

Oral history interview with Anne Radice conducted by telephone on July 24, 2020

Excerpts concerning Connecting to Collections and the C to C Bookshelf

Excerpt 1 (The idea for C to C):

When I was interviewing for the position to be the head of IMLS, when I went to the White House I brought ten copies of the Heritage Health Index and I put them down and I said, “This is what I want to accomplish in my four year term. I really want to make a difference when it comes to preservation and conservation.” I said, “It’s one of the hardest things to get boards to pay for, for people to understand that if you don’t have this, you don’t have a collection.” And so. They started. I reached first and they started opening up the pamphlet. I had a chance to say what I felt was important. And so, if you want me to do this, this is what I’m going to focus on. I said, “And I also think.’ The First Lady had been, well Mrs. Clinton had started Save America’s Treasures. Sometimes, when you change administrations, a program disappears. Mrs. Bush added even more money to it. And I said, “I know Mrs. Bush will be interested in this as well.” And I got the job. [I was sworn in on like March 10th at noon at the White House in 2006 and my tenure ended at noon March 16, 2010.]

Excerpt 2 (Getting HP involved):

And Larry Reger [President of Heritage Preservation] whom I’d known over the years, called me up and he said, “I want you to meet Debbie Hess Norris [Chair of Heritage Preservation].” And I said, “Oh, I’d love to meet her.” And I said, “That’s great. I want you to, I want to talk to you guys about something.” “Okay.” He said, “Let’s have a drink.” It’s my first day at work. And so, they picked me up at the Nancy Hanks Building and we went across the street and I said, “Well, you can’t buy me a drink. You know I’m a government employer.” I said, “But here’s an idea I have. I want to change the whole scope of preservation/conservation within the government. I want to spend millions and millions of dollars on this. And I want you guys to head it up.” And they just about dropped their drinks. Debbie said, “I thought we were going to have to have at least a semi-hard sell to ask you to consider even having meetings.” “I said, “Oh no, We’re doing more than that. We got to do this right away. We got to get going.” And, in fact, I did exactly that for four years. The program went on for four years.

We met all over the country. I think what’s really important is that people kind of ignored the private conservators in a way and I also think that a lot of the conservators who might be in non-big urban centers, they don’t know the people. I said, “So we’re going to give scholarships to people who might not have the funds to come to our meetings. We’re going to have different topics for each one of the meetings. And part of the deal is if you agree to come to this, you agree to have your phone number

published. Accept calls from people who are your colleagues who you might not know.” I said, “To me, that’s really the important thing because that way, conservators who might have issues with something or need some help, they’ll go to the right people. But, that’s the deal.” So, we did Larry and Debbie were like amazing, of course.

Excerpt 3 (Funding):

I got additional money from Bank of America. From the Mellon Foundation. Kress Foundation. I went to Bank of America and I went with someone who helped me raise money. And we go into the corporate headquarters and we’re ushered into a private banking room. I was trying to get a sense of who the person was who was going to be talking to about this. And she comes in and what a personality. I said to my helper, don’t pull out any materials. Let’s see how this goes. And she sits down. She really got inspired by this. She turned to me. She sits down. Before her bottom even hits the chair, she says, “So why should we be giving money to the government?” I said, “You’re not giving it to me. You’re not giving it to the government. You’re giving it to all those people in those small towns where you have banks.” And then she got sort of interested. “What do you mean?” I said, “Well my idea is that you commit about half a million dollars in \$2,500 increments. Because everybody’s got a little historic society and a portrait of a founder or statue or whatever.” I said, “And you are the people who pay for that restoration. It goes on display. Your local bank guy gets there to cut the ribbon. Bank of America’s name is all over the place. And you’ve done a good thing. And I bet you get business out of that.” She says to me, “Now that’s okay.”

I went to see Dr. [Angelica] Rudenstine who had been the head of the grant program at Mellon. When I first arrived at IMLS. I go to see her. And I said, “You know, I started my career at the National Gallery.” She said, “Yes, I know.” She looks at me. I said, “I’m brand new. I want to tell you what I’m up to doing.” I told her about Connecting to Collections and about what we were trying to accomplish. And it was a good meeting. She’s very formal. To put it mildly. And as we leave, she turns to me. She said, “Well, what do you want?” And I said, “Well, what do you mean?” “Well you didn’t ask me for anything.” I said, “Well I don’t think we’re ready to ask until we show you what we can do.” And then I laid it on her about the national tour and trying to give scholarships to people. I said, “Let me flesh this out more for you.” Next say she calls. She says, “We want to give you money.” “Okay. Okay.” And it was nice of them to do it. It wasn’t a gigantic amount. And I said, “I’m so honored

Excerpt 4 (Bookshelf):

The idea of the Connecting to Collections Bookshelf was my idea. And I was stealing an idea from the NEH. Because they were doing a bookshelf of historic titles that dealt with American history. I had worked on a project at NEH called “Picturing America” [<https://picturingamerica.neh.gov/>] where we put in Mylar reproductions of some of the great works of American art. And it was ten gigantic pieces of Mylar with double-sided works of art across curricula. And I believe we sent over 4,000 of these out and they went to schools. There were little hooks you could put into the wall. Teachers could create and curate their own show. We sent them abroad. At the same time we did a book shelf and I thought this is great. We need to do a conservation book shelf. So it was very funny because we pulled together experts and, of course, I came to the meeting to welcome people and I had my little pile of books that I thought would be just great. Of course, they were so out of date. So I quietly put them underneath the table. And someone said, “Anne, did you have some suggestions?” “No. I’m fine.” This was the first time we were able to use stuff online. And the Parks Service had a very nice gray binder type situation where they could put, bring things up to date. So, that bookshelf was really great.

People were so glad. First of all, they were shocked to get anything. And when I would go to visit places and we’d go into the library or we’d go into the study center, there’d be the bookshelf. And they’d be really proud of it. I even dedicated a couple of bookshelves. The whole time if it meant opening an envelope, that was fine. And you know, part of the book shelf also included things dealing with living collections. And one of my Board members who was so wonderful, a man who was Director of the San Diego Museum. So I went to a lot of zoos as well. And one of the zoos I went to was in San Diego and we’d given it a huge grant. Not just for a bookshelf but to help with the, in dealing with a particular frog from Brazil. It’s a very important part of our natural food chain. It has to eat the bugs so the bugs don’t create the disease. And it was becoming extinct. So we put a lot of money into helping it not be extinct. So they said to me, “Would you mind holding the frog?” I’ve held snakes, I’ve held all kinds of animals. I was pictured standing next to a cheetah. Between a cheetah and a golden retriever. So anyway, I said, “No. I don’t have a problem.” So I put some gloves on. I have a linen suit on. I’m dressed up. The frog is sort of heavy. He probably weighed, I don’t know, two or three pounds. He starts wiggling. I do not let him go. And when this particular frog gets upset he lets go the gooiest green slime you’ve ever seen. Which he proceeded to do all over my suit. It was okay. I didn’t let him go. Everyone loved that. Well, I didn’t want him to get hurt. But I always knew, it was always important no matter where I went to bring an extra set of clothes.