

Hudson River Valley Institute  
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories  
Milo Tsukroff

**Interviewer:** Ok, I'm just going to begin with a few general questions about your life and everything. So did you grow up in the Hudson Valley or wherever you were born?

**Milo Tsukroff:** No, my parents are from New York, I grew up primarily [pause] South America, New York area, Connecticut, but not in the Hudson Valley.

**Interviewer:** So like how long have you lived in, like have you moved to the Hudson Valley since--.

**Tsukroff:** I moved to Poughkeepsie in January of 1995, so I've been here 13 years [pause] but as I say, my family, my ancestry was from the New York area in general, so it was kind of like coming home. I spent fifteen years, fourteen or fifteen years in Eastern Connecticut and that was culturally somewhat different because the culture's a little bit different out there and I never really quite fit in, moved back here and felt like home, now I'm fitting in a lot better.

**Interviewer:** So you like the community of like the Hudson River Valley and everything?

**Tsukroff:** Yes, absolutely, I love this area. My wife and I bought a house and are just going to stay here, we plan on retiring here so, which is nice after moving around so many times. My wife said, we've got the one house and we're going to stay here.

**Interviewer:** And is your like, I know you're like a member of the board but do you have like, like what's your profession?

**Tsukroff:** My, I'm actually a professional father, I have had [pause] nine living children, of which I have seven surviving, and that basically has been my entire profession for over thirty years. I need to work really double incomes because my wife needs to be home taking care of the kids and currently, for the last twenty years actually, I've been working on and off as a computer professional which pays me extremely well but I actually feel like I'm going to my job to get away from the family, it's like kind of going on vacation. I mean if I had my way I'd be a teacher but I cannot afford the pay cut. And I, it's just the same thing I tell everybody else that I meet who asks what do I do, I'm a professional father and I slum it working on my hobby as a computer programmer. So that's my perspective on it.

[Interviewers switch places]

**Interviewer 2:** Ok so we got some of the general stuff out of the way I guess.

**Tsukroff:** Actually I should add currently I'm employed by Edison Schools Inc. which is a for-profit school corporation. I work on the Lawson financial serv—Lawson financials, which is a computer program that runs ( ) financials. I don't work for anything school related; and basically I'm maintaining a back office financial system. I've been doing, working specifically with Lawson for six years—six years, actually eight years now—and been working in general with financial computer software for about twenty, twenty five years because that's where the money

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is in computer programming these days. That's what I'm specifically doing; I'm taking a vacation day today so.

**Interviewer 2:** Let's starting talking a little bit about your involvement with the Walkway Over the Hudson project, and I know, how long have you been a board member of the Walkway project?

**Tsukroff:** I was only a board member for about seven months.

**Interviewer 2:** Seven months, and are you currently on the board?

**Tsukroff:** No, not at all. But there's a reason why you're talking to me, and I know why Fred wanted you to talk to myself and Denny Evaul.

**Interviewer 2:** Ok, could you elaborate on that?

**Tsukroff:** That gets into, you'll want to go through these other questions before you get into that because otherwise I'll end up telling my story and that'll take quite a while so.

**Interviewer 2:** Ok, we don't technically have to stick to the script just so you know, so if you want to get some of this information out of the way [voice trails off].

**Tsukroff:** Right, ok [pause] what role do I feel the bridge played—the bridge has played—for the region? I got, I learned about the bridge because after I moved here to the Hudson Valley in '95, I'd always been interested in model trains, played with an HO model railroad set when I was a kid, tried to put the set back together again when I moved to Eastern Connecticut and found I was very frustrated with it. So I gave it all away, and said if I ever get into trains again I'll get into N scale, just small enough to collect. Came here to the valley—it was Christmas 1995—I found a few N scale model railroad sets available at the KB's, they were in the process of getting rid of the trains but they still sold them. And I bought a few sets and began to get into N scale model railroading, and shortly after I bought my house in Pleasant Valley in 1998, I was looking for a place where I could have a [pause] club to join, because after you get to the certain point where basically you have to join a club because otherwise you get frustrated. You don't know what to do, etc. I found that the Hudson Valley Railroad Society—which has its building is the Hyde Park Station in Hyde Park, New York—just up the river from the Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge. They have an excellent library that details the railroads of the area very, very good historically. I moved to Pleasant Valley and found that there was a railroad that had gone through about five hundred feet away from my house and I wanted to find out more details about it. It turns out that the Hyde Park, I'm sorry the Pleasant Valley station was only on the other side of the tracks from our house, so it was quite close. It's actually been preserved by the Town of Pleasant Valley and currently sits up in a—it was dragged up the road to West Road School—so that was my interest in it. I joined the club to find out a lot about railroads and worked as their webmaster, I still maintain the website occasionally, updating it with forums from our train show, etc. So I became quite interested of course in the local history, was interested in the railroad bridge as ( ) of history. I read about the bridge being opened by the Walkway organization, I read about the people going out on it that would say, oh it's really great, it was

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like well, one of these days I'll go over there, and then things began to change in the newspaper. I noticed that it had been shut down; things were not going so well, so we would discuss it once in a while in the Hyde Park, I'm sorry, in the Hudson Valley Railroad Society. They open in the Hyde Park Station we'd go there on Monday nights—we call it a work night—but when there's nothing else to, which is most of the time, we sit around and we talk, or if we're doing something we talk, it's basically a great talk session, you know, it's wonderful for all the guys to go up. Matter of fact I'm a little bit young to be a member because I'm still working, most of the members of the Hudson Valley Railroad Society are retired. Denny Evaul is retired and he has plenty of time on his hands. He's not that interested in modeling he's part of the club. The club has many different, club members have many different interests, and he's much more interested in historic preservation. He's also more tied into the community since he's been here most of his life. So what happened was I was unemployed in 2003-- I lost my job in February of 2003—went on unemployment and started looking for work, and at that time computer jobs were just, they just vanished. I mean there was nothing. I was told later on by a guy down in New York, he said that the entire summer of 2003 he placed nobody, absolutely nobody. He said he could have gone on a six month fishing trip and made just as much money, because he said half of my income is commission, half my income is salary, he said I could have gone on a fishing trip for six months and still made the same kind of money. So it was absolutely terrible. So basically I spent the entire summer—just the rest of 2003—looking for work. So I had plenty of time on my hands. Well what happened was in June of 2003 Denny mentioned that, Denny Evaul, one Monday night mentioned that Bill Sepe had been talking to him about joining their board. Now Denny Evaul was and still is treasurer of the Hudson Valley Railroad Society, and Bill Sepe apparently had some people leave his board. We didn't know what was happening at the time. Hudson Valley Railroad Society wasn't plugged into what was happening with the Walkway organization, so Bill Sepe managed to talk Denny into joining him on his board because he needed more board members, and then talking with, as Denny and Bill Sepe talked a bit, they talked about, Bill needed a treasurer. Would I join and be their treasurer? To which I said, you know I don't have anything else to do and I need to have some experience with financial software. So I might as well keep myself busy and join the Walkway, and asked Bill if it would be ok if I joined. Matter of fact I have pictures, these are just a few of the pictures that are on the disc, you guys can look at it later, of our trip that we took. I think it was, the date seems to be June 29<sup>th</sup> of 2003. We went out on the bridge and did a complete bridge inspection out to the observation platform. I see Denny, Denny's wife, cripes I can't remember her name again, but anyways Denny, ( ), and another member of the board, Bill Sepe is right there [holds up picture]. And we took a look at the bridge; he showed it to us, very proud to show off his bridge and his accomplishments. Here's the building that he refused to allow the town of Highland to inspect that caused them to shut off his end of the bridge [holds up another picture]. The more I learned about it, the more we realized that the Walkway was in a completely dead stop. The people who had been helping Bill, for the most part, had all of them left. Just simply dropped off as far as we could, from Bill's perspective, had simply disappeared. They hadn't disappeared but we didn't know exactly at the time what was happening. It turns out that Denny and I, Denny Evaul and I, found ourselves in a very interesting situation. We had come in from the Hudson Valley Railroad Society, our interest was preservation of the bridge, we were very concerned that the bridge be preserved and the project move forward. Now we said this flat out to Bill, we said Bill we don't care what happens but we're interested in preserving this bridge. Bill was interested in preserving the bridge but he had this firm statement he said, he refused to take any kind of public

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funds, I mean absolutely refused. I've found out that the federal laws for gasoline taxes, every time you do a gallon of gasoline it's like fourteen cents a gallon, federal tax is I think about five or six cents of every dollar is supposed to be spent on non-highway related projects, railroad preservation being one of them. So there's millions and millions and millions of dollars that have been siphoned off from our own gasoline taxes that are just sitting there waiting to be spent on projects like the Walkway. But Bill Sepe absolutely refused to take any kind of public funds, and he was adamant about it, really became a huge argument with him, between him and many, many other people who are on, in the Walkway organization because we could look at it and we could see fundraising by going to various, various fairs was just not making enough money. Now Bill had practically nobody to help him so I and a few other people, went with him occasionally to some of the various fairs in the area. I remember going to a second or third annual ginseng festival over in, over in a think it's, its north of, I think it's the town north of Hudson, I think it's the Town of Catskill, and we made absolutely no money and it was simply just a waste of our time. But I mean this is what was happening. He was trying to sell stuff. He was trying to organize things. He would make a few hundred at the most. I remember him over at the Stormville Airport trying to sell some stuff, again even if he made a few hundred dollars—that was about all he ever made at any of these things—there was no way he was going to get the kind of money needed to preserve the bridge, he needed lots more people, lots more money. As time went on Denny and I found that we were, we began to be contacted by people. Turns out all these people who had broken off from Bill Sepe, formed a, kind of a counter organization and they were looking to take over the bridge project. Bill Sepe was absolutely dead set against it, because he called these people, he used words that weren't, that couldn't be, and that weren't printable. He'd basically say that these are the people that wanted to accept public funds, and technically he was right. Denny and I refused to say whether Bill was right or whether these people were right, we said, we want to see this project move forward. And then we discovered that under the bylaws there was supposed to be an election done every single year and there hadn't been an election in about five years, at which time, technically, the membership could sue and have the organization either disbanded or there could be other stuff. What Denny and I discussed when we were talking privately was that basically, we didn't want to see, we didn't want to see Bill Sepe continue with nothing happening at all because he had every single political organization against him, the Town of, The city of Poughkeepsie wasn't talking to him, the Dutchess County wasn't talking to him, the Town of Lloyd wasn't, the Town of Highland wasn't talking to him, the town of, Ulster County wasn't talking to him, Bill Sepe had managed to alienate every single organization that he had talked to. He's a very colorful character; he's exactly the right kind of guy to seize the bridge, which is what he did in 1992. He was wonderful to get the project started. What he was terrible at was getting involved with, with switching gears and getting involved in bureaucratic manipulations that you have to do in order to get the bridge project going and what it needed now that he had seized the bridge, he had the title, he had everything ready to go. Now what he needed to do was switch gears and start cooperating with all of the politicians in the area. He was just emotionally not able to do it. Now he's a street organizer and we could see, he's really great for doing street fairs and for doing guerilla community action, a great community organizer, but for where the project needed to go next, Denny and I were looking at it and saying, this is not the right guy. But on the other hand, we didn't want to just, it's hard to tell him, tell him up front especially because he tended to take offense, what I tried to do, and Denny as well but I had more time to work with Bill because I was unemployed at the time. I tried to work with him as much as possible, work through the

finances, make sure the things were running well. He kept the books clean, he did a very good job of keeping the books, I couldn't find anything wrong with the books, and he had always been careful to separate bridge business from personal business and I myself have no complaints about that. What he wanted to do was to just continue without having an election. We said, let's have an election and he was dead set against it. There were times when we were afraid that we had to keep the parties separated because if we didn't, there was going to be a fist fight. We basically, Denny and I, basically kept a lid on things. We begged the people working with the breakaway faction—which was basically Fred Schaeffer's group—we begged them please, don't make this lawsuit, keep things calm. We'll work with Bill, we'll get an election going. We begged Bill, please don't get upset, keep the motion going, let's go ahead and put an election together because otherwise you're going to get sued. And it was difficult to work with both factions but we basically kind of, kind of stood and held things apart for a while until we could get a very, very politically proper kind of change occurring and the way that we engineered the change was simply to run an election and say to people, do you want to have, you know, we laid out the slate of candidates. Bill Sepe was, I mean to say that he was not happy would be an understatement, but we basically told him you have no choice because if you don't have the election, then basically you lose your, you lose your [pause] status as a tax exempt organization because you're supposed to have an election within a certain amount of time and you've defaulted upon it. I'm not clear now what the statutes were but Bill was absolutely, the same time he was frustrated about this he keeps on trying to figure out some way to keep the Town of [pause] Highland to inspect his building because that was one of the big things that kept this building closed was the fact that he was, that the building was supposedly out of code. Well actually what it was, was is that Bill just didn't want to have it inspected at all, at the same time he didn't want to accept federal money, any kind of federal money, he was also apparently of the opinion that he could build anything he wanted without having it inspected which was kind of, you know, Denny and I both looked at that at least, my personal opinion is the inspectors are there for a reason. If something's unsafe, you want to know if it's unsafe. They're not out there to kill you, they're just out there to make sure what you're building is safe and basically provide an official stamp, if you've done a good job, great, if there's something that has to be fixed, you fix it but that's it. Bill wasn't comfortable with the idea of having somebody else inspect his work, as a matter of fact it turned out later when the, when, when Bill was eased out and Fred Schaeffer took over the chairmanship, the inspector came in within a month or two, inspected it, gave him a few things that had to be fixed—you've got to fix this, this, and this—building's still there. They didn't have to do more than just fix a few things. It wasn't a major issue, except in Bill's mind. So here Denny and I had to keep Bill and a few people that were loyal to him away from the major faction which was real, you know, the faction was really against the Bill Sepe's leadership more the bridge itself. The bridge sells itself. I mean the first time I went out there in June of '03 it was incredible. Have you had a chance to get out there?

**Interviewer 2:** I have not, no.

**Tsukroff:** When you get a chance to get out there you'll be either terrified or thrilled, there's no middle ground. There's some people who just absolutely refuse to walk across the bridge, they just look at it and say that's it, I'm not going out there. Other people walk out there and it's just exhilarating, and so, there's nobody, nobody anywhere in the Walkway organization who doesn't really want to preserve the bridge. It was an argument over do we accept public funds because

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that's the direction it has to move in, or do we continue to not accept public funds in which case it was going to languish and basically go nowhere. At the time in 2003, really nothing had happened in three years, absolutely nothing, no inspections, there was no progress being made except occasional brush cutting. There were portions of the property that were running down, neighbors were complaining about it. Bill had to go out there and either personally deal with something or arrange to have somebody do some work. It was just going from bad to worse. The bridge, another argument Bill has is—Bill Sepe has—is that the bridge doesn't have to be painted and when I got up close and looked at it, it was very clear that most of the bridge perhaps doesn't have to be painted but there were definitely sections that needed to be adjusted and needed to be, any place where there's pooled water tends to rust no matter how good the steel is. The 1888 steel is wonderful, its very, very good quality, it doesn't rust well at all, its very high in silica. It just gets this (discoloration) and then it rusts very, very slowly. The 1906 and the 1916-1917 is much, much worse, it's rusting very quickly and it looks like, even another hundred years and it'll just basically rust away, but the original 1888 steel is in very good shape. So, but that was also another issue, the bridge had last been painted probably in 1965, you can see traces of the silver there, and it looks like it really needs to be stabilized at some point. Again, Bill was of the opinion you don't have to, you don't have to paint a bridge and he repeated that so many times it was pretty apparent that he had a lot of people telling him, you've got to paint the bridge. Well painting the bridge alone is going to take several million dollars and he couldn't see any kind of way of raising that money so that was why I think he was arguing the other way. So Denny and I worked very hard with Bill to make sure that we lined up and sent out, I remember working doing hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of elections, sending out hundreds and hundreds of them. We did an election by mail which Bill absolutely refused to have a public meeting, he just, I think he was afraid of being lynched, myself, or of something happening. He wanted to have, he was absolutely adamant about having election by e-mail, by mail, so we sent out hundreds and hundreds of ballots, and then we got hundreds and hundreds of ballots back. Denny and I offered the use of the Hyde Park Station as a neutral ground for reading the, compiling the ballots. So I think it was it late November, I'm not sure about the numbers because I haven't double checked them but I believe it was late November that we had the election and we did the counting in early December. We had the counting, as I say, in the Hyde Park Station because we could neither have it at the Walkway offices, which was Bill's territory, or at Fred Schaeffer's office where Denny and I had gone to a few meetings with the breakaway faction, and we could see clearly was the breakaway faction's office. So we said, look we're neutral parties here so why don't you have it in the Hyde Park Station? So we set up a few tables in the Hyde Park Station, put up the chairs, and the entire board, or what was left of it came in, and we sat down and counted ballots. Denny was not elected officially, I think that, I think that I was as far as that I think. I squeaked through on one of the ballots and Denny was not. Denny was thrilled about getting off the board he said, because this was a lot of trouble and I was just doing it as a favor to Bill, I didn't realize how bad it was going to be, I'm happy to be out of there, and I continued as the treasurer for a while. I was in the process of getting a job in Massachusetts, I actually was out on the bridge with, with another workers working on the Christmas tree lights which we couldn't get going, but I was actually out on the bridge, it was either the Christmas tree lights or the flag or both. We were out there as I was taking cell phone calls from a recruiter up in Massachusetts to line up a job that I was going to take up in Massachusetts. So when the job came through from Massachusetts, I handed in my resignation and spent one last week working for the Walkway organization as it moved into the new digs

over at the current location, the current building. And I was out of there, I was very happy because it was taking a tremendous amount of time and I felt torn between the time I needed to put into getting the new job going, and the time that I needed to put into the Walkway and I couldn't do both. I was very happy to work my tail off for the last week and then turn it over to [pause] I think it was somebody Santner, to um, you know, to the guy who took over as treasurer. And that was it; I walked away, that was like seven months, six months of involvement, July, August, September, October, November, December, and January. And in that six months, Denny and I basically kept the Walkway organization from collapsing, or from destroying itself or from going into civil war, and we facilitated the gentle removal of Bill Sepe as chairman and eased the new faction in. We gave a really nice testimonial dinner in January for Bill Sepe and a lot of people showed up and talked about how wonderful he was and really up until that time I hadn't realized how important he had been to the bridge. I just thought, oh well here's this annoying guy and he's pissed off everybody all across the Hudson Valley but what he had done was really remarkable. He had squatted on that bridge and seized it for preservation because up until then Conrail had done it's best to get rid of the bridge, and there was the guy in Pennsylvania who had bought it for a dollar, and Bill's people had to track him down and chased him half way across the east coast to finally get a hold of the guy, and harassed him until he finally gave them the deed for the property you know. He told me these stories about the history of the bridge that were just wonderful, and he now had the deed to the bridge. And so what he had done was preserve the bridge, and seize it for preservation which was, nobody but Bill Sepe could have done that. And the issue that Denny and I had gotten involved in was the question of it, now how do we fund the preservation of the bridge because, as I say, Bill Sepe's concept was here's all this money that should be going to cancer so I'm refusing to take it. And I mean when the money, like I said, when the gas money is out there and you pay your tax and the money's slated to go to preservation projects then that's what it's supposed to go to. As much money as possible is being spent on cancer research and you know that's the way it is. Denny and I saw it differently but we didn't argue it with Bill, he was like, well what do you feel about it? I said Bill, I don't care whether we take private funds or public funds, we just want to make sure the bridge is preserved. We want to do what's best for the bridge. And again, because we're coming from the Hudson Valley Railroad Society's perspective and saying we don't want to see this bridge lost. The Hudson Valley Railroad Society has a lot of plans of local historical structures, and we have photographs and stuff we try to, we try to promote preservation of things as much as we can in the Hudson Valley so that's, that's basically my story. We got involved in June of '03 and kept things from, kept the Walkway from destroying itself in the process of easing Bill Sepe out.

**Interviewer 2:** I was going to ask you but you answered my question, what you thought his motivation was—Bill Sepe's motivation—was for not accepting public funds?

**Tsukroff:** I think that's a very pure motive, I put nothing against him, it's just that his, his concept was not going to preserve the bridge beyond seizing it. A very good concept of well, let's go ahead and keep public funds, lets do this entirely of public funds, well it's a public project at this point. If it was to be torn down, the latest estimate that I've seen was 54 million dollars, the price of it goes up and up and up, but basically the cost of tearing it down alone is about... always is about... double what it costs to preserve it. And the other thing is it's a beautiful, beautiful bridge, somebody once described it as the Eiffel Tower of the Hudson. It

was designed actually right around the same time as the Eiffel Tower, and it's got that same beautiful lattice work structure. If it's, if it's properly painted and properly illuminated it can be an absolutely beautiful industrial object just like the Eiffel Tower in France, and after the Paris Exposition of 188...3 I think it was, anyways, after the Paris Exposition I've read that there was talk about tearing it down, it was supposed to be torn down after the exposition so they just let it sit there and it's turned into an absolute icon of Paris. But the question of was Bill Sepe honest? I think he's really honest when he says he'd rather not have public funds. Well when you get into such a fundamental disagreement there was, like I said, the only thing to do was to replace him and Denny and I didn't really care that much whether we replaced him, as much as we didn't want to see the Walkway organization destroyed. Personally I thought, yeah Bill's wrong, but the best way to deal with it was to deal with it gentlemanly, in a gentlemanly fashion. In a way that was politically correct in terms of, follow the laws, the bylaws of the organization and the laws of the State of New York for nonprofit organizations and do what's right by the laws and by the bylaws and just let's not get into lawsuits, let's not get into incriminations, let's not get into people calling each other names. Bill has a very abrasive personality and he can be very, very intimidating at meetings, and I've bore the brunt of it more than once in the meetings, having him yelling at the top of his lungs at me, and that pissed off a lot of people. That was the other thing too, was that his personality was good, it's good for getting things done at a certain level, but when you've got to deal with politicians, you've got to have a completely different kind of personality involved. You've got to have somebody who's very cooperative, somebody who's very low key, somebody who understands the kind of schmoozing that you have to do with politicians, and it's something Bill has no time and no patience for. He wants to get things done. So like I say, getting the bridge originally, great idea, coming up with the concept—he's a man of ideas—but to get the project finished really takes another kind of a personality.

**Interviewer 2:** Right, and that's what Mr. Schaeffer and David Rocco brings to the project obviously... [voice trails off].

**Tsukroff:** Right, it turns out he was the one who originally got the county to turn the old railroad into a rail trail and there was quite a, he told me one time, he said it should have been done already. He said the huge delay was laying a waterline along the rail trail and that delayed it by almost ten years. It was, yeah there were ( ) as to whether ( ) was going to take the water or not, they had to lay the, the had to make contracts. It takes a long time, it doesn't take long at all to cap a surface but to lay a water line, it takes a lot more engineering, and so that's what's delayed it. It's finally going to be done this year, and hopefully by next year the rail trail can connect right up to the railroad bridge. So again, the concept of the bridge is fantastic, you go out on the bridge and it sells itself. My thinking is—for the future of the bridge—once it's connected up its just, I, I can't say enough about it. I think it's going to bring people in. Somebody had came up with that crazy idea of putting an elevator right by the waterfront in Poughkeepsie, and it's just, I mean at first it was a crazy idea but then they said, but a construction project, they put these elevators—outside elevators—up there all the time, and then the light bulb goes on and everybody hears it and they, its like oh yeah, then you don't have to walk to the end of the bridge, you can go right up there [points up]. That's a fabulous idea and I've seen it incorporated into the official plans, so I mean these things here, it will just basically, like I say, it sells itself. The concept of making it a public park I think is a great idea because it gives us, it gives it, it makes it, the funding of the preservation of it and [pause] the maintenance



and security and stuff that goes into the public parks, and I think that's just an absolutely great idea. It becomes part of New York History. I don't think it will ever be used as a railroad bridge again, there's just, the more I learn about railroad history, the more I've come to realize that local railroads simply aren't needed. Basically, railroads are very effective at moving goods for long distances, but any place where you've got any; you can deliver a product within ten hours, it can be delivered by truck because basically a truck driver's time is ten to fourteen hours. Distances longer than ten to fourteen hours—which is about six or seven hundred miles... beyond that, then a railroad becomes very effective. So out west, Transcontinental, up and down the east coast, railroads are very effective at delivering goods, but as far as local deliveries, railroads are just simply, they're simply just a thing of the past, at least for freight movers. For passenger service, passenger service is beginning to increase more and more, but again there's already a tremendous amount of highways in the area, and up here it's not, it's an east-west railroad, the north-south railroads are the one you need to serve New York City with. East-West railroads just simply, in this area they died off very, very quickly. The last one left was the one that went across the railroad bridge, the east-west railroads that went through Pleasant Valley died by 1935. They just, and they tore the tracks up in '38, it was just, you're gone, all the east-west ones except the one New Haven line. So the real need for passenger services, of course north-south, Metro North continues to increase it's service and move farther and farther north and it's doing great, you know, it's doing great business. For the last year now I've been working down in New York City which I'm very happy, I get to the station, I look, there's the bridge right there and get on the train and off I go to work and then come back and there it is, the bridge again when I come back. So I see it twice a day and it's a very gratifying feeling to see the bridge there, just waiting to be finished up. I can hardly wait 'til they take the ties off the deck, put the proper planking on the top, just finish that Walkway up.

**Interviewer 2:** Will you use it once it's finished?

**Tsukroff:** Oh absolutely, absolutely, for a whole variety of reasons, for the boys at my church—I'm involved with a boys group at church called the Royal Rangers—and I'd love to take the kids across there. For my family, for personal, I mean I could bike from Pleasant Valley, get on the rail trail, get over to the bridge. I could be there in fifteen minutes-half and hour. It would be, you know, it'll be very easy to do without a problem and that, without even having to, just buy a bicycle. Matter of fact that's Fred Schaeffer's involvement, he's an avid bicyclist and he envisioned the rail trail for the purpose of biking and also one of the things he's always envisioned for the rail trail—for the bridge—is to, not only connect up the rail trails but also for the fact that you can bike across it. I have heard some people complain about it and they're claiming, well you know criminals are going to go across the bridge, etc, etc, and they're worried about theft, and quite honestly that's a canard. There are criminals who live in Poughkeepsie and like criminals all across the country now, they have a van or they have a car. They get out of the car and then they, I saw some guys from Poughkeepsie who were arrested up in Stamfordville earlier this week, they drive for many, many more miles than just across the bridge. The bridge will be a strictly pedestrian thing. It can be used for all sorts of things. You could have a road race that would go around both bridges or you know, that's one thing I would like to do is take a bicycle across, do a loop. You know there's, who knows how many ideas people will come up with. The bridge used to be used for starting the, some sort of a rowing race, and if you look very carefully, supposedly you can still see the marks for the lanes for the rowers, and then they

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had a guy up on the bridge who would light off fireworks and then he'd set them up. People would be on the far side on the west shoreline on these big flat cars that had rows of seats in them, and the train would actually come along and parallel the rowers. The only place that I've seen that done by another railroad was the Central Vermont and the Hudson Valley, I'm sorry, the New York, New Haven, and Hartford. On the Thames River in Groton, going from Groton to New London north, there used to be races along there and both the Central Vermont and the New York, New Haven, and Hartford had their own cars. I've seen photographs of them, that they would drag up and down the river for spectators to watch the rowing races. I don't know, maybe there was something like that up in Boston but I haven't seen pictures of it, but I have seen it here that the New York Central had observation cars so you know, very, very neat idea. I guess it finally fell away during the, during the various world wars, and the [pause] I guess it was back shortly after World War II that the New York Central stopped running the rails on the, stopped running passenger service on the far side of the river and they just basically concentrated on this side of the river.

**Interviewer 2:** Any thoughts on what they should name the state park?

**Tsukroff:** No, no, actually I'd like to see it named after Bill Sepe simply to remember his contribution but you know I don't have much opinion in that area.

[new interviewer]

**Interviewer 3:** I just have one question for you, it's September 2009, they're cutting the ribbon and there's a big ceremony, is Bill Sepe there? Is Bill Sepe's name mentioned? Is he a key name in part of the ceremony?

**Tsukroff:** Bill's name is a key part of the ceremony, his name will be there on the bridge, he will not be there. I mentioned to Bill Sepe, I met him a few weeks after, it was spring 2004, and I had gotten a [pause] I guess I'd gotten a taxi ride with him, found out he was driving a taxi, and I was at, it was the summer of 2004, and I was at Pleasant Valley and they had unveiled a war memorial, and it lists every veteran who ever fought for Pleasant Valley. And there is Bill Sepe's name, William Sepe, he was in the Marines, and so I called him up and says, "Hey Bill you got to, there's a war memorial up here, sometime you got to come up to Pleasant Valley and take a look at the war memorial it's got your name on it." And he says nope, I'm not going to come up, refused to come up. I don't know if he's been there since but Bill's the kind of guy who just doesn't want to, if he doesn't want to do something then he won't do it. He's just that way, and I think he's probably, I don't know how bitter he is about losing the leadership on the bridge. He may have mellowed, but I kind of had the feeling that he's pretty hostile to what happened. I hope he doesn't blame me, I know that Denny and I getting involved, we were, I don't see us as catalysts of change, I see us almost as like the people who came in there, we were kind of the grease that kept the wheels from jamming up.

**Interviewer 3:** Facilitators.

**Tsukroff:** Facilitators, if we hadn't been there, we could have seen things going on Bill's way for maybe another six months to a year. But we think it would have been destructive at the very

end. We don't know if there would have been a Walkway organization left after that. It would have been disastrous, we really, Denny and I did not want to see that happen. We really wanted to have an election, somehow to get the whole situation resolved, and really, since we could see Bill was really creating a problem, kind of ease him out in a way he could see, this is the way it's going to go, everything's going to be right. As I say, I hope he doesn't blame us, I don't think I was working for an ulterior motive; both Denny and I wanted it to happen cleanly. But Bill, still as I say, I was pretty hostile against Bill by the end of my experience because he had yelled at me at a couple of meetings and began to see why there were so many people that upset at him. But when I saw person after person coming up at the testimonial dinner and talking about how Bill had done this and Bill had done that, I began to understand there's a side of Bill that was just essential for that bridge, that bridge would not have been preserved without Bill and he deserves all the kudos he can get. Whether he's going to be there [pause] Bill's his own person, I don't know if he'll be there or not, I kind of suspect he won't be. He may look at it and rumble about it's all paid with tax payers money and I won't give my, I won't give any satisfaction.

**Interviewer 3:** But it certainly sounds like he'll be remembered.

**Tsukroff:** Oh absolutely, absolutely, he's the character who started the preservation. I mean there's a huge amount that's been written about the bridge. But when the fire occurred and Penn Central, even before that, Penn Central had it in to get rid of the bridge they knew they were going to get rid of it one way or the other. There's no doubt about it, the railroad companies didn't need it, as soon as Penn Central was created you had, basically, you had a New York access, you had Albany access, and in the middle was Poughkeepsie, and as long as it was the same company that owned all three of them, the middle access through Poughkeepsie was totally unneeded. So that was it, it was an expensive bridge to maintain and they just basically saw it as a huge liability and wanted to get rid of it. So, Penn Central failed anyways and then they had to get rid of their assets and Conrail looked at it and said they didn't want it. So they were real happy to get rid of it rather than run the liability of running it.

**Interviewer 3:** Well it's a good purpose for it then.

**Tsukroff:** Oh absolutely, absolutely, like I say, if you get a chance to go out there I think you're going to take one walk across it and fall in love with it. There's something about being out there, I was out there, it was January of 2004, it was about five degrees above zero and you could hear the bridge occasionally crack because it contracts and it expands. It makes these strange noises and you walk all the way out there, I was out to the third pier and I'm looking around and it was quiet. You could hear the sounds of the city off in the distance, and you could hear the tinkling of the ice as it went by the pier and there's, its sort of a loneliness in the middle of everything that's just grand. You can see the sky above you, there's nothing between you and the sky, you've got a nice sturdy deck under you, it feels solid, you don't have, it doesn't sway like you think a bridge does, it's really solid. And you can just be by yourself, my thinking is once the deck is completed you'll be able to go out there, it doesn't matter if there's people a hundred feet or a hundred and fifty feet away from you in either direction. You look out there and it is a long, long way to either bank, you look back and it's like you can't even see the far shore. You look to the other side and you can see it's a very long ways, you just kind of feel like you're out in the middle of nowhere, and it's a nice feeling. Even though you can see all around you, see this

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magnificent scenery, where you are... just feels like you're just by yourself, and it's a really nice feeling. Just like you're floating above the river, and you see the river go by, you see the boats go by and it's just, you're there by yourself and your thoughts; it's really nice, I think you'll really like it.

**[End of Interview]**

**Transcribed by Jake Racette**