

KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with Nancy Atcher  
Interviewer is Bob Gates  
May 20, 2013

( ) This symbol refers to an inaudible word or phrase.

. . . This symbol refers to an interruption to the speaker

Gates: Where are you from?

Atcher: I have probably a story that's like a lot of people's stories. I'm a seventh generation Kentuckian. And like, probably, a lot of people in our age category, my parents were brought up on farms. My father's people were from Hardin County and my mother was from Breckinridge County. And you know if we're in Kentucky, we're from counties. Because we have so many of them. I was closest to my mother's parents who lived in a little burg called Hardin, Kentucky, that's in Breckinridge County. And they had a 100 and some acre farm and they did what you did then. They raised tobacco, they had hogs and pigs and my grandmother canned, had cows and pigs and my grandmother was an artist. But I never knew she was an artists until I later on had a career. She made beautiful quilts that she made to actually put on a bed. And she made for people who were . . . whose houses burned down and she'd make them a quilt, which is what you did. She was also a musician, she taught and gave music lessons as many farm wives did. She played in a little church, Westview Methodist Church, a little white steeple church.

Gates: A piano player or guitar or what?

Atcher: She played the organ. And she played there for, I think, about 30 or 40 years, played her record . . . there was an article in the local paper about her. Her claim to fame was having played 100 funerals and of course, I will never have that distinction, I don't think. And I doubt that she ever got paid a penny for being. . .

Gates: Is this your mom?

Atcher: My grandmother.

Gates: Your grandmother, okay. 100 funerals, how many weddings?

Atcher: You know, that wasn't recorded. (Laughter, Gates and Atcher) That was pretty interesting.

Gates: Most proud of the funerals, I guess.

Atcher: Yes, yes, but she gave the people . . . children piano lessons and she gave me piano lessons and an interesting fact about my brother, we would spend summers with them on the farm and of course, my brother was the one that was helping strip tobacco and I was in the house drying the dishes, dusting and all this. And my brother made me aware that my grandmother would not give him piano lessons. And think it was just that things. It's a guy, it's a man and you give the girl the lessons and you don't give the . . . what's ironic is that my brother has become a very good musician having learned on his own, just kind of very interesting.

Gates: Does he play the piano?

Atcher: No, he plays the guitar, banjo, mandolin and he's a self-taught artist. I like to think that was innately in our heritage and he just kind of picked it up, but he didn't learn from her as I did. So I'm always grateful for those farm roots that I had. My parents, as a lot of kids did back in the 40s, moved to Louisville, married and I was actually born, they were living in Vine Grove, Kentucky when I was born. I was born in Louisville and then they moved to Louisville. So we got citified, I guess, as you can say and then moved back to . . . we would visit out grandparents, it seemed like every weekend we would go and spend the weekend. And then we spent summers, weeks of the summer. So that was kind of that background that I had that really didn't

come to see . . . I didn't really appreciate it until I was actually in my job that came along. Now that I look back, I couldn't have had a better job than the one I kind of actually fell into. And my own growing up as a young girl, I was not primed to go to college. I was going to be a secretary or, you know, get married and these kind of things, which I did. And decided I did want to go to college and get a career. And my brother and I were like the first two in our family to have college educations. How I got into the crafts was just a total fluke. I went back to college, I was about 26, which to me seemed very old, but I wanted that degree and I wanted to a business degree because that's what women did, you know. That was the time. It was in the 70s, 60s and 70s. And I went and got my degree and I graduated in 1981. Which was the time, it was similar to now. It was Ronald Regan years, and there was a recession going on. And I started applying for jobs. And I applied for 60 something jobs just one after the other and I'd get rejection letters and . . . because the jobs were scarce. Now, of course, understand what I wanted to do when I got out of college, I was going to make \$50,000 and I was going to be like an account rep for a pharmaceutical company or a manager. You know, I had these big dreams about what I was going to do with this business major. Well, as I kept getting these kind of rejection letters, my first job out of high school I worked in a mental health center for 8 years and I'd been, kind of a secretary, medical records . . . so as I'm applying for jobs as a, you know, college graduate, my vision of what I was going to be kept kind of like, well maybe I could. And I then I thought, well, I've been a secretary, I needed a job. (Laughter, Atcher) So I lived in Louisville at the time and then you went through the paper to look for a job. I mean you looked for the, you know . . . it's so different now. Every week I applied for two or three jobs and this particular week, this was probably in the winter of '82, there was this little teeny ad that said, "Part Time Administrative Assistant, non-profit organization.

Gates: That was all?

Atcher: All it said. Well, again, I'd been a secretary. I know how to do that. And I need a job, so I applied for it. And I was scheduled an interview. Didn't know who it was or . . . I went to downtown Louisville at 609 West Main, one of those beautiful old renovated buildings and I walked in this office and it's kind of like Susan's house. I walk in and there's all this artwork and I'm like, "I don't know what this is, but I want it". And I interviewed, it turned out to be the Kentucky Art and Craft Foundation that was founded by Phyllis George in 1981. Mary Shands had been appointed by Phyllis to be the chairmen of this organization. And this was Mary Shands' office. She I was interviewed by Karen Horseman, who at that time was the craft program manager and Sandy Meredith, who was Mrs. Shands' right hand assistant. And they hired me. 20 hours a week. I was probably making \$2, I don't know \$1.60, whatever, it was not much money, but I was thrilled. And the organization as I learned was, kind of, a companion organization to the Craft Marketing Program which had been started under the Brown administration. The Browns were at the end of their administration and, you know, when you're in state government, you never know if a program is going to keep going to the next administration. So this organization was founded kind of like, in case that doesn't happen that, you know, we'll have this other organization. Because it was on the heels of Phyllis George opening all these doors in the Craft Marketing Program starting and there was a real kind of a fervor about the crafts, because she had opened doors that had never been opened before. When we're talking about, you know, a celebrity, she'd been a Miss America, she'd been one of the first female newscasters for NFL football. She just had a . . . she'd been married to one of the big movie producers, Bob Evans, I mean she had all sorts of national contacts. And Fran may have mentioned this in her interview, but one of the first promotions that Kentucky did was at Bloomingdale's in New York. And at that time Bloomingdale's was doing a series of store promotions around the world. You know, China, this and this and Phyllis said, because she knew Marvin ( ), he head of the whole thing, "Why don't you do Kentucky?" So they had this

store promotion about Kentucky. So with her notoriety one thing led to another and it also brought to the awareness that craftspeople and artists are artists first and they've never really been trained to be business people. So part of the thing about craft marketing, opening all these doors, was to focus on, how do you sell your work in a store? You know, historically, of course, crafts were made because you needed them. Utilitarian. And then kind of when we moved to the 60s, it kind of got this hippified things and people were selling their stuff on the streets. And whatever transition happened like in the late 60s and 70s that store owners were like, "Hm, maybe we can sell these art pieces in our stores". The transition that happened with artists is they didn't really know how to sell. How do you wholesale? Wholesale was the new word. How do you sell your work so that you can sell it in a gift shop, you make that work. I was executive assistant with the Kentucky Art and Craft Foundation with the state as we were partnering with them to do training. And we started a series of workshops.

Gates: Where was the craft market at that time and what division of state was it? It was in Frankfort?

Atcher: Yea, it was in Frankfort. It might have been in economic development at that time.

Gates: And Fran was director of it then?

Atcher: No.

Atcher: Karen Horseman was director. Karen had worked on the Brown campaign and through her knowledge . . . and Lois Mateus was the first . . . head of the . . . there was a Department of the Arts, which was such a cool thing at that time for Kentucky to have this Department of Arts that really focused, you know, just brought this focus right on the arts and gave it some really notoriety in itself. So when this transition, again, this was the last year that the Brown's were going out of office and nobody knew what was kind of going on. Well, I started working with Karen and Fran was like the assistant. There was only 2 people in Craft Marketing at that time. So Karen ends up leaving, probably in a year or two, that's when Fran becomes the Craft Marketing manager. But anyway, we started partnering on doing these business workshops, how to price, how to sell to stores, how to market, you know, how to put your booth together, how to do all these things in order that artists, we could start training artists to be able to sell. . .

Gates: And how did you know how to do that?

Atcher: I'm a business major.

Gates: But you didn't work with art.

Atcher: Hello. (Laughter, Gates) It's really interesting you should note that, because I say this a lot, you know, I was a business major who had never heard the word art, ever, in my school. Not how to market it, how to look at it, what it was about. So the neat thing about my own career is the time table of Craft Marketing. We all kind of grew together, because nobody knew how to do it. We didn't know how to do it. I was lucky enough to have had the business background and classes, to know enough about marketing. What we found through . . . and this is still true today with teaching business to artists, is you've got to kind of change it a little bit. And that's not saying bring it down, but it's like, it's a different entity than a corporation who's selling cars. The theories are the same, but you've got to kind of temper it with artists who don't have million dollar advertising budgets, or an artist who is the only person who is making . . . you know, they are the production, you know, they are the marketing department, they are the receptionist, they

are the salesman. How do we bring all that together down to them at their level where they can do this? It was a lot of trial and error. And that's still true today. But I think the marketing is so much more sophisticated than it was back when we were starting in the early 80s.

Gates: Nobody to draw from? No other states?

Atcher: North Carolina and Tennessee were probably strong in programs, but they were entirely different programs. North Carolina has really developed more of a tourism, kind of, outlook. Tennessee. None of these states had their own Craft Marketing program. I went to California to a crafts symposium. I think it was like in 91 and you're thinking, "I'm going to California, boy they know". Oh my gosh, we were like the tell us about it. They were asking us stuff. And you're thinking, "These people, they're California". (Laughter, Atcher) But they didn't have any sophisticated programming that developed such as what we had. The neat thing about our program is that we all did grow together and we all learned together. We learned with the artist. We learned what worked, what wouldn't work. The doors were wide open. I mean, Phyllis just, you know, when you're going to Bloomingdales, you're going to Japan, you're dealing with Neiman Marcus. I mean those people were flying into Kentucky to meet with our artists. For the first time ever that you have the opportunity, not, you know, Susie's card shop, but Bloomingdale's, you know. So that was part of my job at the Art and Craft Foundation was to work with the craft marketing to develop these marketing workshops. Mary Shands was the chair person at that time and, you know, Mary Shands is now deceased but she was really the mover of . . . kind of the funding source, the person, the stability part, the connections part of the Art and Craft Foundation at that time. Also, on the board was Donna Hall whose husband was John Hall who was the president chairman of Ashland Oil. Joan Gaines, whose husband was a big horse person here in Lexington. Vivianne Lake, I think her husband was with one of the automobile companies. Rowan Victor was on it. So as Susan has previously said, it was corporate people. Ladies, women who had connections. Big time connections.

Gates: Back then it was? I thought she had said it had changed over the years.

Atcher: No. I mean, it started out that way. A very funny story that I love to tell is at a board meeting we were having and I was calling the different ladies to remind them we were having the board . . . and I called Joan Gaines and I said, "We're having a board meeting next week, I hope you can come" she said, "Oh, I'm so sorry I won't be able to come. The Queen is coming in", and she was. Queen Elizabeth was coming to their farm to do. . . and you're in a job like this and you're like, "This is unreal. This is absolutely unreal to be in this kind of . . . you're around these kind of people. It was just pretty. . .

Gates: How much interaction did you have with Phyllis George?

Atcher: I had some. She wasn't as active, of course, she changed the election came up and they left office. She was still involved and she continues to be involved with KMAC is now what was the Kentucky Art and Craft Foundation. It's now the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft. It's one in the same. We did fundraising. We had a dinner out at her house a couple of times. One of the first art auctions they did on KET, she was like the honorary person. I worked on that with her. She's kind of a . . . the celebrity, kind of person. My interactions with her were not as much as like, Fran's were, especially when she was First Lady. But anyway, that's kind of what we started with the Art and Craft Foundation and I, again, partnered, I worked hand in hand with the state people. I was there a year part time as the executive assistant and in April. . . that was in '83 and in '84 I was made executive director. So I was the first executive director of this organization.

Gates: Who did you take over for?

Atcher: Me. I was the first staff member they ever hired.

Gates: Oh! I see. Okay.

Atcher: Yes.

Gates: The other ones were just the board members. I see.

Atcher: Yes. They were at that point in their organizational development where they wanted staff so I started as their first staff member.

Gates: Why do you think they hired you?

Atcher: Well, having the business background. You know, I think a lot of what we do is about you and your personality. We all know that it takes. We become friends with these people. And I'm not saying that was what the criteria was but you have to be able to deal on a different level. It wasn't business. You know, here we're going to do this. It was about you and I like to think it was about me and my personality as well as my credentials at that time. And kind of melding with what was going on and being flexible, you know. Being able to learn along with . . . Like I said, we didn't know what to do. Even with the craft market, you know, they didn't know what to do. I was at the third market in '83, you know, Kentucky had never done a wholesale craft market. So they just started parroting after the national shows, like the New York National Gift Fair. And we actually did two markets a year, which is now unbelievable. So the other things that I did at the Art and Craft Foundation, we started a newsletter and in '84 the board decided they wanted to open a gallery and we opened the Marlene Bick, who's now Grissom, had a gallery in the bottom level of Mrs. Shands' building. And she left and took over that space and in October 1984 we opened a gallery. I didn't know anything about how to do a craft gallery. (Laughter, Atcher) But just with all the people and the resources . . . and the first exhibit was Al and Mary Shands' craft pieces and you know, they were extensive collectors. Big folk art enthusiasts. And that's what we opened with. And when I look back at it, you know, I walked into that job not knowing what the heck was going on. And it's been, like I said, it was the career. I couldn't have picked a better career for myself. So then, to go from there. I was there for two and half years and then organizationally, things started shifting and I left and actually did not start with the Craft Marketing Program until '87 so I left Art and Craft Foundation in '85 and I worked for ( ) Hardware. I had never worked for a for profit organization before. When I got out of high school, I worked in a mental health center for 8 years and then I worked for the Art and Craft Foundation for two and half and I thought, "I want to work for a corporation, you know". I worked there for 9 months and they went bankrupt. So 9 months later I'm out . . .

Gates: The hardware store went bankrupt?

Atcher: Yea. It was one of the oldest hardware companies, probably in the United States. Times changed.

Gates: How did you get a job there?

Atcher: I just went looking for it.

Gates: So, why did you leave the organization?

Atcher: Things were changing and they were looking for a different kind of director. And Rita Steinberg . . . Rita Steinberg is a lot like Susan. She was a fundraiser. The organization was at the peak. And what I've read now about organizations, at different levels you need different kind of people. I think I was the people person who kind of got it off the ground, but then it came to this critical mass where it needed some more organizational stability. And I'd never run an organization before. Rita actually started as a volunteer and of course, she knew different people on the board. And so I left and then they made her director. You know, historically, the Art and Craft Foundation has had a lot of directors.

Gates: I remember her being there when I came in.

Atcher: Yea. So she was there may be like '87, '86 too. She left, gosh I don't know, maybe 2000 or something.

Gates: So she was there a long time.

Atcher: Yea. Well, she really built the organization. Again, she had the funding, kind of, knowledge. How to get people to give money and write grants. So I ended up going to the Craft Marketing Program because I'd worked with Fran and some of the other . . . and at that time the Craft Marketing Program went from two people to three people and I was the third person they hired.

Gates: Who were the other two?

Atcher: Fran and Connie. Connie was the secretary assistant there. No! I take that back. There was Sherrie Cunningham, Fran and then Connie. So Sherrie and Fran were like the marketing representatives or whatever. So Sherry left, they hired me. This was under Martha Layne Collins and Crit Luallen was our secretary of our . . . it still was the Department of the Arts. It was really an exciting time to be with the state, because under the arm of the Department of the Arts was the Film Commission, the Visual Arts, Irwin Picket, Creative Services was under that. And the Arts Council, we were all housed together, but we weren't the same entity. They were their own thing and they had a board and Nash Cox was, I think she was there when I was at the Foundation and then Roger . . . what was his last name? He was the director. And then when the Wilkinson's came in things kind of fell apart. And the Arts Council, I think that's the time we went under, the Arts Council and the Department of the Arts went away. They abolished the Department of the Arts, which I always hated, because again, I think for Kentucky to have this Department of the Arts was really a strong, a very strong entity. So anyway, I always think that we . . . I feel fortunate that the Art and Craft Foundation when it started, we were trying to figure things out and then when I was . . . along with the Craft Marketing Program and then the Market was going great and of course the 80s, they were great times for the arts. Great times. And the money was flowing. I mean, we had programs. We had money. The Craft Market was going great. I'm not sure when the folk art . . . I always heard about Bob Gates. You were in Berea. Was that in the 90s?

Gates: '89, '90, '91. Then I came in to the Arts Council in '92. I moved to Frankfort and became part of the Historical Society and part of the Arts Council.

Atcher: So as far as the program, again, we really, I mean, it was really going great. The Craft Marketing Program was going good. The sales were good, again, it was a really good time, I think, in the whole . . .

Gates: What did you start out doing in the Craft Marketing?

Atcher: I was a marketing . . . I can't think of what we called. . . Not reps, associate, marketing . . . that was my title. You know, when you're in these jobs you do everything. I mean, one day, you're having lunch in the governor's mansion and the next day you're loading a semi, you know? There was just this full range and I think that is what had made our jobs so needed. We've done everything. And in those days you did everything to get your program going. If I had to sweep the floor, clean the bathroom, because we were having an opening, that's what we did. I mean, you did everything, you lifted and loaded, as you very well know. The New York Gift Show, you know, Kentucky was one of the first states that was invited to do the New York International Gift Fair when they decided, again the giftware industry suddenly notices art and craft.

Gates: What's giftware?

Atcher: Giftware is cards, anything if you went into a card shop. The little knick knacks, the gift cards, tableware. And that's what this National Gift Show in New York was at the Javits Center. There's like 4,000 exhibitors selling stuff. Just stuff. But they didn't have any original art. So they invited Kentucky. This was under Governor Collins, I believe. For Kentucky to be one of the first states to be there as a state. I think West Virginia, Maine, I always remember Maine being there. And we went as a state group to sell our art and craft products.

Gates: This is a big . . . the New York Craft Show? Or what was it called?

Atcher: New York International Gift Show.

Gates: Gift Show.

Atcher: Yes.

Gates: You went and ( ) Kentucky. You set up a booth or? You took artists with you the first time?

Atcher: The first time the artists had, again I didn't go until '87, so I think this started in maybe '85 or so. But we had a front booth that was Kentucky. We had our banners. We didn't have the Kentucky Crafted logo, but we had Made in Kentucky and that was kind of the frontage and then we took craftspeople with us. I think there might have been 20. And if you want some good stories, you ought to talk to these people who had never been out of their little ( ), their Maysville and they're going to New York City. And I think the one thing I've always thought about New York is I think they loved us up there. Because when we first go into New York, the New Yorkers are stiff and they're not friendly, well honey you know, we're just . . . (Laughter, Atcher) We're turning it on, I mean, they loved, they loved . . . and they would call us Southern I guess. The Southern charm, but we were friendly. They loved the work. It was a time, and I've heard Fran talk about this, we were a little bit ahead of our time with the Japanese, because at that time the Japanese were visiting the gift shows and they loved, well I think the Japanese loved Kentucky anyway, I think that's still . . . But they were buying a lot of little things. Little flowers. Because realize culturally, things are . . . spaces are smaller, so through that gift show,

Takashimaya I think it was like the second largest department store in Japan, flew their buyers over here and in fact the first month I was at the Art and Craft Foundation, Karen Horseman called me and said, "What are you doing?" And the weather is kind of snowing and stuff and she said, "Do you want to go for a ride on the governor's helicopter?" And I'm like, "What?" They were taking these Japanese buyers were flying in and they were going to take them on the helicopter to Whitesburg and David Appalachian Crafts and all that. And I was like, "Well, yea, of course I do!" Again thinking, "Oh my gosh, this is incredible". Turns out the weather got bad and they couldn't fly and so I think Karen and Fran got in a state car and took them all over the place. And they purchased, I think, quite a lot of crafts and ended up, Fran and a group of . . . I don't know how many craft business went back to Japan and did the store opening at Takashimaya. They had, I don't know if it was a ten day store promotion. And they took up music, they had cloggers or you know, I don't know.

Gates: I remember Homer Ledford saying he went to Japan, was that?

Atcher: Well, maybe it was part of that.

Gates: I don't know it was an instrument maker or a musician. I can't remember.

Atcher: I honestly don't know. I was not a part of that, so I don't know.

Gates: You weren't part of the Japan thing?

Atcher: No. But I started going to New York in '87 and just, I mean, if you can imagine, again I think some great stories from the people who first went. But it's a very expensive show. Susan talked about Kentucky supporting its artists. Because it was so expensive, Kentucky was able to support the artists going. And there's been times where we've paid half their booth fee. And these artists were selected. It wasn't just anybody could go. They really had to be at a sophisticated level enough to be able to handle orders, because these people would be getting 10,000, 20,000 . . . and that number of orders, which in the big business picture probably isn't a lot for that, but when you're an individual artist. It's huge. It's absolutely huge. And the other neat thing about New York was we had the notoriety, I mean, we were the darling, I mean Kentucky was the darling. Of course, at that time, Governor Collins would come down.

Gates: Was it a stereotypical view of Kentucky that they did or what it?

Atcher: That's what we took so much pride in is having a booth and being the non-stereotypical, what people think Kentucky is. Its like, "Yes, we have shoes. Yes, we have beautiful, sophisticated art. Yes, we're very . . ." "And I think, again, between the charm as you know, the artist and kind of knowing what to do, I think that really propelled our artists and opened those doors for them that they never had before. You know, on a national, kind of, basis.

Gates: So you had people like basket makers from 31W.

Atcher: Curtis Alvey. (Laughter, Atcher) Curtis Alvey was one of our early one, yea he was quite the character. But he was one of the early basket people that went. And of course, you know, now, looking back, the market has become so sophisticated. Then, and in fact I had one of the artists tell me, said "I used to be able to send out my catalog or be at a show and people would just order". Well, it's such a different game now, I mean, because, really because of this trend of artists learning more, knowing that they need to know about business. The market is very

competitive these days. And of course, with the internet and websites, that's completely changed the game, you know? If you're not, kind of, a part of that.

Gates: But when you guys were doing it you were helping with the early steps to get there.

Atcher: Yea and like I said, we didn't really know either, I mean, we knew the principles and we just kind of started. We had training sessions. We brought in people from U.K. and U. of L. We started using some of our artists who'd been doing it for a while, who knew . . . I think of Curt Bensley who was an Ohio ceramic artist who had his own business and we started having him come in and do training sessions. The Ohio designer craftsmen, would come in, Howell Stevens would come in and do workshops. Of course we had publicity out of the wazoo and we had a lot of magazine people coming in and doing magazine shoots. And also we'd have them in as guest speakers to talk about how you work with media and what's important and what you need to . . . of course that was so different now, because they would come in and do their photo shoots, well now you can send images and you can do them and all that kind of thing. But as we saw the market change, in 2000 there was a real focus on cultural tourism and we started looking at how does that affect what people make and how can we start integrating art and craft into this whole tourism. And of course what's ironic to me now is where we are, is that so many of our counties and cities are focusing on that as a cultural tourism, you know, that's how you get people into your cities now, is because of the artists and because of the history. The one thing I will say about the Craft Marketing Program is we were fortunate for twenty some years to have continuous funding and support of any incoming governor, you know, from John Y. Brown to Martha Layne Collins, Wilkinson, Brereton Jones, Governor Patton, the Fletchers, Steve Beshear. There has always been consistent support by them. Now the funding has changed, as we all know, but I think the funding has changed for everybody. 2000 was kind of a crucial time for the Craft Marketing Program and again, looking at this cultural tourism piece and I think Susan had been talking about this tornado that went through Berea in maybe 1999, 2000. One of our craftsmen, Ken Gastineau . . . Well, Old Town was pretty much wiped out and Ken Gastineau who is a jewelry artist and very politically active, just kind of got this thing up, we've got to have help, we need an artisan center, we need this and that. And through, kind of this, ball that started rolling is how the Kentucky Artisan's Center came to be, is because, you know of that tornado and we need more here. And the Kentucky Artisan's Center is really kind of patterned after West Virginia Tamarack which built a huge visitor's welcome center and it was through their Department of Transportation. So anyway, Kentucky got this wonderful artisan center and it was about this time that the Hindman Artisan Center started, all that cultural development down there with the school that was under Governor Patton.

Gates: School for Crafts?

Atcher: School for Crafts. And their street they've built a gallery and they have an artisan center down as well. But the Craft Marketing Program, again, though, kind of, Ken and this political thing that was going on about the arts and crafts. We received a product development initiative, money for a product development initiative. And that was really looking at this cultural tourism piece and how do we develop these products that could go in these places. One of the things that we've always heard about the state parks is that, to us, they always seem like they had . . . they were just the place that people would buy arts and crafts. And for some reason they were still stuck in the gift mode, like the little trinkets and a lot of the little stuff that's kitschy Kentucky. Kind of the negative stereotype stuff, not all of them. . .

Gates: Made in Japan too, right?

Atcher: Made in Japan. So through Crit Luallen. Through I guess Governor Patton really, we started this initiative. We got this money through the legislature, to start this Product Development Initiative and that's a program that I headed up. Like, what does that mean? What does it mean to develop products that artists can sell? You know, we walk a thin line in an artist making what they want and an artist making something for the marketplace. And how do you cross that line? And for us we said you can do both, but if you really want to make a living, you're going to have some product, a product line that sells. And on the other part of this was this cultural tourism piece, is we need to have affordable crafts and art that people can buy. So we developed several pilot projects and developed this program called the Kentucky Collection in which we developed a line of products that were in this affordable range. \$35 on down to \$2 or \$5. And we test marketed it in several state parks in several independent places, such as Diamond Cavern State Park. We did it with a book store in Louisville. We did it with a store in northern Kentucky and three or four of the state parks. And we developed the Kentucky Collection logo, Kentucky Collection tags. We did a series of training and workshops for our Kentucky Collection artists and that was a pretty successful program I think. And it's led to some other things. I think that program is no longer, I don't know. But again, we lived in a time when the funding was pretty darn good and things were being funded. And maybe that will help us maintain some programs. I think the Arts Council now still maintains the Kentucky Crafted Program. It's a little different, but I think all the history behind it and kind of the end roads we made are still here.

Gates: Well how was it dealing with the parks? ( )

Atcher: I think we had to fight the 'crafts won't sell in the state parks'. Again, we always saw those gift shops as like Wow! You've got the customer, you know we had looked at the profile of the tourist person that was there, which seemed to fit the financial, you know people who could afford it, people with kids, educated people. It seemed to fit the entire dynamic of what . . . your typical craft or art buyer would do, I think it's still an issue, but I think it's a bigger issue on the financial side. I think there's people within the park system that truly believe about the arts and the crafts. It's just making this turnover with the gift shop. Thought of what is a gift shop. Because they still have the ice cream and the candy bars and we never denied that you don't need something like that, you know. But it's just like, they're not going to buy it if it's not in there. (Laughter, Atcher) You know, if you don't have it all, it's not going to be there, so.

Gates: So what happened after the Arts Council?

Atcher: We actually merged into the Arts Council. We had been a part of Economic Development from, I don't know, a long time. And that really seemed a good fit. For one reason, we always felt were economic development with the art side and I think Economic Development really loved having us as part of their . . . again, I've always have said, the art and crafts, they're the public face of Kentucky and what a beautiful face that is. And when the Governor can go on a trip and take, you know, twenty baskets as gifts to their dignitaries, you know, along with the story. I mean, how gracious and wonderful is that? Again as our public face. And then we went to the Arts Council, I'm trying to think, 15 or 20 years ago and became integrated with the Arts Council. And because the Arts Council has always been kind of a funding source, it was a little bit of a challenge I think. You know, how we fit in to that mode. I thought Susan was coming in.

Gates: She's been here.

Atcher: Oh, has she? (Laughter, Atcher)

Gates: Do we want to take a break?

Cameraman: Yea, we're like three minutes on this tape.

Atcher: I mean I think we're pretty close here.

Gates: After you left the Kentucky Arts Council, you started your own businesses or? What are you doing?

Atcher: I go back to our jobs, we have had the opportunity to be involved in so much that you realize that you can do a multitude of things. So people ask you to do a multitude of things. (Laughter, Atcher) The really neat thing about having the career that we've had is the contacts. I'm amazed as I go around the state, I'm always seeing somebody I know or . . . it's just kind of a familial kind of atmosphere that we worked in and we knew different people. So I'm on several boards. One of them is my church. My church just built a new building and part of their mission was to have the arts be a part of it. So I coordinate a gallery there and we have continuing art exhibits and receptions and everything we used to do. And it's kind of ironic to me, a church is really kind of art used to always be. But what I'm seeing with art and churches is that churches are really becoming community art centers as we lose funding for different things that people like myself and you are being able to do some of the art things that maybe another kind of business wouldn't be able to do or can't do now because of funding. I also think our skill sets are useful. I was part of the Art in the Garden, a new exhibit in Frankfort which you are now doing do and it's because I think we had the contacts and the where-with-all to know how to put those kinds of things together. Also, my own art is performing arts. I never was a person who could do anything with my hands, but I loved to perform and I've started my own theatre company and community theatre. The challenge of that is, I've spent my entire career marketing other artist, so my challenge now is can I market myself? And I think I can. Yes, I think I can. It's a little different hat when you're doing it yourself, for yourself, but yea, I think I'm doing it. And I'm very apt at telling other people, showing other people how to do it.

Gates: You handed me your sheet with your picture on it and everything and it looked pretty good.

Atcher: Yea, well, I'm ready to roll. One of my favorite. . .

Gates: Are you doing what you advised other people do, pretty much?

Atcher: As far as?

Gates: Marketing yourself.

Atcher: Yes and I appreciate now when you're working for yourself, the amount of funds you have to do things is one thing, the other thing is the connections that you have. I mean I have a lot of networks that I can use. When you're not involved in an organization, you know, somebody said to me it's like 7 degrees of separation, could you get to the president if you had to? You know, when you're working in state government you have a lot of resources you can call on. I mean from the governor's office on down and it makes your job a little easier. When you're on your own you have to develop and nurture those networks and I use them. But yea, I think that's the part about it, I do some art consulting with individual artists and I'm very glad, now, that I do this myself, because yes, I know how to do a website. I know how to market myself. I know how to press release. I know how to get . . . The other thing I've discovered is

when you're on your own, and this is what artists have to decide. Is how much do I want to do? Because as an artist, you can do anything you want to, but if you're going to make a living, you have to kind of focus. Fortunately, I'm very blessed to not have to make a living and I can pick and choose and a lot of things I do I do gratis because I feel like I have a gift and I can do that for others. But I got on the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association through my associations with Fran Redmon who is the president, Philis Alvic, Mary Reed, Susan Goldstein, the Bellando's, these are people, we've all walked this walk together and we feel like the history is very important. And Susan had alluded to this, Kentucky has always set the bar for, as far as its arts programs and the Craft Marketing Program received a lot of national acclaim. The Kentucky Craft History and Education Association has the ability to set another marker and no other state in the country is documenting its craft history and we have the ability to, once again, be the first to do this kind of . . . and everybody has a story. We are all a part of this wonderful thing. Either history or craft history. And I've enjoyed starting to learn how to find those histories and draw those out, because, like I said, everybody . . . even when you're selling your work, one of the things we used to say in marketing is "Tell your story". You know, I can buy that piece of ceramic art there, but to know that Susan Goldstein did that, she lives in Lexington and she now . . . you know, I've got this wonderful story that all of a sudden . . . when we were in New York doing that show, we would have samples of people's work and I may not know how Susan made that, but I can tell you about Susan. And you can see how enraptured people get when they start hearing the story of the person and, you know, they use recycled materials or that, "Oh my gosh that's the first time she ever came to New York". I could watch people turning and see their interest once they knew that we knew the people and maybe not how they made it but we knew the history of how they made it. So I'm real excited to be on this board. I hope it's a legacy that I can leave. That somebody will look at this interview and say "Oh yea, she was part of this thing that was successful and made a difference" and my history, a little example of what I say to people, "Why is history important". I'm a U.K. fan, basketball fan and back during basketball season Kentucky played, oh gosh, I hope I get the team right. I think it was North Carolina several years ago in the 80s I believe. Kentucky was ahead and Chris Laettner . . . I mean there was like 2 seconds left and he made it and they won. Well, Kentucky played them in the season and they interviewed one of the young guys and they were having the game and he didn't know. He didn't know about this. He didn't know the history of this and I thought, what a difference to know. To walk into that arena and if you didn't know what was going on, how excited the crowd was, how many people came just to see this game and how that would change your perception of how you played that game because you knew how important it was. And I thought, "That's what this work is about". If you know the history of it, you know how important something is and that's why I think our stories are important. Our history is important. Your history, everybody's. And that's the other thing about KCHEA it's about the artists, but it's also about the administrators, it's also about the objects, it's about the whole . . . the museums that started, the galleries that started, all of that. The education that happened in the school as a result of our programming that happened and that somebody thought was important.

Gates: So, where do you think KCHEA is going now? What direction?

Atcher: Well, Susan mentioned the Kentucky Crafted Virtual Encyclopedia which were are all very . . . we think it's . . . you know how you just feel like this is the right thing to do. We feel like this is the right thing to do and we've been in touch with several consultants from Georgia and around the country who have some history . . . there are history virtual libraries, but there's nothing kind of pinpointed just to craft. And they're all like "Yes, go for it". It's the legacy we can leave. And I think it's very fundable, once we can get our act together, get this planning grant and kind of work out the details. It's big. We're talking about a volunteer . . . we're all volunteers trying to make this happen. But we feel pretty confident about it, so.

Gates: Anything else you want to say?

Atcher: The thing I want to say about our work in the arts is that. I get a little teary about it. I remember Brent, Ann Ferral. Somebody asked Ann what her husband did for a living and she said, "He eats pie with people". And I think our work, we were fortunate to be in a business where these people became our friends and our families. When I see somebody out, it's like when I go to the craft market it's like a family reunion. I mean this work, we were so blessed to have been a part of something where we were all on this bandwagon together. And I think that's what made it so successful and that was really the part of my job, when those really hectic, hard times came, that's why I loved it so much. It was because of the people. Because we were all in this together. And I think that's what people feel.

Gates: Yea, you build relationships in these kind of jobs, with the artists.

Atcher: Yes.

Gates: People you work with.

Atcher: I think that's it. It's a wrap. Thank you. Might as well start singing My Old Kentucky Home.

END OF INTERVIEW