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I was delighted to be asked to address the attendees to the Sounder Spaces Conference but was disappointed that I could not do so in person. However, I respect the fact that all attendees were obligated to abide by the request to avoid air travel to minimize climate change-related emissions. My pointing out that my husband and I have never owned a car, and as a result accrued credits to offset my flight, did not persuade to make an exception in my case. Thus, I am addressing you through the voice of my fellow anti-noise campaigner and good friend, Val Weedon.

Researching Noise Effects

My interest in noise can be traced back to my early research on the effects of elevated train noise on children's reading scores at a school where 80 trains a day passed by their classrooms between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. I found that by the sixth grade children attending classes on the noisy side of the building were about a year behind in reading when compared to children who had classes on the quiet side of the building. The year was 1975 and there were few studies at that time alerting us to the adverse effects of noise on learning. This study caused quite a stir in the city of New York because 54 public schools and numerous private schools were located within 150 yards of elevated train tracks. Politicians urged the Transit Authority to take action and the media gave the study much attention. This support emboldened the principal of the school and me to ask the Board of Education to put acoustical ceilings in the classrooms facing the elevated tracks. I was also able to convince the Chief Operating Officer of the Transit Authority to choose the rail adjacent to the school to test out a new procedure on the tracks that lessened the noise. When both noise abatements were in place, the acoustical ceilings and resilient rail fasteners, I again went back to the school a few years later to study whether the children's reading scores on the noisy side of the building still lagged behind the students on the quiet side. The good news - children on both sides of the building were now reading at the same level. Better news - when we provide children with quieter environments, they do better in school!

Thirty years have passed since my initial study in the school and over twenty-five studies have been conducted (several in the U.K.) examining the impacts of noise on children's reading and learning. These studies have confirmed my earlier results but research on this topic continues. As a researcher, I appreciate the need for validation of findings but as a

human being, I would rather we moved to lessen the noise at home and in our schools in order to enhance the cognitive, reading and learning skills of children. We have enough research findings to justify action!

Noise Impacts - A Lifetime Activity

I continued to do work on the impacts of noise, including studies on the effects of aircraft noise on people's mental and physical health, including quality of life. However, I have spent more time advocating noise abatement and quiet. My anti-noise work led to my appointment to the Mayor's Council on the Environment of New York, where I now chair the noise committee (volunteer, non-paid position), and I have served on the Council for four New York City Mayors. In this position I have aided citizens with their noise problems when the Department of Environmental Protection and Police Department could not. I essentially contact the landlord or managing agent to discuss the noise complaint and the fact that I serve on the Mayor's Council provides me with the support I need to resolve the complaint, which I am able to do successfully often, but not always. The Council also distributes an educational brochure on noise and it serves as an information source to the public officials, citizens, and the media.

What Are the Noise Complaints of Americans?

Three recent studies (Bronzaft and Van Ryzin) on the complaints of citizens about noise, including respondents in New York and nationwide (two of the studies are on the Council on the Environment's website www.cenyc.org and the third is being written up) found that citizens are very much disturbed by neighbor noises as well as street noises which include car alarms, honking horns, and boom cars. New York City took pride this past December in passing a Revised Noise Code that should better address the noise complaints of New Yorkers which ranks first in calls to the City's Quality of Life Hotline. However, the Noise Code essentially cannot deal with noisy neighbor complaints because noise from neighbors falls under the provisions of leases between landlords and their tenants. The City has to find a way to enforce the obligation of landlords to provide their tenants with the requisite quiet to which they are entitled under their leases. Whether the Revised Noise Code will lessen the noises of the city remains to be seen in the future. If the Revised Code is successful, then noise complaints to Quality of Life Hotline will decline and Dr. Ryzin and I will find fewer New Yorkers complaining about noise when we conduct our future surveys.

New York City's Quiet Zones

Of special interest to this conference centers around New York City's efforts to create Quiet Zones in its parks. This effort was undertaken in the 1980s, largely in response to loud boom boxes that invaded the quiet atmosphere of our City's parks. Signs were posted at each of these Quiet Zones advising people to wear headphones or earphones so as not to disturb people enjoying the lawn areas, gardens, and bird sanctuaries of our parks. These Quiet Zones are still in existence but the proliferation of personal music systems, e.g. ipods, has largely helped to alleviate the intrusive noise problem. Should London wish to learn more about the Quiet Zone park program of New York City, the Director of Public Information for Parks, Mr. Warner Johnston, can be contacted.

Lessening the Din in New York

However, the Quiet Zone program cannot drown out the drone of overhead jets and helicopters that pass over our parks and gardens nor can it prevent intrusive noises from nearby construction sites. The Revised Noise Code expects to limit construction noises so that they are less invasive but the overhead aviation sounds are difficult to remedy. The key point to note is that New York City sent a message with its Quiet Zone program that it valued the importance of serene areas as a respite from the bustle and noises of the city. The message that New York City values tranquility has been underscored by the recently adopted Revised Noise Code. This does not mean that New York City will be transformed into a "quiet, sleepy village." New York City still values the sounds of its parades, its New Year's Eve celebration, and the many sounds that transmit its vitality and exuberance. The Noise Code aims to tone down the sounds to a reasonable level. During a New York City snowstorm, when the traffic slows down considerably, people are often heard to comment about the city as a "winter wonderland."

Planners, Designers and Builders Must Become More Aware of Noise

Faced with major construction in lower Manhattan because of 9/11, New York City has the opportunity to be especially cognizant of the acoustical environment. It was this thought that I transmitted to the Chair of the selection committee for the Ground Zero Memorial. Imagine my disappointment when I learned that the designers of the selected memorial entitled Reflecting Absence failed to pay attention to the surrounding soundscape. They gave little thought to the sound of the very loud waterfall that would be part of this memorial that was to engender quiet reflection nor did they consider the sounds of downtown Manhattan on the

viewing experience. After my comments appeared in the media, I learned that a water architectural consultant and other acoustical engineers were hired to examine the sound issue of the memorial.

New York City is experiencing a resurgence of construction in many neighborhoods, not just in lower Manhattan. New York City has to be especially careful to factor in the effects of construction noise on nearby residents, office workers and students. Secondly, the buildings themselves must be constructed so that noises don't travel readily from office to office or apartment to apartment. Architects may suggest increased insulation in buildings but landlords frequently resist because of increased costs they associate with insulation. Actually, such costs are minimal especially when weighed against the adverse impacts of noise on residents within these buildings. Furthermore, once buildings take shape, they increase the noise that comes with greater numbers of people occupying the rebuilt spaces and the city must weigh this in as they evaluate environmental impact statements provided by builders. So far New York city has been lenient in their acceptance of Environmental Impact Statements, paying little attention to noise issue. Hopefully, the Revised Noise Code might change the present situation.

Quiet Zones Is a First Step

One cannot just focus on quiet zones in parks and open spaces because people spend more time resting and relaxing at home, especially during the winter months. London should accompany its program of improving sound quality in the outdoors with a program of improving the sound quality within. In addition to homes, this should also include schools where teachers require quiet to teach and children require it to learn, hospitals where patients need quiet to heal, and the workplace where quiet facilitates performance. London in its haste to rebuild after World War II largely failed to consider proper insulation but one could readily forgive a city whose primary concern was speedy rebuilding. Today, London can give greater care to the soundscape as it erects new buildings, creates open spaces and designs new parks. I believe that this conference is a valuable first step in raising the profile of noise management and sound quality in the city of London.