Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2015

Interviewees: David and Patricia Crosby, Worth Long, James and Carolyn Miller

Interview Date: December 4, 2015

Location: Port Gibson, Mississippi

Interviewer: Emilye Crosby

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: 1 file; approximately 3 hours and 20 minutes

START OF RECORDING

Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Crew: We're rolling, so--.

EMILYE CROSBY: Okay.

WORTH LONG: -- see, [you'd?] already taken the money.

JAMES MILLER: What can I say?

WL: They gave you your salary for the year before. All of your salary.

JM: Oh, man. And I got to see all the United States and go all over the place. I mean, Midwest Academy, man, [laughter] ( ).

EC: Okay, so I'm Emilye Crosby. This is December 4, 2015, and we're in Mississippi Cultural Crossroads in Port Gibson, Mississippi. We're here with the Civil Rights History Project, co-sponsored by the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. And we're here continuing and expanding on the interview with James Miller and Carolyn Miller that we had this

morning, and we also have, today, Worth Long, David Crosby, Patricia Crosby, and we're going to talk about primarily Mississippi Cultural Crossroads and the work that it did, the sort of cultural and historical and artistic work that it did, both documenting and in the tradition of the Civil Rights Movement.

Can you--can we start by some of you, whoever is so moved, to tell us how Cultural Crossroads was born?

DAVID CROSBY: Well, maybe I should start, because I was the evil genius behind it. [Laughter] I got--across my desk came a notice from the National Endowment for the Humanities that was offering youth grants in the humanities for young people to get together and study humanities when they weren't in school or whatever. And I think the grants were for $2,500. I immediately thought that Port Gibson was a kind of unique situation for young people to look at all the various cultures that kind of intersected here in Port Gibson, from the Spanish land grant of the Natchez territory to the French culture of both the Natchez territory and the US flag flew and the British flag, and it was a whole mixture of things; of course, the Native Americans, who were here when the French arrived in the 1730s.

So, it's--I also thought that my wife Patty, who was unemployed at the time, would be the ideal person to manage such a grant. And as it turned out, they gave it to us, and then at that point, Patty took over and ran. And I just kind of stepped into the shadows and gave moral support and material support that I could.

But the basic idea, I think, came from a sense that there were a lot of voices in the history of Claiborne County and Port Gibson that were not really reflected in the official stories that were told by people who had concerned themselves with the history of the

region. And the most important story that was left untold was that of the African American presence. So most of our activities were designed to try to engage both white young people and black young people in conversations about that heritage. And Patty can tell you what some of the first activities were, if you want to go on to that right now.

EC: So, what year is this?

DC: This was--.

PATRICIA CROSBY: Nineteen seventy-eight.

DC: --nineteen-seventy--it was a little earlier than that. [19]76, probably, that we first started--for--wrote the first proposal, and then it went through bureaucratic channels and so on. But the first work of Cultural Crossroads, actually, was probably in 1977, [19]78.

EC: And it's probably helpful to know in this context that Claiborne County is an eighty percent African American community, and in [19]78, if we connect this [19]76 through [19]78, if we connect this to what we were talking about earlier, this is about three years after African Americans win a majority on the policy-making board in the county, after years of exclusion. And so, the community--can you--does somebody want to try to describe kind of what the dynamics of the community was like at the time that Cultural Crossroads is born?

JM: It was just so much going on, and as you reflect back on it, right, I mean, it was like two or three revolution[s] going on at the same time. All right? You had the influx of Grand Gulf, right? You had a black political takeover. You had established white power that was fighting tooth and nail to maintain control, right? You had the

emerging of a baby organization in the community, Mississippi Cultural Crossroads, ran by a white woman. [Laughter] Okay, in a predominantly black community, right?

EC: The worst of all possible worlds.

JM: But not just your average white woman, mind you. [Laughter] Anybody know Patty--y'all, going to tell the truth, right? She's a very strong, opinionated person, right? And not easily intimidated. So, that--you had them dynamics going on, and mind you, all of the people that we had control, politically, were males. Okay? So, you got the chauvinistic thing going on, you got--you got Patty pushing hard, trying to get stuff done, you got an evolving evolution of black leadership, all right, that's coming into power that's never been there before, right? Trying to figure out how they fit into the mix. Then you got a bunch of little fools running around talking about, "Why this white woman running this? I thought there'd be some black person, right?" They got all they going on, right? So, it was, I mean, lot of friction. Lot of dynamics.

PC: There was Julia Jones. I mean, in terms of--.

JM: Oh, okay, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. But I'm talking about in policy-making positions.

PC: Yeah, okay.

JM: You know, Jones was the--.

PC: Circuit clerk.

JM: Circuit clerk. All right? But the folks that had the money, [Laughter] they were on the Board of Supervisors. We didn't go in the--.

EC: So, what were some of the early organizations, and what's the relationship between the--I mean, not organization--early activities, and what's the relationship between the grant Cultural Crossroads and those early activities?

PC: The $2,500 planning grant we got from the NEH enabled us to say we had a grant, say we had money, which was absolutely critical. Nobody ever asked how much. And then to gather together people in the community--Dave was teaching at Alcorn in a master's program, so he was teaching some of the teachers in the community. So, that's how he got to know both your teachers and others in the community.

And I'm not sure how we made a contact with Chamberlain Hunt Academy, but on that early board there were a couple of people. And Worth was in and out of town in those days. So, we gathered together that group of people--and there were high school kids on that board--and said, "What do we want to do?"

EC: So, what's Chamberlain Hunt Academy?

PC: Well, it was the private segregationist academy. I mean, it had a history before the war where it was a military academy for boys, but when the court said finally, "You must--." what did they say? Integrate or desegregate? I don't know which word--the schools, then Chamberlain Hunt Academy, started accepting white girls and local boys that had not before that been there. So, it was an alternative school to the public schools.

EC: And so, what--go ahead.

PC: So anyway, we just met every couple of months and talked about what we wanted to do. And the upshot of that was, the high school kids essentially said, "We'll do anything, even talk to the old people, if you'll get us cameras and show us how to use

them." And that was a time before everybody had a cell phone with a camera on it, so that those Canon 35-millimeter cameras and the darkroom that we set up were really an important thing for the high school kids, I think.

And then just very early on, Worth, who sat at the table with us, was at that point on--a panel? Panels--for the NEA folk life folklore program. And so, we talked about, what did we want? We wanted tape recorders, we wanted a darkroom, we wanted cameras. And Worth, on a panel, got us $9,000, I think. But then again, dynamics were there. You couldn't--I couldn't, as a person, apply to the NEH. But there was a library in town, and we had asked Nancy, the librarian, to be on our board. So, we said, "Nancy, can the board--can the library accept this $2,500 if we get it?" She said, "Sure." None of us even ask what the NEH was going to require, and they require a 501(c)(3) or something else. This library was just a library. The oldest one in the state, but it wasn't what--so I went to the supervisors and I said, "I've got this money, but I can't accept it for the community--I need to have a government body or a 501(c)(3)." Do you remember the white lawyer from Natchez who was the board lawyer in those days? Anyway, he was sitting at the table, and I went in, hat in hands--.

JM: [Zakario?]? Zakario?

PC: Yes, exactly.

JM: Zakario.

PC: Good job. And I said, "I need somebody to accept this grant." And he looked at the board and he said, "What can she do with $2,500?" [Laughter]

DC: Well, actually, that wasn't the 2,500. This was the--.

PC: No, that was the first one.

DC: Oh, okay.

PC: And then--that was the first one. Because the library had said they could but couldn't. And then, when we got the NEA money, we had already figured out at the house that we needed to be a 501(c)(3). I couldn't go around asking people to accept money for us. But the second money came through the school board, which is another major miracle, because I really never had a good relationship with the superintendent, but they accepted that money.

Then he wouldn't give it to me--I don't know whether you remember that--because, well, I assume you've talked about the school issues, but--.

EC: We haven't, really, so you might be the--.

JM: Mmm-mm. It was a good thing, right? [Laughter]

PC: At just about this point, the schools lost their accreditation. And Emily and some of her classmates were playing basketball. And the major upshot of losing your accreditation is that you lose the right to play in high school athletics, so that these kids, who are very good, were bumped aside. So, Dave and I and Reggie Porter's mother--and did Frannie's mom, Katie Young, join that party?

DC: Yes, I think so. I think it was just us and Porter--.

CAROLYN MILLER: I'm not sure.

PC: At any rate, we filed suit against the high school activities association. And the superintendent took that as a personal affront. We said it wasn't him, it was the children, but--. So, he had this money from the NEA and he wouldn't give it to us; for about a year it sat there, and we just kept spending and hoping.

So anyway, that would--then we got started interviewing people, and *I Ain't Lying*, and that was a start.

EC: But some of that was going on before the school stuff, because I was almost--I was about to graduate when that happened, and Octavia and all of them were doing *I Ain't Lying* long before that, right?

DC: Yes, I think so.

PC: Yeah, yeah. You're right.

DC: I'd like to go back and provide a little background to those activities. Because Patty and I had come to Claiborne County in [19]73, and we had been reading the Whole Earth catalogue and that kind of thing, and we had--through them had learned about Wigginton and the Foxfire Project. And so, we were--we had really that kind of model in line of going to the elders in the community, and in our case particularly the African American elders in the community, to get them to talk about their lives and their crafts and their traditions and things like that.

So, that's kind of where I started, but then we got in touch with Brother Worth here, and he enriched that a lot by infusing us with this sense of the--what was maximum feasible participation, so that the institution tried to be as representative as it could be of the people that it was trying to reach.

WL: It's--participatory democracy is the concept.

DC: Yeah, exactly.

PC: And shortly after we moved here the Chamber of Commerce published something called *Claiborne County: The Promised Land*. And there was a big book signing and opening at the Chamber, so Dave and I, on a Friday afternoon, went. Why

not? We were new in the community. You could read that several-inch book and not know that there were any African Americans in this community except the [Pages?], because the Pages had caused trouble.

CM: That's in Reconstruction, or slavery.

PC: Yeah, yeah, they had caused trouble, but they still made the book. But, so--.

DC: Well, so did the slave who saved the family from burning when the chimney caught fire.

PC: That's true. He was the other one. But I said to people, "You could read this book in Michigan and not know that eighty percent of this population in this community is African Americans." So, that was another kind of driving force for encouraging people to talk about their lives, to tell their stories. And we started out interviewing just whoever the kids wanted to interview.

DC: Yeah, we let them take the lead very much. And they--as you said, they were so thrilled to get a hold of a tape recorder and a camera and be able to do something with it that they became eager to do that. But--may I go on? The--.

PC: Or did you...?

DC: -- the--I think most important thing that happened during that first year was that by the end of it, we realized that the people--one of the strongest artistic traditions in the county was quilting. And that there were a lot of parents and grandparents of these children who were quilters. And so there was a kind of critical mass of artists who were going completely unrecognized in the community. And so, we--one of the first things was Patty and I wrote a paper, a kind of show-and-tell that we took

to a meeting of the Mississippi Folklore Society. And we showed a number of--well, before that, I guess, there was the--.

PC: Yeah, where the kids were.

DC: -- we were able to go to the Mississippi Arts Commission then and get some grants, small grants, to work in the schools with resident artists. And our resident artists were folklore artists, folk artists. And the most popular one was the quilting. We also had a blues and sculpting one with Son Thomas, and--I'm not sure how this fit--we actually got the old blues singer from the Delta--

EC: Sam Chatmon?

DC: Sam Chatmon.

JM: Yeah, Sam Chatmon.

DC: Sam Chatmon performed at the movie house--.

PC: That was different money, but--.

DC: It was different money, but it was--but that was the basic idea, getting the kids involved, being taught by the people who were actually the artists in the community or in nearby communities--the extended black community, if you will. And that led to, I think, a recognition that--oh, going to--the paper we wrote, trying to show that, basically, black quilts operated on a kind of different aesthetic level than the traditional white quilts, which were based on squares that were perfect and added together, all contributed to one pattern. Whereas the African American quilts, by and large, grew kind of organically from a set of procedures or way of building a quilt that led to different things, like quilts that were based on long strips of material rather than squares, or if they were squares, they were then made into long strips before they were put together, and so on.

But we presented this paper up at the Mississippi Folklore Society, up in Oxford, that particular year. And I remember going to the restroom after the presentation, and the chairman that year of the Folklore Society looked at me from the next urinal and said, "You don't really believe all that crap, do you?" [Laughter] And I was certainly taken aback, because he was a--.

PC: Because he did believe it.

DC: -- a friendly young fellow, and I did believe what I was saying. I thought--but there's a disconnect here somewhere. I'm not making myself clear to the people that I would think would be most sympathetic to the point I'm trying to make. And we've been kind of trying to make that disconnect into a connect ever since.

But that's how we really got involved, I think, in the kind of programming that Cultural Crossroads then became known for--a quilting program, the theatre arts program, the documentation.

EC: Can we--? I want to--we're kind of--.

DC: Go right ahead.

EC: -- because of our timing--I want to come back to some of that--[break in audio] file--.

Worth, can you say--Worth, can you talk about--your coming out of working with SNCC in the [19]60s--.

WL: Right. I can do--mm-hmm.

EC: -- and then how do you come into contact with Cultural Crossroads, and what's in your mind at this--at the birth of this organization and this work?

WL: All right. Tell me when.

Crew: We're on.

WL: Yeah. My background was in the Civil Rights Movement, and organizing with the Civil Rights Movement, working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC. And during that particular time, during the period in which the Cultural Crossroads was developed, I was already involved in trying to do, in southwest Mississippi, a program that was--I came on the board in 1980, so in 1977, I was involved in a Ford Foundation program that was called--what?

JM: Leadership and Development program.

WL: Leadership and Development program, in which they funded me to do some study and research. Part of that study was with Alan Lomax at Columbia University; he was there at that time. And what the study--what my study was about, basically, was the whole question of how can you--and this relates to Cultural Crossroads--how can you, in communities that are not empowered, legitimize the program that is already culturally compact and developed within the community, but is not respected in the larger community? It's almost a parallel in terms of what the Civil Rights Movement was trying to do during that same time. So, you're asking the question--you're talking about--in the Civil Rights Movement, we're talking about racial equality, but here we're talking about cultural equality. How can we be sure that people, but especially oppressed people, people who are outside the limits of the society, how can they, in fact, be respected not just based on their numbers and the work that they do, but on what they contribute to the education, arts, and culture of their communities and of the larger communities?

So, those were some of the things that I was looking at, and trying to see--what are the forms that can be developed that can address that? What are the institutional forms that can do that? Institutional and cultural forms that can do that? And when I saw people talking here in Southwest Mississippi about trying to do something for a community that had legitimate cultural expression but did not have an avenue for even passing that Ford to their own--within their culture to their own kids, right, and could--and were looked down on by the local gentry. Then what I said was, "What you can do probably is you can organize people in a grassroots way so that they can be exposed to not just the classics of--European classics, but also of the classics of--that develop and the culture that develops just in the local community." And we talked about some of that in 1980 when I first came in.

The other thing that I remember contributing at that time was my experience as an organizer, and trying to be sure that everybody was involved at every level in--of the organization. So, that when you start to organize something, then you're not just dealing with the preachers and the teachers. You're not--and the people who sell things in the community. But you're dealing with the grassroots folk, who are just ordinary working-class people who have a wealth of culture and are the real foundation for the entire community, not just in terms of economics, but also in culture. So, how can you deal with organizing them in such a way that the wealth of their community, the treasure of their community, can be passed forward?

And Cultural Crossroads was talking about how they could do that by showing them, by reflecting to them, the beauty of what they had. Right? And you can do that in two--several different ways. You can convince them by showing--by comparing what

they have with something else, but one of the most important ways you can do it in many cases is that you can popularize it in a larger society, and then they say, "Well, wait, this stuff that I thought didn't mean anything, in this case, a hill of beans--that didn't mean a hill of beans is really something." And quilting is the best example, I think, of that. Because once--once somebody is dealing with something that they consider is just something to keep you warm, and they see that it gets a national prize, then you don't have to convince people to have more quilters. Right?

And so, notice I did not use the economic element--that there is an economic value in that. That comes along, but the cultural element--and then I remember, once you had begun to organize, the storytelling quilt started to develop within the repertoire of--I can't--oh.

EC: Can we redirect--can I redirect for a moment?

WL: Yeah, uh-huh.

EC: Because I want to come back to this, but in the next fifteen minutes or so--some of the--some of the things, though, that seem--that stood out for me as really important, historically and in engaging the history, are the two exhibitions, *Picturing Our Past* and *No Easy Journey*, and the day-long--well, in one case, multi-day, or maybe both cases, but the forums, the humanities forums that accompanied the opening of those exhibitions, and then there's, of course, also the *I Ain't Lying* magazine, which I think is probably the first publication to document the local Civil Rights Movement outside of the newspapers, probably. And then *What It Is This Freedom?* that came with *No Easy Journey* in the opening, and then also the *Romeo and Juliet* production; there may be other things, but in--.

PC: *Telling the People's Story*, I think, is the one that was the several-day that you're thinking of.

EC: Yeah, and I just--and *Picturing Our Past*, I mean--not *Picturing--No Easy Journey*, there was the play and then there was the forum. So, can we talk about those programs, and how they developed, and sort of the community context?

JM: Can I just add one quick point to what we're saying about how the larger community don't seem to recognize the culture that exists in relationship to the suppressed community, right? I mean, there's no other classical example than the blues. I mean, the Rolling Stones got their name from Muddy Waters, right up the road here. It came out of Mississippi and the Delta, okay? Eric Clapton, them boys, all them old blues things that came out of the Delta, right? Okay? They embraced them, when over here we in the United States were saying the blues was a bunch of crap. Over in Europe, them brothers was having a good time hanging out with them all brothers. They used to go over there and play in them clubs, man. They were superstars in here, right? The Beatles. I mean, okay? The Yardbirds. I mean, you can go--the list goes on and on and on. And any of them--any of them rich white boys [Laughter] that make all that money, okay, if they tell the truth, they will say it, that the roots of their stuff came out of the blues, out of the blue. So, you're so right. Our culture is rich. And when people tell us that it don't amount to a hill of beans, right, well, that's a bunch of bunk. All right? You know, but--.

WL: Beatles was opening for Little Richard.

CM: Yeah! Little Richard, yeah, yeah!

JM: I mean, look what James Brown did when the Beatles come over here. I'm just saying, classic--I mean, those are classic case in points, right? But hey, welcome to America. How--the rich--the culture was rich. And I think what Mississippi Cultural Crossroads did here locally, right? Okay?

[In Penn?], now, we had a lot of discussions about this, right? The whole issue, again, of race reconciliation and how we get the white folk to come to the table and say "Our stuff [is] just as good as your stuff." It wasn't an issue about the--deciding always what's good and what's bad. It wasn't an issue about that *American Bandstand, Soul Train.* Okay? *American Bandstand,* different. *Soul Train,* different. They are not--one is not better than the other; it's how people express themselves. It's how people express themselves, right? And so, they both should be complimented and be a part of history. But ( ). [Laughter]

PC: With the exhibits, I believe *Picturing Our Past* came first, right?

JM: Mm-hmm.

PC: *Picturing Our Past*, there was a photographer named James Allen? Or some Allen--Mr. Allen.

JM: Briscoe Allen, right?

PC: Yeah, right. In the early 1900s, he had a view camera, took zillions of glass negatives of this community, and a lot of them still existed, both locally and some of them were already at archives. So, we said, hey, not every little town has a photographer who took pictures of the community in the 1900s. So, we got a little money from the Humanities Council and put together an exhibit of--somewhere in the twenties?

DC: More than that. I think it was about fifty.

PC: Photographs that Mr. Allen had taken. And those--I used to say to people, "That's one picture of what this community looked like at a certain time." Now, Mr. Allen was a very wealthy white man. He was in government, he sold, among other things, Chevrolets. So, those photos were taken through his eye. He held the camera. And we got a lot of flak from members of the black community who said, "Those photos don't--"I don't know. "Those photos don't picture us well. They don't depict us. We are living in pretty minimal housing, and Mr. Allen's got a two-story entry to his house," and all this kind of business. There were pictures of black men fishing. What do you call it?

EC: Seining or seining? I don't know how to say it.

PC: Seining, yeah. Anyway, we got a lot of flak from members of the black community for celebrating Mr. Allen's photos, and they're still over at City Hall now. Within a year of that, we were beginning the work on *No Easy Journey*, the civil rights exhibit that is across the street. And all of a sudden, the people we were getting flak from were different. We were getting flak from the white folks about celebrating this story. And we were working with Patty Black at the Old Capitol Museum, and we were trying to get it right. Local stories, pictures, things that could tell that story. And after one day, when James and I--who often were the brunt of people's--.

JM: Bullshit.

PC: -- anger, we--.

DC: Well, maybe we ought to mention at this point that James was for a long stretch the president of Cultural Crossroads, while you were the executive director.

PC: Right. So, I guess it was reasonable that we got the flak. But James said, "Why, when we celebrate our history, is it that old mess?" And that's exactly what people were saying. "Why are you putting that old mess in the courthouse?"

EC: I think it's also important to say that even though Cultural Crossroads always welcome anybody, regardless of race, that it was perceived in some ways as leaning towards the black community, probably.

PC: Sure.

EC: Or certainly whites were much more reluctant to participate.

PC: Sure.

EC: And *Picturing Our Past* was the first real embrace by some of the white community in terms of being willing to work with Cultural Crossroads, right? And that's part of the context.

JM: Well, when you learn about a history--you learn about a history, and you are looking at the footnote, right? And you never put any resources into documenting any of the history of eighty percent of the people who live here, obviously, we got to step up to the plate and--I mean, we're behind here. Your stuff has been documented time and time again. All of these buildings, right, around here, that black folks built, right, that you lived in, all right--that's part of black history, but it's never been documented, right? That's what I'm--it's the racism and the arrogance, okay, to say that you're not worth anything, okay? I mean, we are here. We are human beings. Look at us.

PC: And in conjunction with that exhibit, *No Easy Journey*, we hired Nayo Watkins, a poet and playwright, to write a play, *What It Is Is Freedom*? Is that what--yeah. *What It Is Is Freedom*. Nayo said I'd learn to say it someday. Anyway, Nayo

wrote that, and we hired a director, a professional director from Harvard School of whatever, and--to come in and do it. So, we had a celebration of it. We didn't just slap stuff on the wall. We gave people the opportunity to see a play and then to have a conversation about what that history is and means and how it's part of the community.

EC: I guess part of what I was thinking about is it seemed like, with the Allen photos, *Picturing Our Past*, that at least some whites in the community embraced that and portrayed it as the beginning of a new interracial collaboration. Am I right about that?

DC: Well, I think the--.

EC: Main Street? The whole economic development piece?

DC: Main Street, Al Ho--what was his name?

PC: Hollingsworth.

DC: Hollingsworth. Al Hollingsworth was the head of the Main Street organization. And he--what?

PC: No, you're right. I was just thinking about something. Go ahead, honey. I'm sorry.

DC: He was actively involved in the whole *Picturing Our Past*--.

PC: Choosing the photos.

DC: -- yeah, choosing the photos, and he helped build some of the display panels and things like that--paint them, at least. And as part of the forum for that, we invited Alan Trachtenberg from Yale to come down and to talk about photography and the uses of photography, repurposing photography and things like that. And he was wined and dined and feted by the white community and invited to come back whenever

he wanted to and so on and so forth. So, when we got around to *No Easy Journey*, we invited Alan back again, and he came, and--.

PC: Because we got those photos from the highway patrol and others that--.

DC: And Alan, after the weekend was over, came up to me and said "What, what's going on here?" He said, "The last time I was here, everybody was very friendly. Nobody'll talk to me now." [Laughter] And Patty explained to him what was going on.

PC: What should have been obvious. [Laughter]

EC: He'd crossed the tracks.

DC: Yeah, he had crossed the tracks.

PC: Exactly.

DC: And we've had similar experiences from others. We always tried, with our forums, to try to bring some outside voices to bear on the--what the value of whatever it is that we were trying to do, and to analyze it and to stimulate conversation. And sometimes they found it easier to do than other times.

And Trachtenberg, although he's white, is just one example, because we had many black commentators and analyzers, who--.

PC: Well, we've just slid over [Roland?] in talking about the quilts.

DC: Right. Of course. Yeah.

PC: I mean, we knew about--.

EC: Can we come back to that, though? Like, just--.

PC: Not now. Okay. Sure.

EC: I mean, I think we'll definitely address that and talk about that. But with *Picturing Our Past* and *No Easy Journey*, what's the organization trying to do with those exhibits? Why do they matter to the community? Why are they important?

JM: Okay. I think maybe at that time, what we were trying to do--again, we were trying to mend the community and trying to do it by way of the culture of arts in the culture, right? And working in conjunction with Patty and the members of the Board. But the mayor--okay. Again, you got to go back to that time frame, right? Okay. The Grand Gulf monies were--we were headed toward bankruptcy, because they had taken the money away, all right? The Grand Gulf money, the state legislature, right? And so, we were faced with having to reach a compromise, some kind of compromise, with the powers to be. And what was there going to be? So here comes the boogity-boogity mayor, James Beasley, right? He comes over, and all of a sudden now he wants to sit down around the table and negotiate. Well, so he came to my office. Now, why he came to my office as opposed to going to some supervisor, I don't know. But he did.

EC: What was your job at that point?

JM: I was county planner then, okay? I was county planner. And he came in and said, "Somehow we got to get along, and I have done some things that was wrong in the past, and blasé, blasé," confessing, like, you know? I didn't--mm. So, I'm saying, "You scared the shit out of me, man, what do you want to know?" So, I'm sitting there listening to him, and I said, "Mr. Mayor, what [do] you want me to do?" He said, "Talk to your supervisor." I said, "Well, yeah, we--." Said, "We got to save that Grand Gulf money." But, see, he was old-gangster, old-school gangster back from way back when. Beasley was, right? And a racist, too. And so, he wanted to--he wants to get his cut of

the money, before--because the city wasn't getting any money from Grand Gulf or for nothing.

And so anyway, make a long story short, there was a coalition that was built, a fragile coalition that was built between the city and the county and the leadership here locally, to sell the Grand Gulf situation. To the point that there were some pickets down at Grand Gulf, right, and eventually it would sell, so we got x number of dollars. Then he--.

EC: And let me just say, at this point you've got--the county government is majority black and the city government is still controlled by the white community, sort of in continuation of the Civil Rights Movement.

JM: Yes, yes. It was the last remnants--yeah.

EC: The city/county dynamic.

JM: Yeah. That's the last remnants of power for the whites, the city of Port Gibson, okay? The county that--blacks took over the county.

EC: And so, that's what that tentative compromise, their coalitions--.

JM: Yes, exactly. That's what that was about, right? And so he really played ball on that. So, we sat down and talked, and then he sends his wife. And so now all of a sudden, she becomes the--.

EC: Emissary?

JM: Thank you. All right? And so [Laughter] as a result of that, she said--I said, "Well, how [are] we going to institutionalize this piece?" Because we've got to work within a structure, right? And so, we thought we came with the Main Street concept. And it was just kind of populating the state at that time. And so I said, "We[re]

going to--." he said, "I got my--I know some guy from Connecticut," and that was Hollingsworth.

And so, they brought him in to be the mainstream manager, because they had to be sponsored by the city. They--it couldn't be sponsored by the county. It was a city concept, came by the cities. And so, Al came in then and started working, right? And it never fails, man. And I--because it's the fact. And he came in knowing everything to do. He'd do this when he'd do this, then he'd do that, right? So, I'm sitting here listening, right? I said, "We're not compromising; you are dictating. You know, when you said 'I need to talk about this,' the library you talked about was all white. Okay? Bunch of little white women was on the board. Now that they got to get out of City Hall because they got to renovate City Hall, where are we going to put the new library? Mm, a chance now for compromise. Now a chance to expand the library board. Now a chance to do something downtown. Revamp an old downtown building--still part of the Main Street program. We helped to build them because all the downtown area was blighted because we just came out of the boycott on--the last end of the boycott, prior to it being settled in, what? [19]84, I believe it was.

EC: [19]82.

JM: [19]82, it would be. Okay.

EC: And downtowns are dying all over the country.

JM: Yeah, but more so here, though. It was--I mean, it was--this place was blighted, man. It was gone, all right?

And so, we got big-time white folk from DC coming down; y'all know the name of them cats at the National Trust and stuff coming down, big--we all up in white folks'

houses and stuff, drinking wine and talking shit, you know? [Laughter] And getting along. Acting like human beings. [Laughter] And all this is going on.

So, to make a long story short, basically what happened at the end of the process, we were able to use the Main Street program, work with Beasley and the city. And that was--it was--there were issues along the way. You always got to fight for your position. But we were able to do the building, make the connection with Mississippi Cultural Crossroads, bring it into the mix, right? Able to get more funding for Mississippi Cultural Crossroads. They helped expand the programs, because the part of--*No Easy*--no, not *No Easy Journey*. Ah, *Picturing Our Past*. And also, the play we did, and Carolyn, I think you was a part--you was in that, wasn't you?

CM: Mm-hmm.

JM: You was in a play, okay? And we got community interaction going on, but there were local whites that were part of the play. And some other people can talk about those experiences, but I'm still saying, we're trying to develop good relationships. And somehow or another, we came out of that whole process with a somewhat-stable Cultural Crossroads that had made a point, downtown redevelopment. We still ain't where we're supposed to be but we're making a little bit of progress. Okay. And then it changed.

Crew: Can we pause for a second? (break in audio) And we're back up.

JM: Patty, we talked some about that--I don't want to--I'm not going to have this conversation.

EC: So, when you--so you put up *Picturing Our Past*, which is something that the white community felt strongly about, was excited about, wanted to see happen, and at

least some members of the black community were not thrilled with it. But Cultural Crossroads decided it was important to do--.

JM: But they did it and went along with it. They did.

EC: And why does Cultural Crossroads decide that's important to do?

PC: I--. (pause)

DC: First of all, it's available.

PC: Yeah.

DC: It's local. It's historical. And it's--it involves the arts. So, it just seems like a--.

PC: He was a pretty good photographer.

DC: -- a real good fit with what Cultural Crossroads was trying to do. And as we worked on it and saw more and more and more of the photographs, and--I've been told later that we didn't see all the photographs. That the more racist photographs were already censored out, and we never saw them. Including one that involved the lynching of a black man from outside in the county a little bit, that happened in the--around 1910, 1912, something like that.

EC: Who was lynched? Do you know?

DC: I've forgotten the name now; it's been a long time. But he talked about--I have an interview with--.

PC: Mr. Allen?

DC: -- Mr. Allen, yeah.

PC: The son of the photographer.

DC: The son of the photographer. Who talked about how--.

EC: That would be Jimmy Allen.

DC: Yeah. How he was chased from where he committed whatever crime he did--he was accused of raping a woman, and he was chased from Hermanville, all the way around the country, across the--into a lake somewhere down around Bruinsburg. And he was--he got into the lake and was breathing through a straw, according to this. And they knew he had gotten onto the lake, so they got in a rowboat and went out there and then he came up behind them and they shot him. And then they brought him into town on a board of some kind and displayed his body right out here in front of the courthouse for a day or two, and the people came and took their pictures, and Mr. Allen's father had been one of the photographers who photographed that incident. That we didn't see at all.

PC: We never saw that photograph, but apparently, it was shown to Trachtenberg when he was here. They thought a man of his importance would--should see that photograph.

EC: Why?

DC: Well, they were--I know that they were courting Trachtenberg because they wanted to get the materials, in a sense, out of the hands of Cultural Crossroads and into the hands of somebody with a prominent name, so that they could get them published and make money off of them.

EC: And they thought that he would appreciate this picture of a lynching?

DC: I have no idea, Patty.

PC: We can't, we can't--.

DC: I can't even begin to wrap my head around that.

PC: -- we can't speak to what--why--.

DC: But I mentioned it just to say that we had a lot of photographs with a lot of different subject matter, and not a lot of them involved black folks. There was one that some people found offensive because it depicted--well, two of them, actually, because they depicted--no, just one; depicted a black woman in a kind of menial position as a caregiver to this young, white Jimmy Allen. But there were some others. One was a genre picture of, I think, four black men--shooting dice, were they? Yeah. And then there was--.

PC: Seining.

JM: The water one.

DC: Yeah, one of the pictures that I thought was among the best of the shots was the fishing, but the black men who were fishing were naked, and they were depicted that way, I thought, without any particular prejudice to them. But it was not seen that way by everybody in the community. So, it was really the--the blacks felt--the blacks who complained, at least, felt that we had allowed this black man to show them in ways that were not--.

PC: This white man.

DC: -- white man, to depict them in ways that were not the best, and that therefore they didn't think that we should continue to support that kind of thing.

PC: You ask why. It seemed to me that that community was and is still incredibly divided. And I thought that maybe if we could look as a community at what we looked like in various times and through various sets of eyes, we could figure out--I mean, Mr. Allen's photos showed a lot about what life was like. He was not privy to

black folks celebrating or anything, so that part of the picture is missing. But--so I just thought that--and what Dave said, they were available. I mean, we wouldn't have gone after some photographic exhibit if we'd had to grab a photo from here and there and whatever. But we had these.

JM: You got them stored someplace?

PC: And there was a lot of conversation about juggling back and forth. When you talk about compromise, we had all these photos that we were looking at; most of them were four-by-five that we were looking at, and then printed much larger. And so, Al was at the table. Al wanted downtown pictures. Dave was at the table; he wanted images that showed people and--so anyway, there was a lot of give-and-take. Had I sat at the table alone, I would have picked a different fifty photographs, but we were all in it together, and I don't think that's a problem. It just spreads out the point of view of that exhibit.

DC: Well, and it--obviously, though, at the same time, during that whole period, we were displaying the work of Roland Freeman, and--a prominent black photographer, so that--it wasn't as if we weren't showing as many sides of the thing--I think the most important thing we thought would happen would be there would be a dialogue about race.

JM: Exactly. Exactly.

DC: And there--I found that the black folks who wanted--who objected were not willing to say that out loud, not in public. I mean, not where white folks were present, anyway. And the white folks didn't think there was any problem, so, the

dialogue never really got going on the surface, but I think it started to roil the underground a little bit.

JM: Yes. Those forms, man. I'll never forget those forms, if I live to be a hundred. When we sit over there and we had those forms, and the people from the white community came in and the black community came in, and they talked about this community--Percy was there, Gage was there, Beasley was there. And it was so apparent to me, right, that y'all just don't get it. You just don't damn get it.

EC: I think that's the forum that went with *No Easy Journey*.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

EC: And it's got Mayor Beasley, I mean, Beasley's wife, Joan--.

JM: Beasley's wife, Joan, yeah.

EC: Robert Gage the fourth, the fourth generation to be president and owner of Port Gibson Bank. And Percy Thornton, who was an African American Board of Supervisors and previously a history teacher, and you, as county planner and chair of Cultural Crossroads, talking about the community's civil rights history, what the community looked like today, and visions for the future. And you were on one of those panels, Worth.

WL: Yes, I remember that. Yeah.

JM: I mean, we didn't create what was in place. See, that's what I'm saying. And the white folks don't seem to get that. I mean, you created two equal societies. We didn't create that. And then, when you create it, and then the fallout from it grows. Then you want to come back and blame somebody else for what you did. And we are saying, okay, look, we didn't create this.

Case in point--classic example, all right? There's a dual education system in this state for higher education. White folk, big time school, Ole Miss, Alcorn. [Laughter] Okay, now, who created this institution? It wasn't no black folk. Okay. And so now a hundred years later, some decisions have got to be made--a state as poor as this state can't support all of these higher institutions of learning. What are we going to do with them? We're going to just cut out the black ones and save the white ones. And those blacks that can afford to go to Ole Miss go there, or you don't go. [Laughter] You know? No. No, no. No, no. No, no.

We have to sit down and talk about this, and the implications of this. And it needs to be understood that this was a monster that you created, not a monster that we created, but we're willing to sit down with you and talk about how we need to solve this. But we've got to have some parity here. Worth, you see what I'm saying? I mean--.

WL: I know. I did attend the discussions, but one of the things that I remember that--one of the questions that came to my mind was, there was dialogue. But not--there was talk of dialogue but not of interaction, you see. And for a change--you cannot have change with dialogue and no interaction. The whole question of social interaction is the foundation for change, it seems to me. And that--it wasn't even visualized in either community. It was not well-visualized in either community; I need to say it that way. It was not well-visualized in either community. Yeah. The pulling together of people to come together, though, was--it was a great idea. In fact, it was fairly well-programmed. But then when the time comes for where do we come from here--and that leads to that you have to be side-by-side, or--.

EC: Or that the compromise has to go both ways?

WL: It has. And--it has, but the--in a compromise between the powerful and the powerless, who compromises, is the question. Right? I hate to try to be philosophic, but--.

DC: Well, could I go on to talk a bit about *Romeo and Juliet*? Because, I mean, it represented a very similar kind of thing, where the interaction between white and black communities--.

EC: Yeah, hang on. Let me just say--so *Picturing Our Past* was around [19]92?

DC: I think so.

PC: If you want to know for sure, I've got the timeline over there.

EC: And *No Easy Journey*, I know, opened in December of [19]94.

DC: Okay, well, this is earlier.

EC: And *Romeo and Juliet* was earlier.

DC: It was--it began in 1988, and the performances were in 1989. But it was one of those things that happens once in a lifetime for an organization, because we had the opportunity, and that's--there's a backstory to that, but we had the opportunity to bring eleven highly-trained professionals in theatre to Port Gibson to plan a play with the cooperation of the community, a classic play revisioned through the eyes of the community today. And the play that was chosen was *Romeo and Juliet*, and when the Cornerstone Theatre Company came to town in November of [19]88, they began a casting call, and people were auditioning, and people were volunteering to serve on the crew, and to--the front office and stuff like that.

PC: To make the dresses and--.

DC: To be part of this thing.

PC: Carolyn's mom. ( )

DC: And a lot of the white community were just absolutely dumbstruck by this wonderful thing that was happening, all these bright Harvard kids coming into town to help us do culture.

EC: Dumbstruck in a good way.

DC: In a great way.

PC: Yeah. Oh, absolutely.

EC: Clarify. There's all kinds of "dumbstruck." (laughter)

DC: But then, when it became clear that Cornerstone Theater was going to cast their lead performer--.

PC: Amy Brenneman.

DC: --Amy Brenneman as Juliet and cast Romeo as a local black high school student, the attitudes of the white community changed pretty quickly. Not all of them--.

PC: Not all.

DC: --but one of them was the mayor's wife.

EC: And Amy is white.

DC: And Amy--yes, Amy is white. I forgot to mention that. In fact, all of them were white, all of them--.

PC: Yeah, in those days.

DC: --in those days, so that was something that changed later in terms of Cornerstone's history. But there was still enough white participation in it to make it a community-wide thing, and it showed for, like, thirteen performances--.

PC: Thirteen performances, I think.

DC: --in March, and everybody who was connected with it thought it was a great artistic success. Bill was a terrific director, and the--we had one of those wonderful forums sponsored by the Mississippi Humanities Council.

PC: Humanities Council.

DC: In some upstairs room--I kept trying to remember where that was. It doesn't matter, of course, but I often--I can picture it.

PC: Wasn't it just in the theater?

DC: I don't think it was, but--.

PC: I think it was in the theater.

EC: The discussion?

PC: Yeah.

EC: Yeah, it was in the theater.

PC: Yeah, it was in the theater.

EC: It was in the theater up on the stage after the performance.

DC: Up on the stage, okay.

PC: Yeah, they were on the stage, and the audience was in the audience.

DC: I don't know. But that was really the one time that race became kind of overtly recognized as a source of trouble, but also trouble that could be overcome by this kind of collaboration, until the woman who played--the mayor of Mississippi. What was the--.

PC: Verona.

DC: --Verona, Mississippi. Tell me her name.

PC: Mary [Curry?].

DC: Mary Curry, who is the peacemaker at the end of the play who says, "This has got to change. This has got to change." We'd all be together and shake hands with--anyway, it's a big peaceful reconciliation, although people are dead.

PC: Sounds about right.

DC: Right? But anyway, at the discussion afterward, Mary Curry stands up and says, "Yeah, you know, this is all good and wonderful, but, you know, tomorrow your son is going to walk past--."

PC: "My son Allen."

DC: "My son Allen is going to walk past your daughter and--."

PC: "Your daughter," [Anthony Dodgins'?] daughter.

DC: "And they won't speak to each other. And, you know, this will all be gone tomorrow. Forget about it." And awe and shock among the white community, in my poor little heart, too, because I was willing to believe that, you know, we could progress from that as a starting point. But I still think that, to this day, that performance had--an experience of putting that performance on had a huge impact on this community and how issues like that were dealt with even though these things that we've been talking about happened later. I think they were provided with a kind of floor to operate on, maybe. I don't know, but--.

PC: But Mary was right. She just recognized that even though there had been months of people working together the way you have to work together and trust if you're in theater together, even though that had happened, they had hashed out together language, I mean, whether--what's Shakespeare's person--anyway, whether they should

use the word "nigger" or not in performance. And then, there was all this discussion of history and what the word that Shakespeare used meant and blah, blah, blah, so that there were a lot of conversations like that that the cast and crew had input in. They didn't always get the last word, but they had that kind of input, so there was, I think, genuine working together during that period, but Mary spoke to the reality that once this play is over, once Allen doesn't--because Cornerstone Incorporated, Allen and [Dwayne?] Nash and a few of the little kids in the play, once there is not that mechanism, we will go back to our worlds, and that doesn't include our children going to school together or anything.

DC: But it was shortly after that that the first white students auditioned for Peanut Butter and Jelly Theater, and three were in one eight-person cast of Peanut Butter and Jelly. Maybe we could talk about that another time, but a local theater group that performed around the state.

WL: And didn't one of the cast members from the Harvard group, one of the local persons, join that cast?

DC: Yeah, for a reunion show. They did a production of *The Winter's Tale* that they performed at every spot that they had performed in during their tour of the United States, and it was the boy who played Romeo.

PC: Brinston.

WL: Right.

DC: Brinston.

PC: Edret.

WL: So, I brought that up to show how interventionist--how it can be both external and internal.

PC: Okay, and we shouldn't be negative about this, and Carolyn is probably saying we have to quit. But when *Winter's Tale* came back here with Cornerstone and Brinston was coming back home--he'd been on the road with these guys for a while, and they're setting up in the empty lot across the road. Peanut Butter and Jelly had been inside rehearsing, I think--yes, because they were going to do a little bit of a show for Cornerstone, so Dave had them back in here. So, he had Genni McKey with her long stringy blonde hair down to her waist, and Robert--

DC: I wouldn't call it stringy, but go ahead.

PC: All right, straight. (laughter) Robert [Hamlin?], those two had not seen each other since they had worked together, one black, one white. So, they're standing out there in the middle of the street--.

EC: Black male, white female.

PC: Black male, white female. Okay, sorry. And they're standing out there where there used to be a stoplight, in the middle of the street, hugging. Okay. Al Hollingsworth came into the building and said, "How can you allow Cornerstone to disrespect us like that?" It was the day Cornerstone had arrived back in town, and I said, "Al, what are you talking about?" So, we went out there, and Genni and Robert were still talking, and I said, "Oh, those two? That's Genni McKey. Her dad works down at Grand Gulf, and that's Robert. They are Peanut Butter and Jelly." But, you see, the assumption was that if there was a black and white standing--teenagers standing out there, it was these outsiders who had done that, not their own.

JM: I think that's a crucial point, because it goes back to what you were saying earlier. I mean, most of the kids--it was very few of the local kids that were participating.

Most of the people that were white were from outside of the community, and there was--I mean, there might be some people. Genni McKey might be an exception, right, and there might be one other kid locally.

EC: Let me ask--so with *Romeo and Juliet* was maybe the strongest white participation in the theater stuff that Cultural Crossroads has done?

PC: Well, Carolyn might be able to speak to the one that Joe Carson--

EC: The *Deal Rocked Up*?

PC: --*Deal Rocked Up*, yeah, that Maya directed--.

CM: Maya--it was more.

PC: --and Joe wrote.

EC: And that comes later.

CM: Yeah, much later, much later.

PC: Yeah, much later.

JM: Yeah, much later.

EC: So--but when you go to *What It Is, This Freedom*--so *Romeo and Juliet* is, like, '88.

DC: Eighty-eight, eighty-nine.

EC: Eighty-eight, eighty-nine, and *What It Is, This Freedom*, which was with the opening of *No Easy Journey*, so that's December '94, I remember there was the little boy who was Francis Nelson's grandson.

PC: Chad.

JM: Yeah, Chad.

EC: And his dad owned a service station.

PC: Grandfather.

EC: Grandfather. He was one of the only white--.

PC: Right. Chad, as far as Chad was concerned, was born to do theater, and Chad pretty much got what he wanted out of his parents, and he knew--Chad used to come do art with us. He was kind of the same age as [Leconte?], and, anyway, Chad wanted to be in that play, so he came and auditioned for Tim Banker, and Tim said, "Sure, we can find--I mean, the kid has got skills." So, they cast him as a senator from before Reconstruction or something. I don't know, not a kid's part, but Chad got it. Well, his mom came in a couple days after he'd been cast, and he said--she said, "People are telling me that I shouldn't let Chad do this. This will not be good for Chad. Chad will be mistreated. He may be harmed. He may be--," and I just said, "Melissa, he's been coming to our art programs after school. Has he been harmed? Has he--you know, is there a problem?" And she said, "No." And I said, "Well, then why would you assume this is not a safe space for your kid?" And Melissa let him hang in there, and the night--the opening night of that play, his mom and dad were here and Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland were here to see their grandson perform, but--

EC: Was there any other local white audience?

PC: Yeah, we had some.

DC: Oh, yeah.

PC: I mean, not a lot, but there are people who want to do theater, like your father. There are people that want to do theater, and if you live in this little town there aren't a lot of opportunities. So, if you really want that, you come, and you do theater.

So, most of our white participation in theater was people who really wanted to do theater, and then their families come, you know.

JB: I need to pause for a second.

(break in audio)

JB: Okay, we're back.

EC: So, James, when did you get involved in Cultural Crossroads?

JM: I think the first time I ( ) when you were over from the high school. Yeah, over near that little--.

EC: Hut.

PC: Quonset hut.

JM: --yeah. I wandered through there one day, and I saw ( ) going on up in here, man? There were just kids doing everything. It was just like bees, little bees just all over the place. They were doing *I Ain't Lying*. They were doing photographs. They were doing--.

DC: Art.

JM: --silk-screening, yeah, art and stuff, just all kinds of stuff. And I said, "Damn, and a white girl is running it." (laughs) ( ), but, it was beautiful. It was beautiful, man. It was beautiful. I mean, what Patty had them kids doing, man, it was--these kids--I don't think Patty even realized the impact that she has had in this community in terms of children that have gone through here, I mean, like, [Little Red?]. What was her name, ( ) little brother, right?

EC: Rod?

PC: Rod.

JM: Yeah, but it's not just him. It was just [goo-gobs?] of kids who got to do stuff they never would have had the opportunity to do, okay, and it was, yeah, a safe place for them to come, a safe place.

PC: And we insisted from the start that every kid, every adult, should be welcome. I mean, there was a time when Jimmy Smith, who was then president of the school board, came to me and said--I mean, we were always struggling to pay whatever bills we had, and Jimmy came and said, "I can just give you a big space in the school. We can build you a dark room. You can do that in the school." And I said, "Well, yeah, but if we do it in the school I'll be teaching photography. We won't be doing Cultural Crossroads." And it wasn't long after that that a president--and I have no idea which one, because they used to come and go--at Chamberlain-Hunt Academy came to me the same way and said, "If you'll do that up on the hill at Chamberlain-Hunt, we'll give you a dark room. We'll build you a dark room," because at that point we had three kids from CHA who were coming to Cultural Crossroads, and I just said, "No, that's not what we're about," so we didn't do it either way.

JM: In fact, can I make an observation on that, Patty?

PC: Sure.

JM: I never knew that happened, right, but I'll tell you this. That was a wise decision you made not to, because you would have been the slave of both of them.

PC: Absolutely.

JM: And you would not have had to do--been able to do none of what you wanted to do. What you would have been doing is what Dave wanted you to do.

PC: Exactly.

JM: And especially [Jim?].

DC: Well, it's interesting to me that with all of this the last big show that we did was *How the Deal Rocked Up*, where we actually--we commissioned a playwright, Joe Carson, to come into town, listen to people's stories, and then create a drama based on that that local people could perform. We hired a professional director to come in and direct, and in and among the stories that we dramatized was one in particular that had to do with the Civil Rights organizing in this community, and that was [Ms. Gusta's?] story about going around registering people with Rudy--Rudy's last name?

EC: Shields.

DC: Shields. And I got to play the plantation owner (laughter) in that story.

JM: I know you're a good actor. (laughter)

DC: But that was--that was--.

PC: That was Maya's ( ).

DC: Yeah, but that one story dealt so specifically with the Civil Rights Movement, which, of course, is the topic of this interview, but it was there, and it was in context part of a whole lot of other stories told by people about this community, so it wasn't a question of that being the whole play, but it was--and I think that's, in a way, what some of these other things were that we've been talking about. They were bits and pieces of stories that we tried to tell or tried to--there were other stories that we, of course, tried to introduce people to, like when we hired theater troupes to come to town, like the one in Nashville that--.

PC: Carpetbag.

DC: --Carpetbag Theater.

PC: Nubian Theater, both of those.

DC: But Carpetbag particularly affected me because their storytelling process with the [crick-crack?] and, you know--it was wonderful the way--what they were doing meshed with what we were trying to do. But then, at the same time, we would bring in white--the Kentucky place.

PC: Appalachia--you know, Worth.

JB: Apple Shop.

PC: Apple Shop. Thank you.

WL: Apple Shop.

PC: Apple Shop.

DC: Apple Shop's theater thing, which was called something different, but you know what I'm talking about. And they did a kind of--like, mountain stories. They did the Jack stories and things like that, *Pretty Polly*, so it wasn't that we were exclusively looking at stories that involved black material. And when we programmed Peanut Butter and Jelly Theater, we repurposed some classic stories. Like, there was a Welsh story called somebody--*Colin and the Pot of--and the Pot of Brains*, I think.

PC: Yeah, I think that's what it was.

DC: *Colin and the Pot of Brains*, and we rewrote it as *Willy and the Mess of Brains*.

PC: I think you helped with that. (laughs) You were home that summer.

DC: Yeah, you were. You were.

PC: You were home that summer.

DC: You were our fact checker on linguistic propriety.

EC: And you listened? (laughter)

DC: So we would--because we knew our audience was predominately black, we thought that they would like to see that story from a black perspective because it was universal kinds of things that it was dealing with, but other times, you know, we would tell Aesop's fables as rhymed by Tom Paxton and, you know, "The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs" and "The Tortoise and the Hare" and "The Grasshopper and the Ant," things that had no racial component particularly, and the kids had fun doing all of them. Our audiences responded to all of them, and we got our best multiracial audiences with Peanut Butter and Jelly Theater even though this was a theater troupe that many years was--.

PC: Entirely African American.

DC: --entirely African American. When we went out into the world to Boys and Girls Clubs or to--

PC: Libraries, feeding stations.

DC: --libraries.

EC: But not here.

DC: No, not locally, but Mississippi.

EC: But still, to clarify.

DC: But, you know, in Tutwiler we probably had 500 people in our audience, at the Bass Auditorium in Cleveland--or was that--not Cleveland.

PC: No, Greenville, Greenville.

DC: Greenville. I know we had 500 people in our audience, and they did a little poem by a black author--.

PC: Eloise Greenfield.

DC: --Eloise Greenfield, yeah, which was what?

PC: "Honey, I Love" is the one we always do.

DC: "Honey, I Love," "Honey, I Love," which, you know, was done in basically a kind of African American dialect and style, but it didn't address anything but--.

PC: The honey I love. (laughs)

DC: --it's--no, but, you know, what rural issues--what it's like to grow up in the city but have memories of the country and stuff like that, and that audience in Greenville was rapt. I mean, they--when they delivered the last line, "But honey, I love you too," and the place just exploded. I mean, it was--so that, I mean--I believe it was Auden who said, "Poetry does not make anything happen," but I'm not sure I agree with him. (laughs) Some things do happen.

EC: Carolyn, you were in some of the plays, one of the plays. Which plays were you in?

CM: *How the Deal Rocked Up*, and there was another one.

DC: I think it was *What It Is, Is Freedom*, wasn't it?

CM: The one we did--.

DC: The one we did over there.

CM: --yeah.

JM: ( ) *Customer*.

CM: No, that's--yeah.

DC: Oh, the dinner theater?

CM: Yeah, the dinner theater. Yeah. Yeah.

PC: Oh, that's right.

JM: Oh, yeah.

EC: What was it like to be in the plays?

CM: Oh, it was a lot of fun to be in the plays, and then it also--I also got to interact with local whites that I had never had conversations with before or limited conversation. And actually, Nancy [Batton?] and I developed a relationship just from being in one of the plays. One of her daughters--.

PC: Beth.

CM: --yeah, Beth was in one of the plays with me.

EC: ( ) Nancy.

CM: Yes.

JM: I used to drop her off, man, at practice. You all would go to the houses, remember?

CM: Yeah, and from that I became a library board member. ( ).

JM: Yeah, after we restructured the library when it was put downtown, and we put black folks and white folks on it, too, not just all whites.

EC: And Nancy was the librarian ( )?

CM: She was the librarian. Yeah. Yeah.

EC: Did--?

WL: No, I was just thinking about that period. Go ahead.

EC: Did any of your kids do any of the art programs?

CM: Yeah, my youngest ( ) was in it.

PC: And your granddaughter, right?

CM: Oh, yeah, two or three.

JM: Maya and ( ).

CM: Maya and ( ). Yeah.

EC: What was your sense of Cultural Crossroads through that?

CM: Oh, well, like Patty was saying earlier, I knew it was a safe space for the kids to be, and they were actually learning something and getting exposed to some technology and stuff that they weren't going to be exposed to in the school system. And even after I became a schoolteacher, I developed a relationship with Patty, and I would bring my students up.

PC: To bake bread.

CM: Yeah, to bake. I still have those pictures.

DC: Who did you bake bread with?

PC: You.

DC: Oh, ( ).

CM: They baked bread, and it really--it meant a lot to those kids, because they didn't even realize where bread came from, you know? And first grade, I'm still teaching first grade. But it was a very profound experience for them. Mrs. Gusta--no, Gustina.

PC: Gustina Atlas.

CM: Gustina Atlas, who was my algebra teacher--how could I not remember her name? (laughter) Anyway--

PC: She'd throw you out the window. (laughter)

CM: Yes. Ms. Atlas was my algebra teacher many years ago, but she was here then quilting. I actually have a quilt, two quilts, two small quilts that we made--my class made. She came--she and a couple of other people came to my classroom and did some--had the kids draw, and she brought all the materials back up here and put them together and brought them down and presented it to the class, and I actually show it off now in Texas in my classroom.

EC: What did the kids think of the ( )?

CM: Yeah, and they were like, "Ms. Miller, your kids made that?" I said, "Yes, my students made that. Can you do this?" "That's a quilt?" "Yes." "Did you sleep on it?" Oh, God. (laughter) But, yeah, it was a learning experience for me as well as for the kids, you know, and during the summers when I had the chance I would come up and volunteer and help out and work with the students.

EC: On the summer art?

CM: Yeah.

PC: I mean, you--

WL: I did mean to kind of ask you, since you were here, how did the space add to the experience that you had?

CM: The space?

WL: Yeah, you said you had a good experience, this space with the windows and the sections, the quilting here. How did it work?

CM: Well, believe it or not, it's so much different from when we were--now, it looks a whole lot smaller than it used to, but this space was where we baked the bread, and we had--there were several stations set up so the kids could move about, and I know I

had at least 15, 20 kids, little first-graders in here. So, it worked well in here, and when we did the summer art program we made--bound some books.

PC: Books, that's what I was thinking.

CM: Yeah, we did--.

PC: When Maya was here, it was one of the years we did books with Amy and her sister.

CM: And that was a great space. I mean, it looks a whole lot--.

WL: And you could see out the open windows--.

CM: Oh, yeah, and people could see us.

WL: --and people could see you. They could see you.

CM: Yeah. Yeah, they could see us working in here, and I think with them--since you mentioned that--with other people walking by and seeing who's in here and what they're doing, that kind of affected some people or had an impact on some people to wonder, "Well, what's going on in there? I want to go in," because, actually, that did happen when we were doing the bread, because there was always an issue that, "What are you doing with those white folks?" Even as a teacher with my students--that was, you know, a whole lot of years later--that question was still being asked, "What are--why is a white woman still running that? It ought to be this person, or it ought to be that person." Well, does it matter?

PC: Where are those people right now?

CM: Exactly.

PC: I could use somebody. (laughter)

JM: Well, see, that was--.

CM: They're walking around here right now, not knowing anything but complaining.

EC: I'm wondering how come--.

JM: That was one of the embarrassments I was never able to get over, get past, right, in terms of Cultural Crossroads, right, as an administrator working in the system. I could never generate a consistent funding source for Cultural Crossroads because of the politics that existed on the board, which was all black at the time, because of foolishness, right, for whatever reason. And I don't know if it had a lot to do with the constituency they were adhering to, was it personal kinds of relationships kind of going on, right, but we had some--we had fairly strong success in getting the funding stream to Cultural Crossroads when [Percy?] was there. Do you know what I'm trying to say? Okay, we ( ), and we'd twist Albert's arm from time to time. They would. I wouldn't, because I worked for him, but from time to time, to get some consensus. And usually, during that time, we went to them with good projects like *No Easy Journey* and stuff like that. We got some funding and stuff, but they never would make it a line item on the budget.

CM: That was just ignorance.

JM: I know.

CM: It was ignorance and prejudice reversed.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

CM: That's all.

JM: Well, let's call it what it was. There's a certain element in the community, right, even within the black leadership that do not want to see progress because it goes against their agenda. You know, okay, so they'll use Patty as a scapegoat, right, and say,

"Why are you--why does this white girl got to run it? What's up with that?" A case in point, when you wrote your book, okay, that's a classic example, right? I've heard and been part of conversations with numerous people in this community. "Why is this white girl writing this book about the black experience?" My comeback was, "Damn, you write one. You're black. You write one." And then, the conversation quits, and there's just nothing--no comeback. Do you know what I'm saying? I mean, what does it matter? (laughs) What does it matter? I mean, what--here is something that's documenting about our history, and it's factual. Now, if you've got issues with it and you want to punch holes in it, go do that. I welcome it, no problem, you know, but the books you read as you went through high school, most of them were written by white folk. So, what's your point with this foolishness, with this foolishness? If it's objective, good, written material, and it's quantitatively ( ) stuff it's doing--the numbers are there, they're factual, and they're all interviews with folks who lived here.

PC: Worth asked about space. Before--we bought this side of the space in 1989 and bought that the next year, because that kept flooding into this, and we had to get control of that roof. But before that, we had--and I don't know whether you remember this--we had what the girls called guerilla art. We would have art in the National Guard Armory. We'd have art up here in the--what is that thing on Highway sixty-one?

DC: Civil Defense.

JM: Civil Defense.

PC: No, no, no.

JM: On sixty-one?

PC: It's on sixty-one. It's outside. The farmers bring their stuff there.

JM: Oh, oh, oh.

DC: The fairgrounds.

JM: The fairgrounds.

PC: The fairground! Thank you. Okay.

EC: ( ) there.

PC: Yeah. We would have it at the National Guard Armory. We'd have it there. The high school kids used to meet over in what was called Sheriff Two, and we shared the space with the parole officers and things in the afternoon. There was--and then, Peanut Butter and Jelly Theater we just did wherever. The kids used to rehearse out in somebody's front yard, and we'd do it wherever we could move so that when we bought this building and moved in here, people would say to me, "Oh, are you the people that do summer art? Are you the people that do Peanut Butter and Jelly?" So, at one point, I put a sign in the window that said, "We are the people who do," and then, you know--(laughter) and we did *I Ain't Lying* over in the Quonset hut, and the quilters. That's where Mrs. Rankin and Geraldine started, over in the Quonset hut, so it was kind of all over. But when we bought this corner and put a roof on and then started doing the work, we were staking a different presence downtown.

EC: Can we do--.

JM: And what started the Renaissance.

EC: Yeah, started the revival of downtown.

JM: Yeah, the revival of the downtown area.

EC: Can we do one more thing really quick and then take a break?

JM: Okay.

EC: The mural. So, you're talking about this space, right? If you drive into Port Gibson, the mural on that wall is just so eye-catching, so can you tell us about the creation of that mural and about Ms. Gustin and the [Bollards?]--.

PC: Ms. G. and the Bollards.

EC: --I mean, Ms. G., Ms. Gustina?

PC: What was the year that we did *No Easy Journey?*

EC: [Nineteen] ninety-four.

PC: [Nineteen] Ninety-four. Okay, in [19]94, Dennis Sullivan came to see the play that opened, *No Easy Journey*, and Dennis is an architect and an artist. So, while he was here, he was looking around, and he saw that--I think it's a 140-foot wall.

EC: And it's on [Fair?] Street, which we were talking about this morning that used to be the center of black business in town.

PC: And the whole wall, the paint was flecking off. I mean, it just was awful. I have a before picture. And Dennis said, "I've got some time this summer. I'll come down during your summer art program, and we'll put a mural up there." So, Patty, never wanting to think small, in this case did think small. I thought, "Okay, four-by-eight mural," on this 140-foot wall, you know. But in order to paint, even on Fair Street, I had to go get permission from the preservation commission to do this whatever. So, they wanted to know--well, Dennis said, "Patty, I can't give you a design of the mural until I get down there and I meet the kids and I do whatever, but you can tell them we'll use high-quality paint. We'll use primary colors, and it'll be good." So, Dennis gets down here with about twelve high school kids in the all-day and little kids in the morning, and they start drawing all kinds of things, just themselves playing music, doing this, doing

that, whatever, and they're doing all of this on the floor, life-size stuff with the little kids. And then, in the afternoon, Dennis and the high school kids would kind of put this stuff together. It became clear to me that this was not a four-by-eight mural. This was from the corner to the shoe store. This is what this was going to be. But because I couldn't bring them a design or anything ahead of time, they put Keith Alford, an artist out at Alcorn, in charge of watching us. (laughter) So Keith would come in. Keith, she would come in, and she'd just kind of see what we were doing, and we'd do it. And so, anyway, we started doing the painting and all, and I, until this summer, didn't know what a Bollard--well, let me not jump to the Bollard. So, during the day, the lot across the street from us is empty. It's empty all the time. There would be people in their lawn chairs kind of watching us, and the--yeah.

EC: Watching the paint dry.

PC: Exactly. (laughter) And the first thing, we--Dennis said, "You don't even have a sign up saying what this place is. We're going to say this is Mississippi Cultural Crossroads." And Mississippi is, in that way, a great word, so he and the kids made letter about this call, and they danced, you know, S's and I's, so it's--.

DC: Up and down.

PC: --up and down, and the whole length of the 140 feet it says "Mississippi Cultural Crossroads," in these big, easy to read, dancing letters.

DC: So kids and animals can poke around ( ) noses--.

PC: Yeah, and then the kids and animals would be in the center and around and all. So, I got to work once morning about 7:00, and Russ Miller, who was on our board--he worked for the bank. He's since deceased. Russ was standing there waiting

for me, and he said, "I got a lot of phone calls last night, Patty." And I said, "Yeah?" He said, "People are complaining that you couldn't even get the letters straight." (laughter) So I said, "Well, maybe they could wait until we're finished, but we had something in mind," and, of course, I didn't have a clue what Dennis had in mind. Nobody ever had a clue what Dennis had in mind. Nobody ever had a clue what Dennis had in mind, but anyway--then, as Dave said, the kids did kind of self-portraits. Their face would pop out of the letters that were this, or they'd be around the corner and all. So, anyway, I just said to Russ, "We've just got to let this go," and he said, "Okay, I'll just keep them kind of at bay," and we kept on going, and we never violated anything that we said we would do. We used primary colors. It was clear and easy and all of that, so--

DC: Are you going to tell them about when Dennis realized the little kids couldn't reach up high to paint?

PC: I don't remember.

EC: The sidewalks.

DC: They painted the ( ).

PC: Oh, no, that wasn't that. We ran out of space. I mean, we ran out of things for the little kids to do, because--you're right--it was--the high school kids would paint the high stuff on ladders.

EC: You didn't put kids on ladders?

PC: No, we did not put little kids on ladders. So, the sidewalks in this town at that point were the pits. They really were. A lot of them have been replaced. So, Dennis came home to dinner. He was staying at our house. He said, "Patty, I've got it. Tomorrow, we'll have the little kids design what used to be on Fair Street," so there were

juke joints. The kids did horns and things. There were stores. So, the little kids in the morning made drawings that fit a kind of sidewalk square, and then we painted them. It never occurred to me. I had permission to paint, but I had permission to paint a wall, not the sidewalks.

EC: Not the sidewalks that were, like, a walking hazard.

PC: So, I walked into my office, and [Kathy Dodgin?] called and said, "What do you think you're doing over there?" Of course, how do you answer that question? So, I said--.

DC: "Good. We're doing good."

PC: I said, "I don't know, Kathy. What do you have in mind?" And she said, "Well, I'm with the chief of police right now, and we're trying to figure out what to charge you with." (laughter) And I said, "okay, what are the categories?" And she said--.

EC: ( ) arrest you and figure it out.

PC: She said, "Defacing public property." We had painted the sidewalks, and there was no getting it up. I mean, really, they could--I mean, we could have painted it all one color. So, I said, "Look, I--"

EC: Now, and this is--but, wait, this is an abandoned street.

JM: Yes. Yes.

PC: Yes. Yes.

EC: There is not a business on this street.

JM: On the street.

DC: And ( ) wall.

EC: ( ) wall. The sidewalks--somebody will walk down. They'll sue the city for tripping on them.

PC: That's right.

EC: Okay.

PC: And so, my high school kids, this joyous bunch of kids, are working in the Mississippi sun all day long to do this, so I think they ought to get a medal, and they're trying to figure out what they're going to charge me with. Well, they apparently never could figure out what to charge us with, so the side--the painting was there, though years later, when yet another mayor was getting sidewalks done--and our sidewalk wasn't being done in the front or anything, and we have those handicapped ramps and things. Anyway, they were--.

JM: That's the result of the grant ( ) money that we [sold?] when we did the compromise. Now, we've got money, so we're going to ( ).

PC: That's right. So, at any rate, I called and complained that the sidewalk, our sidewalks were being ignored.

EC: In the front of the building and the side, I figured, and I had to sign something for [Imelda?], the mayor, saying that if they put a new sidewalk down I would not paint on it. I would not paint on it. Well, I figured a new sidewalk was worth it, and that was kind of faded anyway. I mean, the mural you see out there now is not the mural--not the first mural we did. That was a second one. But then, the kids are painting, and they're kind of finished, and Dennis is a loose goose at best, so Dennis says, "Why don't we just paint the bollards in front of the building?" Are they still there? I don't even know.

EC: Do you know what a bollard is?

PC: Yeah. I did not know what a bollard was, but Dennis taught the kids and me what a bollard was. And they went out there, and at the end of painting, if they had blue they'd paint the bollard blue. If they had red, they'd paint the bollard red. You know, they finished--.

DC: Candy-stripe or--.

PC: No, no, they were all solid colors. (laughter) We were really--we were pretty [tame?].

EC: ( ) careful. (laughter)

PC: So, the next morning, Russ Miller, our banker, board member, and friend again--and Russ really was good.

JM: He was good.

PC: He must have just hated it when we did anything because nobody would ever call me. They would just call you or Russ.

JM: Yeah. (laughter)

PC: So, anyway, Russ came, and he said, "Patty, the bollards have to be white by five o'clock tonight. You do not have permission to paint on Main Street." We could paint on Fair Street, and there probably wasn't anything they could do about it.

EC: He said--somebody said, "White only on Main Street."

PC: That's right, and so--that's right. So, he said--.

JM: ( ) history. You've got to know the history.

PC: That's right. He said that. So, Ms. G., Carolyn's math teacher, Emily's math teacher, quilter extraordinaire, was up here working.

EC: And not somebody that you would think is a radical if you [didn't know?]--

PC: She was apolitical during the whole business.

JM: Oh, yeah.

PC: So, anyway, Ms. G. said, "You paint those white. I'll paint them black." (laughter) Now, she never did, but it put it right out there for everybody to know what was going on. So then, I got to explain to the kids that we were going to paint these white and that there were battles that we could fight, that we couldn't fight, and those bollards weren't worth that to me, and Emily got a published article out of it, so it can't all be too bad. (laughter)

JM: That's amazing.

PC: But then, that paint--that faded, that one, so we hired another man to come work with the kids, and they did that mural that's there--.

EC: ( ) now.

PC: --and there were adolescent boys that would bring their dates to that wall and say, "This is what we did this summer." Vincent Reynolds is the first one I saw out there one night sharing his work. I mean, high school kids that proud of painting a wall in ninety-degree heat?

DC: Wasn't there some complaining about the black and white hands?

PC: Oh, yeah. Joan Beasley told me. One of the images up there on the mural that's there--well, but Dennis started that. I think we kept that part, but there is a kind of outline of a black hand, white hand, and we were told that that was insightful--inciting, not insightful.

DC: Too much like a ( ).

PC: Yeah.

EC: Incitement? Inciting to riot.

PC: I guess.

EC: So, this--so Dennis came to the exhibit that was in--the opening, so that's December [19]94, so is this summer [19]95? Yeah, it is, because I was home that summer.

PC: Yeah, that was his first summer. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, Dennis came back a number of summers to work, but the first one was out there.

EC: Yeah, but the one--the mural was done the summer of [19]95.

PC: And I really--I had to say to people I really thought it was going to be a four-by-eight patch on that wall. I had no clue that we--I mean, he had the kids out there scraping the paint off and painting, and it was incredibly hard work.

WL: Summer of [19]95, we went to the Smithsonian probably.

DC: No, [19]96.

WL: [Nineteen] ninety-six, with quilters.

DC: Right.

WL: Right. Who can summarize that quickly? I mean--.

EC: The quilting?

WL: --could you--.

EC: The quilting at the folk life festival?

PC: Summarize what?

DC: The folk life festival?

WL: That episode, could the two of you--.

DC: The folk life?

WL: --yeah, why that happened. Why would Mississippi Cultural Crossroads, a little speck on the map of Mississippi and the world, have its quilters invited to come to the Smithsonian Institute?

PC: Because we have friends in high places. I mean, I--.

WL: [Well, then?] say it. (laughter)

PC: I would think we got that invitation because of the work that you and Roland did with us, with our quilters. No?

WL: No, not really.

PC: Who?

WL: I don't know.

DC: It wasn't Kate, was it?

WL: I didn't do it.

EC: So, what happened?

WL: But what happened then?

EC: So, what happened? So, you got invita--Cultural Crossroads got an invitation?

PC: We got an invitation, and we were asked to come as an organization, not as quilters, okay? So, we were asked to come as an organization, so we kind of talked about it, and they kind of said they wanted us to kind of set up like we were at Cultural Crossroads but in a tent on the mall.

EC: This is the folk life festival [on the mall?].

PC: Folk life festival. So, Geraldine, an excellent young quilter, was eager to go--an African American quilter. [Marianne Norton?], a much older white quilter, excellent quilts, probably the best one of her category that this community ever produced, and she had spent her whole life wanting to go to the Smithsonian and had never been there.

EC: And you--and she was one of the whites whose kids stays in the public schools longest after desegregation--

PC: Yes. Yeah.

EC: --and she worked in the schools, too, as an aide after--.

PC: She worked as an aide when you and your sisters were at Richardson.

EC: --so they were among the few whites that were in the--what was then the public schools after most of the white community fled. And that was earlier, but that's part of her background.

PC: Yeah, that's part of her background. So, Marianne Norton wanted to go. Geraldine wanted to go. Essie Buck, an older black woman, wanted to go, and then there was a fourth slot, and I think it was Geraldine who said, "Well, if we're going to reproduce Cultural Crossroads on the mall, you need to be there." Well, whoever we were dealing with at the Smithsonian wanted us to be an integrated group, so they were really glad that Marianne Norton wanted to go, but they didn't want me to go. And I got a phone call saying, "We're just--" it was Newt Gingrich time in Washington. (laughter) And they said, "We're just--we just don't think it would be good if you came. We think it should be another black person." And I thought, "Huh," and I was, of course, miffed on the phone, but I said, "Well, we'll talk about it." And then, I got a lecture about

politics. That's why I know it was Newt Gingrich time, and I just said to whoever was on the other end of the phone, "Listen. Every breath we take in Mississippi is political. Don't you talk to me about politics." But I got off the phone, and we came in here and talked about it, and Geraldine just said, "Look, if we're okay with you, they need to be okay with you, so you tell them we're not coming if you're not coming," which was pretty high and mighty for us, I think, but we did. We said it, and they said, "Fine." And we--it was a glorious two weeks, but we worked our butts off. We were the first people to get there and the last people to leave, and we had that big tent full of kids, nursery schools, families, whatever. We still have about--and then we brought--they said, "Bring material. We want you doing stuff." So, Ms. Buck and Marianne sat in the middle. We hung their tent from the middle--or their quilt from the middle of the tent, and those two sat and quilted with the people who came and wanted to quilt, and then Geraldine and I did the work with the kids, and Geraldine sewed the stuff together and--.

EC: What did you do with the kids?

PC: Well, we did all the kind of quilting activities with kids we do here. I mean, kids--.

EC: We haven't talked about any of that yet.

PC: --kids drew with fabric markers on their kind of--on the fabric that's good for that. We had triangles and squares cut out, and the kids made whatever, and each kind of group of kids we would bag up what they'd done either in a given day or if it was a given nursery school or something, and we brought them home. And so, for a long time, the quilters just kind of put them together. Some of them were this big. Some of

them were much bigger. We've still got about twenty, twenty-five pieces that the women made out of the stuff we did at the Smithsonian.

JB: What size are those pieces?

PC: Well, the smallest one is about inside my arm. I don't know. What is that, a foot by two feet? And some of them are five-by-six or--.

DC: Four-by-six.

PC: --yeah, something like that. They just were whatever they worked out to be. They're in the--.

DC: So, like, [album?] quilts.

PC: Yeah, they're in the back. And then--.

WL: So, were you well received at the Smithsonian? That's the last thing.

PC: Oh, I think so. I mean, I don't know. Weren't we? I think we were.

WL: I think you were celebrated. (laughter)

PC: I mean, we felt great. We felt great, so I don't know. Yeah, the only issue, if we're talking about issues that we had, we brought a certain amount of material, but we had not reckoned with the population of Washington, DC that comes to the festival every year, so that, where we started with pieces that were about a foot-by-a-foot square, we ended with pieces that were about this size, (laughter) because we kept saying, "We need more material," and they kept saying, "Okay, we'll--I don't know what--commission it. We'll requisition it."

DC: "We'll requisition it."

PC: Anyway, it never showed up, so--.

CM: It's going to show up one of these days.

_: Well, good.

PC: At a certain point, the women said, "We're done. We have made all the quilts out of this stuff from the Smithsonian we're going to do." And I got an address, and we sent it back, and we said, "If you don't want it, pitch it, but we're not going to do any more with it."

JM: Well, I think the only other organization in this community that has more impact in terms of people's lives from a positive perspective and cultural crossroads has been the NAACP, really. I mean, nothing--and they were so ( ) about it. The people who were in positions of power when all of that was going on had no earthly idea what the hell was happening right across the street. That's sad. That's sad.

PC: One of the hardest things the supervisors ever did to us--there was a jobs program. I mean, we got a variety of federal jobs program money early on until people realized what a plum that was, and then we were out of the running. But the supervisors many summers would pay kids to work two weeks, or they'd pay them five hundred dollars, however long you could stretch that five hundred dollars. So, kids would come here, and they would have to apply for a job, fill out an application. They'd have to go through an interview process, generally, with Geraldine and me, and then we would pick a dozen kids, whatever number we were--we had money for. And often, if you got a job with us when you were thirteen and you did a good job, you were at the head of the line to get that job the next summer so that we always had older kids teaching the younger kids what the rules were, what was serious about all this business. And then, the supervisor said, "If you work for Cultural Crossroads one year, you can't work for them the next year." And that just--it was devastating, and it was not that we didn't want more

kids. It was just that there was that maturing and learning that went on and teaching of the younger kids that then couldn't happen.

CM: Kind of like ( ) little dynasty.

PC: Probably.

DC: Yeah, but there was also an attempt by them to control who you took.

JM: Exactly. Exactly.

PC: That's right.

JM: Yeah, exactly, exactly.

DC: And that was one of the first run-ins, really, you had with the board, was when they said, "You've got to take so-and-so," and she said, "I don't think we can use him." And they just--they were--.

PC: They weren't used to being told no.

JM: ( ) my job on the same ( ). What you just said, I'm serious, man, I remember that clearly like it was yesterday, because that whole concept of those kids coming over--you know, ( ), okay, but my point is that when they did--when they pulled that old bullshit, you know, I said--I worked for these guys? Okay, that's my livelihood and ( ). And I said, "What are y'all doing? This is ludicrous. This makes no damn sense."

DC: That's a good political way to talk to the board supervisor.

JM: Well, you know, it wasn't an open session. It was behind closed doors. (laughter) But--okay.

PC: But, clearly, their jobs program--.

WL: What would happen if you had ( ) is with people--you can't do--.

PC: If you worked for us once, you were done.

WL: Oh, you can't ever--.

PC: That's what they decided at a certain point.

JM: It was about control. It was about control.

DC: It was about control, but it was also about pleasing constituents.

CM: Exactly, ( ). It was about votes.

DC: It was about votes.

PC: Yeah, exactly, it was about votes.

DC: "We got a job for your kid, so you vote for me." It's perfectly sensible.

PC: And there--I must admit there were some times we--a supervisor made a case for a kid, and we took them, and sometimes it was a mistake, and sometimes it wasn't. But, it was clear we were going to interview the kids. They were going to apply. If this was a job, then we were going to treat it like a job, and the kids were going to be there. The kids signed contracts and their parents saying, for example, that if they didn't finish the program they didn't get paid for any of it, because they'd work a week and then they'd want to be off to wherever, and we just said--we started that with Peanut Butter and Jelly, and then we extended it to the summer program.

JM: See, they think they're little feudal lords. They've got a feudal lord mentality. They really do, and even to today, right now, as I speak, that ( ).

DC: Well, I don't know about you, but I made some mistakes choosing kids for Peanut Butter and Jelly [Theater?].

PC: Sure. You always make mistakes. I mean, they're teenagers, and we're not infallible.

EC: So, before we take a break, James and Carolyn, can you say--kind of sum up what you think is most important about cultural crossroads and the community and sort of--.

JB: I'm going to pause the tape, and we'll go on.

JM: I think Cultural Crossroads having been here in this community has added--has brought value added to the lives of the people, okay, who heretofore would not have had the chance to do that. All right. Do you know what I mean? I mean, just go back and chase--and trace the history of the kids who have come through here, man, and the things that they're doing now. Okay? I mean, I think this is a classic example of it, and it did, I think, create an environment where some dialogue did go on in the white--in the black community around certain issues. You can't all of what Cultural Crossroads did, right, and not have some kind of impact, you know, and I hope it was positive, and I think for a lot of kids it was positive. And again, I ( ) in terms of when she was ( ), how I remember taking her and dropping her off at people's--different people's houses when they were practicing for the play, and I would say, "Damn." I'd go to one of her black friend's house who's in the play, right, and I'd see two or three other white folks driving up and going in the house. I mean, this was unheard of kind of stuff, and they would be there for--everybody has got a bottle of wine or something, and some cheese, and they're up in there chilling, man, practicing for the play.

EC: You thought they were practicing.

JM: Well, I thought they were. I thought they were practicing.

EC: They were.

JM: Yeah, well, she'd know what they were doing.

PC: Maya was a tough taskmaster.

CM: She was. She was.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

CM: But it was fun.

JM: And--last point--I think it broadened people's perspectives and it enriched people's lives, right, and it was a happy place to be. It was a safe place to be, good interactions, good positive interactions.

CM: Yeah, it was great. It wasn't just a wine-drinking session, but, that helped after we finished practicing. And, like James was saying, it gave people who normally would not have an opportunity to have any dialogue to have honest dialogue, and we had some conversations about race.

JM: ( ) [preacher?].

CM: Yeah.

JM: Didn't we have the little--

EC: Oh, yeah, [Harold?].

CM: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

PC: Michael Harold.

JM: He's the ( ), right?

CM: Yeah, so we got to talk with--even within those session when we weren't--after we were done practicing or sometimes in the middle of practice we might have a conversation about race relations in ( ) County, and I got--like I said before, I got to know people that normally I would not have, and I had been here all my life, and they had been there all their lives, and had not even spoken to each other.

DC: Let me say a word about that play. The premise of that play was that Patty Crosby had been murdered, and who--.

EC: Was that the dinner theater?

DC: That was the dinner theater, and who of the many, many people who hated Patty Crosby--.

PC: Might have done it.

DC: --had committed the crime.

JM: Had committed the crime.

EC: Well, see, I planned to do a murder mystery series that has James and Mom and ( ) as the detective. (laughter)

WL: ( ) do it. (laughter)

DC: The Albert ( )?

JM: ( ).

PC: Yeah, I was going to say, did I really die? I can't remember.

JM: Did she die?

PC: Who killed me?

JM: Who killed her?

DC: There was a scream at the beginning of the play, you being dead.

PC: ( ). Yeah.

DC: But who did it?

(break in audio)

DC: Okay. Ask me a question that doesn't ( ) it.

PC: Just don't ask him any questions. Worth and I will do this.

EC: Are we rolling, John?

JB: And we're rolling.

EC: This is Emily Crosby. It's December 4th, 2015. We're at Mississippi Cultural Crossroads in Port Gibson, Mississippi, with Worth Long, Patricia Crosby, David Crosby--who was born many years ago--and we're here with the Civil Rights History Project, which is co-sponsored by the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. And John Bishop and Guha Shankar are also here, and this is our third conversation today. We started with James and Carolyn Miller, and then we talked with James and Carolyn and the three people here about the history of Cultural Crossroads, which is a cultural arts organization in Claiborne County that is in some ways born out of the Civil Rights Movement or some of the themes of the Civil Rights Movement, and it's also an organization that has documented Civil Rights Movement history through art, culture, music, and various other artistic forms and cultural forms. So, we're going to pick up the conversation with some of the earlier days, earlier history of Cultural Crossroads and what it grew out of, some of the cross-fertilizations. And I think you were starting to talk about when and how you met Roland Freeman and, later, Worth Long, who were in Mississippi doing their own cultural work, and how sort of meeting them influenced the founding of the organization and some of the work, what you brought, what they brought, and how it intersected. Does somebody want to kick us off?

DC: Yeah, there are a couple of things. One, we were familiar with the Eliot Wigginton Foxfire project over in Georgia and the whole concept of cultural journalism. Patty was a photographer by this time and had been introduced to that in Chicago but

became very avid about it a little later in Mississippi, so the idea of photographing our new environment--everything was new to us--and learning about it was part of the beginnings, and it kind of led to this grant proposal to the--what is it, the arts?

PC: The first one? The NEH, or the second one, the NEA?

DC: Yeah, National Endowment for the Humanities for a youth project in the humanities. And so, to make a long story short, we kind of put Patty's interest in photography and my interest in cultural journalism together with a group of young people in Claiborne County who would be able to work on that kind of thing. So, that was really the inspiration, was cultural journalism, and that, of course, has its limitations, and we were aware of them, but we weren't sure how to handle them. But the first time I encountered Roland Freeman, who became, you know, an integral part of Cultural Crossroads history, was at a football game at Alcorn State when he was working the sidelines, and I was working the sidelines with Patty's camera, basically. (laughs) And as was common in those days, I invited him to come to dinner at our place, and our place at that point happened to be back in the woods, and it was probably not more than a month after we had--it had to have been, because we moved into the house in the--.

PC: March.

DC: --in March of 1976, so this probably had to be the fall of 1976, and he came back, but he wasn't so sure about himself. So, he--.

PC: He backed the car in.

DC: No, not that particular time, but he was very impressed with our road, which, as you know, is a mile and a quarter off the highway and, at that time, was particularly rutted, because all the--.

PC: Treacherous.

DC: --construction vehicles had been on it to build our house. But anyway, he came, and we talked, and I can remember sitting at the kitchen table arguing about this, that, and the other thing, including--well, maybe I shouldn't--.

PC: Yeah, you should edit that out.

DC: I shouldn't go there.

JB: Could you take your sunglasses off?

DC: Sure.

JB: I just noticed.

DC: They were on for the entire other thing. (laughs) Okay, arguments about authenticity in the representation of people and people's traditions, it was just exhilarating to meet someone of Roland's obvious talents as a speaker and talker who was interested in a lot of the same things we were in, but he had a different point of view about them. So, that was really the beginning of our contact with him, and he was in Mississippi following up, really, the first big project that he and Worth Long did together called Folk Roots, and that was done for the Smithsonian. Is that right, Worth?

WL: In part, and I'll elaborate on that. For the 1974 Festival of American Folk Life, Mississippi was the state that--.

DC: The designated state?

WL: --designated state, and I did field research, six months of field research, and one of the areas that we saw that was very important was, of course, southwest Mississippi. Roland came in at the end of my research, after six months, and was hired to

come in as a research photographer to photograph the people that I had selected to come up and--

DC: Was that mostly for material culture?

WL: It spanned--it would--he had a mandate that was broadly written, but, after conversations, we decided we would include--and the fact that he only had three days to do a photographic study--that we would do most of it, and north--the more northern area of Mississippi, even though the treasure trove that I was really impressed by from having done the statewide research was southwest Mississippi. And then, so I can follow up on that.

DC: Okay. Well, anyway, we got enmeshed with them, and we at the same time were developing this folk grant in the humanities and doing the cultural journalism thing, and Roland was very encouraging about that, and he suggested that, in order to go beyond what we were able to do in this one-year project, we needed to write a proposal to the National Endowment for the Arts, because what we were finding when the kids went out to interview people was a considerable amount of art, anything from blacksmithing to quilting to chair-weaving and things like that. So, we did that, and that led to then some further--well, the grant, I think, was helped through the process by the connections that Worth and Roland had with the Smithsonian and that whole Washington folk life crowd. But with that new grant that Patty mentioned in our earlier interview, we were able to create some projects. The most important one in my mind was one that brought four folk artists to the schools to do one-week residencies with schoolchildren, and we chose folk artists because that was what the grant was about, but also because we wanted the Claiborne County kids to see people who, although they were much older, looked like

them and came from the same kind of places they did. And in particular, with the quilters, these were four women who often enough were the grandparents or--

PC: Or parents.

DC: --aunts and uncles or parents or whatever of children who were actually in the schools. So, when they were doing these quilting projects, we were discovering that the quilting was not a lot like any quilting that we had seen before, so we decided that this was something that we needed to give a broader audience to.

EC: Can I get you to--so when you say "we," at this point--so you talked in the earlier conversation about a community board that had students, so what's the organizational structure looking like at this point?

DC: Well, we had the committee.

PC: Yeah, we had the community board, which included Worth by this time.

DC: No, I'm not sure it did.

PC: Well, I went--.

DC: Eighty-one to--.

PC: I went back and looked. I cheated.

WL: Eighty-one.

PC: I looked at the database this morning of board members of Cultural Crossroads, and by the time we had a board, which I told you was 1980, Worth was on it. He's on the list, and, essentially, Worth and Paula Tadlock--.

DC: Excuse me a minute. Wasn't the board after the incorporation?

PC: Probably, so, yeah, we had to incorporate.

DC: We had two incorporators and--yeah.

PC: Yeah, Sarah [Chandless?] and Nancy and I.

DC: Okay, but I don't think we were incorporated by then, because that arts grant, you said, was administered by the public schools, because we weren't a 501(c)(3) at that point.

PC: Do you want us to sort this out or to go on?

EC: No, ( ).

PC: OK. Yeah--.

DC: Well, whatever.

PC: Yeah. But the community board, if you want us to talk about that, we had from outside the community Worth and Paula Tadlock, who was what's called--.

WL: The state folklorist.

PC: --state folklorist at the time. And then, we had--.

DC: She was at that Oxford meeting too.

PC: Right. And we had, then, local folks. We hadn't lived here a long time, but they were teachers. Your dad was teaching. There was a connection with Chamberlain-Hunt Academy that got us a couple. I think that was really pretty much who was--and high school kids. Pat Morris and Carl [Dorsey?] and Wickes--.

DC: [Daryl?].

PC: --Daryl Wickes were the three high school kids, and just structurally that was the hardest thing to maintain. We had to finally give up having high school kids on the board because by the time they'd get on the board they'd be going off somewhere. I mean, it just--so we just had to decide that high school kids would have an impact on the organization and what we did, but it wouldn't be at the board level, because it just--it

really didn't work that way. Though you asked what your dad meant by "we," I mean, part of what was happening was we didn't have any full-time staff or anything. I was written into grants as part-time staff, usually as in-kind match, so that there were discussions by the board about what we wanted to do. But, in all honesty, what the Mississippi Arts Commission offered, what the NEA offered, the Folk Life Program, that guided what we could afford to do. You were talking earlier about the program that Pat Morris and that bunch of kids was in.

JB: That's the first group of kids you worked with, right?

PC: Yes, and that was money from the Mississippi Arts Commission. They had these artist-in-residency things, so we were able to engage Eloise Philpot Black and Chuck Black to come and teach video and animation. Eloise did the film. Chuck did the video, and we got the kids out a day a week for about seven weeks, and they then learned how to use this equipment that was B-tape, beta tape, what that--.

DC: I don't know. It's reel to reel.

PC: --it predates cassettes. Yeah, it predates cassettes, and it was half-inch stuff.

DC: It was about a half-inch reel to reel.

JB: Half-inch [VIGA?] number one?

PC: Probably, and I actually have some of it in my house because we're hoping the archives will be able to read it someday. At any rate, those kids followed around, and they made films working on the river. They went down and interviewed the people at Grand Gulf, and the little kids who were involved did animations, a day at the zoo and the haunted house. You know the house by Richardson?

EC: Oh, yeah, with Mrs. Richardson or--.

PC: Well, they had way back when lived in it. Anyway, the kids, you know what a source of energy that was for the little kids, so they did an animation of the haunted house. But that was the first, and then we did--the kids did an interview. [Elvin?] was involved in this, did an interview with [Artemise Brandon?]. So, by this time--I mean, things were kind of interweaving, because by this time we must have known that Artemise was a quilter, because there we were, out there.

EC: Did he interview her as part of the film project or--.

PC: We have film of it. Yeah, but, again, things like that overlapped. He could have been standing there with the film when whoever did Artemise's interview for *I Ain't Lying* was there. I mean, we would often have a kid with a still camera, a kid with a tape recorder. And then, when we had money for film, we'd have somebody doing film as well.

EC: You talked about this a little bit earlier, but what kinds of things drew kids to these projects, to these programs?

PC: I think they were often curious kids. They weren't always the smartest kids in the school, though some of them actually were, but they were kids who saw a camera, wanted to know how to use a camera. I think the camera was a big draw, and then, you know, they could--once they satisfied me that they knew how to use the camera, they could take it home. So, they had these cameras on the weekend, taking pictures of their family, or they could take them to school functions, anything like that.

DC: Shoot fashion photography ( ).

PC: Yes. Yes.

EC: We have the best documented set of public schools in the country probably from that era. (laughs)

PC: Well, I wouldn't say that, but Ellen Duffin, she was younger--well, she's four years younger than you. The schools were, again, in difficulty when Ellen had a camera, and she would take the camera to school and photograph the bathrooms, photograph the peeling paint, just because she said, "Well, if it ever becomes possible to show people what our schools are really like, I'll have it." So, Ellen did think of herself as an investigative--.

DC: Journalist.

PC: --journalist. But, anyway, so I just--I really think it was that, and then the kids had a certain amount of cache because they had the camera in the school. We did school programs where the kids were in it, so I think that later spilled over with Peanut Butter and Jelly, I mean, because I'd go to the Piggly Wiggly, and little kids would say to me, "I'm going to be in Peanut Butter and Jelly when I grow up," because they had seen it, and they wanted to do that as well.

EC: I always wondered, you know, with *I Ain't Lying*--and maybe you should describe *I Ain't Lying*.

PC: Well, *I Ain't Lying* is a cultural journalism magazine. I think that's what they call it, but the high school kids would go in pairs. On most cases, I was in on the interview. On a couple, your dad was. We would go interview somebody that the kids wanted to interview, a lady down the street, a man, an auntie, or an uncle, somebody that they thought was interesting.

DC: And they had to justify that--.

PC: Yeah, pretty much.

DC: --to our satisfaction, but that didn't take much.

PC: (laughs) No. So, we should show up with kids shooting film and a kid doing the tape recording and interviewing, and we'd interview people depending on how much they had to say and what kind of a talker they were. I mean, you interview Rose Page Welsh, and you ask her one question, and, as Carolyn said, three hours later she took a breath. Some were not that easy. Carolyn just had gotten lucky. So, the kids did that, and then they did the transcribing. The transcribing was work, not generally enjoyed, and sometimes--I mean, Emily can tell you this--sometimes, kids would graduate without their transcribing done, so another kid would pick up the transcribing. And in those days, it was like dinosaurs still walked the earth. One of Dave's--we paid one of Dave's secretaries to type the handwritten transcripts at lunch. She would give them to us, and we would copy them, but then the kids would, with scissors, cut and paste the articles, tape them onto pieces of paper, and then we'd read to see if they flowed. And then, there were editing questions. I mean, your dad's skills and knowledge of the English language were really quite helpful in helping us edit things, but we made a decision early on--and just the way I put it was--that the people in this community shouldn't have to sound like me, and I couldn't negotiate sounding like them. I'm not verbally skilled that way. So, that guided a lot of our editing in Cultural Crossroads, I mean, in *I Ain't Lying*. I can remember--who's our state senator--Albert Butler, when he first saw *I Ain't Lying*, he said, "I trusted you to clean up the English."

EC: And he was a schoolteacher?

PC: He was a schoolteacher at the time.

EC: And you interviewed him?

PC: Have we interviewed him?

EC: You interviewed him?

PC: No. No, he saw it.

EC: Oh, so he thought you should clean up other people's language.

PC: And I just said, "Albert, we cleaned up glitches. We cleaned up uh-huh's and repeats and all that kind of stuff, but we--"

DC: We're not going to make subjects and verbs agree with one another necessarily.

PC: If somebody else didn't. And anyway, people were finally okay with that, but it was an early-on issue. And then, the kids--.

DC: Let me add one thing about what made the kids interested. At that time--. and probably to this day--there was no art in the schools, visual arts. There were no performing arts in the schools, so any kids that were hungry for that kind of thing, the ability to lay out a page in a magazine or to perform something other than Martin Luther King's speech in elocution class or something--.

PC: *The Creation* by James Weldon Johnson.

DC: Weldon Johnson, *Annabel Lee* by--anyway, that was a great part of the interest, the hands-on work of an artistic nature, that brought a lot of kids to it, and I think that accounts for the fact that they weren't necessarily the kids who got the best grades in school, because that wasn't something that the schools were offering.

EC: I didn't have time for it, but I never understood why anybody would want to do anything that would make them have to write extra. (laughs)

PC: And the kids did have to write more than they did at school, because they had to write introductions. Even if they were only three paragraphs long, that was often a struggle.

EC: So, Worth--

WL: Yeah.

EC: --when you're--I know that you talked about that your dad did a circuit with his churches.

WL: Right.

EC: And I think when we met you, you were doing a circuit.

WL: Right. Well, it has to do with how you structure your research, and I mentioned [19]74, and [19]74, by that time--well, in [19]70, I had--Arkansas was the state that went to the Smithsonian, and I did just a few months of research, but I developed in that area that I was assigned a way to cut the state into quadrants and then to do figure-eight's through the quadrants, and then do a big figure-eight imaginatively around the quadrants, and to do that in a way that coincided with my availability to do it and circle and to be in places where I wanted to be on the weekends. The weekend was very important in terms of doing folk life research, especially in African American communities, because you've got Saturday night and Sunday morning, you know? (laughs) So, in fact, I could take off on Monday. (laughs) But so, in [19]74, in Mississippi, having been assigned for six months and having the whole state as a resource, quadrants, I divided the state of Mississippi up into quadrants and did the figure-eight, the large figure-eight, and did the four segments. And southwest Mississippi was the gold mine of the area, not the delta, which I thought was going to be

the prizewinner for me. I found both in terms of material culture and then also in terms of just the expressive culture that related to lullabies and song and stories, that all, that southwest Mississippi was fertile ground.

So I--at the same time I worked going through the state, I said, "Well, I want to come back to this area," and after meeting, of course, Roland Freeman, who was assigned and whom I mentioned, came in to catalogue the research and only had three and a half days because it rained, (laughs) he flew in, and, of course, I was not there to meet him at the airport but told him I would meet him in Jackson, and we went off up to Natchez Trace and did--he did--he found what he wanted, what he was--he not only found what I had located, but he found--he helped me develop further, to actually consolidate in a visual form what--how a particular culture might be depicted.

And I learned a lot from him immediately, and, of course, we decided to team up and choose an area that I had mentioned, southwest Mississippi, which he had not seen and where I didn't take him in those three days. (laughter) We also didn't go into the Delta, because I had been doing work in the Delta since the [19]50s, the early [19]50s, so I knew the Delta and Civil Rights, and that's important. I'll say it in a couple of sentences. If you didn't--you had to know where you were, and you had to know your environment for your own safety, so I knew not only the backroads. I knew the paths in many areas, especially in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama. I knew how to get in and get out. I knew the bus schedules, right? I knew where I could hitchhike, and where I couldn't. I knew where to say, "Yes, sir" and where to say, "Yes, suh." I--so, it was very important for me.

I--having worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, both as a field secretary and then later as a staff coordinator--then, I had five states. And what did I do? Divided [laughter] each state up into quadrants, [laughs] right. And what did I do? I divided the region up into quadrants. And I circulated. I did, as you say, CC riding. My father was a--and I'm through with it at that point. But my father was a presiding elder, and he had fifteen churches. And I copied from him, methodology for getting to a place and serving that place, and knowing the people in that place. And I applied that to, first, civil rights, and then secondly to culture. And then I passed that on to Roland, and then I shared some aspects of that with Cultural Crossroads.

But Cultural Crossroads, they were developing--one of the things I liked so much about it--and I do--and again, I'll say a couple of sentences--is that in bringing me on board, they asked, "Well, how should we further develop this--our organizational structure?" And one of the things that I could suggest, based on having been in the Civil Rights Movement, was that you include youth. You empower. You choose youth on the board, and then--and that happened. But you include grassroots people. You decide who is it that needs to be served? Who is it you choose to be--to serve? And then, who you going to serve? It's different from choosing. Right, who you going to serve? That's--I'm talking about long-range. And Cultural Crossroads had answered--asked and answered those questions succinctly, all right?

PC: One thing I didn't say, when you were talking about the board and the structure, is that Worth would come from wherever he was. [laughter] On the Greyhound, on the day of a board meeting.

WL: [That's right?].

PC: And you know how plan-ahead I am. It would have been--I would have loved it if he'd come the day before, so I would have actually known he was going to be there. But Worth was always there. And the conversations before and after board meetings with Worth were the ones that helped Dave and me understand the community we were living in, and how we needed to do this if it was going to work, really.

EC: Do you remember any examples?

PC: My God, Emily, I'm seventy-three. Let's see.

EC: There'll be a quiz later.

PC: Yeah. [laughter]

WL: ( )

PC: Well, I think the one thing--the--I don't know, Roland and Worth always said, "You do work--fieldwork, in your case--you have to exhibit it first. You have to bring it back and show it to the people who generated it, the communities that produced it."

DC: As a matter of respect for the community.

PC: Yeah. I mean, it just has to be a given, so that always--*I Ain't Lying*. You know, the kids did these interviews, kids took the photographs. I think it would have been fine with a lot of them if that had been the end of it. But we said, "You trusted us to do this interview, we're going to publish your interview." So, we only--I mean, things changed and the organization kind of grew out of hand. So, there are only four issues of *I Ain't Lying*.

But the quilts--I mean, we started--the women started teaching--demonstrating at the school, teaching, so we started having a quilt show, because--and the women were

quite articulate about that, that, "We make these quilts." And they put them on the beds or it keeps them warm. And we were saying, "We're going to hang them on the wall. We're going to treat them like art, we're going to judge them. And then your kids can sleep under them if you want." But--so that I think, though, those commitments on our part, as an organization, to always exhibit, publish, to produce a play, come from that notion that you have to show the work in the community where the work comes from, wouldn't you say?

DC: I would definitely say that. And after we did the workshops by the--with the folk quilters in the schools, we were also able, then--well, because people would come out of the woodwork and say, "Well, my mama quilts."

PC: "My auntie quilts."

DC: Or, "My grandma and my auntie would--." So, we were kind of swarmed with people who could quilt. And so, we decided that the best way to return that to the--first of all, when the quilters finished a quilt, it belonged to the school, and the kids who made it, the--.

PC: Well, we put every kid who worked on a quilt--we put their name in a bag. And then, they got to pull them. So, those five quilts went home with kids. A thing that makes me take a deep breath, because I didn't photograph them before they went home. And I just--oh, how young I was. But we just--if a kid worked on a quilt, their name went in the hat. And those quilts, those quilts went home. But the thing we also learned--.

EC: It'd be interesting to find--see if you could find some of those quilts.

PC: Yeah.

WL: Yeah.

PC: I--we've been through a lot of that, Em. In terms of the paperwork--you know how many pieces of paper I have. And when I was going through it, I just--I didn't even see a piece of paper that said, "These four kids took them home." But when we did those quilts, as Dave said, people started saying, "My auntie quilts. Lady down the street quilts." This--so, before we ended that residency, we said to the kids, "Bring the quilts to school." And we transformed Addison. We hung them willy-nilly, up and down every hallway. And that's when we said, as an organization--.

EC: Who let you in the schools?

PC: It was Mr. Watson, still, because Sarah was in the ninth grade. Yeah, Sarah was in the ninth grade. By that time, you were over at P.G., so--but what it said to us was that quilts are magic in this community. There isn't just Melissa Banks, who Rowan knew, or just Geneva Gibson, who I met, or--and the other two quilters we found--because our daughter Sarah went to school and said, "My mom's got some money to pay some quilters, but she only knows two." And Maria Farmer said, "My grandma quilts." And Bonnie Rankin said, "My mom quilts." So, the next day, I knocked--oh, sorry--I knocked on those doors. I knocked on the doors and said, "Hi, I'm Patty Crosby. I'm Sarah's mom, and I hear you quilt." And that's how we got those two to come to school."

EC: So, where did Ernestine Rankin and ( ), so you got her name from Sarah's classmates.

PC: Yeah. Yeah, from Bonnie.

EC: And then knock on the door.

PC: And I said to Mrs. Rankin, "Hey, I'm trying to get some quilters to come to school for a week." And Mrs. Rankin, all of her children were in the Claiborne County public schools at the time. And she said, "I'm kind of afraid of those schools." So, I said, "Well, I'll go with you. I'll be there every day." And so, I did, and she was just a glorious hit, because she's a natural teacher.

DC: And you took a lot of pictures of that.

PC: Yes, I did. [laughs] By that time. I'm not a--I do learn. Yeah, we have lots of pictures of that first residency. But one of the things I learned, because she was teaching the kids and me--she made a quilt with the kids out of, well, diamonds. They used triangles. Two triangles together to form diamonds. And I'm, all along--I, who believe you can do anything, am thinking this is not going to end up being a quilt. These kids are sewing and she's teaching. And anyway, so--but by the end of a week, there was a quilt. In fact, by the end of a couple of days there was a quilt. She threw out the top and then she looked at it and said, "Oh, no." Took a--scissors and cut straight through one set of the diamonds, and I just--.

DC: Well, first of all, you have to say that the set of diamonds didn't line up.

PC: No, they didn't. They didn't, but--.

DC: She did her diamonds in strips, like this.

PC: But--.

DC: And she cut across them this way. And she got three quarters of a diamond here and a half a diamond here, and a quarter of a diamond here.

PC: Just--and for somebody with my toilet training, it was really hard to watch. But, you know, she then--and the kids quilted the thing. Each one of the four quilters

needed a different quilt frame. They had to have their own structure. I had to take them to the--get the material in Vicksburg, because--now, these were women making quilts out of scrap. But here was this person saying she had money to pay. So, we went off and bought the kind of material they wanted, but--.

DC: And they each got a stipend for being in the school.

PC: Yeah, they got a stipend from the school.

DC: Which again, gave them recognition as artists. They were--just like bringing a painter into school, they got the same kind of stipend that they would get.

PC: And that may have been something we learned from Worth. It may not have been. But we always paid local people to work. In the schools, here, money was always pretty short, but we made sure that whenever we asked for money, it included payment for the--in this case, women--that were going to do the work.

EC: And Miss Rankin, at a certain point, started doing story quilts.

PC: Yes. I think Roland is really the person that's responsible for that. Mrs. Rankin's father was shot and killed when she was a very young girl. And Roland--she was telling Roland about that, and he--she took Roland to the spot where her father had been shot and killed. And he said to her, "Why don't you do a quilt about that?" And I think that was her first story quilt of a kind. And then she started making what she called her story quilts, which were more often blocks of children walking to school, her mother churning butter, that kind of thing. Though she also did one--a big story quilt that was coming back from her father's funeral. All the children in a cart, coming home.

DC: I'm going to interrupt for a second and--.

EC: So--.

M1: I think Worth was about to say something.

EC: Well, yeah--.

WL: No, I liked the fact that--.

EC: Is it--are we rolling?

M1: We're rolling, yeah.

WL: Yeah. I liked the fact--when I ( ) well, first of all, I liked the openness of the Crosbys to the whole idea of asking people what they want and then trying--and ask them what they need. And then trying to deliver to those needs, to those felt needs. And I think that was kind of a principle that was--.

DC: Definitely.

WL: --developed. Other principle was from the community to the community. From the community to the community, not from the community to the world necessarily. That will come. But from the community to the community. Once you started showing the community beautiful images of itself, whether it's a picture, a photograph--. I remember when Roland took a photograph, and he always returned a photograph to--in the project in which we were--to the person he took the picture of, especially to the family. And they say, "That's me!" [laughs] Or they would say, "Wow, that's nice." It's almost like saying that's store bought.

When people--they make a prettier garment than anything in the world, and they say, "Oh, that looks store bought." And [laughs] so, you--that whole store bought legitimacy was happening in this community. I was beginning to see it. Also, letting someone take a camera, of--something of value home with them--I can imagine what

happened in some families. And I can see some of the kids sleeping with that camera, for more than one reason. [laughs]

PC: I mean, I was fairly tough, and I just said, "You're the one that came and learned how to do this."

WL: Right.

PC: "You're the one that gets to use it."

WL: Right.

PC: "Somebody else wants to use it, you can tell them where we are."

WL: Right.

PC: "And they can come." But they--if they wanted it again, they knew they better bring it--.

WL: Right.

PC: --back this time.

WL: So, the question is, would that happen in the school? And you can answer that? Would that happen in the school?

PC: I think the right kind of teacher in the--with the right kind of stuff could have that happen in the school. I think it's tough. I don't know.

WL: She might send the chalk home with the child. [laughs]

PC: Well, all right.

WL: ( )

PC: We'll talk about Sarah later. [laughter]

WL: Yeah.

PC: But Sarah has had a number of programs in the schools--.

WL: Right.

PC: --in Jackson where she has given the kids cameras.

WL: Right.

PC: Several hundred dollar cameras.

WL: Right.

PC: Little kids.

WL: That's right.

PC: And they have taken them home and brought them back.

WL: Right.

PC: Now, she was an extra, but she was doing it through their classwork. So, I think it's not impossible.

WL: And she was trained through Cultural Crossroads.

PC: Yeah, of course. [laughter]

DC: Well, let me--.

WL: Yeah.

DC: --pick up something and try to bring us back to a place we were before.

WL: Okay.

DC: The--.

EC: Can I--before you do that, we were talking about Miss Rankin.

PC: Mm-hmm.

EC: What was the big award Miss Rankin got?

PC: National Heritage Award, in 2000. No. No, wait, 2000--2000 was--big year for us. We got Coming Up Taller in the Crossroads Quilters. I think it was about

2000--was the actress--was Jane Alexander still chair? And Dan Sheehy? Yeah, it was kind of the year Jane was leaving that job, and I think that was 2000, but--.

DC: It was 2000.

PC: Yeah.

DC: Yeah.

PC: But Dan was the one--at that point, Bess had left and he was in charge there.

WL: I was ( ) [laughter]

PC: Yeah, were you?

WL: So, I--right, that's what I can remember about it.

EC: Okay, I just wanted to get that--.

DC: Right.

PC: Right.

EC: --on the record.

DC: And that prompts me, before I go onto my other thing, to add to that that the main reason that Mrs. Rankin got that award, other than politics and stuff like that--.

WL: Right.

DC: --was that every time there was an opportunity to nominate one of our artists for an award, Patty would put the application together and work with the artist to provide the materials that were necessary, whether it was an award at the state level or the regional level or the national level. And so, there was an increasing recognition for the artists who came through or worked with Cultural Crossroads. Thing--awards that, first of all, just--the state arts commission had a program where it was an apprentice

program. You could apprentice people to a master craftsman. And so, the--you had to prove that the person was a master, first of all, and then that there was somebody that wanted to learn that. Well, we had four quilters who were ultimately named master quilters through that. And we never hesitated to use that designation, master quilter. And then, there was a state award that the--Herron Award, which involved not just folk art but visual art ( ) well, Mrs. Rankin won a Herron Award. Gustina Atlas won a Herron.

PC: And so, did [Jeannie?], yeah.

DC: And so, that--then, when you have that kind of background of successful award-seeking, you get to the national level and you've got a track record, and things go from there, so--and that feeds back to the same thing you were talking about. It's better than store bought kind of thing.

WL: Oh, right.

DC: But what--.

PC: And we had photographs.

DC: Right.

PC: I mean, I think that was--.

DC: Oh, absolutely.

PC: --critical--.

DC: The documentation--.

PC: --to all these things.

DC: --was always there, so--.

WL: Right. And it was always good. The documentation was excellent.

DC: So, let me go back now to the slitting of the diamonds in the quilt.

WL: Right.

DC: Because--.

PC: I have the part she cut off.

DC: Because that was an a-ha moment for both Patty and me. Hers was one of shock. Mine was more one of recognition that, hey, we're dealing with something here that we don't understand.

PC: Don't have a clue.

DC: Yeah, and that ultimately lead to that paper presentation at the Folklore Society meeting in Oxford, where we tried to account for the fact that symmetry, obviously, was not a particular concern. Regularity of pattern, even, was not a particular concern in the aesthetic of Mrs. Rankin, and that we could find other examples of that kind of thing in other quilters. And so, that was when I first began to develop this idea of two different sets of aesthetic principles working in the white community and in the black community. And Worth came to a presentation I made in--believe it or not, for the--what is that literary--that you wouldn't even--.

WL: Yeah.

DC: --know, but we should--.

WL: Whatever society it was.

DC: Yeah.

WL: Right.

DC: Was--.

PC: Are we talking about recent or ancient history?

DC: No, recent, not--well, 2009.

PC: Oh, Atlanta, okay.

EC: Oh, Atlanta.

PC: Yeah, okay.

DC: Yeah, but it was SAMLA. Modern Language Association, this--.

WL: Okay.

DC: It was the Southern Regional Modern Language Association, and they had a sub-section on crafts or something like that. And Worth brought it up the other day when I picked him up at the airport, that that--I--by that time, I had developed a much more coherent way of talking about the construction--.

WL: The architecture.

DC: --the architecture--.

WL: Right.

DC: --of black quilting that I had already kind of put together in a little quilting booklet called--

PC: *Quilts and Quilting in Claiborne County*.

DC: --*Quilts and Quilting in Claiborne County*, like, a very specific kind of focus. But that was--that a-ha moment that came out of, again, this--just the notion that we were working with people in the community, and we're able to see things. And then, when the Folklore Society of Mississippi couldn't understand what I was trying to say, that just provided more incentive to try to keep that kind of thing coming.

EC: One of the things that was--couple years ago, you sent me a couple speeches that you gave about Cultural Crossroads.

PC: Yeah.

EC: Maybe around the [19]90s? I don't know when it was. But anyway--and you--.

PC: Yeah, one was in Oxford. Dennis asked me to do one--and did, so it was probably around then.

EC: And in it, you talked about some of the early racial dynamics that you were negotiating. And so, when Cultural Crossroads was founded, you've got, in Claiborne County--it's eighty percent black, and the public schools are probably ninety-nine percent black.

PC: Yeah.

WL: Right.

EC: And almost all the local whites go to Chamberlain-Hunt Academy.

PC: Or CEF.

EC: Or, yeah, or the sister elementary school. And yeah, Cultural Crossroads tried to be a space that anybody in the community could come to and be welcome. So, what was it like to try to create an interracial space in such a segregated context?

PC: I think in some ways, ignorance is bliss. I mean, I really didn't know how determined people were to keep things as separate as they were. One of the things we did after kind of getting started with the quilts, or really at the same time, the teachers on the board said, "We don't have any art in the school. We want to have some art in the school or art for our kids." So, that's when Barbara Green walked into our life and we started having these residencies at school. But one of the things we did was a two-week summer art program in town. And Keith Alford, who was teaching art at Alcorn, on the faculty, said she'd be happy to help run a summer art program. And Keith is white and

Episcopalian, in the community. So, Keith was a bridge, because even though Dave and I are white, our children were in the public schools. And so, that separated us out from the white community in a way that just wasn't really bridged. So, with those early summer art programs, we had a lot of white kids, because Keith was the artist and Suzanne Disheroon and a couple of other white women were on the faculty with Katie Young and [Toncy Wicks?] and Delores. So, we had a kind of--.

DC: Who are black women.

PC: Who are black women, right. So--.

EC: Teachers?

PC: Teachers. They're teachers in the public schools and they were teachers in the art program. So, for the first couple of years, we had about sixty kids. And they were really--quite a large number of white kids for this community, for this space. And then, Keith sent her son to the private school. When he started school, she was no longer interested in working with Cultural Crossroads or the teachers at Richardson Primary, because her kid wasn't going to go there. And by this time, we had about two hundred children coming to the summer art program. So, I met--and we had the white kids at the summer art program now were Emily--were Sarah and Jessie. I mean, really, we had dropped down almost--.

EC: My younger sisters.

PC: Yeah. Emily's younger sisters. We had dropped down to almost none. And I met Suzanne Disheroon at the Piggly Wiggly. And I said to Suzanne--she had taught in the program; her kids had come initially. So, I said, "Suzanne, what would we have to do to get the white kids to come back to the summer art program?" And she said,

"Oh, well, you'd have to keep the ratio one-to-one." And I said, "My God, if all the white kids came, that would mean we'd have to eliminate about 150 black kids. That's entirely too high a price to pay." So, that, even though, initially, in that program, we had a balance of adults and kids and all of it--wait a minute, can I just ask, are you in trouble? Do you--.

DC: No.

PC: Okay.

DC: I'm trying to stop ( ) but I can't.

WL: Yeah, okay.

PC: Oh, okay. So, we just--we always tried to have the space good. We insisted on having the artist be as good as we could get, on the assumption that if the art was good enough, people would send their children. And that happened, sometime.

DC: If you build it, they will come.

PC: That happened sometime. Especially with theater, but also when Wyatt Waters came. A Jackson watercolor artist worked with us a couple of years. And the afterschool program, we had white kids because Wyatt Waters had a reputation. He was a known artist in Jackson. So, these are some of--this mural is some of the stuff that Wyatt did with the kids, so--but the reality was, Dave taught at Alcorn. You guys were in the public schools. So, anybody who cared about that stuff knew it. But we had white kids from CHA, couple of times, come down to work on *I Ain't Lying*, but they were always boarding kids that were kind of desperate to get off the hill. And we were just there and offering cameras and excitement, so--I don't know whether that answers your question, but--.

WL: Yeah. Just thinking about color separation versus social class separation now. Say something on that one. [laughs]

PC: Well, Barbara Green, an artist, white woman from Colorado, came driving through town. This is the kind of luck we have. She's driving her daughter from Colorado to Florida. Stops here, likes this town. On a Sunday afternoon. Stops in the chamber of commerce and says, "I'm an artist, I want to do some work with kids. I like this community, and who should I call?" She said, "Well, there's that woman over there at Cultural Crossroads. You could call her." So, she gave me her phone number. And Barbara Green came back for three, maybe four years as a volunteer. Worked in the public schools during the day. Sometimes came in the summer. She brought a friend of hers. So, we did all kinds of artwork. But the first time Barbara and I were over at Richardson, we were just--we were doing these gorgeous self-portraits with the kids. We were doing smaller things of them, what they wanted to be when they grew up. They did a series of, "When I'm angry" or "When I'm fearful." All this kind of stuff.

And then Barbara said to me, "Patty, you can't not keep a record of this. There are some of these that are just absolutely wonderful." Well, I had--I knew what I liked, but I never thought of myself as an art judge. So, Barbara starts picking out things. And she didn't pick out the work of the teachers' children. She picked out--she didn't know who these kids were. She just picked, like, Nikita Jackson. [Hermanville?]. She picked one of hers one day--and I had a rule that if we picked a kid's artwork, they got to do another one, so that the kid would leave one with us but got to take one home, okay? So, the next day--she picked Nikita's, so Nikita did another one. And Barbara said, "Oh, my. We have to keep this one." I said, "All right, we'll keep this one. But whatever she does

tomorrow goes home with her." But Barbara didn't pick the artwork of the teacher class, which is the--.

DC: The nobility.

PC: That's the nobility in this community, really.

DC: [Really?].

PC: So, early on, we had some problems with class. And then, we had kids who would come in here like Rochelle. Rochelle started coming in here when she was in the third grade, and figured--well, she came first with her class, because the princ--we were doing work at school, but the principal, probably wisely, didn't want us doing batik with third graders in the public schools.

DC: Yeah. [laughter]

PC: Okay, but that's what we were doing. So, Dolores got all the kids to get signed permission slips from their parents that the bus could drop them off at the corner and they could come in here. And then, if they burned themselves, it was on Dolores and me. And Rochelle happened to be in that class. So, she came in with her class, and the next day she came by, she came in and she said, "You really don't have to pay to come in here?" And I said, "No, you don't have to pay to come in here." And she was probably here every day after that for the rest of her school.

EC: Say something about her art?

PC: Well, she's--she does very interesting art, as well. And one of her pieces was chosen to be part of the governor's wife's GIVE Awards or something one year, which was a really big deal. We all got dressed up, but--.

EC: Right.

PC: --went for the award ceremony in the capitol and all that kind of business. But Rochelle has a really interesting eye. I find it painful that we never had the resources to train her as an artist or to provide her--provide--I don't know what's missing. If I knew, I could have given it to her, maybe. But something so that she could've been an artist on her own terms, but--.

DC: Well, a certain amount of stability--.

PC: Stability in her life.

DC: --in her life.

PC: Yeah.

DC: Because her family situation was just--.

EC: Right.

DC: --terrible, and--.

WL: Yeah.

DC: --so--.

WL: I remember at one point--. [phone rings]

M1: Excuse me, can we stop for just a second?

PC: Yeah.

WL: No, you can't.

PC: Yeah.

WL: But I remember--.

PC: Here.

EC: Okay.

PC: I'll just ( )

WL: Yeah.

M1: Okay, hang on a second. Hang on a second, Worth, I just--.

WL: Yeah.

M1: --we got to answer this phone call or--.

WL: No, no, I--.

M1: --cut the phone off. Sorry.

WL: This wasn't--.

PC: Hello? Cultural Crossroads.

WL: --but it had to do with--when the newspaper started seeing the success, the newspaper changed somewhat--.

PC: It's me, Carter.

WL: --too.

PC: But we're interviewing, still. That's okay. No, no. Okay. Bye. Okay.

WL: All right.

DC: What's he going to do?

PC: He's--he just wanted to say hey.

M1: I just stepped all over Worth's line, so--.

WL: Okay.

M1: --got to do that one over again.

PC: Sorry.

M1: Okay, Worth.

WL: Yeah. I was--the--who--I was on the board, just [19]80 to [19]90 or [19]81--

PC: [Nineteen] eighty to [19]91.

WL: --and to [19]90, but at a certain point, there was--seemed to be a--the state newspapers and the local newspapers seemed to view you in a different way, don't you think?

PC: Well, yeah.

WL: What--.

PC: I mean, the local newspaper, though, did start publishing our pictures. I would take to Edgar pictures the kids had done.

WL: Right.

PC: In fact, I just sent--.

DC: You're talking about photographs?

PC: Photographs, sorry. Or pictures that I had done of kids' artwork and all.

DC: Right.

PC: But he--it--I don't know, he published the stuff when we brought it to him, ready to publish.

DC: Right. But he put it on the black page.

PC: Yes, that's right. [laughter] I'm sorry, I--the *Reveille*, the local newspaper, when the girls were growing up, the back page was always white folks' announcements, weddings, funerals. Just, you know, the white page. And then, when the black kids could--or black community in general could get in, it had its own separate--that news had its own separate page. So, Sarah was at Northwestern--our daughter, Sarah, was at Northwestern, and she had just been named a Rhodes Scholar. And so, that was something that the *Reveille* couldn't skip. And so, he put a story in there. And Sarah

said, "Oh my God, I'm on the white page!" [laughter] And it was the first time for her to be on the white page. But anyway, so--but--.

EC: And, I know we're winding down, but--.

WL: Yeah.

EC: --there's one thing. YPCEP was a pretty--was it?

PC: Yeah.

EC: Was that the name?

PC: YPCEP.

WL: Yeah.

EC: YPCEP?

PC: I mean, David and Roland just really hated that we called it that. They wanted us always to call it the Young Person's Cultural--the Young People's Cultural Exchange Program?

DC: Person's, I think.

WL: Right.

PC: Person's. I never got Person's and People right, so ( )

WL: Right.

PC: --go find the magazine. Yes, what about it?

EC: Just say something about it? What it was?

PC: Roland had friends--us--in Claiborne County. He had friends--or David's sister, actually, worked with Yaqui Indian children in Tucson. And he had a friend, Christine somebody, who--a white woman who was a principal of a grade school in Vermont. And Roland had this notion, as he moved from one space to the other, that it

would be a great idea to get these children together, these organizations together. So, he and David and Judith and the Group for Cultural Documentation raised the money to do what was initially a two-year program where we hired an artist and we did--we had meetings where we talked about culture and art and all this kind of stuff. All of us, the staff from all three places. We did it here once, once in Tucson, and once in Vermont. And--.

DC: Very structured program.

PC: Very structured programs, yeah. Judith and David are organizers par excellence. But then, we would come back and do artwork with the kids based on food, celebration--what are the other categories? God, fun, play, work. The things that make us people, okay? We would have a discussion with the kids about those, with the artist, and then the kids would do artwork. And sometimes, we were careful, we gave them a piece of paper a certain size and a--and paint or a marker. Sometimes, we just said, "Go for it."

DC: I did imagery for--.

PC: Right. And what--I think the most powerful thing I learned from that first time was that with every piece of artwork, we asked the kid what they had done. So, every time, after they had done something, we had their words. And some kids talk a lot more than others. But we had their words about this painting or how it fit into celebration or food or whatever. And then, at the end, we were able to bring two of our children to the other two sites, and then two kids from each site and staff came here. I think what we learned--I probably shouldn't say this, because it's such a smart aleck crack--but what we learned about culture and food is that all kids in this country like pizza. [laughter] I

mean, you know? Now, we learned all kinds of other things. It really was a powerful program, I think, for the organization, because it changed from then on what we expected when we were doing art.

And then, at the end of it, David and Judith and Roland said to us--David Levine and Judith Katz, by the way--said to us, all of us, "Well, wouldn't it be great if you could do this on your own, in the states?" Well, nobody took them seriously but us. And we, then, with their help, organized a program where we had a group on the Gulf Coast, Moore Community House--a group, a social action kind of group, Operation Shoestring in Jackson, where they--at that--up until that point had not really done much art with their kids. They had tutoring after school and daycare and that kind of stuff. And then, we had a group in Madison, Mississippi, which is the wealthiest, I think--either top or second wealthiest county in the state. So, we had a kind of mix in that. And so, for two years, we did our own version of the Young Person's Cultural Exchange Program.

WL: With decent funding from--.

DC: The Group for Cultural Documentation?

WL: No, the--.

DC: No?

WL: --the state said--yeah, I'm--we were in Biloxi together at a certain point, and I just realized that that--who had sponsored that conference there in Biloxi? They would--you had gotten some money from them--.

EC: ( )

WL: --one time.

PC: No, no, no.

WL: Starts with a K.

PC: Kellogg.

WL: Kellogg.

PC: Yeah, thank you.

WL: Yeah, right. That's the commercial. [laughs]

PC: Yeah. Kellogg helped with that and--God, the other one just went out of my head. But you're right, we had a good bit of Kellogg money.

WL: A decent--.

DC: Was it George's--.

PC: So, that--.

WL: Right.

DC: --group in Jackson? Community--I forget it.

WL: Right.

PC: FMS. Foundation for the Mid-South. Yeah, I think we got some money from them for that, too.

DC: Yeah.

EC: So, been a full day.

PC: Oh, God, yes.

WL: Yeah.

EC: Final--.

DC: This guy is still eager.

EC: Final thoughts?

PC: Well, I'll have to say this, and it's really kind of embarrassing to me, but one of those early conversations with Worth, he said to me, "Well, what do you envision Cultural Crossroads doing?" And I said, "I don't know, it seems like a kind of nice part-time job." [laughter] But I don't know. I think we did good work.

When I was getting ready to retire in 2008, we went to archives and history and showed them our stuff, our administrative stuff, and made the case that this organization was a really interesting piece of this community's history. And, to tell you the truth, you could figure out what the NEA was funding and what the state was funding by the programs we were doing, if anybody ever cared to figure that out. So, they agreed to take it. And at this point, they have about two hundred boxes of our--.

EC: Administrative stuff.

WL: --administrative stuff.

EC: That's not the other stuff.

WL: That's not the quilts. The Mississippi Museum of Art bought seventy-five of our quilts. And, for me--okay, so people say, what did you accomplish? I don't know. We had a good time while we were doing it, we gave kids experiences. But, in addition to that, now the public record has on it--I mean, the public record includes the history of this organization, and by extension a lot of the history of this community that was going on.

The state museum--well, it's not officially the state, but the art museum in this state has seventy-five quilts made by women in this community. And we're now working on--we have between 1,500 and 2,000 pieces of children's art upstairs, and we're looking for a home for it. That was our artwork done from between [19]80 and

2008. And I just--I think it's artwork that you wouldn't find, I used to say, in the middle of Indiana, you know? It's just a different place. So, we're hoping--that includes about twenty-five quilt collaborations with the women and kids, and just all this YPCEP artwork. So, I think, in the end, we did good work, we had a good time doing it. And I think now, this community's voice has a better chance of being part of the public record than it did before we started.

WL: Right.

PC: Don't you think?

WL: Yeah. I just say amen. [laughter] Okay?

M1: Say amen, somebody.

PC: Yeah, yeah. [laughter]

DC: Let me have one last thing. I think the thing I learned most completely is that no accomplishment is permanent, and that any of the good that we may feel we were able to accomplish here is reversible, and that we wish to God there was some successor who would take Cultural Crossroads, or some other organization in Port Gibson and Claiborne County to the next level. Because I think without that, there is the same kind of danger we find in our political life nationally, that progressive ideas are being challenged everywhere and need to be asserted as aggressively as they're being challenged.

PC: Well, maybe. We look--okay, a case in point. Dave did a lot of work on the Rabbit Foot Minstrel Show that was headquartered in this community.

WL: Yeah.

PC: I mean, we--our kids uncovered some of those really horrible, racist images when they were researching for *I Ain't Lying*. And I remember Worth once asking you, "What do we do with these?" And you said, "Well, sometime you'll understand them." I thought, well, thanks. But we didn't publish them, because we couldn't.

WL: Right.

PC: We didn't have a context for them. Fifteen, twenty years later, Dave--.

DC: Two thousand six ( )

PC: --really dug into the history of that minstrel show. Found out it was started by an African American, Pat Chappelle, in Florida. And so, we did an exhibit that puts that show in its context.

WL: Context.

PC: Took us a while to finally figure it out. So, on the one hand, parts of it are sitting over there, kind of a mess. It's not anywhere hung up or--pieces. But the research is done. It's kind of out there. So, if anybody ever wanted to know about that piece of this community's history and the broader minstrel show business, the work has been done. Now, I'd be happier if it were hanging on some walls where people could actually see it and it was in order and made sense.

WL: Right.

PC: But nevertheless, it doesn't go away, just because--.

DC: ( )

PC: --right now--well.

DC: Someone could walk in and throw it out tomorrow.

EC: Well, just so--.

PC: It's on your computer, too.

EC: --the institution might not stay, but the work of the institution doesn't get undone if the institution--.

DC: Right.

PC: Yeah.

DC: I understand that.

PC: See, I think that's--.

WL: Yeah.

PC: --where I have to go.

WL: And especially if it was education and arts and culture, and it generated youth, because somewhere down the line, you're going to see another Crossroads.

PC: Tammy, who was in here today--.

WL: Right.

PC: --kind of helping me with Cokes and ice and stuff used to work here pretty much full time. Now it's sort of when somebody can pay her, or she comes up here and quilts. One of these is probably her.

DC: Another master quilter.

PC: Another master quilter. And she was born in [19]69. So, she's the generation that's the children of those other women. And Tammy had one of her quilts chosen to tour China for two years. Now, I don't know, it doesn't put bread on her table. But I think that's a kind of--an important thing that you can't take away.

WL: Right.

PC: Tammy's sisters, Tammy's nieces, they know Tammy's quilt--.

WL: Right.

PC: --was chosen to be one of two dozen from the United States that toured China, so--.

EC: Right, and I know that even though we've been talking off and on about this for about five hours--.

WL: Right.

DC: God.

EC: --that we've barely scratched the surface ( )

WL: Yeah, no doubt about it.

EC: --in some ways, of the programs and the work and the--.

WL: Right.

EC: --folk that have made up Cultural Crossroads, but I think that's a good place to call it a day. So, thanks, everybody ( )

DC: Well, thank you, Emily--.

PC: Yeah.

DC: --for--.

WL: Yeah.

DC: --providing this--.

WL: And we also--.

DC: --opportunity.

WL: --want to thank somebody who has been holding--.

PC: Yeah, right.

WL: --hold--.

EC: And I should also say--.

WL: Let's acknowledge--. [laughs]

M1: That would be [Guha Shankar?]--.

WL: Yeah.

M1: --who has been holding the boom.

GUHA SHANKAR: It's been an honor and a privilege.

EC: And we'll be doing a full interview with Worth Long, about his life and work in the Civil Rights Movement, the modern Civil Rights Movement, the [19]50s, [19]60s Civil Rights Movement--.

WL: Yeah.

EC: --on Sunday.

WL: Yeah.

PC: You know what?

WL: It'd be--.

PC: If we need--oh, go ahead, sorry.

WL: No, no, no. No, go.

PC: If we needed some justification, there's always Charles Payne--.

EC: [laughs] Yes.

PC: --who called this place a freedom school.

EC: That's right.

DC: Oh!

EC: He did.

DC: There you go.

EC: In 1994.

DC: He did?

PC: Yeah.

EC: He did.

F1: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by the Audio Transcription Center 3/29/2017