

KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with Judy Sizemore
Interviewer is Bob Gates
September 28th, 2017

() This symbol refers to an inaudible word or phrase

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

Gates:

Hey, Judy, how are you doing?

Sizemore:

I'm doing well, Bob. How about you?

Gates:

This is the 28th of September. And we're down in Berea. What's the name of this place?

Sizemore:

This is the Broadway Center.

Gates:

The Broadway Center. Okay. And we got a room here so we could interview you and we've got some nice background there. That's a mural that was painted, right?

Sizemore:

Yeah. It was painted as part of the Learn Shops about three or four years ago.

Gates:

Oh, okay. Good. Well, I wanted to talk about your life and your work with artists over the years, sound good?

Sizemore:

Okay. Sure. Sounds fine.

Gates:

Okay. You know, you can tell from your accent that you're not from around here and you're from the east coast, right?

Sizemore:

Well, yeah, kind of several places in the east coast. What I think of as home is New Hampshire because I spent all my summers there. But when I go, when I go back there, they say I have an accent too. So, at this point, I don't know quite what kind of an accent. I have some kind of a hodgepodge.

Gates:

So where were you born? Where'd you live?

Sizemore:

I was born in White Plains, New York, but I only lived there as a ... long enough to get born, I suppose. And then I lived ... and my parents were divorced. So my father lived in New York City and my mother lived in Massachusetts. And like I said, we spent all our summers on a lake in New Hampshire. And that's ...

Gates:

What your mom or with your dad?

Sizemore:

With my mom.

Gates:

Okay. So, you lived with your mom...

Sizemore:

And families of cousins all around the lake.

Gates:

Okay. Did you live mostly with your mom?

Sizemore:

Yeah, mostly.

Gates:

So was there artistic stuff in your family?

Sizemore:

A lot of writers in my family and a few artists and a couple of musicians.

Gates:

Well, who were they? Can you talk a little bit about them?

Sizemore:

They weren't anyone, you know, that was ever successful. They were just, you know, musicians for their own pleasure and, you know, I mean, they performed a little bit just locally and ...

Gates:

Were they like hippies? (laughs)

Sizemore:

(laughs) There were a number of hippies in my family. Yes.

Gates:

I mean, how would you describe them? This kind of just artist and ...

Sizemore:

Well, yeah, kind of a more diverse and just being hippies because this was multi-generational, you know, so there was, you know actually several of the writers in my family did more religious philosophy kind of writing.

Gates:

Oh really? Was that your dad or somebody?

Sizemore:

No, it was on my mother's side, like my aunt, my uncle, my grandfather.

Gates:

What'd you think of them as writers? I mean, because you're a writer I was wondering if that influenced you at all.

Sizemore:

Well, it's interesting, I think to look at their styles in terms of generation, because you know, the style as well as the content and kind of the way of looking at society and family, you can kind of see it as an evolution in response to changes in society. But my grandfather's writing was much more kind of informal and more conversation about the role of family and, and things like that. And whereas my uncle's was more kind of an existential philosophical approach to Christianity. So it was, you know ... and yet it's still in a conversational mode, but he was a chaplain at a university. So his is more like a dialogue that he might've had with students.

Gates:

Okay. Did he publish it then?

Sizemore:

Oh yeah. Both of them had several published books.

Gates:

Magazines or?

Sizemore:

Yeah, they did a lot of articles that I've never really seen because, you know, I've just looked at their books.

Gates:

Well, my daughter lives in Maine. Now, her boyfriend's from New Hampshire area. Massachusetts I guess. But now they're in ... But he turned me on to E.B. White and it's not Charlotte's Web so much, but things like what he wrote about living on the farm up there and how he went from New York City up to the farm. I really enjoy that sense of place. I was wondering if any of that came from your childhood?

Sizemore:

Yeah. I had an incredibly strong sense of place at that lake. I mean, I still feel like that that lake is kind of my liquid heart, you know, that it very much shaped me. And it was at that time, it's not a huge lake, but it's pretty good-sized lake. And there were only four families that lived on it.

Gates:

Did it have a name?

Sizemore:

Well, some people call it Darren Lake, but it's actually named Lake Piscataqua, which is the name of the native American people who lived on that lake. And so there were, you know, like islands and as kids, we each had our so-called island, you know, and then it was the boys island and the girls island and Blueberry Island. And of course we didn't own them, but we just, you know, claimed them.

Gates:

How did you get out to them?

Sizemore:

Sometimes we canoed and sometimes we swam, it was about maybe a mile.

Gates:

You swam a mile?

Sizemore:

I was quite the otter in those days. And I still love to swim, you know, but, and most of us learn to swim before we could walk, even though it was really ...

Gates:

A mile out and a mile back?

Sizemore:

I may be exaggerating. I don't know. But it certainly felt like a mile to me. (laughs)

Gates:

So you'd hang out there in the summers, right? How long? All summer?

Sizemore:

All summer. And then sometimes for a couple of years we lived through the wintertime there too. And then when I got married, my husband and I lived there year round for a couple of years. And it was fun in the wintertime because it's on a dirt road off a paved road that wasn't plowed. So, you know, to get to town at most times we had to ski, go cross country ski into town and then try to bring groceries back and backpacks.

Gates:

And that was like 20 miles. Right?

Sizemore:

It was about seven miles one way. And it would take all day. I mean, you'd leave early in the morning and, you know, so we would obviously put in most of our supplies before the big snow came.

Gates:

And that was a family house?

Sizemore:

Yeah. It was actually, it was built by my grandfather.

Gates:

What did it look like?

Sizemore:

It looked kind of like a log cabin, but it was just split logs, you know? So instead of being a full log, it was like split logs. And then...

Gates:

Was it squared off logs?

Sizemore:

They were actually vertical. And then there was like framing on the inside and like the rafters, you know, on the second floor, there was like 2 stories. And then on this second story that the rafters were open at the top. So, you know, we would climb up there and play in the rafters that was, you know, which was insane really when I think back on it, because it, you know, it's probably kind of dangerous and ...

Gates:

You could've fallen off.

Sizemore:

Yeah. Yeah. But we never worried about that. You know, we were kids.

Gates:

And Dennis never fell there, did he?

Sizemore:

He never would go in the rafters.

Gates:

You were telling me all the accidents he's had. So I thought that he fell off of there too.

Sizemore:

He's fallen off many things, but not out of the rafters.

Gates:

Well, so that was a major influence in your life, living there.

Sizemore:

Yeah. And, I think, you know, when you were talking about E.B. White and his going back and forth between his new England farm and the city, I think the fact that I spent a fair amount of time in New York City kind of sharpened that sense of place because I was never comfortable in the city and I'm still not very comfortable in cities. And, you know, so always returning to a more rural...

Gates:

Why did you go to New York?

Sizemore:

That's where my father lived.

Gates:

Oh okay. So, you'd visit him. Where did he live in New York?

Sizemore:

He lived in Manhattan, he lived on east 72nd street.

Gates:

What did he do for a living?

Sizemore:

He was a lawyer.

Gates:

Oh, wow. So you'd visit him a lot too.

Sizemore:

We'd spend all our vacations, you know, not summer, but all of our school vacations there.

Gates:

So when you're saying 'we', do you have a brother and sister?

Sizemore:

I've got three brothers.

Gates:

Three brothers. Are they older than you?

Sizemore:

Two are older, one's younger.

Gates:

You're close to the middle, I guess you can be with four. Yeah. (laughs) So how did that help you with your viewpoint on life, being up on that lake?

Sizemore:

Well, I think what you touched on that sense of place and have that sense of place is expressed in so many different ways, you know, from, you know, the way that people speak to the foods that they eat to the herbal remedies that they're familiar with to the art that they create. And so that's always been something that I'm really aware of, is how sense of place and connection to culture really impact you as a person and as an artist or as a writer.

Gates:

People around you or your family, you're thinking. Do you have a lot of family folk lore that you're thinking about right now?

Sizemore:

Oh yeah, you know of course we didn't have a television or anything, so, you know, we'd always go ... I had my two uncles were both storytellers and have very different types of stories, you know, and I was, you know one evening a week we can go across the lake and listen to stories and had a fire or something, you know, and then canoe back, you know?

Gates:

Oh, so it was like a little place, a little camp area?

Sizemore:

No, we'd go to their house.

Gates:

Oh, so they had a house there, too?

Sizemore:

Yeah, the families that lived on the lake were all my cousins.

Gates:

Oh my gosh. It was like the dynasty there, huh?

Sizemore:

Well, you know, it started in that house that we lived in, my grandfather had built and then across the lake a house that a friend of his had built and there were three houses and then eventually some of my cousins, because we all lived in the same house, so it got kind of crowded, so they built another house.

Gates:

Did they own the lake too?

Sizemore:

No. The lake was actually owned, you know, all the rest of the property besides our little homestead areas was owned by a woman who lived in New York and came up only very rarely. And she was kind of a philanthropy activist woman and it was, it was sensational, but as long as she was alive, because she lived, you know, she owned all the lake and so it was just wild. But then when, when she passed away her heirs sold it off. So now it's still not, you know, really crowded, but it was, you know, to me, it's, it looks like, oh my gosh, there's so many houses there.

Gates: Do you still go up there?

Sizemore:

I haven't been up for several years, but whenever I go up to that part of the country, I was go out.

Gates:

Do you still own the house?

Sizemore:

No. No. In fact, there's only one set of cousins that still owns the house that they, that they lived in.

Gates:

You talked about sailing one time. Did you used to sail there or in the ocean?

Sizemore:

We had at one point we had those, I think they were called sunfish, you know, the little bitty, sail boats, you know, flip over real easy. I never had one, but you know, some of my cousins and brothers had them and, you know, so we'd go out in those, you know, but so far it's going out in, in actual sailboats. I went out with, you know, cause during the winter we lived in Massachusetts and a lot of my friends had sailboats out on the coast there and we'd go out there. I never really learned how to sail very well. But I'm a great passenger.

Gates:

I'll try and get you out on mine sometime. I took Nancy Atcher out the other day.

Sizemore:

Oh, I bet she loved that.

Gates:

Yeah. We had a nice wind for about 20 minutes. It was good. So you're Massachusetts and we're about in New Hampshire was that lake? Was it the middle or the coast?

Sizemore:

It's the Southern end of New Hampshire, there and it's interesting because it's in the Appalachian Mountains and it's, you know, like there's so many similarities in terms of like you know, the stories that people tell. I came down here and it was the same stories, just different character names.

Gates:

Really? Like what?

Sizemore:

Oh, like the light on, you know, the mountain, whether it's Clark Mountain or Brown Mountain or whatever, you know, the light that travels across, you know, and the ghost that carries it, you know, those and then even some of the more obscure Jack Tales we're real similar to some of the stories that I heard. But usually the character in that story was somebody named Bert.

Gates:

Yeah. And those are stories your uncle told you?

Sizemore:

Yeah, that my uncle told or that were...

Gates:

Did they all grow up in that area?

Sizemore:

No. No. They grew up in upstate New York.

Gates:

Okay. Which is not that far away, I guess. But similar culture, mountain, kind of the mountain culture. Appalachian.

Sizemore:

Yeah. A little less rural. Yeah.

Gates:

Well, I was wondering if you felt like you were an insider to that, or you were exploring other people's culture when you were up to the lake?

Sizemore:

Well I guess, I guess both because the culture that was around us, you know, that it was in town and stuff, you know, that it was different, you know? And the dichotomy there, I think is, has grown more pronounced over the years because now there's a lot of people that live on the lake as vacationers. And so they have, you know, this kind of vacation lake culture, which is very

different than the, you know, the surrounding culture. And yet there's, there's this kind of, it's kind of morphing, you know, because there's more direct transportation. I mean, there's, you know, not from our lake, but from some of the lakes up there, there's, you know, it's not that far to get a bus to ride down to Boston and people actually commute from there, you know you know, not again, not my, not the lake that I was on, but, you know, lakes a little further to the south. So there is, there's more of a melding, I think, of the cultures now, but back then it was, it was like we had our own culture on the lake. And then there was, you know the culture in town that, you know, we were kind of a part of, but kind of an outsider part of.

Gates:

But you weren't like these people now we're just coming up for the summer and were outside of the culture, you were somewhere in between.

Sizemore:

Somewhere in between.

Gates:

Sounds pretty cool.

Sizemore:

Because we had friends in town they'd come out and, you know, go fishing and stuff, you know?

Gates:

But you were there for long periods too.

Sizemore:

Yeah.

Gates:

Like three months, four months?

Sizemore:

Well, we were there every summer for three months. And then a couple of years when I was a kid we'd lived there year round though. We didn't live on the lake because we were little in it, you know, it would have been really difficult, because of the, you know ...

Gates:

It sounds a little bit like Walton's pond.

Sizemore:

Yeah.

Gates:

You had a bathroom though, and all that stuff. Right?

Sizemore:

We had running water year round, but in the winter time we did the running, you know, we would bring it in buckets up from the lake.

Gates:

Oh, really? Because the water froze?

Sizemore:

Because the water froze. Yeah. because the lines that we had where there was a pump house, but the lines were above ground and to get them put into the ground would have, would have been a really major thing because it was kind of a rocky cliff that we lived on.

Gates:

So, I'm envisioning you and Dennis living there in the winter time and what made you go there?

Sizemore:

It was awesome. I mean, it was like we'd go weeks and not see anyone. There was a guy that would come once in a while with his sled dog team and we'd see them on the lake cause he liked to go out there and, you know, we we'd see him from a distance, but that was pretty much it. And it was just beautiful.

Gates:

You guys want to get away from it all by going out there? Or was it like an extended honeymoon? (laughs)

Sizemore:

(laughs) It was just a beautiful place to live. And we had, you know, I had to kiln there and I had a...

Gates:

Oh, you had a kiln?

Sizemore:

Yeah. And you know, and Dennis built a little forge and, you know, we did a lot of writing and you know, it was, I mean, it was, and I remember one year during the kind of the early, early years of when crafts were, you know, the big thing, you know, one way that we found that was a really salable items made with glass wind chimes that we would make out of bottles, we'd slice the bottles up and melt them in the kiln and hang them, you know? And, and I remember one year making trunk loads of those wind chimes and then hauling them out to the road and getting in our truck and driving down to Florida because Florida was a great market for those things, you know? So we'd take them down once a year. We'd make a big trip down to Florida and go around all the shops and, you know, get orders and sell what we had and that, you know, we'd sell enough to pay for the trip.

Gates:

Where'd you stay when you were down there?

Sizemore:

We just, you know, kind of camp out here and there.

Gates:

You gave me some wind chimes, are those the same ones?

Sizemore:

The same ones. Yeah.

Gates:

Oh, I thought you had just started that up when you gave those to me. I didn't realize that was a part of your ancient history.

Sizemore:

Yeah. That was, you know, our economic mainstay for many, many years.

Gates:

Coca-Cola and 7Up and things like that?

Sizemore:

Coca Cola and 7Up are not very good bottles to cut.

Gates:

Oh, well you had given me orange...not orange, green.

Sizemore:

Green. Yeah, no wine bottles are great.

Gates:

Oh, wine bottles. Okay. Yeah.

Sizemore:

Wine bottles are terrific. And Sprite bottles

Gates:

Sprite, but not 7Up.

Sizemore:

7Up has, you know, has a baked on label. Oh. So that, you know, messes it up when it's fired it discolors, it clouds the glass.

Gates:

So that was kind of your moneymaker, but what other kinds of pottery you do?

Sizemore:

I did more enameling than pottery. Sometimes I would use a combination of screen printing and then put like a layer of clear enamel over that and then, and then color it with other enamels on top of that, you know? So it was mostly like wall hanging kind of things. Wall art.

Gates:

We didn't talk about your high school or grade school or anything like that. Is there anything we should talk about?

Sizemore:

Not necessarily. (laughs) I did leave high school earlier than most people did, but I did eventually get a diploma.

Gates:

Oh, why did you do that?

Sizemore:

I was kind of bored. I had taken all the courses that they had except for one English course. And so what I did the summer after my junior year, I took two courses...summer courses at Boston University. And then I sent those back to my high school and they gave me a diploma. So then I went to France for a year and...

Gates:

You went to France. By yourself?

Sizemore:

Yeah. I went to the University of Bordeaux. They have a program for foreign students. So I went there for a semester and I went to the University of Barcelona for a semester.

Gates:

Wow. How'd you get into those places? It sounds like you were a genius.

Sizemore:

Oh yeah. I was a genius. (laughs) I mean, to get into their foreign studies or it's not foreign studies, it's studies for foreign students. To get into that program is it's pretty much you register. I mean, there's a little bit of an acceptance. But it's not terribly difficult.

Gates:

Now, this is in the sixties?

Sizemore:

This was in yeah, the late sixties.

Gates:

Was there any political reason you went over there?

Sizemore:

No.

Gates:

I mean the wars going on, I thought maybe...

Sizemore:

No, you know, it was not on my first time over, but I'm a second time over when I was living in Paris and that was going to an Alliance Francaise there which is a school basically for foreign students to come and study French language and culture. But I was there during, when they had their riots there in Paris, you know, so that was, that was kind of exciting, but ...

Gates:

Did you stay out of it or were you in the middle?

Sizemore:

I didn't really know it was going on until I was as riding the subway into my classes and they sealed the subway and filled it up with tear gas. And when you'd run out, they'd hit you on the head with... so that was kind of my introduction to protests. (laughs)

Gates:

Did you get hit on the head?

Sizemore:

I did get hit on the head. Yes. But I wasn't arrested, but I've never been a big fan of crowds or protests since then, you know, just...

Gates:

How old are you?

Sizemore:

How old am I now? I'm 70.

Gates:

You were born in what year?

Sizemore:

1948.

Gates:

1948. Okay. You're only two years older than me. I always thought you were really wise, but...(laughs)

Sizemore:

I am really wise. (laughs)

Gates:

Yeah. A lot wiser than me. That's pretty neat. You went over there by yourself and what did you want to do?

Sizemore:

Learn French and study the literature. There's a lot of French literature that I really like.

Gates:

Really? What kind of...

Sizemore:

I like Jean-Paul Sartre, you know, and I actually like some of the romantics, you know, but...

Gates:

So what got you into writing?

Sizemore:

It's always been a part of my life. I can remember being really young and wanting to learn how to, how to write so that I could write my stories. And I would just always I found it a great way to have kind of a parallel life, you know, kind of an imaginary life. And then also, you know, for shorter things, for like poetry or something. And I find it that it's... I always talk about this... You know, I'm a teaching artist. I go into the schools a lot. And so I always talk to the students about, you know, to me writing poetry, it's about either some pain that I want to kind of wrap up and take outside of myself. You know, it gives me a way of coping with that or some great joy that I want to capture and save. And you know, and some people do that, you know, with paintings and some people do it with pottery and I just do it with poetry, but I like for young people to realize that they can use the arts, whatever art form they are into as a way of not only communicating, but a way of kind of regulating their own life and you know, dealing with, because a lot of young people are, you know, dealing with some really serious issues and they need a release and it's I think it's important to give them as many opportunities to try different types of art as possible so that they find the one that works for them.

Gates:

So you see art as kind of a release?

Sizemore:

That's one of the many things.

Gates:

Or a celebration too, it sounds like.

Sizemore:

Yeah.

Gates:

Was your family's divorce...Was that something that influenced you or your writing or anything like that?

Sizemore:

Oh, yeah. I'm sure that had a big impact, you know I think that whatever you go through as a young person kind of stays with you all the way up to you're old.

Gates:

So part of that reminds me of Madeline a little bit, because she would make this imaginary world too. And she'd sit in her room and write all these different names for people, and then she can link them together, they didn't exist but she had all these, it was like that. Yeah. It was hard for me to understand. I didn't understand what she was doing. I could kind of see it now what you're saying.

Sizemore:

I think it's, you know, like when you, when you read a really good book, you know, you enter into that world and it's the same thing when, when you're writing it is, is that there's all kinds of things that happen in that world that never make it into your story, but that are the backdrop.

Gates:

I mean, are you imagining this world then and just writing a little bit about it? Or does the world come alive, when you write it?

Sizemore:

The world is alive. And I write about it. I mean, we talk about it being an imaginary world, and yet it's more, you know, there's something that happens at a certain point where the... it's beyond your imagination in a way. I mean, there are things that, that happen that you tell about that happened in this world. Now that the kind of writing that I really liked doing the most though, I have yet to completely finished the novels that I'm working on, it's historical fiction. And so it's kind of a cross between the real world that you can learn about by being in the place where the things happened and doing the research, and then having, you know, these imaginary characters that are interacting with that world. That to me is the great attraction of historical fiction.

Gates:

I didn't know you were doing historical novels.

Sizemore:

Well, it's because I've never had time to finish them, but one of these days.

Gates:

What are they about?

Sizemore:

They're actually set in Florida on the mounds that are off the coast of the west coast of Florida that were built by the Calusa. They were there when the first Spanish came over.

Gates:

Oh, so this is really almost pre-history.

Sizemore:

No, it's historical times, but one of them set in the 1500s and one of them is set in the 1800s and the later one is during the second Seminole wars.

Gates:

So you had to do a lot of research?

Sizemore:

Yeah. Well, but what got me interested in it was we were living on a boat off the coast of Florida and the islands out there, many of them have these incredible shell mounds on them. And and they were clearly not just middens because they weren't, you know, the structure of them was so intricate and the way that the conch shells were interlocked. And then there were areas where people had excavated into them. So it was like, what is this about, you know, so went to the library and started reading about it.

Gates:

Were they burial mounds?

Sizemore:

No, they weren't. They were mounds that were, I mean, there are some burial mounds out there, but these mounds were mostly built so that you could survive on an island through the hurricanes.

Gates:

How?

Sizemore:

Because they were built up. So, I mean, they were huge. I mean, they were like, you know, 50, 50 feet high and, and just vast. And then they had an end, the villages and the structures would be built on top of them. And then they had, like, there were canals that would come to you and they'd have fish ponds and the interior of them, you know? So yeah. Some of the, some of the islands down there are really amazing. Yeah.

Gates:

It's pretty neat. And they, they would have their houses on top and that would give them a good foundation, but give them up above the water. I see. Okay. Yeah. And so your novels are set in that setting. And you fill them in with people.

Sizemore:

And some, some of, some of the people are historical people, you know, people that actually, you know that there's existing writing that tells about them, you know, so it was these historical characters and then my imaginary characters interacting with them.

Gates:

How often do you think about it?

Sizemore:

Daily. I look forward to actually, you know, retiring so that I can actually, you know, finish it because I thought I started working on those about 30 years ago when we were living in Florida and, you know, got kind of the bulk of the writing done then, but it, it just needs a lot of work in, I've just never had the time to get back to it, but I will someday.

Gates:

That's cool. So when you were going to Paris, you were looking at writing then too. Were you writing then?

Sizemore:

Yeah, yeah.

Gates:

Poetry or?

Sizemore:

Poetry and some fiction. More poetry.

Gates:

Was the idea of getting them published or was it just for yourself?

Sizemore:

Both, I guess, you know, I mean, I've published a fair amount of my poetry over the years but usually when I'm writing them, that's not why I'm writing them.

Gates:

Yeah. I keep going back to Paris because I can see you in your mini skirt, walking in Paris with a little beret on.

Sizemore:

(laughs) I was really cute. I was cute.

Gates:

You got some pictures, I guess.

Sizemore:

I don't know if there's any that still exist.

Gates:

So that was pretty eventful then for you living there?

Sizemore:

Yeah. I think the travel is really good because it's good to see how other people respond to you as an American is just, you know, that in itself is an education, but then being there long enough to become immersed in other cultures and other points of view and, you know, I mean, France and Spain, they were more different than I expected them to be. But I also lived for a while in Turkey and that was way more different, you know what I mean? It was, and I think it's, even if you just, you know, have the opportunity to travel through briefly, it's important to do, but if you have the opportunity to stay for awhile, it's...

Gates:

I've been teaching some community college kids at Lawrenceburg Community College, about folklore. And I'm trying to talk about when, where they've traveled and none of them had done anything like you did, or like I did as a kid, I'm just trying to get them to think about doing that. And do you tell that the kids when you're working with them?

Sizemore:

Yeah. And it's, you know, the world is, is, is kind of different, a little very different now than when I was kid, because some of the kids that I work with it may never have traveled or never have they might never have the opportunity to travel. They've got virtual friends in other places that they interact with. And so that's, you know, I mean, it's, it's interesting, you know, I think there's still a huge benefit to actually physically traveling, not just virtually, but it's interesting, you know, to kind of see how that's become a part of people's lives.

Gates:

And so you were in Paris and Spain and Turkey, different times of your life. Did you meet your husband in Turkey?

Sizemore:

I did.

Gates:

Yeah. How'd that happen? Was that part of these years? I mean, did you go to college then?

Sizemore:

I went to many colleges. (laughs)

Gates:

Okay, which ones? (laughs)

Sizemore:

The University of Bordeaux, and the University of Barcelona and Boston University and New York University. And then I went to Alliance Francaise, and I went to a secretarial school because my mother said, if I couldn't figure out how to do anything else, I should at least learn how to type so I could be a secretary, but I never could learn how to type.

Gates:

You didn't?

Sizemore:

No, It's terrible.

Gates:

How come?

Sizemore:

It made my fingers hurt, you know on the old time of typewriters, you know, how you had to push down with your pinky finger to, you know...

Gates:

I'm reading an article, I guess, in New York times. Cause I'm getting it now. And it was, it was about kids should take a typing class. If nothing else, they should get a typing class.

Sizemore:

Well, I think they should take a keyboarding class. I don't know about typing. Keyboarding I can do. I just use two fingers on each hand.

Gates:

Oh, you don't do the whole thing?

Sizemore:

Well, every once in a while.

Gates:

But you could right?

Sizemore:

No.

Gates:

But your mom was right. She was very smart.

Sizemore:

She was, you know, she was a very wise and practical woman.

Gates:

I never heard you talk much about her since I've known you.

Sizemore:

About my mom? She was my 'shero'. She was a phenomenal educator. She was in elementary education and she was just always encouraging everyone to look and listen and think and understand and appreciate, because that was kind of her approach to education. It wasn't so much, you need to learn these facts as you need to open your eyes and open your heart and open your mind.

Gates:

How'd she get like that?

Sizemore:

I think a lot of it came from her parents. But then a lot of it was just what she'd learned from life and who she was.

Gates:

Was she religious? Or your family religious?

Sizemore:

My family, my extended family tended to be religious. My mom, not so much. I would say that she was spiritual more than religious in the sense that she had a very personal connection with creation, but was not necessarily tied to a specific dogma of a particular, you know, church. I think she kind of tended to feel that there were many different ways of connecting with, you know, God or the creator or whatever. And that, that, that they were, that they were all valid, as long as they weren't saying that they were the exclusive way to do it. And most religions tend, tend to think that they're the exclusive way to do it. So I guess that...

Gates:

So, did she raise you that way?

Sizemore:

Yeah.

Gates:

You and your brothers. Well, you mentioned you liked Jean-Paul Sartre. Wasn't he existentialism?

Sizemore:

Uh huh.

Gates:

So did you go in that direction?

Sizemore:

Partly. You know, I tend to be very fascinated by all the different ways that people find as... find meaning in life, you know, I've been doing, I've been doing a lot of work lately. I do a lot of work for KET developing some of the support materials to go with videos that they create. I've been working on a series this last month about the Holocaust and was rereading Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, which I read when I was, you know, really young and, and it still resonates with me that that idea of that it's critical to find life meaningful. You know, though, it's, I think it's also really important not to impose your sense of meaning on others.

Gates:

That's kind of what you go by.

Sizemore:

Yeah. I guess

Gates:

I remember reading existentialism when I was in college and growing up Catholic, it was like a whole turnaround. Well, there isn't any God and I got to embrace that. I had a little problem with my family because of that. In fact, when my sister had her operation, everybody tweets, love and prayers, love and prayers and I said, "Well I can't really say that, but I'll come over and give you goetta". (laughs)

Sizemore:

(laughs) That's interesting, because you know, I have that same interaction with lots of people, you know, and I actually feel fine about saying prayers because I feel like, you know, I do pray a lot, but it's probably in a different way than most people.

Gates:

Probably more like my wife does. Yeah. You know, Janet.

Sizemore:

Yes, I do.

Gates:

I mean the way she looks at universal life. I kind of say that to them just to bug them a little bit. (laughs) I do say prayers too, but you know...

Sizemore:

Goetta is its own form of prayer.

Gates:

It is. Everybody was sick up there. I did a get a goetta about a month ago. I went to every one of my brother's and sister's house and brought them a thing of goetta. They were happy. Except my one sister wasn't there, she was in Florida, so I couldn't get it to her. Is it safe to say you went to all these universities? Did you get a degree in any of them?

Sizemore:

I did not. Nope. Though, I did many years later through the University of State in New York, put a bunch of those credits together and take some of those college level exams and get it an associate degree so that I could at least say I had an associate degree.

Gates:

What were you studying at all those different universities?

Sizemore:

Life. (laughs) Life and art.

Gates:

You seem like a real free spirit then. Was that part of the generation or was that part of you?

Sizemore:

A little bit of both, but it's really kind of a strange thing because even though I did all those things, I'm really a chicken and I get lost really easily. So like, I won't go to Louisville unless somebody meets me at the edge of Louisville and takes me in and...

Gates:

Well, it is kind of complicated neighborhoods.

Sizemore:

Yes. It's very complicated, you know? And like when I go to Lexington, there's one place in Lexington I can drive to and I park there and then I walk, you know, so and I have daily moments of panic when I think of I'm lost someplace.

Gates:

Where does that come from?

Sizemore:

It comes from, I believe, having sensory, integrative dysfunction, it's really difficult for me to...

Gates:

Sensory what?

Sizemore:

Integrative dysfunction. It's like, I have really hard time remembering my right, my left. That's why I wear a ring and a watch, so I can, and then I'll also have to go, let's see, my watch is on my right hand, which is, you know, cause you've, anyway...

Gates:

I've when I was younger, I always had a birthmark on this one. So I knew this was my right, but yeah, but that was a condition you're saying as people could have.

Sizemore:

Yeah. It's people that are, you know, part of it is, is having a really bad sense of direction. But it's also things like it's really difficult for me to walk backwards. And so then trying to drive backwards is, I mean...

Gates:

How often do you drive backwards?

Sizemore:

Well, you know, like if you're trying to back into a spot, you have to drive backwards, you have to back out of your driveway. But I mean, I'll back up a little bit and then I'll get out of my car and walk around...

Gates:

I knew that about you, but I didn't know why. Now I understand. I can see that Madeline, I keep bringing her up because I keep thinking of you and her sometimes.

Sizemore:

Yeah, I love that child.

Gates:

But she had, I mean, we went camping to River Gorge, went hiking and Barbara and I were lost, but she knew exactly where we were.

Sizemore:

See, you know, when I met Dennis, I asked him something about where something was, and he pulled out his compass and I was like, I'll take him. (laughs) And Robin's like that too. I mean, we went to Boston when she was seven and we got off the airplane in New York and I was like w-where, w-where, where, where should we go next? You know? And she just took off, you

know, and I was like chasing her across the airport. And she went right to where we were supposed to get on the plane. I mean, she just has an instinctive sense of direction. Some people have that. They just know where they are all the time. I would love that.

Gates:

Yeah. The way I do it is, I always think when I'm in an area, if I go to a conference the first night, I'm there, I'll just go out and explore. I walk around every place and try to figure out where I am. But then I also try to think if a river's here and this road's here and this road's up there, I can't get lost because I'm going to hit one of those eventually. But you don't think that way do you?

Sizemore:

I can't. When I go to someplace like that, I figured out how to get to the dining room and back, and that's and I'm like, I've got this, you know, I know when I get off the elevator that I turn...

Gates:

So there's no cure for this, huh?

Sizemore:

Well, yeah, there is because I mean, like I can drive now. I mean, it took me till I was up in my forties to learn, but I kept at it, you know?

Gates:

You didn't drive until you were 40?

Sizemore:

No. And well, I tried to learn how to drive one time. I came out of my holler and you know, I was going to go down there and turn around, you know, but there was a coal truck coming and I thought, well I better stop. So I hit the accelerator and I went right in front of that coal truck and he stopped and he didn't hit me. And he got out of the car and he said, "What are you doing?" basically. And I was like, I'm trying to learn how to drive. He said, you get back up in that holler and don't you ever come out again? (laughs) I was like, all right. So then it was many years before I tried again. And then when I was trying to learn how to do it, I would literally have to do this. I would take two mirrors and I would practice backing up. I mean, walking to try to figure it out. And then I made myself this big thing where I had the roads intersecting and I had cars coming up to each side and I put the stop sign in different places and try to figure out who was supposed to go first. So, you know, there's, there are coping strategies. I don't know that there's a cure.

Gates:

Yeah. That's pretty hard for you then. It's was that when you were young and were in Paris, where you had that?

Sizemore:

Forever. I got lost in my elementary school and it only had one hallway, so it was quite a feat, but...

Gates:

Oh, that's something to cope with and work with.

Sizemore:

I think it's actually been in the long run, a good thing for me because it's like, I work with a lot of kids who have different types of learning disabilities and it's made me empathetic it's made me, you know, have more understanding for what, you know, what they're dealing with. And also being able to, to say to them you just have to find the strategies that, that will work for you in, in dealing with whatever this, you know, mismatches between you and the ...

Gates:

Yeah. Well, that's good that you can help people with that. Yeah.

Sizemore:

And I'll tell them, well, you know, at least your problem stays on the page. You know, if a kid has dyslexia, you know, and it sees letters reversed, at least that's just on the page. It's not out in the world. You know, of course now some of them have both, but it is more challenging when it's not just a question of seeing a B for a D, but it's a question for you know, whether to hit your brakes or your accelerator.

Gates:

So the reason you married Dennis, is because he knew how to read a compass? (laughs)

Sizemore:

Yes. Yep.

Gates:

Have you ever regretted that?

Sizemore:

Nope. (laughs)

Gates:

So he's guided you to different places?

Sizemore:

Uh huh. Yep.

Gates:

Okay. And he was in the army, right?

Sizemore:

He was in the Navy.

Gates:

And you met him in Turkey.

Sizemore:

Yep.

Gates:

So how'd you get back here?

Sizemore:

On an airplane. (laughs) How do we end up in Kentucky, you mean? Well, his extended family was from Kentucky. He was one of those Cincinnati kids that spent every weekend in the car coming down to Kentucky.

Gates:

Oh. But he was from Kentucky, but he lives in Cincinnati.

Sizemore:

Yeah. His extended family was from Kentucky. His parents both grew up in Kentucky, but he grew up in Cincinnati.

Gates:

Whereabouts?

Sizemore:

Oh, in Kentucky? Whitley county. Not far from where we live now.

Gates:

Okay. So are you living on property from that family?

Sizemore:

No, but we did when we first moved here. It wasn't, you know, a farm that was part of that family, but we were right next to, you know, his grandpa.

Gates:

So did you have a job when you came here?

Sizemore:

Did I have a job when we came here? No. No, I couldn't drive. I couldn't have a job, you know, I'd had jobs in cities when I lived in cities, but I didn't like living in cities. So, you know, it was... but I've always been freelance. I've always done everything freelance. Now Dennis, he can drive, you know, he could always drive. So he, you know, he was an electronic technician.

Gates:

Okay. Who did he work for then?

Sizemore:

Different radio companies, mostly at that time.

Gates:

Setting up radio towers and things?

Sizemore:

Yeah.

Gates:

Okay. Well, that's why he fell off of one. That makes sense.

Sizemore:

Yeah. He wasn't just climbing it just for fun. No, no. (laughs) He was going up to repair something.

Gates:

Okay. So you move here to McKee area, right?

Sizemore:

No, initially we moved to Whitley County.

Gates:

Mountains.

Sizemore:

Yeah.

Gates:

And that was different from where you grew up.

Sizemore:

Not really. It was warmer, but it's the same mountain chain.

Gates:

Where you an outsider in a community then?

Sizemore:

Not really because I've, I'm married right into it. I mean, if you're a Sizemore, you're from Eastern Kentucky, you know. I mean, people would still ask about why I sounded funny, but you

know that was after they said, which branch of the Sizemores, well, I don't know which one do you like? (laughs)

Gates:

Did they have big reunions and things?

Sizemore:

No, not really. And, really, you know, we didn't live around the Sizemores. We lived around his mom's side of the family, which is... You know, but they didn't really have reunions, but they were back and forth to each other's house all the time.

Gates:

When I first met you, you were working with the Arts Council.

Sizemore:

I still work with the Arts Council.

Gates:

You were, what do you call it...

Sizemore:

Teaching artist.

Gates:

Oh, that's your first job with them was? Tell me about your life in Kentucky.

Sizemore:

So when we moved to Kentucky, I was still making wind chimes, you know, that was still one of my economic mainstays. You know...

Gates:

You said wind chimes, not moonshine.

Sizemore:

No wind chimes, not moonshine. And you know, and Dennis was working in radio, but then when Robin, my daughter, when she was in the second grade, I went in and read one of the stories I'd written to her class. And her teacher told me about the Arts Council and said, you know, you ought to do that. That would be fun, you know? And so I looked into it and I thought, well, you know, that would be something that I could manage to do.

Gates:

Reading one of your stories at... is that what you said?

Sizemore:

I read one of my stories to Robin's second grade class.

Gates:

Did they like it?

Sizemore: Yeah, yeah, they did. And I was like, yeah, this is great. But then I also had them write their own stories and this teacher was a phenomenal teacher and she was using the write to read program where they would, you know, write stories and then learn how to read by reading their own stories back. But so she encouraged me to look into the Arts Council and I did. And when I first started as a teaching artist with the Arts Council, I still couldn't drive. And so I could only go to two places that my husband could take them, drop me off at, you know, so that was kind of limited. So that's when I started trying to learn how to drive plus, you know, Robin was wanting to go places. And so I kind of did those two things in parallel. I learned how to be a teaching artist and I learned how to drive. And then, then once I could drive, then I was able to kind of broaden where I went. And with one of the things that I, that I really value about the Arts Council and specifically at that time, was that they had the summer retreats for teaching artists. And that gave us the opportunity, not only to meet other teaching artists and develop collaborative projects, but also to learn more about the other programs of the Arts Council, like the Folklife Program and the Craft Marketing Program. And that's how I became aware of what was going with that.

Gates:

Was John Benjamin running it, then?

Sizemore:

He was after, you know, the first couple of years I was there. Let's see, I think there was Nancy Carpenter and there was somebody else was there temporary, you know, but by about the third or fourth year, by the time I was really doing it a lot, John Benjamin was there and John had an absolute gift for creating community. And the first summer orientation that I went to for the teaching artists was...

Gates:

Was that at Fall Bush?

Sizemore:

No it was in Louisville. And so I had to get somebody to drive me there. And it was nice and it was, you know, like it was a two day, it was like an afternoon overnight, but there really wasn't enough time to find out what the other artists were doing or did, you know, and, and of course I was new to it then, so I was more nervous too, you know what I mean, some of the people that came there, you know, and a lot of them lived in Louisville at that time. At that time, a lot of the teaching artists were from cities and, you know, that's, that's one of the big changes that's happened is that there's a lot more Eastern Kentucky and rural artists on the roster now. Because I was always saying "You ought to get on it". I encouraged a lot of people to become teaching artists.

Gates:

That's what I wanted to talk about too. Yeah. Yeah. How you encourage people. Keep going.

Sizemore:

But then when we started doing them at Fall Bush, it was for one thing, we were kind of removed from the world. We weren't in the rush and hubbub of Louisville.

Gates:

Who came up with the idea of Fall Bush?

Sizemore:

John, I imagine.

Gates:

Were you like part of his inner circle at that point? Because he always had a group of people that were...

Sizemore:

I guess I very quickly got into his inner circle. Because one of the first times that we were, I guess it was the first time we were Fall Bush there was our group and then there was another group that was, they were math teachers. And I had done some work for the math teachers through a program called Box It Bag It, which was like, you know, one of the early programs that made math into hands-on manipulatives. And, so you know, the two groups were there and, and I knew that some of the artists that were there could do work for this other group as professional development. And so I asked John if it would be all right, if I invited the director of the other program to come over and talk to our artists and he, you know, he was always open to anything that would give his artists more opportunities. And so it seemed like, yeah, if you don't bring him on over. So that was kind of one of the first times I think that I kind of stepped up and suggested something and said, you know, Hey, why don't we connect these two things, because I think it'll provide more opportunities for artists and it, and it actually worked out really well. There were several of them that ended up getting, getting you know, not long-term employment, but you know, a couple of gigs as providing professional development.

Gates:

And people who are listening to it might not know what that program was about, but can you explain it real quick? You were going to work in a school. The Arts Council gave you a semester or two semesters?

Sizemore:

Yet at that time you could get longer residencies, you know, you could get residencies for up to nine months. Now it's much shorter, you know, you can, it's one to four weeks, but at that time you could get, you could interact with the school for up to nine months or with the school district for up to nine months, which is what I did, you know, initially. And you know, the whole idea of having a teaching artist come in is to develop a collaboration between the teaching artist and the teacher so that they, they, they kind of worked together to either, you know, in some instances you'd be teaching an art form as just as that art form. And in other incidences, you'd be integrating that with other areas of the curriculum. So a lot of, of say visual artists might integrate with either the science curriculum or the social studies curriculum. You know, I primarily would integrate with the English language reading and writing curriculum, you know, whatever it happened to be called at that time. But I very quickly saw that it was exciting and it was beneficial for the students to make connections to other areas. So for instance, we might do

cultural folktales and connect that to social studies, or we might do historic fiction and connect that to social studies or science fiction and connect that to science, you know, or be doing something with specific forms of poetry that would interact with mathematics, you know, so you know, I liked doing that, but then what was even more exciting to me was to bring in an artist in another art form. And at that time, if you had a nine-month residency, you had a budget for bringing in visiting artists. So you could bring, you could bring somebody else in and they could, you know, do something with the kids, a painting. And then, we'd write about the painting or, and you know, that's something that I've continued, you know, up till today. I, you know, I love to work with like, there's a blacksmith that I work with it that does this dragon project, and then the kids can write their dragon quest, you know, and that's what Fall Bush really inspired was, you know, the artists would get there and they'd see what the other artists did and they'd go, wow, we could do this together. You know, and it, because a lot of times when as, as a teaching artist, you know or as an artist, really, if you live in a rural community, especially, you know, a lot of times you feel very isolated, it's kind of like, you know, well, I'm the only person here that does this. And so being able to feel connected to those, those other artists, even if they were in a completely different discipline, a completely different medium, you know, was, it was still that sense of community. So that after several years when you'd come to Fall Bush, it was like a family reunion. It was like, oh my gosh, you know, what have you been doing? You know? And, and just an incredibly creative time both in terms of inspiring. I mean, I wrote a lot of poetry there and a lot of people, you know, created their own art while they were there, but we were also having these just really creative conversations about how do you get that spark in a kid? You know, because kids are all different, you know, and, and you can put 14 things in front of a kid and they're like, blah, blah, blah. And then all of a sudden that 15th, you're like, that's it, you know, I'm a quilter, you know, or I'm a potter or I'm a dancer, or writer you know, they, they connect in different ways. And as soon as you've got that spark, then you connect everything else to it. And so that was, that was what was really exciting to me about Fall Bush. And then the other thing that, you know, one of the ways that I worked with John really closely was like on helping the teaching artists sync, because they were already diversifying your income stream. You know, they already creating art and teaching art, you know, and I was always like, what else can we do? Or where else can we teach? You know, and that's how, you know, I came up with this idea of professional development for teachers being led by teaching artists, you know? And, and so that was something I worked really closely with John on. And eventually that became a part of the Fall Bush retreat. Was that, you know, the artists would come and we'd have like a day and a half, and then the teachers would come and the artists would provide professional development for the teachers, which was, it was mutually beneficial because it was not only that the teachers were getting to experiment with different art forms and seeing which artists they might like to bring in and what projects they could do on their own without having to bring an artist in. But it was also helping the artists to have more understanding of what the teachers were doing so that they could say, well I'd like to fit that into my curriculum, but we would need to do this or that, you know, so we could kind of tweak it so that it was, you know, it was, it was, it was much more collaborative. And a lot of the artists that were there during that time have tried to pass on that sense of collaborative work to the newer artists that have come on because now, you know, I guess budget cuts and all different kinds of things. We have much shorter, some orientations here less than a day. So, yeah. So it's a really short time of being able to...

Gates:

I don't think the leadership understood Fall Bush later on, or maybe it got, I don't know...

Sizemore:

Yeah. I think there were various reasons that it was not continued, but I think it was a loss.

Gates:

Yeah. I enjoyed it when I went to it.

Sizemore:

And that was the thing too...I thought it was a really exciting time at the Arts Council was there that there was this collaboration among the different programs, you know, so it wasn't Folklife and Craft Marketing and Arts Education. It was all of those interacting, you know? And, and I think that that enriched all of the programs.

Gates:

Yeah. You also worked later on as a free Arts Council was what was name?

Sizemore:

Well, first we were called Circuit Riders, which, you know, I'd always have to go in and people say, well, are you a preacher or a bootlegger? And I'd say, well, it's kind of a cross, you know? And then when I, when I first started that job, I told Robin what I was doing. She was circus rider, you know, I mean, because she was always like, how am I supposed to even tell my friends what it is that you do?

Gates:

You ride in on a white horse in the circus.

Sizemore:

Riding on the white horse in the circus, bootlegging and preaching at the same time. But that was, that was fun because it got me out into a lot of areas of Eastern Kentucky that I know I hadn't been before. And by that time I was very accomplished driver and I would just make sure that I had my directions for where I'm going written down and really big letters so I can see them, you know, now I back that up with my phone, but sometimes my phone will tell me to turn left at a place where I'm not going to turn left and you know, so I like to kind of map out where I'm going in advance.

Gates:

Do you ever use a GPS too sometimes?

Sizemore:

I never have used a GPS.

Gates:

Oh, you haven't? What's the phone doing?

Sizemore:

Well, I guess it is a GPS on the phone. Pardon me.

Gates:

Well, it's telling you can turn left here and go there, right? That's a GPS.

Sizemore:

Yeah, but it's not the one that you put up on your dash. I tried using one of those ones and it just didn't work. And, even with my phone, I mean, I get in arguments with it, because you know, I won't turn left unless there's a traffic signal to turn left.

Gates:

Okay. We were talking about Circuit Rider. Did they change the name of it eventually?

Sizemore:

Yes. Then it became Outreach Coordinator, which does sound more sophisticated.

Gates:

Professional.

Sizemore:

But, it was still the same, basically.

Gates:

Well, when I met you, you got me to go to a class up in McKee someplace.

Sizemore:

Oh yeah. I remember that.

Gates:

Yeah. And I was really impressed by how you could talk to the teacher and introduce me and made sure I did okay. And the teacher wasn't mad at me afterwards, but what I was always impressed with you was that you just seemed to encourage everybody, teachers and students to do things. And I guess that's why you made a good Circuit Rider and a good Outreach Coordinator. Because you always came up with ideas about how to get this group to do this or that. I mean, you didn't talk them into it, it didn't seem like, but how'd you get them to do it?

Sizemore:

I think what I like to do is to try to find out what... Help them figure out what they'd like to do, and then help them figure out how to do that.

Gates:

How do you figure out finding what they like to do? Through the workshops you're talking about?

Sizemore:

Listening. Well, you know.

Gates:

You say, visits?

Sizemore:

Listening, listening. If I have a residency coming up next month, I'll try to communicate with the teacher really early on and say, you know, tell me a little bit about your class and, you know, what it is that you're hoping to get out of this residency. And, and then I'll send a draft lesson and say, you know, how does this sound, you know, and, and we'll kind of... because if I'm coming in and my approach is I want to teach kids to use poetry, to be self-expressive. And what they're really wanting is for me to teach poetic devices and structure, you know, we're going to miss. So if I know that that's what they want, I can still do what I want to do, but also make sure that I'm addressing what they want. So it's same kind of thing in terms of working as an Outreach Coordinator or whatever, it's kind of trying to find out... And a lot of times they, you know, they, you know, and on the same way, it's difficult to articulate exactly what it is that you want, you know because sometimes you had this kind of vague idea of what you want. And so trying to help people kind of refine that their own vision and find their own voice for it.

Gates:

It's kind of like in my field of folklore, it's like field work. Trying and get to know them enough that you can figure out what they want with them.

Sizemore:

And I credit you with giving me a lot of those skills, for example, when I ask a question, making sure that I'm quiet long enough to give them enough time to answer it, instead of, you know, jumping in with the next one, you know.

Gates:

You didn't have any trouble with that before did you?

Sizemore:

It's certainly something you helped me be really aware of.

Gates:

Yeah. That is a hard one. I'm just interviewing you. I was trying to keep myself from letting you go, well, I'm letting you go, you know?

Sizemore:

Yeah. And, and, and then to, you know, another thing that I learned from you is making an interview into more of a conversation instead of making people feel like, you know, they're kind of out there on their own...

Gates:

Oh good. I always credit you with being the - and you didn't like this - being the grandmother of the Community Scholar Program.

Sizemore:

(laughs) No, wait a second. I was told that I have now graduated to being called the matriarch. I am the matriarch of the Community Scholars Program. Yeah.

Gates:

It's still going on. We're still doing it. Mark Brown at the Arts Council is still doing it. But when we first start thinking about it, it was a model that came from the Smithsonian and they want, it's like Warren Brunner here in Berea was my first thought of having a Community Scholar, which didn't really work out very good because we didn't connect that program wrong. And it was, it wasn't what we really wanted. But so when we started doing a state one you were the one who said, let's not do it in Frankfort. Let's do it in these communities.

Sizemore:

And part of that goes back to how hard it is for me to drive.(laughs) But also to an awareness of the fact that the people that I envisioned doing that work, we're not going to be able to spend two weeks in Frankfort. You know, they just had too many other obligations. When you're doing like Outreach Coordinating and Community Scholars work and all that is that, you know, that's one of the things that you run into is that there are, in any community, there's one group of people that's really active and doing things and they're doing everything. And so trying to, you know, engage them in doing one more thing is, is really difficult. But if you can create something that enables them to do what they're already doing better or at a different level, or, you know, with more people or whatever. I think that's, that's one of the great values of the Community Scholars Program is that it gives them a tool to use in all these other things that they're already doing, rather than it being an additional obligation.

Gates:

That's true, because I mean, when we first got there, I wanted to just teach them how to do folklore. And you guys said, no, they want to do cemeteries. They want to do this, they want to do that, which by definition could be folklore, but it wasn't, you know, it was a lot wider. And because I see you want them to do something they already wanted to do. And, you were, that was good. I mean, we went to all these communities because you introduced us to those communities and talked it up and you always had like 15 or 20 people there in the beginning, you know?

Sizemore:

Yeah. They don't always stay. (laughs) But even just one session I think of doing that Community Scholarship is really important. And...

Gates:

I mean, the Community Scholar Program was, just for the record here, I don't know if people don't know what it is, it was about basically teaching people how to document their own culture and our community for whatever purpose they wanted to, but using the tools of a folklorist and anthropologists and historian kind of, right? I mean is that what you thought?

Sizemore:

Yeah. To document it and, and also to take that additional step that you, you showed us how to do of using that documentation in some way, whether it's through a presentation or it's through a...

Gates:

Like a narrative stage...

Sizemore:

Narrative stage or a workshop or going into the schools, or, you know, I mean, there's so many different ways that you can do that, but, not just documenting it just so you can set them on a shelf, but documenting it so that it can become a living invaluable part of the community.

Gates:

The hardest part for me, I think, was in the very beginning, when you had like three or four people who would out evaluate how the first couple sessions went and then say, well, Bob, you talk too much and you got to get more hands-on and you got to, you know, but it really worked.

Sizemore:

And it was, you know, I thought it was remarkable that you were willing to go through that process and listen to those people, you know? Because I mean, it's hard. I mean, it's like even like, you know, one of the projects that I do today in Berea is helping to coordinate their Festival of Learning Shops, which is a program that started off as two days and now it's about two weeks long and we have artists in all different disciplines that come in and teach workshops that vary from two hours to three days or even longer. And part of that process is that we, you know, we do a survey and people send in their evaluations and I always share those with the, with the artists and then try to follow that up by having a discussion with them about, well, you know, you know, maybe that person was just kind of in a bad mood that day, because you do get some off the wall evaluations, but it's hard. I mean, I hate it. I hate reading of my stuff, you know, because it's, unless everybody's saying, oh, she was just most wonderful thing, you know, but I mean, there's always something that can be improved and it's sometimes it's painful to hear, you know, but if you kind of take it and go, okay, well...Because my first reaction is...I'll be real honest. I think a lot of people are like, this is my first reaction. It's kind of like, well, hmmph. You know.

Gates:

Who's the woman from Hyden, real close to where they used to do, they do the festival about the woman who would go out in the woods...

Sizemore:

Mary Breckenridge? Frontier Nursing Service? Gabrielle Beasley?

Gates:

Gabrielle Beasley. She had a way of evaluating me. It was really hard, sometimes, but it was good.

Sizemore:

Yeah and she's done the same thing to me. And she's one of the people that I, you know, first think, "Hmmp" and then I'll go, well, you know, well maybe, well, yeah, I guess, I mean maybe if I did it this way, you know, so, you know, yeah. it's a difficult process. And, and I mean, when I, when I did something like that in a classroom, I use that long, drawn out, you know, like praise, ask questions, list, you know, I make sure that the first thing that, that kids hear as feedback is positive and that whatever suggestions come afterwards are something that they're ready for. And that are, you know, because teaching people how to do a positive evaluation and positive, you know, positive criticism, you know, I mean, that's, that's a skill set of its own.

Gates:

No, what you're talking about is doing a positive criticism when you're working with these teachers. Right? Because you're trying to run the school kids, you're, you're trying to nurture them without giving something that... and I think I've been guilty of that of saying too much.

Sizemore:

Yeah. And I, I, you know, I try to do the same thing with the artists, you know, that even if they're, you know, as old as I am, you know, it's, it's still hard to hear something harsh about yourself. And I feel like it's really important that I share all the evaluations with them as they were written, you know, but then that I also engage them in a conversation to think about, you know, will, you know that particular criticism, you know, what do you think about that, you know, or is, is maybe what we needed to do there to describe your workshop a little bit differently so that they had a different expectation coming in.

Gates:

And maybe that person had a bad day when she wrote it.

Sizemore:

Yeah. And you can't please all the people all the time and that's okay, but just trying to have a critique be a positive experience. We didn't necessarily give you that give you that positive feedback first, I tried to but... (laughs)

Gates:

Yeah, no, I learned from it. I think I did. I think it helped, it helped me a lot. It helped me take criticism better too. And you were very good at it. As long as you spoke for Beasley. (laughs) So anyway, we all got along pretty well, but you know, part of this interview is about your work with craftsmen too. I know, you've done a lot of work with craftsmen?

Sizemore:

I have, and I've always been more on the education side of it then on the marketing side of it. And whether that's encouraging them to become teaching artist or to, you know, just do workshops like the Learn Shops. And there's a number of reasons that I think that's really important. One is that, you know, it's just basic survival because I want to make sure that these incredibly gifted craftspeople can survive economically and whenever possible to survive in ways that are related to their art, rather than having to have another job. And just do that on the side. You know, if that's possible or even if it's just a side job to make that if possible, economically rewarding, as well as emotionally and spiritually rewarding. And so one of the

things that I've tried to help them think about is how to market their knowledge as well as their product.

Gates:

What do you mean by that?

Sizemore:

So whether that's well, it might be teaching a workshop so that you're teaching somebody how to create a pastel drawing or how to do basic forge techniques, you know, it might be skills but it might also be you know, and this goes back again to a lot of the training that you gave me, how to share their heritage or, or their cultural connections or their creativity, you know, so it's, helping them inspire others, you know, whether it's skill sharing or it's just sharing their story, you know? So part of my motivation for being so devoted to that kind of idea of arts and crafts education is to help the individual artists thrive, not just survive, but to thrive. And then another part of it is, is to keep those skills and those traditions and those histories alive, you know, because, there's always been this kind of cyclical thing of, you know, hand made's the thing, hand made's not the thing, hand made's the thing, you know, but if, but there is an overall, I think kind of a graying of the crafts field that I find kind of terrifying. And so I want to make sure that that's passed on not only to younger people, but to, say someone that's a recent retiree, you know, to give them a second, you know, it's a second career or whatever, but to keep that knowledge alive and not just the skills, but the heart of it, you know, the reason that they do it, you know, like we've got a series of workshops coming up in November that we do here at Berea, that's kind of an outgrowth of the Festival of Learn Shops, it's called Make it, Take it, Give it. The idea is to give something not only from your heart, but from your hands, you know, and I know when I was a kid, you know, that was, I mean, we made all our Christmas presents, you know, that was what you spent the months coming up to Christmas doing, you know, and, you know, I loved making the candles where you'd whip up the hot wax and you'd put it all over like froth, and then you'd cover it with glitter, you know, to me, that was, that was the magic of Christmas was making these things and giving them to somebody and having somebody go, oh my gosh, I love it. You know, and it's different than giving you something that you've just purchased, you know? So it's not just this specific skills of how do you make that hot wax candle? It's how do you put your heart into something that you make with your hands? So I think that it's not just that I want the artists to thrive. I want young people to thrive by becoming a part of that tradition, whether they're ever going to do it professionally, you know, and I hope many of them will because that's how it's going to stay alive. Or if it's just something that, that they're doing for themselves or for their family, or for whatever purpose that they have, the immense joy of creating, you know, and that's, I guess that's why I feel so compelled to be a part of that, to be a part of making that possible, not just the me to pass something on. Because, you know, I mean, I know a little bit of stuff, but these other artists, my gosh, I mean the things that they create and that the visions that they have that, you know, I mean...and when I see one of them passing it on and my heart's with kids, but, you know, I like it when it happens with older people too. But when I see that light come into a kid's eyes, and I know that they're seeing magic, you know, they're seeing magic right in front of them and they're wanting to be a part of that.

Gates:

Do you think you're help creating artists, young artists?

Sizemore:

Yeah. That's my goal in life is to create young artists. Yeah. That's what I want to be.

Gates:

Be a creator of young artists. You're doing pretty good.

Sizemore:

Well, you know, I enjoy it. You know, the work that I'm doing now with Berea College for their Partners for Education Program is really, really fun because the arts director for like, I don't know what her official title is, but basically she's outreach programs that Berea College does through Partners for Education. She's over all of the arts, the teaching artists and stuff. And she was a kid that was in my creative writing class when she was in third or fourth grade.

Gates:

What's her name?

Sizemore:

Natalie Gabbard. Yep. And so, and there are so many, you know, teachers that I'll go in and they go, I don't remember when you came to my classroom, you know, and now, you know what I mean, now I'm working with grandchildren of people that I worked with, you know? So yeah, it's whether they become teachers or artists or whatever they become as long as they have, as long as the, you know, because I used to say to kids, you know, you could be an artist. And I was like, well, that's wrong now I say to him, you are an artist and getting them to see that about themselves, you know...

Gates:

Art in everyday life in a way. Right. And they're just finding what the art is in their life.

Sizemore:

Yeah. And whether it's, you know, making banana pudding or whatever it is that they can put themselves into it, you know, they can decide to change that recipe.

Gates:

I haven't lived down here. And how many years you lived here?

Sizemore:

I keep wiggling back and forth in my chair, is that okay? (laughs) I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Gates:

I said, how many years have you lived here?

Sizemore:

In Eastern Kentucky?

Gates:

Yeah.

Sizemore:

50 years. Yeah. For the most part. I mean, we've gone other places in between, but...

Gates:

But you work with a lot of artists, right?

Sizemore:

Oh yeah. All the time.

Gates:

Some craftsmen and what I would call folk artists or traditional artists, some who were...

Sizemore:

Dancers, musicians, writers, whatever.

Gates:

You might've got frustrated with me because I would say, well, are they really a traditional artist? And you say, what? And I always got from you, I don't really care what they are, they're just artists. Is that true? I mean, did you get mad at me about that stuff or?

Sizemore:

No, no. I never got mad at you, but I guess it's that there's... it's hard sometimes to define people and put them into certain categories because they might have grown up with that as part of their tradition. And yet then they went to college and that changed it in some way, or they might have, you know, be like what you would call an outsider to the culture and yet the so completely a part of it, you know? And so it's not that I don't care if they're traditional artists. It's just that I guess sometimes I find that trying to create strict categories is limiting and that there's a lot of crossover of things. I totally believe that tradition and heritage is incredibly important, but I also see how fluid that, you know, and, and I think this is true even more now than it was, you know, all those centuries ago, when you, when I first started out doing this stuff, that the world is so fluid that mingling and mixing is okay. And this is something too that, that you helped me to see is that folk arts, folk traditions are always evolving. It's not like, you know, you have to do it just the way your grandpa did in order to be a traditional artist. I mean, it's going to morph and change. And I think that it morphs and changes, not only just within particular family lines or cultures or communities or whatever, but across those. And so I think tradition is hugely important learning about our traditions honoring and, and being a part of our evolving traditions is hugely important, but that it's also important to not create boundaries.

Gates:

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, part of it was because I was, we were being funded for different boundaries in those days. Yeah. I'm a lot more open than I was. And when I want to give tours at Buffalo Trace, always take, you guys are members of, when we get back to our tasting area, I'm going to ask you a question who belongs to a folk group and how many do you belong to, you know, because there are all these folk groups and they don't have to be called folk groups. They're just influences that guide us, I guess. So they don't get a drink until they said they were all are members of folk groups.

Sizemore:

I bet they're all members. (laughs)

Gates:

(laughs) They all remember that part anyway. So I give a little test at the end. So that's cool. You want to go a little longer? Are we about done?

Sizemore:

I could probably go about another 10 minutes or so.

Gates:

Okay. So just getting back to craftsmen and that, how many do you think you've worked with over the years?

Sizemore:

(laughs) Oh lord. I'm really old, Bob. I've worked with a lot. If I think just in terms of craftsmen...

Gates:

No, it doesn't have to be craftsmen. I mean, just people who were artists, I guess.

Sizemore:

Hundreds, I guess, you know, I mean some for a lot longer than others.

Gates:

Do you think if you think about the art of Appalachia that has really changed?

Sizemore:

Yes.

Gates:

I mean, I used to get calls from people who would say, oh, the curriculum is about Appalachian art this year, what can you...and all they wanted was the old timey stuff.

Sizemore:

Right. Yeah, it's constantly changing and now more than ever just because of, you know, the digital world and everything...

Gates:

If you're going to do a show about Appalachia and art, it'd be pretty broad wouldn't it?

Sizemore:

It would be broad. Yeah. And that's interesting because one of the things that we always struggle with at the Festival of Learn Shops and these other things is, is how to categorize different things, you know? And I mean, some things, you know, I just can't figure out what

category to put it into, you know? But yeah Appalachian arts is, you know, I mean, you got your, your traditional kind of things of, you know, the quilts and the blacksmithing and, you know, but then there's so many different ways that it's evolved and different influences that, that have come into it. So that you've got like Appalatin music, you know, and you've got the you know, the Jappalachian art, you know.

Gates:

Jappalachian art? What's that?

Sizemore:

You know, well, Berea and several other Kentucky cities have got a sister city thing with a city in Japan. So there's a group of artists that go from Berea over there every year and, a group of artists that come from there over here every year. And then they send exhibits and stuff back and forth. Like, my grandson's art has been exhibited in Japan.

Gates:

Really?

Sizemore:

Yeah.

Gates: So he's a Jappalachian artist?

Sizemore:

Well, no, he's from Richmond. So, they don't consider themselves Appalachian up there. (laughs)

Gates:

You have to go down to Berea to do that. (laughs)

Sizemore:

There's just all these mingling of influences, that have been embraced to a large extent.

Gates:

Any stories you want to tell us about those things? I mean, special things that you've been involved with? I mean you've probably got thousands of them. Your favorite moment with teaching or an artist?

Sizemore:

Well, let's see.

Sizemore:

Well, this isn't so much a story it's just a program that I really, really enjoy working with is the Partners for Education at Berea College, because one of the things that they've really, really focused on is in their Arts Education Programs to work with local artists. And it's been so much

fun to kind of take everything that I learned from the Arts Council and, you know, Folklife Program and everything, and help to apply that to the development of their outreach programs. And now, I think at this point, we just didn't training for new artists coming on and it was so much fun to watch artists that had come through the first training now being the trainers, you know, and then there's some of the golden oldies like me that are still hanging in there and adding to that mix, but seeing young artists like Taylor Dye, who's a musician from Owsley county. And when I first met her, she was a high school student, and now she's a presenter training other artists, you know, and she's only about 24. So, it's not like it's been... but I mean, just to see that embracing the idea that it's not only economically more sound to work with local artists, but that it's really important for students to see.

Gates:

How do they work with local artists? What do you mean, they go to an artist's place and work with him?

Sizemore:

No, it's mostly the artists going into the school and artists looking at their art form and saying, what do I do that I could translate into a 45 minute lesson and maybe get three lessons with these kids, you know, helping them, helping them see how to make that practical, to take it. Now, once in a while, they've had the opportunity to take them out to an artist studio. And one of the programs that we have here intermittently in Berea, when we have funding for it is, is to bring kids into the artists studios here and watch the artist blowing glass, or creating pewter jewelry, or doing the things that they do in their workshop. And, you know, I wish we had enough funding to do that all the time, but since we don't the second best is to take the artists into the classroom. But working with artists that are within that community, instead of bringing in outside artists says to the kids, you live in an artistic community, you live in a creative place and you're a part of this. Yeah. So, I like that a lot.

Gates:

50 years of translating this stuff to lesson plans for teachers and things like that, has it changed your...have your ideas of what you want to teachers to learn and the kids will learn? Has that changed?

Sizemore:

Not that much. It's like a not a Trojan horse. Exactly. But it's, and it's not really a subversive thing. It's like, what, what I want kids to learn is that they have something important to say in whatever way that they want to say it, and that they are valid and creative individuals. And it's that what's changed is what lesson plan do you have to fit that into? What standard are you addressing and doing that, you know, is it speaking and listening skills? That's kind of an art form of its own is to take what I think of as the learning targets, what I really want them to learn and look at what is required for them to learn and see how that ... you know, because there's, there's always a way to make it connect. Sometimes it's harder, you know, but there's always some way.

Gates:

When we used to do the festival, you and I would sit around and say, what do we want people to learn when they come to this festival? And how do we get them to learn that? Is that what you mean? Something like that?

Sizemore:

Yeah, yeah, exactly. It's like, you know, we were doing this workshop the other day for the new teaching artists with Partners for Education, and this, you know, something I learned partly from you and partly from Jeff Jamner at the Kentucky Center for the Arts, is that is to think backwards thing, you know, what is it you want them to learn? Or what is it you want to create at the end? You know, and how much time do you have? Then you figure out your process. You don't start at the beginning. You've got to start with where you're hoping to get.

END OF INTERVIEW