

Ross Martin Interview Transcript
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How long have you been a member of La Plaza?

Since 1995, so I guess that's about 18 years, going on 18 years.

How did you get involved in the first place?

Well, it was kind of a natural thing for me. I selected my apartment because, well the neighborhood was really crappy, and it was cheap, a two-bedroom apartment. But the main thing was it looked out over the other garden across the street and so, when you walked in, the first thing you see in the main rooms is this view of the huge willow tree. All the other apartments I looked at had views of walls, and other urban environments, and so I chose it right away because of the low rent and the view. It was a really bad neighborhood then, and I was told of course that it was worse before I got there, but as I unpacked and got into living there I spent a lot of time just looking in that garden. Eventually I ventured in and tried to become a member but they were kind of unreceptive, you know?

Then a poster went up on the wall saying that all the gardens were being threatened by development, that Giuliani wanted to sell them off to build housing and whatnot, and it was a call for action to come to the community board meeting. I went, I started going to other meetings, and then I met this woman Carolyn Ratcliffe and she was running this garden. At the time this garden was in complete disrepair. I totally ignored it the entire time, even though I'd lived here for months, I just would walk by and not pay any attention because there was graffiti on the amphitheater, it was overgrown and rundown, and you know as a landscape architect it kind of offended my aesthetic sensibility. But she was telling me that they were starting this restoration project and they needed new blood, would I be interested in joining. I'd get a plot, and so I did. It was all her, and otherwise I probably would have continued to ignore it.

Was there anything that motivated you to get involved besides the call to action?

Well, yeah, I was not in a real good place work-wise, or just in general, my lifestyle was kind of out of control, and, like you I missed gardening. I came from the

West Coast and I missed nature in general. So, I guess it was the need to do something productive, do something physical, and to try and get my life back on track. And also the sense of community is really missing in New York, you really have to seek it out, and a lot of people don't. Like, I didn't know anybody in my apartment building at the time, I think it was like six months before I even was on a first-name basis with anybody. And that came about because they came and helped me, were part of restoring this place. They saw me doing the physical work and asked if I needed help.

You talked about how, when you tried to join the other garden, they weren't so receptive. Could you expand on that?

It was more established, you know? And so there was a definite process, like the funny thing is the minute I joined this garden, I had met the guys who were running that garden in the process of getting involved through these meetings, and the day I signed the application they called and asked me if I wanted to join their garden. So, it was kind of funny because I went down one morning and I filled out, or used a scrap of paper and put my name and address and phone number and that I was a landscape architect and that I was interested in getting involved, and never heard anything back until I got involved here. And it's not to criticize them, I just think they had they didn't need the help that this place needed, you know? So they kind of, Carolyn in particular, bent over backwards to include me. So it just seemed natural.

Could you talk about what the garden space means to you? Do you think it means different things to members and to non-members?

To me, what it means, I mean, I'm obsessed. It's basically my life, you know? I think about it all the time, I'm constantly involved in it. I spent a lot of time and money and energy on it, and since the trees fell in Sandy and Irene, it's actually opened up an opportunity for us to pursue some things that I've been working on with other members that weren't possible without the new sunlight and the new space that we have available. So I'm able to actually pursue some of my career philosophy goals, in particular, we're building a fruit and nut orchard and establishing a permaculture demonstration garden. So anyway, I guess what it means to me is well, I wouldn't be here, I wouldn't be in New York if it weren't for this place and these opportunities. And in particular, what's happening recently.

But, it does mean a lot of different things to different people, and I think that's what's so great about it, you know? People can get what they want from it. The majority of people, either use it casually or are not members, or they have views of it. There are million dollar apartments that have gone up because they have these green views. And then other members I think the biggest thing that kind of crosses everybody's joint appreciation of it is the sense of community, you know the ability to be able to be a part of something, to get to know your neighbors, have a place to go to, socialize.

And then there's the historic aspect, which I think is what you're getting on, which, it's interesting. I mean that's why I started writing about it, was that, most people don't know about it, and still, there really isn't a lot of literature or any form of arts that represent exactly what this place does for this community, and in particular the lack of community, because it's kind of disappearing, you know, and moving elsewhere. Even just looking at our membership, we don't have a lot of the original founders, or the Latinos, involved anymore. CHARAS is gone, and once CHARAS left then the Latino community kind of, well, literally fenced themselves off from this space. That's one of my goals with writing this is to try to bring that back.

Could we talk now about CHARAS's history and involvement in establishing the garden?

CHARAS basically started this space it was basically two gardens. From the willow tree over to Avenue C was the original space, that was called La Plaza. There was a building here, and that was in like 1977. And it also went through to 8th Street over here, and on the other side of this building that's behind you, there's a space that was a Casita garden. So, on 8th Street there was a metal foundry that was abandoned, and Gordon Matta-Clark, who's a deconstructivist artist, joined CHARAS and he wanted his work was basically deconstructing buildings and showing how they're put together. He wanted to start something that would be more permanent. Because all his installations until that point were eventually destroyed. He'd go into condemned buildings that were going to be demolished and take them apart. I think his most famous work is he chopped a house in half and showed it.

Anyway, he started this resource center in a foundry over there, and with his help, CHARAS then built La Plaza into a park. He would go into the tenements and start taking them apart, use some of the building materials to build the benches and the amphitheater and things like that here. And CHARAS's goal with the space was to

make a community center. So they built the amphitheater, that was the main thing, you know, they'd have not only community meetings but Tito Puente played there, and plays, and they started a program called the University of the Streets where they taught English as a second language and business initiatives, small business initiatives. Really, they were ex-gang members, they wanted to harness the energy that was going into the negative parts of the gangs and do something positive and help take back their neighborhood. They got a grant from Plant-a-Lot and that was what funded the trees, the three linden trees, the three willow trees that used to dominate the site. And all of their work caught the attention of Buckminster Fuller, you know, he donated the geodesic dome, or two I think, and got a lot of national attention. They eventually toured other cities and taught other people how to do what they were doing.

And it all went along pretty well until like the mid-'80s, they were approached by the city, I guess they'd been angling to try and get in a building. There were a lot of abandoned buildings down here. In fact, between them and Gordon Matta-Clark, they basically started the homesteading program down here where people would come in and get, for a nominal fee, a tenement building that they could rebuild. And Gordon Matta-Clark, through his resource center, would help them, help the youth learn how to do that. But anyway, they were offered a building on 9th Street a school that now sits empty, I guess it's going to be a dorm if they gave up this site. And so they kind of, informally agreed with the city that they would not fight development here, and so eventually, the neighborhood found out.

Well, the Latinos basically left, like I said they fenced off those two sites that went over to 8th Street and made their own gardens, and this one went into disrepair, and there was like a rogue soup kitchen here. People were living here, and a lot of anarchists and squatters from the homesteading movement were occupying it, I guess you could say. But it was out of control, drug use, crime. Gordon Matta-Clark died very suddenly from a rare form of cancer, and so this, his program, died with him.

And the city moved forward to develop the site, but when the neighborhood found out that that's what was happening they fought, and the legal battle went on for a number of years. It went all the way to federal court, and they won by they won on a technicality which by the way you should talk to Don Yorty about this, he knows this history a lot better than I do. I'll give you his information. But, the technicality was

that Housing and Urban Development, who wanted to build senior housing here, had lied about the percentage of low-income housing and social services in this neighborhood. And that violated their own regulations. At the time, it was called over-ghettoization. So, they weren't technically allowed to put the program they wanted to put here, Casa Victoria senior housing. So the judge ruled in the neighborhood's favor, and the development ended up happening a block away instead.

So after that, it just basically kind of sat unused for about a decade, until I moved here. And it wasn't my I wasn't the catalyst that got it started, but in fact, the restoration project was what basically got me involved. At that time in-between that time, the building that was sitting here burned down, and people on the block took over that lot that was separate from La Plaza, there was a fence between them, and started a community garden, and that's what you see behind you. So when I got involved, they had shut the gates and kicked out the anarchists and the soup kitchen, and they were in the process of tearing down the fence between the two spaces, so the community garden took control of La Plaza and tried to bring it back into a state of better use. But the anarchists were angry about that, so they tore down part of the fence on Avenue C and broke in and rioted, and tried to take back La Plaza, but the police squelched the riot pretty quickly and kind of put an end to it. That happened like a month after I moved into the apartment, and so that's when I got involved.

And then after that, a few years into my involvement, a group called the Lower East Side Girls Club wanted to build here again, so they put together a proposal and the design for a building, and they got site control from the community board and tried to build here, but we fought that. They eventually found another site on Avenue D and built there. But then, ten years after the original legal fight, HUD changed their regulations and we were told by our lawyer who fought our first battle that they'd changed it because of the battle that we launched, even though I say we, I wasn't part of it so they didn't have to worry about over-ghettoization any more. So they proposed the exact same building, got \$10 million again, to build it, they used the same floor plan that they had originally proposed, and so, again we were fighting development, and at the same time Giuliani had ramped up his pressure to develop gardens in the neighborhood and throughout the city. Eliot Spitzer through Carolyn Ratcliffe, who, once again you can get a better read on this from her, but, she presented to Spitzer's office with some other people, Don Yorty being one of them, a video of our space and what we're about, and in particular he was really impressed with the fact that we did

performances and other community things, so he basically filed an injunction against the city, I think it was against the city developing any more spaces until a judge determined whether that was legal, and that went on for two years. And then in 2002 he made a deal with Bloomberg after Giuliani left office to move the gardens into the Parks Department or to be moved to a land trust and to be left as open space. And again our lawyer, Larry Hutsky, said that Spitzer was so impressed with Carolyn's presentation that he went down to the mat for us, that we were the one space, because it's such a big, corner lot, that HUD really was hot to develop. And we, basically, were the deal killer. Eventually, he negotiated and saved us.

And from then on, basically, we've kind of just been going through the various changes in administration and how we manage it, and we dealt with the two hurricanes. One, I think it was a little tornado came and blew down our trees, and then the other was the major flood here, we had four feet of water. So I think that's it.

Again, you should definitely cross-check with other people, everybody's history is different, but I've done a lot of reading. There is a book that you can get on CHARAS called *The Improbable Dome Builders*. It's not widely available, you can get it, or I got it on Amazon used, or I know there is a copy at the Main Library at Bryant Park. You can't check it out but you can read it there. And then, there are a few books there are a lot of books about Gordon Matta Clark, and obviously Buckminster Fuller, I have never found any book by either that talks about La Plaza by name, but I do have copies of letters that Bucky wrote to CHARAS to, I think to Chino Garcia, that verify that the domes were here. And then the last book that came out about Gordon Matta-Clark, I think it's called *Objects to be Destroyed*, it's written by a woman doing her PhD on him, that mentions the resource center, and it was called Loisaída which is basically Nuyorican for the Lower East Side, and it shows a picture of him standing in front of La Plaza before it was really anything and you can see the trees are just like whips. And it says, "The Loisaída Resource Center, never realized." Which is untrue, of course, it was realized. It's not general information, it's not generally known that actually this did happen, and we're kind of the embodiment of it still happening, and we want to make that more public. But anyway she, the woman who wrote that dissertation, and now book, talks a little bit about his involvement down here and the resource center. So that's worth finding. That's maybe a couple years old. And the other source you might talk to about Gordon Matta-Clark is the David Zwirner Gallery, the executor of his estate.

With the continued gentrification and changing demographics of the neighborhood, where do you see the garden going?

In the last five years, it's changed considerably, moving more towards families and young professionals, which is, funny enough, what we always planned it to be. Not necessarily the demographic that it's gone in, but the original goal was to make it safe for children, you know? And it certainly is that now. So you see a lot of younger kids, and there are a lot of kids who are basically growing up here. Like, this is a very big part of their childhood, their only experience with nature. And I see that happening a lot more. We're being very careful in not allowing it to be taken over by that, at the same time, we still want to accommodate not only, you know, people like me, seniors, but just the kind of old guard of the neighborhood, you know, we want to make it comfortable for everybody as much as we can. So we've worked towards that. And it's a delicate balance, you know, trying to make sure that we don't lose our identity and we don't sell out, I guess. So, I'm not exactly sure how successful we'll be at that, but things like the edible forest garden that we're doing, and the educational programs, and that sort of outreach and encouragement to actually get physically involved and emotionally involved in it, I think will help us maintain our character and soul that we've worked so hard to build. But, we'll see. Time will tell.

In terms of both the administration of the garden and the day to day operations of the garden, do you feel any tension between the old and new groups?

There are conflicts, there are conflicts in a lot of different ways. I mean personally, sometimes I come in here and I don't recognize a soul and they're all young and good looking and successful and I feel totally out of place, you know? And so and that's my own hang-up but I, you know sometimes I resent that, but it's minor. At least people are using it. And then there are other times when, frankly, I just get so annoyed with the kids running around yelling and, you know, I'm trying to work or just even be at peace, and you can't, and I just can't manage it. So sometimes I resent that, and, you know, I catch myself like, well, you know, they need a place to be. And sometimes the parents are obnoxious, you know, they just parents and other people who use it, they feel, I think, entitled and they take advantage of it and they don't appreciate what it takes to actually make this happen for them. And I definitely resent that. And then there are people who just abuse it, who are getting drunk and passing

out and yelling, that kind of thing. But all of it, you know, it's worth it in the end and this is a city and you're just gonna deal with that kind of shit, so, there's always going to be conflicts. But, I think that the benefits outweigh all of that. Again, it's a balance. We're always going to be struggling against that. That's part of life.

Could you talk about some of the programming that the garden offers?

One thing that we've been working on for a long time, and have been reasonably successful with, but we still haven't really realized it in its entirety, is a workshop program idea where we really want to make this an educational component of the community. Because we think we have something to offer that isn't available anywhere else in the city, and that is well, in Manhattan in particular and that is, you know, teaching people about gardening, about plants, about permaculture, about healthy living and eating, and all of those things, under open sky and in a way where people can actually, physically get involved. That's my main interest, the other program that similarly has not been realized is a community supported agriculture program, and it kind of goes hand in glove with the workshop program. We have some beds that are community or communal, and they're meant to be basically gardened by children mainly, or school groups, or just the community in general, but then the food is made available either to the people who steward the plots or to a soup kitchen on Avenue B and 9th Street, Trinity Lower East Side, because it's safe. So those are the two main programs we have.

We also have a performance and events committee, which has been very successful in hosting live art like Shakespeare and concerts, and we've done harvest festivals, we do that annually. And we even hosted Occupy Wall Street a couple years ago. Anyway, they bring in almost all of our money, because we also rent the space out for weddings and other events.

Sorry, another distraction... we have a combination of people who either hoard things, they bring things down, sort of like a communal hoarding area, and then they also purge at the same time, so they throw things out that I don't necessarily want thrown out. But, I'd rather be part of the purging than part of the hoarding, [laughter] so I need to let go. But, that's just one small dynamic of this organization.

So, programming. There are other things that are a little less formal there was a woman in here that I was talking to when I first met you, she's Iranian and so she does an Iranian New Year Event, it's firewalking basically, it's very cool. So the reason I bring that up in particular is, it's also kind of an area for that sort of tradition and, you know, for people to be able to host that kind of thing. And so we get to be exposed to other people's culture and tradition, and they have an avenue for doing it.

In your experience, do you feel like the programs mostly draw in people who are members of the garden or people from the wider community?

It's kind of everything. People usually we don't really have an outreach program, you know, like we don't seek people out. They come to us. And it's usually people just wandering in, or coming to an event or something like that. But we get a lot of publicity too, which, again, we don't seek that out. And we're connected with the city through GreenThumb and other organizations. So that brings people to us. It's hard to say exactly what's the main draw I think it probably is just people wandering in for whatever reason. Like the two guys that just walked by, that's exactly what they're doing. They'll ask us questions, you know, if I look like I'm official in any capacity. And we have cards we hand out, direct them to our website. And then we have a meeting every, today for instance, every second Saturday of the month at 1:00. Today it's moved to the third Saturday because we're having our board elections and we needed a little more time to get that out there. Although I don't see anybody around so I don't know how successful that's going to be.

Could you talk about the spatial organization of the garden?

Like I said, it was two spaces, so this is a bit more incidental, this area here, and it was designed solely as a community garden. So this area has individual plots that it's divided up into that people steward. So they commit to like a year of stewardship, they can have them for several years in succession and some have had them for Carolyn probably like 20 years. I had a plot, right over there, for probably 15 years. I gave it up a few years ago because I was not really using it, and there were so many people who wanted to use it. So there is a basically a waiting list of people who want to steward these plots. But you can be a member without stewarding a plot, and do what I do which is garden in other sections, like containers and things like that.

So the original La Plaza started from the willow trees over, and it was subdivided into two major spaces, and eventually subdivided into several small spaces. The two major spaces were the amphitheater area and the hill, and that was for performances, and then the lawn area, there used to be a willow tree where you were sitting, that fell in Irene, and it's still there, but it was the tallest of all the willows. And then the area from that willow and there were two linden trees also that fell that was lawn, and that was for kids. So those were the two main spaces. The subspaces that we built in the meantime are the orchard where the trees fell, there's a little sandbox for the kids, we're doing a native plant garden that kind of rings the lawn, and we're going to build a nature trail that goes throughout the entire garden, that really kind of demonstrates what we are about, about community gardening, permaculture, native plants, and those sorts of things.

And then in the back, we have a little maintenance yard I can show you with a shed, that's really kind of like our office. And that area is also our compost system. We have a very effective process that basically takes care of several tons of organic waste a year. We bring in stuff from restaurants and from people's kitchens. It's a pretty intricate process, it's run by our compost committee that's headed by Pedro Diaz, you might want to talk to Pedro and his wife Magdalena, they're terrific, they have a great perspective on the garden, and a great kid named Dante. And that area's kind of like a private area, so we kind of sometimes hang out there when we don't want to deal with the public [laughter]. And then on the other side of the shed we have a little sink and table, and that's where we want to do the workshops, and that's also more of our "public" picnicking area. On the hill we have the CSA, community supported agriculture, and a little blueberry patch in the back called blueberry hill. And then there's this area which is more intimate.

How do you see the inter-garden relationships in the neighborhood?

It's been kind of haphazard in the years that I've been involved, it's only recently well, i'll back up. The whole reason I got involved is I met this woman named Felicia Young and she started a garden coalition to fight the development of all the gardens, basically. So it was pretty unified then, and she used to do this thing called Earth Celebrations where she'd do on the winter and the summer solstices she would do a pilgrimage to the gardens, which was basically like a parade, where she'd get people in costumes and dance and drums and stuff like that and they'd walk to the

gardens and they'd do these homages to individual spaces. So there was a lot of unity then, but it kind of got fractured because some of the spaces like the 9C Garden got put into the Parks Department right away, they were like immune to development, and same with the 6BC Botanical Garden, they got saved right away, and so there were very few gardens that got kind of moved in during that period of stress and development, so there was a little bit of resentment and it kind of got fractured then. And then we all moved into the Parks Department and no one really knew what was going to happen, the whole unity thing kind of was not necessary any more.

I personally, I've always wanted to do something like garden tours and, you know, try and revive that. But most recently, two organizations have evolved that have been doing that themselves. One is called MoRUS, the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space. It's right over here on Avenue C, it's run by a guy named Bill who's terrific, you've got to talk to him. He actually does garden tours, his organization, that are very effective and very popular. There's some guy who does them on bicycles, I don't know his name but he comes in with a troupe of like 20 bikers. He's a little less organized and a little less involved in the individual gardens but he does bring tours into the neighborhood and make people much more aware. And then the latest organization is LUNGS, Loisaida Urban I'm forgetting what the acronym stands for. It's run by a guy named Charles out of this garden on 8th Street, and his goal is to organize he does the Harvest Festival that we have here, and his goal is to unify the gardens, and so it's reasonably successful. I personally am really only involved with La Plaza and El Jardin, you know, I know a lot of people who garden over here and am very friendly with them, but we don't really do a lot of work together.

How did you deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy?

Well, Irene was the worst, because it came in it was definitely a worse storm in terms of wind and stuff like that, and when we got up and actually came out here to see, basically it was the two big trees, the willow fell and took one of the lindens with it, and that really had a huge psychological effect on the neighborhood. I mean, people showed up from everywhere to see this tree that had fallen, because it was kind of like the icon of our struggle during the development battles. You know, it was always on posters and it was our logo, and it was just emotionally really devastating. The Times wrote about it.

Anyway, so that kind of prepared us for Sandy. And Sandy didn't have that same sort of impact in terms of the actual space, and it certainly wasn't as immediate. But what also happened is that there were three lindens, one fell, outright, so we had to get rid of it, the other was kind of knocked askew, and Sandy helped it fall more, so we eventually had to take it down. That's that big stump over there. But I guess we were kind of prepared for all that, and the flood itself really had more of an impact on the neighborhood in general, and we really didn't notice the impact it had on the garden until the next year, until this year, because a lot of trees and plants died from it, from the saltwater.

I guess the most noticeable thing was we walked in and the pond had been flooded and so all the fish were dead, and we lost all the turtles and everything. It was just so weird to walk along the path and, for some reason, the fish followed the path, so they were like bright gold fish laying in the middle of these brick paths, just strewn all the way along. So that was kind of hard to take.

But, personally, I'm a little bit of a snob about plants and things like that because of my profession, so it kind of cleaned up plants that I didn't really like [laughter] and it gave me a new clean slate to start with. I don't think I'd admit that to any people. And it did open up the opportunity to do that orchard that we were wanting to do and didn't really have the space to do.

So there were good things and bad things about it?

There were good things. I think overall, it's positive, you know? I mean for one, I love the willow trees, but they're really difficult in an urban situation. They drop branches all the time, and that one, the top has fallen off, and it grows back, but they're a liability, and I would never plant one in this situation. People are mad at me for that reason, but, you know, it makes practical sense. So, yeah, so it's positive in that regard.

Is there any sort of logic behind the plants that are here? The individual beds versus the native plant garden that's going up?

There is, it's not obvious well, I'll take that back. Originally La Plaza was actually laid out by architecture students, from what I understand, I don't know too

much about it. So basically it was a T, there were three willows along 9th Street and three lindens bisected that, and that separated kind of the performance area from the lawn area, so it had a really good structure to it. By the time I got involved, it was so overgrown and out of control and people were just kind of planting things everywhere, I tried to bring it back to that, but kind of soften the harshness of the architectural line up. So what I did is I tried to plant around the edges, and bring down the scale of the buildings and the scale of the huge trees, and make it more of a layered structure. And I did that by, with jobs I would have, if there were leftover trees and shrubs and perennials I would bring them here. Or, a lot of the gardens that are under my care change really often, some of them four times a season, so the plants that would usually normally get thrown out, I bring them here or to El Jardin. And so a lot of them are orphans. So, sometimes when I'm planning a garden for a client, I choose the plants [laughter] based on ones that I want here, because I know they're gonna end up here ultimately. So there's that logic, and that's pretty much the space over here.

On this end of it, really, you can plant pretty much anything you want as long as it's not invasive or toxic, or illegal. Most people in the past have been planting ornamental things, mostly flowers, but ever oh, I didn't say about Sandy that a big change that happened, that was actually very devastating, was, a graduate student came in and decided to do soil testing of all the gardens, he was from Marist University, and our garden and I think Los Campos Garden, on 13th, tested positive for PCBs. We were also positive for heavy metal and lead, which we kind of expected would be the case, you know, pretty much every urban lot has that. But the PCBs were a huge concern, because it's more of a free-radical, really difficult to deal with, very easy to ingest for both children and adults, and highly probable of causing cancer. So, you know, everybody panicked, we didn't know what to do. We shut down the garden and told the city we didn't know what to do, and we needed to get further tests done, and it would cost like \$5000 to do, which we really didn't have. So, the city agreed to do it for us, to do the testing, and it came back that it wasn't a concern. It turns out, my brother's an environmental engineer and so he did a lot of research in this, and it turns out that PCB testing is notoriously difficult and complicated, and is often erroneous.

But, out of that, we decided to do raised beds. That's all these, we never had raised beds before. But that's all these new cedar planks that you see. And we got in several

tons of new topsoil and we've replaced, not replaced, but we've added to the soil here to kind of dilute the concerns of toxicity. And the reason I bring that up is that now it looks like we're going to have a lot more vegetable growing over here, instead of ornamentals. It's going to shift in that way. So, the long answer to your question is, there is a lot of logic, but it's not very obvious.

Do you have one favorite memory of being in the space, one story or one event that stands out for you in your mind?

Yeah, actually, and it's recent, very recent. A couple weeks ago, first of all we have a new leader, Bill, who you talked to. He's great, brings in this incredible energy and professionalism, dedication, that we really, really needed. Because I led for a number of years, and I'm not good at it, and the woman who followed me was great but she had to resign. Anyway, point being is he secured some grant monies recently, and also, a woman on the block, Jenny, started a Kickstarter with the willow fell, and raised like \$2300 to replace the willow. Of course, we're not going to replace the willow, but we suddenly had all this money to buy the trees for the fruit orchard. And coincidentally, the Lower East Side Ecology Center on 7th Street wanted to do a million tree giveaway here, and brought in all these serviceberry trees and hazelnut trees to give away, and they couldn't give them all away, so we had all these extra trees. And it attracted all these people from all over the neighborhood who I'd never met. This guy from the projects who is a single father with five kids, and they came in and they planted the trees for me. And it was very festive, we ordered pizza and spread the soil that we got delivered. And that one stands out in particular because, one, it's accomplishing something I've wanted to accomplish for a long time in a very short period of time, and it was very community based, it was largely spontaneous, it was emblematic of what I think is really good about our organization, you know, just a lot of fun. But, it just stands out to me because that represents what we are. I mean, there are several really fun events that we've had here. And it's hard for me to pinpoint exactly one, because it may be like one event that wasn't so significant but it's where I met my best friend Marga, you know, who now I can't imagine life without. That sort of thing. But I guess it would be that planting in the orchard that would stand out as my favorite. The Occupy, the day that Occupy Wall Street came in was pretty cool, too.