CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

EDUARDO ROVIRA, JR.

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION AND ACTION FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH IN AMBLER (REACH Ambler)

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Lee Sullivan Berry

at

BoRit Superfund Site
Ambler, Pennsylvania

on

12 March 2014

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This oral history was conducted as part of a joint project of the Chemical Heritage Foundation and the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. This project was supported by the Office of the Director, National Institutes of Health under Award Number R25OD010521-01.

IRB Approved
From: 05/06/2013
To: 05/05/2014

THE CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Center for Oral History

Title of the Research Study: Resources for Education and Action for Community Health in Ambler
Protocol Number: 817669
Principal Investigator: (name, address, phone and email) Frances K. Barg, PhD, Anatomy Chemistry 141-2, 215-746-1830, fran.barg@uphs.upenn.edu
Co-investigator: (name, address, phone and email): Jody Roberts, PhD, Chemical Heritage Foundation—315 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA, 215-873-8281, jroberts@chemheritage.org
Emergency Contact: (name, address, phone and email): Frances K. Barg, PhD, Anatomy Chemistry 141-2, 215-746-1830, fran.barg@uphs.upenn.edu

FINAL RELEASE FORM

This document contains my understanding and agreement with the Chemical Heritage Foundation with respect to my participation in the audio- and/or video-recorded interview conducted by Lee Berry on 12 March 2014. I have read the transcript supplied by the Chemical Heritage Foundation.

1. The recordings, transcripts, photographs, research materials, and memorabilia (collectively called the "Work") will be maintained by the Chemical Heritage Foundation and made available in accordance with general policies for research and other scholarly purposes.

2. By signing this document, you will grant, assign, and transfer to the Chemical Heritage Foundation all right, title, and interest in the Work, including the literary rights and the copyright. Participants retain the right to copy, use, and publish the Work in part or in full until their death.

3. The manuscript may be read and the recording(s) heard/viewed by scholars approved by the Chemical Heritage Foundation unless restrictions are placed on the transcript as listed below.

By signing this document, you are agreeing that this constitutes your entire and complete understanding.

(Signature) Eduardo Rovira, Jr.
Eduardo Rovira, Jr.

(Date) 12/11/14

OPTIONAL: If you wish to place the following restrictions on the use of your interview, please indicate below:

Regardless of any restrictions that may be placed on the transcript of the interview, the Chemical Heritage Foundation retains the rights to all materials generated about your oral history interview, including the title page, abstract, table of contents, chronology, index, et cetera (collectively called the "Front Matter and Index"), all of which will be made available on the Chemical Heritage Foundation's website. Should the Chemical Heritage Foundation wish to post to the Internet the content of the oral history interview, that is, direct quotations, audio clips, video clips, or other material from the oral history recordings or the transcription of the recordings, the Chemical Heritage Foundation will be bound by the restrictions for use placed on the Work as detailed above. Should the Chemical Heritage Foundation wish to post to the Internet the entire oral history interview during your lifetime, you will have the opportunity to permit or deny this posting.

The Chemical Heritage Foundation will enforce my wishes until the time of my death, when any restrictions will be removed.

This interview has been designated as **Free Access**.

***Please note*:** Users citing this interview for purposes of publication are obliged under the terms of the Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF) Center for Oral History to credit CHF using the format below:

> Eduardo Rovira, Jr., interview by Lee Sullivan Berry at BoRit Superfund Site, Ambler, Pennsylvania, 12 March 2014 (Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation, Oral History Transcript # 0817).

Chemical Heritage Foundation
Center for Oral History
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

The Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF) serves the community of the chemical and molecular sciences, and the wider public, by treasuring the past, educating the present, and inspiring the future. CHF maintains a world-class collection of materials that document the history and heritage of the chemical and molecular sciences, technologies, and industries; encourages research in CHF collections; and carries out a program of outreach and interpretation in order to advance an understanding of the role of the chemical and molecular sciences, technologies, and industries in shaping society.

ABSTRACT

Eduardo Rovira received a degree in chemical engineering from the University of Puerto Rico. Shortly after college he began working for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He spent six years as an oil inspector and then became an on-scene coordinator (OSC) in the five-state region that includes Pennsylvania. When he was called in to perform the initial assessment of the BoRit Asbestos Site, he recommended more sampling of air and water especially. Although a full year of testing found that asbestos risk was too low to require intervention, the EPA decided to list the site on the Superfund National Priorities List anyway. Their justification was that there were both visible and hidden asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) that could potentially be made hazardous by people or weather.

Rovira describes the different processes involved in remediating Wissahickon Creek, Rose Valley Creek, and Tannery Run Creek. Though they have most elements in common, there were some variations of treatment. Wissahickon Creek's channel was widened and its banks were stabilized by clearcutting vegetation, including all trees. Then the area was leveled and covered with geocells, then topsoil, hydroseeding, riprap, and straw mats to prevent erosion. When Rose Valley's cable concrete mats (CCMs) were destroyed by a tropical storm the EPA replaced the original CCMs with stronger, better-anchored CCMs with riprap. Tannery Run had to be partially routed through an eight-foot pipe to preserve a collapsing parking lot, and the Run also required CCMs. Remediation away from the creeks did not require these more extreme measures; the area was clearcut and then covered with geo-fabric, topsoil, straw mats, and vegetation. The EPA is now dredging the reservoir to test the ground underneath; the water will be treated and discharged to the Wissahickon Creek. When this process is complete, water will be pumped back into the pond and vegetation will be replanted, in the hope of inducing birds to return.

Rovira explains his communication with the citizens of the area; he says he sends a weekly email update, and he is available for questions at any time. Even invasive activities have not produced hazardous levels of asbestos, and people's fears have decreased with the years of cleanup. Rovira thinks that capping is the safest and ultimately the cheapest method of remediation. He points out that the Ambler piles were hilly and did not lend themselves to development, but the BoRit site is flat and will be suitable for whatever purpose the citizens choose, probably a park; he believes this remediation will be completed in about a year and a half. Ambler's experience should, in his opinion, remind other communities to be involved early, to have good leaders, and to try to understand the issues involved.

INTERVIEWER

Lee Sullivan Berry earned a master's degree in medieval studies from the University of Notre Dame, and a bachelor of arts degree in religious studies from the University of Pennsylvania. As a staff member in the Center for Oral History, Berry conducts background research and oral-history interviews, edits transcripts of completed interviews, and coordinates with interviewers and interviewees to finalize transcripts. She was the lead interviewer for the REACH Ambler project and has presented her work at meetings of the American Society for Environmental History and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX