

StoryCorps Interview at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences

Ann Smith and her daughter Karen Linehan

Ann Smith: Karen, the first time I noticed that you were a different sort of a little girl was in the spring when you had just turned two. Tent caterpillars had just hatched, and you were fascinated with them because they fell from all the trees. And you won't remember this, because you were two, but you picked them up and you would keep them in a mason jar. And at night, when you went to bed, you went on to sleep and I would go up to cut your light out. It was very obvious that you had been opening the jar because the tent caterpillars were all over you. And I had to pick them off and put them back in the jar. You were always bringing things into your room and even into your bath!

Karen Linehan: Well, right, because I have a younger sister Robin, two years younger than me. And you always wanted us to take a bath together to save water, but I always wanted to take a bath by myself. And so I devised a special trick to keep Robin out of the tub, is that I would hurry into the tub before she got there, and I would bring, I remember, reptiles and amphibians usually. I remember I had a ribbon snake, and a turtle and a toad that I would put in the tub, and they would be swimming in the tub with me. And Robin did not have the same fond feelings for these animals that I did, and so she would not get in the tub and I would achieve my goal.

AS: And I found her at the top of the stairs saying, "I will never take another bath with Karen." And I said, "Why not?" And then I looked in there, and that ribbon snake was flying through the water! I wouldn't have taken a bath either.

KL: One thing that resonated with me especially as I got a little bit older was that I knew that I was different. I knew I was different from other girls my age, and I knew that I was different from you. But I felt truly loved for who I was, and not only that, but that you nurtured the qualities in me that made me different.

AS: Well I know that you've been an inspiration to your children that you teach, you have been an inspiration to your family, and I am just thankful that I received this incredible child who opened doors for me that never would have been opened.

KL: Our relationship as mother and daughter was strengthened and deepened really through the museum, through our work that we did, connecting people to the museum as a way of connecting them to the incredible natural world of North Carolina. And I think that both of us have always felt that this is a museum that belongs to the people. It is our museum, and it really feels that way.

AS: And for our family, it has for over 50 years, been a place of heart. And it has been a place where we felt we could make a difference. And I think that matters in life.

KL: Yes.