EPISODE 73

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:06] ANNOUNCER: You are listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, leadership conversations that explore adapting and thriving in a complex world with Rick Torseth and guests.

[00:00:19] RT: Hi, everybody, this is Rick Torseth, and this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders. The podcast where we have conversations with people who've made decisions in their life and in their work to take on difficult challenges, community building challenges, work that requires getting a bunch of people involved in a project or an initiative without little or no authority by the person who's instigating the act.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:42] RT: Today is a typical day in the swamp for me, although what's not typical is I have a friend on the podcast today. Wendy Tyner, who I've known for a very, very long time, is here and Wendy brings all the requisite, in my opinion, all the requisite background that slots into the purpose of the podcast. She has been the Director of Philanthropy and Publicity for the Wintergrass Music Festival in the Pacific Northwest. She's done that for 20 years Wendy, 20 years. Executive Director of Friends of the Farms for five years. Development Director of Mountains to Sound in the Greenway Trust for five years.

For people who don't know it, those years often overlap so there were periods when she was doing three gigs at one time. You're also a certified grandma, aka Baba. Got some awards in your back pocket. You've been given the Boeing Community Interactive Award in 2010. Humanitarian Award from Clear Path International in 2003 and the Wintergrass Transformational Service Award in 2023. Holy cow, Wendy Tyner, welcome to the swamp. It's good to have you here.

[0:01:51] WT: Well, thanks, Rick. I'm really happy to be here.

[0:01:52] RT: All right, so I got a bunch of questions, but before we get started, what is it you want people to know about you that will help them have some context and perspective about what we might talk about here?

[0:02:03] WT: Well, I believe in my lifetime I've accomplished what I'd hoped to have accomplished but feel there's a lot more to do. I'm a young 68-year-old, and as a professional I have found that I can succeed in what I do because the people around me always support me. I always have people that are above me or below me or beside me that help me do what I do. I love being a board member of various organizations. I love being a volunteer. I take part in a lot of activities within the different organizations that I support. I love working. I don't have any plans to retire right now.

But as a person, what allows me to do what I do is I am energetic. I am inspired to pass on any modest, simple, humble knowledge I have. I was a teacher. I taught kids with severe and profound disabilities for a number of years when I was, well, from about 18 years old and up. And as a teacher, you are one who teaches. So inherently, I am one who likes to pass on knowledge. I like to promote artists. I like to bring people into the fold. I like to connect people. That's one of the foundations that I have that have allowed me to do what I do.

That hasn't changed in my lifetime. It seems that when I was 18, I did that, and I continue to do that. So, age may change parts of you, but that hasn't changed my motivation to change the world and be part of any humanitarian cause.

[0:03:44] RT: All right, great. We were reading over my shoulder with some of my questions here. I wanted to begin our conversation in your journey with your experience teaching. You started to cover that, but the question I really had is in all that time when you look back on your time teaching, what did the kids teach you about you and how you might use yourself?

[0:04:04] WT: Have you been around people with severe and profound disabilities, Rick, very often in your lifetime?

[0:04:09] RT: Not often. No.

[0:04:10] WT: So, these folks are inherently a part of me. They are kids and adults who couldn't speak, who couldn't feed themselves, couldn't walk. Some had autism. And then there are over 200 different genetic conditions. When you teach over a course of a lifetime or half of a lifetime, you deal with lots of different kinds of challenges. And all of those children and especially the parents taught me how to accept and understand life because you can't be judgmental when it comes to children who are struggling. Then there are kids out there with learning disabilities, and there are people who are blind, and then there are people are in wheelchairs who have typical or normal intelligence. Anyone with allows me to see myself differently.

More information that you want to know, I had breast cancer in 2017. That broadened my perspective and understanding of people. You turn that around that when you accept people and understand people, you can't help but want to be part of their lives and help them. When you watch parents go through what they're going through, my job wasn't just to provide instruction in the classroom, or as it evolved into community-based instruction where you brought kids out to the community to learn. I was always there for the parents to hold their hands because they're the ones that went home with their children and lived with them.

Some of the families that I spent time with were 70 years old, and they had their 40-year-old son or daughter or daughter with them. So, their life was impacted for a lifetime. When you have a position like that, and it wasn't just a position, it was a belief of mine that they're going through something that I haven't gone through. So, I hoped that I helped them through their challenges and their struggles, even if it's just listening. We always talk about there's people that talk, people that listen. And I tend to be one of the talkers, but really no. I am one who listens and tries to understand where people are coming from.

[0:06:21] RT: So, when I first met you, you were in the midst of that journey, and then somewhere out here, and I'm guessing it was right around the millennium, you made a change in your life direction and what you're doing, and you've been committed to what I would call a really long and rich legacy of volunteering into different kinds of projects. We're going to talk about the projects themselves here in a little bit because they're really interesting. But where's the volunteering aspect? Where does the juice come for you about how you use yourself, in a cause when there's no compensation necessarily involved or nothing that makes a huge difference in a person's life? What's that all about?

[0:07:01] WT: I have had the privilege to have a job and get paid for what I do of positions that I really believe in. They are part of my soul. So, I have been able to work and get paid. But I've also, beyond a 40-hour a week, always have had an interest in other areas. And that's where my volunteerism comes in. It could be my church, and we may talk about the bluegrass world. When I was at the Mountains to Sound Greenway, I was very involved in conservation and making sure to advocate and lobby for land and people. And whether I'm paid or not, if I have a charge, if I have a mission, I will get involved.

You talk about what was the incentive. I think it's very intrinsic. I think when you volunteer, you could put it on your resume. You could put another notch on your belt, but there's that intrinsic validation that one gets when you're volunteering because you're not doing it for the money and you're not necessarily doing it for a title. You're doing it because you believe in a mission or their values that they follow. In everything that I've done between teaching and being in philanthropy and being a promoter of artists, musicians specifically, I can't do anything that I don't really believe in.

There's quite a difference between people who ask for support, financial support for a non-profit organization, opposed to a salesperson who is paid a commission. In philanthropy, there are philanthropy bill of rights, and one of them is you don't receive a percentage of donations that are secured. When I talk about whatever I'm involved in, I truly believe in what I am asking support for, and that – you've known me for a long time, when someone comes into my circle and comes into my world, that's so exciting that you want to go to Wintergrass and listen to bluegrass music or you want to go walk on a trail. And it's been supported by the community and people have protected this land. Then when I see you out on the trail, it makes me excited that I've been part of that.

So, I am a little more egocentric than some people, but my goal is always to make sure people are supported and get what they want and be affected by some of my words and anything I pass on to them.

[0:09:32] RT: Okay. So, let's give people a flavor for the actual projects that you've been involved with, and in some cases simultaneously across years. Let's start with the Wintergrass,

the bluegrass thing. First of all, you're the first person in the swamp to bring bluegrass to the to the deals, so thanks for classing up the act. So, tell people what Wintergrass is and what's involved with it and the work it takes to pull this thing off.

[0:09:56] WT: Oh, how much time do you have? So, Wintergrass is one of the leading bluegrass music festivals in the nation and in the world. There are others out there like MerleFest, and Gray Fox, and Telluride, and a couple of others. But Wintergrass has always stood out not only internationally, but in the Pacific Northwest. So, it's held in Bellevue. And Bellevue is about a 15-minute drive from Seattle, Washington. And the difference between Wintergrass and a lot of other – Rick, we've never talked about this, but I think you would really resonate.

Wintergrass is different because of the quality of music, the quality of organization, the quality of the volunteers. I don't know about the staff, but everyone else. Long ago when non-profits put together their value statement, they randomly come up with words and it's aligned with the board members, then they vote on it. We did a wonderful exercise through someone named Stephen Rufo who used to work for a company about mediation. And it turns out, the practice allowed all of us to really discern who we are and what we believe Wintergrass should be.

So, after the board members and staff went through an exercise, the words that came to mind from everyone became our value statement and they included quality, community, inclusion, the word fun, education, fiscally conservative. These words came from each board member. We did not vote on them as individually. We just took what each board member and staff came up with. Ironically, mine turned out to be fun, and that definitely defined who I am, that I have to be able to do something that's fun. So, Wintergrass is a fun place to be. It's a four-day indoor festival at the Hyatt Regency and shameful promotion here. It's coming up on February 20, 2025 at the Hyatt.

Most festivals are outdoors. This one's indoors. So, it's great for the artist because it's during the shoulder season. There's not a lot going on in February anywhere for musicians. They love to come. My job specifically was to secure donations and to be able to help education program and then any other areas of need. But to have 30 bands show up and serve about 150 students, but have 4,500 people come a day. The math doesn't work out. It turns out to be about 12,000

people overall, over the course of four days, 12,000 visits. But these people live for this event. They come early in the week, and they leave on Monday, or they stay another week. So, we probably won't get into economic development, but city of Bellevue, City of Seattle, bellevue.com, love us. Because the economic impact that Wintergrass has on Bellevue is $6.8 million. It has a huge impact on that whole community. We certainly don't do it for that, but when we're the story, the person listening wants to know about economic impact, we can show very clearly that this benefits the city financially.

But Wintergrass really affects the heart. People cannot wait to come back to Wintergrass and either attend a show. There's usually four stages, music playing simultaneously. They can go to an education program. They can go to free workshops or they can jam. So, imagine going through a huge, beautiful hotel and every 20 feet are 20 people jamming. They're playing a banjo, a fiddle, sometimes a cello. We once had a tuba show up, which was bizarre, but who cares? And they're all ages.

One year, Ricky Skaggs was in the hallway, playing with a four or five-year-old, just playing. We had Doc Watson one year in the early years. Well, we didn't, but he was performing and he was doing the same thing. He was playing with children. I don't know a lot about the rock world, the jazz world, but the people in bluegrass and American music are very, very humble, very modest and they're not rock stars. They want to be part of the scene. Some of you who are listening have heard of Billy Strings. If you haven't, please tune in to Billy Strings. Billy Strings was this young child of 20 years old that came to Wintergrass and blew everyone away. No one knew who Billy Strings was. We had him, I believe, three times. We can't afford Billy Strings now, because he's now playing with everyone. He'll pick with Paul McCartney and anyone that wants to be with Billy Strings can.

So, what Wintergrass is great about is it helps new artists and emerging artists have a platform and they're entertaining and it's back to the quality of music. They are quality performers, but it's not the top 40. You're not going to see the ones that you see or hear on the radio, which I don't know if anyone listens to the radio or not. In the bluegrass world, they are the top 40, but you might not know them by name. But one year we had Linda Ronstadt and Laurie Lewis and Maria Muldaur. That was a pretty remarkable day, but for the most part, their names that people

will come – they won't come because of the name. They'll come because the music is just good music.

[0:15:56] RT: Okay, so say a little bit about Friends of the Farms and Mountains to Sound Greenway, because those are completely different initiatives than Wintergrass, and yet you've been involved with those for quite a while too. So, a little bit about each of those, because then I want to get into how in the world one woman can spread herself across these projects and save the impact. So, give them a taste of what they're about and then let's get into your influence and your impact on it.

[0:16:22] WT: If you want to only work 20 hours a week, the jobs that I've done wouldn't fit your interests. You have to work the 40 hours a week or more because there are so many things that go on in the evening and on weekends and at both organizations, both 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, the mission was similar and that it was to conserve land and promote riparian zones, farmland, open space, working farms, working lands like tree farms, and that's specifically about the Mountains to Sound Greenway. Friends of the Farms was almost exactly the same except it was really focused on protected land farmers that want to grow food, raise animals, have row crops, grow flowers.

The whole idea is to, when you work in an organization like those two, is to be able to communicate and let the community know what goes on within your organization so that they can either volunteer, they can donate, or whatever they can do to continue to expand and advance the mission. The mission at Friends of the Farms was truly about supporting farmers. So, I live in a small community near Seattle called Bainbridge Island. It is a self-contained island. It's just 30 minutes west of Seattle, but it's not that rural. It's still an urban community. But within the rural part of Bainbridge Island, there's a lot of farmers who needed support. So, our goal was to make sure that people knew about the farms.

We'll probably talk about some of the activities, which I did. But the mission was truly to support those farmers in any way they could, sometimes financially, and then connect them to people that might have land. I created a program called Farmlink. In the state, there was one called Washington Farmlink, but I created the Bainbridge Island Farmlink. And what that was, was the people on the island have lots of space and lots of land and there's a lot of heritage farmland.

So, a farmer needs land, but they may not be able to afford it. We would connect a farmer with someone that might have an acre of land or more. An acre lands a lot to farm by the way.

It was great to connect people. I loved getting the phone calls from people saying, “I've got an acre and a half, it's self-facing,” which is always what you want. “I have water and there have been animals on the land.” There are no longer animals now, but I'd love a herd of cow or chickens or some animal, or pigs even. Or the opposite, the landowner calls me and says that, “We have this wonderful piece of land and I am willing to help build the infrastructure. I'm willing to bring in fences and I'll help pay for equipment. I'll put in hoop houses.”

So, when you have the resources to connect people, people just contact you and my job was to match those people to find out who is aligned with whom and then offer suggestions of terms of – I'm not an attorney, so I would suggest that they have a written contract and then I had attorneys that they would talk to, to make sure everyone understood what the plan was.

[0:19:48] RT: Let me just pick up on what you said. I know this because I know you, but I also know this from multiple podcast conversations. You're operating in a space where you have really no authority to make things happen. In that context is where I experienced leading shows up because I believe leading is a choice and an activity and it can come from anywhere, anytime. So, we constantly see people choose to raise their hands and put themselves forward to lead on something. How have you learned to mobilize other people who are sitting around going, I'm doing whatever I do. And the next thing, I may be deciding to spend time and help on Friends of the Farms or Wintergrass or something. So, what's your wisdom after all these years about how you foster a movement of volunteers or people to give of something of themselves to the cause that you're shepherding here? What do you know about that and what works and what doesn't work?

[0:20:41] WT: What doesn't work?

[0:20:43] RT: Let's start with what works. What works? What do you got to know how to do in order to make this stuff fly?

[0:20:48] WT: I love this question because it's something that I do on a regular basis, that I want to bring people into the organization. I want them to be aware of what's going on. So, there's four things that I do, and I'll just generally say them first. It's informing people. It's engaging people. It's involving them in some way. It's incorporating their interests into what we do. It's moving them along in a gradual progression. When I am talking to someone, I'll find out, I'm intuitive in that I can tell if they want to talk to a male or female, if they want to do things privately and individually, or if they want to meet other people and do something within a group.

So, I will take that information and go with it. Typically, I like to talk opposed to text or email and I want to be able to have coffee with them or someone invited me for a glass of wine, which was great. But typically, it's coffee or tea or something and it could be in a local coffee shop. I love bringing people to my home. If it's an individual gathering, I will initiate the opportunity to get together and talk about the organization. When it's a group, I'll invite them over for dinner or lunch. The best part about being part of a conservation group or Friends of the Farms is I would make all locally sourced food and then I'd talk about the farmers.

I mean, this is not rocket science, but it made sense that if we're trying to promote farming, let's have food on the table that the food came and I'm not going to name the farmers. But there were 27 farmers on the island and I would pick and choose who I would buy food from and then prepare salads and soups and have flowers on the table that came from one of the farmers.

So, they see it in practice. That's really important. It's not just always at an intellectual level, but they actually see that I can go to farmers market. I can even go to our local grocery store and buy locally sourced-food. The other way I've done this is just getting to know people and not talking about my mission.

Rick, I don't know if you've ever noticed, but when we're in our company, sometimes I will tell people what I'm working on, but a lot of times when I'm meeting someone, I'm talking to them about them. I want to find out what they're doing and trying to listen for how are we aligned? What would their interests be? Then when I see that there's an opportunity to get them more involved, then I will offer them more information. I don't know if people listening are in philanthropy, but in philanthropy, there's something called donor moves or a donor continuum, and if you're going to ask someone to give you a million dollars, it's not someone you're going to

ask off the street. You learn that there is a time to ask for certain amounts of donations based on their involvement and their interest and their commitment.

For example, a board member is exactly the one that should consider giving a larger donation or offering some plan giving and offering securities, or putting them in their will. Wintergrass is in our will. It's something that I can't promote Wintergrass unless I truly believe in it. The fact that Wintergrass, it's called acoustic sound and we're doing business is Wintergrass. The fact that they're in our will shows that I really believe in what the cause that I'm often promoting within Wintergrass. When you ask the question about how do I do all of these simultaneously, when I was teaching, that was more than a full-time job. But after 25 years, it did wear me out. Then I found other interests that somehow allowed the two to overlap.

[0:24:53] RT: Okay. All right. So, what's hard about this? I mean, this is difficult challenging work. When you look at it, what's been the biggest challenges that you face and difficulties that have come up? Maybe they reoccur. What is the hard part about this?

[0:25:08] WT: Even though I just mentioned that I like to bring people into the story, the challenge is that some people don't believe the story. They don't value one does. In philanthropy, I don't have any problem talking to someone about the mission and asking them to support the organization. There have been times when I have directors or board members who don't believe in the model. Even though the organization has hired me to do that, there are times when there are certain people don't want that, and that's challenging. If someone works in a non-profit, there are people that don't believe it. They think that the organization should be a for-profit. That's not a bad thing. That can be an option.

So, it's always been my role to come up with an idea, and explain it, and what the outcome is. I have this idea and explain what I want to do. I'm working with a group of people right now. I'm a volunteer, but because I know production, and I know promotion, and I know how to make an ask, I've been working on a project where it's a musician, a jazz musician, and it's all about birds and conservation and climate change. Trying to make sure that when people attend this event that they really understand how fun it is. I'm not the leader of this particular event, but I'm part of the core group, and I have some simple ideas and minor and simple ideas.

The one idea was this is jazz music, what do you do when you go to a jazz concert? You sit in a dark room and you sit around tables and you have a glass of wine. Well, it's being held at a church and it's not going to – for this particular concert, it's not going to work to do high tops and dark, dark tables. But I want people to be drinking wine and it will be held in a pretty large sanctuary. So, what I needed to do was talk to the leader and said, this is exactly what I said. "This is what a jazz concert looks like. How about we have everyone get a glass, champagne glass, but it's bubbly water, and it's inclusive. That way, you walk in the room, everybody gets a glass of bubbly water, and they can sit in this beautiful theater/sanctuary and listen to pretty quality jazz music. But the goal is for people to understand what they can do about climate change and takeaways. So, the people speaking and performing will offer various takeaways as it relates to how to electrify your home and how to use solar paneling, what kind of car to consider."

That one is pretty minor. The other is when I've wanted to do a huge event that will cost money. That one is probably the biggest challenge in my work. There's that phrase, you have to spend money to make money. There are people that have been my supervisors, my board members that really don't believe that you have to spend money to make money. Yet, there's no way I can achieve my financial goals without spending some money. So, how do you get around that challenge?

[0:28:28] RT: How do you get around it?

[0:28:30] WT: Sometimes I personally pay for it, because I really want something to happen. And then there are times when it didn't happen, so I come up with another idea. Within philanthropy, and I'm very research-based, but I'm also an evidence-based person. But the research in philanthropy is there are characteristics of philanthropy director, and one of them is you can accept a no. So, I don't take it personally. I know there are reasons behind why someone would say no. When there is a time when an idea is not supported, then I just come up with a new idea, another way. Try another way. It's a phrase from the seventies from a man named Marc Gold with kids with developmental disabilities. If you can't do something one way, just try another way. That's part of who I am.

Speaking of philanthropy, a couple of other characteristics are sometimes we have unrealistic goals. So, sometimes I can think too big. That's a challenge within conversations that have multiple leaders, board members, treasurers, directors, assistant directors. You have to make sure that your idea is within reason. So, I've learned in the course of my lifetime, even though I can think about grandiose ideas, sometimes I have to take it down and make it work for people.

[0:29:58] RT: Okay, so let's flip the conversation or just a little bit. It's my belief we learn oftentimes from a leadership standpoint, more from our failures than we do our successes. Everybody in this podcast gets asked this question because we have people listening who are a little further behind in the leadership journey than where you and I may be. If they can pick up a few things from our conversation, it helps them. And maybe they don't step in the same potholes that we stepped in. What's an example of something that you did in the leadership position where it just didn't work out. You didn't do it well and what did you learn from it?

[0:30:32] WT: There's a pause because I'm very proud of my successes and I don't bring up my failures and that's probably a failure because people do learn from mistakes and learn from what didn't work. I would say the first thing that comes to mind is in special education. I not only was an instructor and led 10 or 11 paraprofessionals and worked with three or four occupational therapists and physical therapists and speech and language specialists. In order to succeed, I needed to work a lot with administration in a school district. When I was down in Whittier, California, and in San Francisco, the outline systems were there. There was a foundation to do what I did. There wasn't any concern there.

But when I came to Bainbridge Island, it was a different model. And I came from a model where, for the word inclusion was popular, before the term mainstreaming was popular, that was my background. I did a lot of University of San Francisco and UCLA, and I was a demonstration teacher with the state of California. So, we were very progressive. Those kids were out in the community, they were riding buses, they were working in restaurants, they were swimming in the local YNCA pool. That's what life is all about. We need to be out and part of our community, and so the goal was to make sure people with disabilities are out in the community as well.

In the classroom, there was no reason that the student's ICER should be within a self-contained classroom. It's more important that they be out in their art class, their music class, out in PE.

Maybe part of a classroom activity, depending on what the activity was. A lot of the principals didn't believe in this. The superintendent at one time, even the director of special education didn't believe in a lot of this, mainly because there were finances involved. Money had to be spent.

I, after 25 years of being in special ed and working in a district that didn't believe in this, that wore me out. I was able to have all 11 kids included in their classrooms and believe me, these kids were kids with behavioral disorders, who were blind, in wheelchairs, who had a nurse by their side. The teachers actually supported it more than administration. Some of my best friends are administrators, so I don't want to make a blanket statement about administrators in general.

But when one has a strong voice about how much money is spent, that put a damper on my altruistic goals about where children should be. It makes me sad to believe that these kids weren't receiving a free and appropriate education. I'm very fortunate and blessed that our own children have normal intelligence, or I think they do, but they received a free and appropriate education. This is a federal term. The students that I was serving also had the right to a free and appropriate education, and I didn't believe they were receiving everything that they should.

So, the parents that I had of these students were as strong advocates as I was. We have learned, I have learned in the course of my lifetime of not to be a tree hugger, that long ago to save a tree and maybe not that long ago, but you climb a tree and you chain yourself to it to save it. What we've learned and I've learned in my lifetime is you have to take smaller steps and work incrementally. I was one to go from A to Z because in California, in these two cities, Whittier and San Francisco, I was able to do that.

But on Bainbridge Island, I needed to take smaller steps. And that makes me feel not very proud of what I did and I learned from it, and that I've taken with me into other jobs and how I work with board members or if I've had an executive director is to just, I don't know if they're aware of the smaller steps. They may think that I'm always thinking of the bigger picture, but I don't know how people take that to their desktop today, but I think if you self-assess and self-evaluate who you are, that's one thing that you have to know is people are telling you no. Why are they telling you no? It may be that they – back to the information – informing, engaging, involving, and incorporating people into your world, you don't know what the no means. It could mean that they

don't have the money, they don't understand. Maybe they have a child with a disability and they can't talk about this. It's just too much. Maybe they're overwhelmed and maybe they had a bad day or it wasn't communicated properly. So, take back the rejection or the no and find out and go deeper into why you received a no.

But Rick, I have to say, I don't receive a lot of noes. I'm really happy in my lifetime and the compliment that I get is, “Oh, I can't say no to you, Wendy.” I like hearing that, because I like to bring people – that's the other thing is making sure that when you have – I don't know if this was a failure, but it's certainly a challenge is that when you're working with certain people, make sure you offer them positions that they really love to do, and not just get paid some kind of compensation, but it's something that they really love.

[0:36:13] RT: Okay, it's a good answer. I know your husband, Tom. He's a very good friend of mine. When you're out there doing all this stuff, somebody's back home making sure that the house is clean and all that. How has Tom supported you in your work?

[0:36:30] WT: I anticipated the question. You and I didn't talk about questions about who are my role models and who inspires me to do what I do. Number one is Tom. Tom's an attorney for the Trust for Public Land and there are different kind of leaders. Tom is one of those quiet, unassuming leaders. He is not what I do. He is not one to promote. He's not one to invite you into his world, but he is there to support me in anything I do.

So, I have an idea, but the way he supports me is he'll ask lots of questions, very non-judgmentally. When would you do this? How would you do it? Where is the funding coming from? Is this going to work with our family? Is this going to be – will this affect the time you spend with our grandchildren?

In terms of, it's funny you would bring up the house, he lived alone in college. He lived alone after college. He's pretty self-reliant. He washes dishes and vacuums. That part is not an issue. We've been married 42 years and have been friends, close friends for nine, and he's been my best friend my whole life. So, it's a very, very easy relationship. He has never told me not to do anything. I think that's really important that when you have a peer or a role model or someone that you look up to that they don't put a damper on what you want to do. Because that affects

your little psyche, like, “Oh, what was I thinking? I don't have the confidence.” You take that information and you manifest it into another direction that you shouldn't go.

So, he's one of my – I have a lot of role models that I follow, but he is definitely at the top.

[0:38:24] RT: Okay. We're kind of coming to the end here, so I want to give you a chance. What are you most proud of in the body of work that you've done to this point? I know there's some stuff ahead. I don't know what it is, but as you sit here right now, what are you most proud of in the work that you've done with these organizations and the people you've worked with?

[0:38:41] WT: Oh, because my job with Mountains to Sound Greenway and then Wintergrass was to raise money. I'm really proud that I raised a lot of money for these organizations, but more importantly, these people are and we're my friends. I didn't just talk to them about supporting a cause. I got to know them, they got to know me. We socialize. They come to our house. I go to their homes. I left the Mountain to Sound Greenway around 2011 or so and just spent time on the phone with one of the directors two days ago and just hung out on the phone and talked for a while.

That's really important to me, that when I have done my job, people don't see me as the one that I'm just wearing my professional hat. That I am interested in them as much as my interest in my professional world. Oh my, there's probably more. What I'm really proud of is there's a poet, unfortunately, who has passed away named Mary Oliver. And I know you're familiar with Mary Oliver. She wrote a poem called “On Blackwater Pond.” One of the phrases in that, and I may have to paraphrase, what is that beautiful thing that just happened? I produce a lot of shows. I work with a lot of volunteers. I present at conferences a lot. One of the things I always tell people is when you've done an event, when you've run a festival, and those people have walked away, those attendees have walked away, what is that beautiful thing that just happened?

I want people to walk away and go, “Whoa, I can't even explain what I just experienced.” And there's a new artist out there named Sierra Ferrell. Oh, my gosh, I can't describe her. But when I left a concert from the International Bluegrass Music Association Festival, I'm a board member for the foundation and I'm a treasurer. But when I left her concert, I was blown away by her talent and who she – had 5,000 people and made it very intimate and a lot of us know bluegrass

artists, but she's more Americana. But that's how I felt when I left her concert. I can't even explain what I just experienced and had heard.

That is my mantra is I'm very happy that – and this is an integral part of my life and people come to my house, our house for dinner, if we have an event at our house. We've had bands at our house. When people leave, they just go, “Wow, that was fun.” I'm hoping that one of my peer to speak at my funeral. Not yet, Rick, that people would leave happy and leave remembering me or whatever event I'm working on.

[0:41:37] RT: Okay. The last question. So, you have another gig now, you're a grandmother, and you're not just a grandmother, you're a full on involved, active with your grandkids. I'm just curious, what have your grandkids taught you that you didn't know in this whole long arc of a beautiful life that surprised you either about the world or yourself?

[0:42:00] WT: Oh, well, endurance. Who knew I had the endurance, the emotional endurance, the physical endurance, the psychological endurance. There are two little boys, five and two and a half years old, little Owen and Jack. I spend one day a week with them, if not more. Sometimes one or the other parent travels for work, so I'll spend four or five days with them and they live about an hour away. My son or our daughter-in-law and I will take care of the two boys. They make me want to live. They make me want to enjoy life. They make me want to stop and smell the roses. You watch the little children and they'll stop to see the ice on the grass. That was a big deal two weeks ago. They couldn't wait to go outside and just step on the ice on the grass. That I remember. I really love the idea that they can just take in the simple parts of nature that you and I have forgotten about. It's just part of who we are.

[0:43:04] RT: Brilliant. Wendy Tyner, thank you so much for coming to the swamp and sharing these stories. It's been just a kick for me.

[0:43:12] WT: Well, thank you.

[0:43:13] RT: So, thank you for doing it very much.

[0:43:14] WT: Thank you. Thank you. I really appreciate being asked, Rick. One day I think someone should interview you because you have a wealth of knowledge, and I have heard around a fireside story, at friends' homes that you'll talk about what you do. You're very humble and honest and you don't ever try to impress anyone, even though you do impress people. Someday, if I have a podcast, you'll be the first person I interview.

[0:43:44] RT: I will be there. I will be there.

[0:43:45] WT: There you go.

[0:43:46] RT: Thank you much.

[0:43:47] WT: Thank you. Take care.

[0:43:48] RT: Bye-bye.

[OUTRO]

[0:43:52] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders with Rick Torseth. Please take this moment and hit subscribe to follow more leadership swamp conversations.

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