wasn't thinking about that when the two men knocked on our door at 7 a.m. on that crisp morning in 1988. On that morning, I lost my cool.

Not only would I not move our car, I told the two visitors, but I wanted an explanation. Why did our old ash tree have to go? It provided so many obvious benefits, keeping the dust down and reducing the noise on our busy street; hiding the ugly telephone poles that visually dominated our blue-collar neighborhood, and adding dramatically to the curb appeal of our modest home. Spanning three seasons, its canopy was enormous, its colors rewarding in that intangible way that no money can buy and no money-hungry person could ever grab.

What did I know from trees? The crew foreman informed me that this tree was between the curb and the sidewalk, and that was public property, implying that we had virtually no say and no rights. The tree would be replaced by one of those nice small maintenance-free lollipop trees that would never interfere with the power lines. I remember listening, bleary eyed in my bathrobe, thinking that old tree was more than a thing of beauty, and I remember the sound of the chainsaw awakening one block over, and no doubt waking the neighbors. Our tree would be next.

Let me tell you about this tree. It was a rock-solid hardwood, three feet in diameter with a trunk magnificently embossed in rich gray tones, set in deep relief with an exquisitely interconnected skin of bark that was somehow both coarse and forgiving to the hand. The ash is actually from the olive family, but designed by nature to reach 70 feet upwards. This particular specimen had been carved back over the years, allowed to grow no more than 30 feet high, the center trunk removed some 15 feet up as the remaining limbs wrapped like a giant green chalice, obscuring the power lines. Regardless, the lush, dense canopy spread almost as wide as the height. It was indeed a thing of beauty, and so much more.

It would be many years before I would better understand the sizable economic and health benefits of trees and the myriad ancillary benefits most people take for granted. That a tree can add so much to the landscape and real value of a home as well as the municipal tax base; that strategically located trees can reduce energy bills by as much as 50 percent; that a city's tree canopy can reduce skin-cancer rates and particulate pollution associated with lung disease and the heat-island affect associated with tropospheric ozone. That's the bad ozone.

On that morning the city forester explained that this tree exemplified a serious problem that engulfed the citywide "urban forest." The great majority of the city trees had been planted in the early days of community growth, by the pioneers of the late 19th century and for two generations through the early 1930s. Evidently concern for the trees skipped a generation or two. The tree was emblematic of a city forest that had been neglected for too long, a forest that was disappearing since the post-war city rapidly expanded and policymakers and planners placed a priority on growth with more and more concrete and blacktop and buildings and little concern for the green infrastructure of the city. For every tree planted, three were being removed. That trend, and dramatic loss of canopy, continues to this day in cities and towns that lack planning.

So I asked the city forester, who was soon on my doorstep, a simple question: Doesn't the homeowner have any rights when a street-side tree is to be removed? A tree that so profoundly

impacts the value of the home? So the tree was on city property, and we had no say: That's the letter of the law, but what about the spirit of the law? Didn't we deserve at least the common courtesy of notification before losing such a valuable asset to our property and our neighborhood?

The city forester agreed, but not before explaining that the tree was scheduled for removal along with all the old ash trees on a seven-block stretch of our street. The trees were "over mature and in their declining years," susceptible to all sorts of infestations, and considered high maintenance under the power lines.

Over mature and in their declining years?

"I don't know about you," I said, "but when I'm over mature and in my declining years, I don't want to be cut down, ground up and hauled off," which is what was happening to the tree next door.

The city forester regretted that his office didn't notify the neighborhood that all the street trees for seven blocks were scheduled for removal. He had some federal grant money to plant trees, and the power company was happy to assist. He also confessed that his paltry budget made him "little more than a mortician." Then he pulled the crew off the street, welcomed a second opinion, and invited me to the next city forestry board meeting.

Two weeks later at that meeting, I was armed for bear. A second opinion from an arborist stated that most of those trees that were scheduled for removal were indeed over mature, but most also had a good twenty years of healthy life remaining.

The reprieve we won that day remains for the old green ash tree, now a centenarian. And what began as an adversarial relationship with the city forester gradually changed as I learned he had a 5-person crew to handle 175,000 street trees. I wanted to help, so I went back to that city forestry board a month later and offered a solution. What the city needed was a nonprofit organization to supplement the city forester's work, to awaken the community to the value of this urban forest as an asset. After all, it's the only portion of the urban infrastructure that actually appreciates in value, depending on the species planted, for more than a half century.

One of the forestry board members stood up and said, "You're right. That's exactly what the city needs, and you're the one who should start it."

And that's how I started a nonprofit urban forestry organization, and found my passion.

As I was saying, that old tree had a history. There was a scar on the street side of the tree because long ago it stood between an errant automobile and a young girl in harm's way. The car bore down on the child, but she ran behind that tree, the story goes. This was nearly a half century before we bought our home.

That old tree was a life saver. What I couldn't know then was that the little girl's life wasn't the only one the old tree would save.

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Soon afterwards I revisited the city forestry board and cited the existence of The Twin Cities Tree Trust, Trees Atlanta and American Forests. I said "This is what Salt Lake City needs, a nonprofit organization to supplement the city forestry budget and awaken the

community to the value of their urban forest." Mary Pat Matheson, a newcomer to the city and this forestry board, actually stood up and said: "You're absolutely right and you are the person who should start it." (Mary Pat would later help form TreeUtah as a board member. Some years later she became the director of the beautiful Red Butte Gardens at the University of Utah, and eventually she moved to Atlanta where for many years she ran the Atlanta Botanical Gardens.)

I began asking the question, "What if" during the spring of 1988 when I wrote an editorial in the Salt Lake Tribune. After the initial editorial I received a phone call from the former assistant to Gov. Calvin Rampton of the law firm Jones Waldo Holbrook and McDonough. I met with Gov. Rampton and asked, "What if someone were to create a nonprofit organization to replant the urban forest of SLC and teach the basics of tree care to the people? He agreed there was a need and he agreed to be the first honorary chair of the organization. "Pepper," he said, "call me when you really need me and I'll be there," and he was true to his word for the entire first decade of TreeUtah as I designed and expanded the organization.

TreeUtah was initiated in name and spirit by March of 1988, encouraged by former Gov. Rampton. That was when this adventure began. (A "20 Year History of TreeUtah" written without the founder's input, stated that TreeUtah began in 1990 with federal nonprofit status, but the tree plantings and the formative work of TreeUtah cannot be denied. We received federal approval to operate as a nonprofit with a tax number in 1988, and that's when planting began. Formal review was completed in 1990, a mere formality.) I was driven and I built the organization with the help and guidance of many community leaders. I put together the first board and filled in the blanks, and Jones Waldo Holbrook and McDonough, the Salt Lake City based law firm where Gov. Rampton worked, sent in the nonprofit organization paperwork without charging a dime, and that's when I first learned the value of pro-bono leverage through nonprofit organizations.

Let me reiterate. We received approval from the IRS with an EIN number to operate TreeUtah as a nonprofit organization immediately during the review process. We planted trees that spring and fall.

Federal recognition in 1990 was just that, a mere formality. Mayor Palmer DePaulis announced the existence of TreeUtah to the city with a formal tree planting of a dozen flowering white pear trees at the entry to the newly refurbished City/County Building. I know. I wrote his speech, and he read it verbatim.

When I approached Salt Lake Tribune Publisher Gerry O'Brien, again asking "What if," he too agreed there was a need for such an organization and appreciated my strongest selling point, that such an organization could be non-controversial and, as far as I could tell, totally benevolent. Who could argue against planting trees and teaching tree stewardship, especially when the city forester's budget was far too paltry to begin to address the issue with a half-million-dollar budget to cover some 170,000 street trees along with those in city parks.

When I learned that the owner of Mitchell's Nursery, George Mitchell, was the president of the National Nursery Association, I called and met with him. That wonderful white-haired gentleman heard the words "what if" as well, and responded without hesitation. He, too, was true to his word and lent expertise to TreeUtah for many of the formative years, offering guidance, sharing contacts and often donating trees for special event plantings. He introduced me to the Utah Nursery Association members and Diane Jones, who became longterm partners and friends with TreeUtah for more than ten years of the Plant a Family Tree Program held for a month in the autumn when nurseries would discount their trees and donate to TreeUtah for every tree sold. They also provided prizes and promotional materials for their staff. The local radio stations and The Salt Lake Tribune would run Public Service Advertisements as well. What began slowly would grow annually and eventually exceeded 10,000 trees in 2002 with cross promotion by the Salt Lake Winter Olympic Games.

In 1988 I had several meetings with a public relations company, Gardner Marketing Agency. Several key players in that company offered pro-bono assistance to establish brochures and other print materials needed for the fledgling nonprofit. It seemed the "What If" approach worked well, especially because of the non-controversial nature of urban and community forestry. The mission of TreeUtah – to improve Utah's quality of life for present and future generations by enhancing the environment through tree planting, stewardship and education – remains to this day.

I was young, inexperienced and naïve but I went to the public library and studied nonprofit management, corporate marketing and board management. I decided to establish sustainable annual programs that could grow incrementally (Plant a Family Tree, Run Through the Trees, Memory Trees, the Gateways program and Y.E.S., aka Youth Environmental Stewardship, an umbrella name for seedling plantings, most notably Vaughn's Jordan River Project) and use my journalism experience to create a newsletter. I told myself that if I was going to do this, I wanted it to last beyond my participation.

Soon after that, I was invited to visit the board of Project 2000 at KUTV (later renamed Envision Utah). Project 2000 wanted to spin off its efforts to encourage the greening of Utah. Their founder and director, Stephen Holbrook, asked TreeUtah to take over their efforts. That led to the first official TreeUtah planting of 20 thundercloud plum trees in St. George and Cedar City, some 300 miles south of Salt Lake City. It was held as a joint effort of Project 2000 and TreeUtah during the transition of key members of the Project 2000 planting committee to the TreeUtah board of trustees. That's when I met John Smith from St. George, who coordinated the design and implementation of our first two very important plantings at the gateway corridors to Cedar City and St. George.

Through Project 2000 I met and hired staffers Ann Burnett and Danene Torgerson who became critical in the early development of TreeUtah and were largely responsible for helping to expand the planting events and programs. Ann coordinated a major planting of some 10,000 seedlings in 1990 at Wasatch Mountain State Park near Midway in the wake of a deadly August forest fire that took the lives of two firefighters. Vaughn Lovejoy was her assistant working with the Utah State Prison inmates program to purchase seedlings

for this restoration project. While I recruited Dave Meade from Utah Power for our Board of Trustees, Ann was instrumental in securing a \$100,000 grant from that power company for TreeUtah. Danene worked tirelessly to help codify our young organization's administration as I worked to expand the board.

The National Tree Trust (NTT) was established as part of the "America the Beautiful Act of 1990" designated by President George Bush. Congress endowed the NTT, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, with a one-time-only grant of a million dollars along with another million to assist nonprofit tree-planting groups in each state. I was among some 15 organization leaders brought to Washington beforehand to provide advice on the use of the funds, to be channeled through each state forester's office. Tony Dietz was the Utah state forestry officer in charge of distributing the funds. The majority of our state funds went right into the state office, but the law required those funds to go to the nonprofit tree-planting group, so Dietz distributed a portion to TreeUtah, the only qualified organization in the state. TreeUtah introduced urban forestry to the general public, primarily in the capital city but eventually across the state.

In 1990 I hired Vaughn Lovejoy, who eventually would become the next planting coordinator. He wrote me a letter requesting a job, assuring me he would raise half of his own salary. Working with Vaughn was always a challenge, so I'll be brief. I believed in his sincerity and over the years I raised funds for his salary and seedling-planting efforts. In the long-term my naiveté was costly in many ways, but I will always be grateful for the years of service he provided to TreeUtah. Eventually I would move on, creating TreeLink and the TreeLink website, an information clearinghouse that reached more than 100 countries and surpassed a million hits a month. TreeLink allowed me to combine my passion for urban forestry with information-packaging skills developed on the World Desk at The Tribune.

I worked without pay from TreeUtah during the first two years, 1988-1990, in order to pay the initial staff to help build the organizational foundation and initiate nonprofit status for TreeUtah. Those were tough times as I began to burn the candle at both ends, working seven days a week. I was a full-time editor at the Salt Lake Tribune. Fortunately, I had two jobs that I loved, but I was also rebuilding our starter home, and my wife and I were raising two small children, my most important job.

Burnout is endemic to leaders of nonprofits, and I was no exception, but we endure, driven by a passion and unshakable belief in a higher calling, and this is exactly what I asked for when it all began. George Bernard Shaw once said: "This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown in the scrap heap."

In 1990 the Forest Service flew me to Washington, D.C. to provide input for the National Tree Trust Initiative as part of the omnibus Farm Bill. There I met Emily Meade, senior policy advisor to then President George H.W. Bush. The following year, Emily Meade nominated me for a volunteer award called the Point of Light Award. When Emily called and told me I was personally nominated, I told her I preferred to have the award in the name of TreeUtah because it would spotlight our volunteer-based organization. Our fair

city and the nation became more aware of TreeUtah as a result, and we listed the grant in future corporate and foundation grant requests. I am certain the mileage we got from this award was helpful. As Einstein said: Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted. Many years later I would quote this favorite source time and again.

Now I turned my attention to fundraising and board development. The TreeUtah board grew to include key players like Scott Matheson, Jr., Hope Eccles, Dave Mead (Utah Power), Patrick DeFrietas and TV anchor Terry Wood. They brought diverse backgrounds and board experience, unique skills and creative energy to the organization. Andy Glantz deserves special mention as a longtime board director and confidant who became a lifelong friend. Diane Gleason, Environmental Programs Director for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, was a stalwart supporter who recognized the value of our Plant a Family Tree Program and embraced it in partnership with the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City. Gov. Michael Leavitt and many more state dignitaries joined in support along with successive Salt Lake City mayors.

Our annual programs grew incrementally, spreading across the state over the ten years I remained involved. Plant a Family Tree grew from one participating nursery to dozens, from 45 trees the first year to more than 10,000 trees in the year 2002. Run through the Trees grew from 150 runners to nearly 700. Gateway plantings grew from the capital city to communities across the state. Individuals supported Memory Trees (celebratory or in memory of, etc.) through the years. Vaughn's devotion to ecological restoration focused on seedling plantings on the Jordan River Project with volunteers from the University of Utah. Another hire, Camille Russell, would hold down the fort as administrative assistant for several years. I could never thank these people enough. Any difference of perspectives only added to the diverse nature of TreeUtah.

In 1996 I met a terrific grant writer, Sherry Vance, who specialized in education grants. Together we applied on behalf of TreeUtah (only nonprofits could apply) to the USDA Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council for a \$100,000 matching grant. This was a competitive grant. Years later I would learn that our competitors included the International Society of Arboriculture and American Forests. Little TreeUtah's application was in competition with two of the largest powerhouse forestry organizations in the United States. I was able to bring my editing and urban forestry experience to the grant, but Sherry's grant-writing and research expertise was priceless. That grant was the foundation of TreeLink, a web-based global information clearinghouse for urban and community forestry that one-day would reach more than 100 countries and garner worldwide recognition.

Our great philanthropic supporter in Utah, the George S. and Dolores Dore Eccles Foundation, provided funds annually and spurred additional matching dollars from around the country and beyond. As a result, I would be asked to speak nationwide at universities and at state conferences, and to key-note the European Urban Forest conference. And the United Nations' largest department, the Food & Agriculture Organization, would invite me to speak at workshops and conferences around the world. I could quote Einstein again here, the point being that I had the good fortune to meet and

exchange ideas with passionate, devoted advocates for urban and peri-urban forests from all over the globe. As far as I was concerned, this was my ultimate reward and greatest benefit: Engaging in a great, absorbing endeavor with a diverse and brilliant group of collaborators while maintaining a high degree of autonomy and avoiding tedium and coercion. In addition, I found myself strategically positioned to make a difference in a world of high technology that was poised to expand into major global impact.

As I transitioned away from TreeUtah to TreeLink, I asked our board to oversee a national search that led to hiring Meryl Redisch as the new executive director. Meryl was a devoted administrator with great heart and a good work ethic. At first she would call me several times a week for advice as I relinquished my position. After awhile she would call once a week, then once a month, etc. until her familiarity with TreeUtah sufficed.

Through the years many people approached me and said: "I bet you had no idea that TreeUtah would become so big" and my response was always the same. To be honest, TreeUtah followed along the path I foresaw and expected every step of the way. My aim was true.

In 2000, armed with a \$100,000 competitive grant from the Secretary of Agriculture at the recommendation of the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council, I immediately hired Sherri Vance, key co-writer of the initial grant, and soon hired Chris Tarabochia, an extraordinary technology programmer, aka "Captain Cubano" to handle technology for TreeLink. He saw the value of TreeLink straight away. Before long we could finish each other's sentences. The TreeLink website could not have existed without Chris. If I could imagine it, Chris could make it happen.

When I began work on TreeLink, I quickly realized, and informed the TreeLink board, that TreeLink would someday outgrow TreeUtah in scope with a national and international reach. Soon after that I convinced the TreeUtah board of trustees to allow TreeLink to become an autonomous nonprofit organization. It was not easy to convince the board to allow this very successful "program" to leave TreeUtah, as I had forecast.

Let me put this into perspective: When we started TreeLink, very few government employees used email, which was only beginning to catch on across the country, as was urban forestry. It was an exciting time to be involved in something I so deeply believed in, that is to say, planting and stewardship education in cities and towns. Statistics showed that our national society had morphed from an agrarian society to a predominantly urbanized society by the mid-20th century, wherein the great majority of people and human capital became based. This global paradigm shift impacted more than half of humanity, and grew rapidly from there. Rural culture was becoming eclipsed by urban culture. By 2050 it was predicted that 64.1% and 85.9% of the developing and developed world respectively would be urbanized. Urbanization was changing our species on so many levels, environmentally, economically and socially. Someday, perhaps, history will note the short period of time when this world shifted on its axis, and the profound ways in which everything changed as population growth took a vertical trajectory.

I continued to write grants for TreeLink for \$10K, \$20K, \$25K, \$40K, \$80K and so on and finally I wrote the two-year grant proposal that won \$250,000 to expand TreeLink through 2005. During that time we created a national board that included representation from diverse backgrounds geographically with a wide range of talent from technology (Steve Weisser, Jim Benson, Jason San Souci), urban forestry (Ray Tretheway, Janette Monear), the corporate sector (Randy Miller, Tom Prosser), and organizational leaders (Diane Gleason). As I saw the desperate need for urban forestry funds and created the iTreeBank program to leverage technology and raise funds in unison with nonprofits across the country. That program grew practically overnight to 45 cities and, in a second wave influenced by major support from a rock group (Foo Fighters) it expanded quickly to 75 organizations in 12 countries.

Then our economic world began to change rapidly.

Unfortunately the bursting of the U.S. housing bubble caused the values of securities tied to U.S. real estate pricing to plummet, damaging financial institutions globally. The financial crisis of 2007–2008, also known as the Global Financial Crisis and 2008 financial crisis, is considered by many economists the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. It resulted in the threat of total collapse of large financial institutions, the bailout of banks by national governments, and downturns in stock markets around the world. In many areas, the housing market also suffered, resulting in evictions, foreclosures and prolonged unemployment. The crisis played a significant role in the failure of key businesses, declines in consumer wealth estimated in trillions of U.S. dollars, and a downturn in economic activity leading to the 2008–2012 global recession.

As I said, I wanted to leverage technology to reach out faster and farther to wake up the "sleeping giant" and monetize urban forestry beyond mere government support, so I created a technology tool with a long-term goal to establish small endowments for local urban forestry programs across the country. That tool was iTreeBank, originally funded by the George S. and Dolores Dore Eccles Foundation. That program, inspired by the Equilibrium Theory of Prof. John Nash (Princeton) – the basis for the book and feature film "A Beautiful Mind" – grew rapidly to more than 70 members across the United States and several foreign countries. Unfortunately, iTreeBank suffered terribly when the U.S. economy had a massive downturn (and yet, ironically, another small nonprofit, operating on a shoestring, received a million-dollar grant from a giant hardware and lumber company, catapulting that organization into national leadership. I was a co-founder of that organization and wrote a letter of support for the grant). Meanwhile, my attempts to establish new iTreeBanks across Utah and nationwide became fruitless practically overnight. Phone calls went unanswered, appointments impossible to schedule. It was a painful time, a harbinger of what was to become a long, painful, nationwide economic slide. Corporate sponsors practically dried up overnight. Foundation responses slowed. Former supporting leaders from the federal government began circling their wagons to protect their own internal budgets, and support for TreeLink had, in their words, become "a tough sell." It didn't help when a trade group leader voiced envy that our little nonprofit was winning grants they coveted. This, I often said, was the Achilles Heel of environmental groups competing for a fraction of a

fraction of federal support for urban and community forests. In their defense, all of the urban forestry organizations deserve much larger budgets to keep up with urbanization, and the federal and state budgets are simply too small to address the massive problem. That's why I developed iTreeBank. That's why the United Nations Food & Agriculture Department, its largest arm, was interested in working with iTreeBank.

Important to reiterate: The federal government sector has (to date) lacked the political will to share more than a tiny fraction of traditional forestry funding with urban and community forestry. It doesn't help that forest fires eat into the federal forestry budget. It also didn't help that there was too much petty infighting for federal funds among the major urban forestry players and too much preoccupation scrambling for scraps among the small organizations. Urban and peri-urban nonprofit forestry organizations need funding far beyond government sources. (Again, this is why I created iTreeBank.) Nevertheless, politicians have yet to learn the voting power of urbanized areas by redirecting a more equitable portion of the massive federal "traditional forestry" budget toward urban and community forests.

When the national economy falters and begins to impact internal budgets, those who control government funding see the writing on the wall. The unflinching principle of human nature applies: cover your own butt.

Hope springs eternal. The movement is too important to die because urban and community forests so powerfully impact our greatest human resource centers.

In retrospect, my business savvy at TreeLink was accurate. I had a full-time career as a journalist while I was building it. I simply ran out of energy, time and the patience to fight the good fight in an uphill battle with a deeply scarred economy. I began to slow down TreeLink to minimal upkeep and eventually to near dormancy. I had always felt that TreeLink was ultimately meant to be a program of a much larger, international organization, and had already joined a science-based group interested in a potential merger. It made perfect sense but that organization had a national corporate sponsor represented by a board member committed to another agenda. There was a conflict of interest there, but no one wanted to point that out to a major corporate sponsor. I took the high road. At my recommendation, TreeLink backed away.

Eventually we passed TreeLink on to the National Alliance for Community Trees, assured by Director Carrie Gallagher that both TreeLink and the iTreeBank program would continue under ACT. I turned my attention to personal health issues, and my wife and I moved to Arizona. We keep a home in Utah to visit our many friends there.

Epilogue

I thought I just wanted to be a journalist but I asked for and found a higher calling. Oh yes, it began with an awakening, a transformation, a genuine epiphany, and not just planting something in me. Vaughn has a similar story about looking down in grief and seeing an acorn; Andy Lipkis has a story that inspired TreePeople in Los Angeles and beyond; Kirk Brown and Janette Monear experienced magical

transformations inspiring the Twin Cities Tree Trust; attorney Marcia Bansley's life was transformed and transformative for Trees Atlanta; Kemba Shakur has an astonishing story in Oakland, of all places, ironically named and denuded of trees; Joan Lionetti inspired Trees for Tucson. There's another woman with a beautiful story in Savannah, and a forester in Baton Rouge. There are many others, a woman in Chicago who inspired the mayor whose birthday, coincidentally, was on Arbor Day (my birthday too).

I was asked to Washington, D.C., in 1989 to meet others citizen forestry leaders as advisers for the omnibus Farm Bill. Most of us were lone doves, suddenly surrounded by a flock of others who experienced their own inspirations. Evidently there were multiple epiphanies. In time I would hear similar stories, and not just from across the United States.

When I went to Bogota, Colombia for a United Nations Food & Agriculture conference, I heard terrific stories from Brazil and Chile and Mexico, from the Caribbean and all across South America. When I keynoted the European Urban Forest Conference, I learned that others were inspired long before me and since then, not just from Eastern Europe but from the U.K. to China and all across the Far East.

I practice no formal religion. My wife says I'm a pantheist (nature as god) but if there is an omnipresent spirit, which means everywhere, it makes sense that everything is connected. I can't say I believe in divine intervention, but I believe in evolution, that Earth is Paradise but man's free choice has been to consume it with blind disrespect and disregard for its health.

And so, it's as though a great spirit had cast seeds from on high that, in retrospect, clearly was the genesis of something extraordinary that had taken root as it became needed in the 21st century and the new millennium. The world was rapidly transforming from rural-based communities to urban and peri-urban areas, the cities and surrounding suburbs where the human capital expanded as population growth hit a vertical trajectory. We know today that more than 80 percent of the U.S. population lives in urbanized areas. As you probably know, that figure is two-thirds globally and exploding. And when it comes to infrastructure, trees are the ONLY portion of infrastructure that actually appreciate in value while the rest depreciates. That's why I like to say that dollar for dollar, there is no better investment in the environment where most people live.

Not incidentally, that's how I conceived iTreeBank, based on the equilibrium theory of mathematician John Nash with the above global perspective in mind. Do you know anything about that? Then there's the other acorn: Think globally; act locally.

When I left TreeUtah I was already aware of the common problem that many nonprofits experience when their founders leave the organization. I had no intention of being guilty of Founders Syndrome, hanging around forever. I stayed on the TreeUtah board for several years and left entirely by 2002 to work full-time on TreeLink as an autonomous organization. Unfortunately, when a director leaves a nonprofit, the favorite programs of that director may go by the wayside when others have new or no ideas for the future of the organization. It upset me to watch while exceptional programs I created were phased out of existence, but once I was gone, I only revisited when specifically invited for a good reason. My last letter to the director and board of TreeUtah at that time regarding those programs did not receive the courtesy of a reply. It is the nature of nonprofit organizations small and large to morph and hopefully evolve with the times. I accepted that. I did my part and moved on. TreeUtah and TreeLink both had terrific long-term

impact. Of that I am proud. My only regret is that iTreeBank had the potential (and still does) to empower so many more cities and towns – and thereby urban and community forests – around the world. I had many more ideas to help make that dream a reality.

In retrospect I have nothing but love for TreeUtah, TreeLink and associated staff. I always maintained that, dollar for dollar, there is no better investment than trees in the infrastructure of your hometown because trees are the major indicator species of a healthy city and town, and the only portion of the infrastructure that actually appreciates in value. If these sound like platitudes, well fine, but now that energy costs and skin cancer and water runoff and so many problems have emerged with urbanization, research supports what these nonprofits have known for years.

Anyway, all this really does have a point: Working for a nonprofit volunteer-based organization will never make you wealthy, but one cannot walk away from working with volunteers without becoming enriched in a way that money cannot buy. Work with them long enough and you learn that volunteers are mostly people inspired by a pure motive . . . to give . . . and asking nothing in return. They are the backbone of nonprofit organizations, and those nonprofits match your donated buck and make it worth what a buck used to be worth, with an endless wellspring of volunteer muscle and know-how and passion, driven by no other choice but the simple good of it.

Some say you have to give to get in this world. I think there's more to it. Volunteers are like an unseen force in the evolutionary process of spiritual enrichment, but they also drive our roots into the earth and our limbs heavenward. That's more than a platitude, and no mere metaphor.

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