

Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region

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Interview of

Elaine Eff

By

Roger Horowitz

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HOROWITZ: This is an interview with Elaine Eff, conducted by Roger Horowitz in her house in Catonsville, Maryland, on June 27th, 2007.

Elaine, it's good to be here with you. Tell me about your family and your mother and father and how you were brought up.

EFF: Excuse me? My family?

HOROWITZ: Yes, really quickly on your family.

EFF: I am the youngest of two daughters born in West Hartford, Connecticut, in a year that I don't reveal. My dad was a dentist in the Air Force. My mom was a sweet little girl from Boston whose family went to Baltimore.

HOROWITZ: Stop for a second. [recording interrupted]. Okay, Elaine, let's try again. Tell me some more about your family.

EFF: Do you want me to start from the very beginning?

HOROWITZ: Yes, in the beginning.

EFF: Okay. I was actually born in West Hartford, Connecticut, my father's home. My father was an Air Force dentist. As a result, we moved a lot. Actually, by the time I was eight we had lived in about that many different places on the East Coast, from West Hartford to East Quogue in New York on Long Island near Montauk Point, to West Hampton Beach on Long Island long before it was "the Hamptons," and Silver Spring,

Maryland, and back to West Hartford, Connecticut. Ultimately when my parents divorced when I was seven, we moved to Baltimore where my mother's family had relocated from Boston. [We] lived in an incredibly wonderful nurturing family environment, surrounded by my mother's sister and her family and my mother's brother and his wife and kind of extended, in-law-type family. It was great.

I started school in the fourth grade in Baltimore and, in fact, opened up a school. It was called the Cross Country School. I went through junior high and high school. My mom remarried when I was thirteen, which was, in retrospect -- when you're thirteen, who cares? But absolutely it was just the most wonderful thing. She married a junior high school geography and history teacher, coincidentally the teacher in the rival junior high school to the one that I went to. So it was kind of embarrassing because people would say, "Hey, you're married to Mr. Goldberg -- your mother is married to Mr. Goldberg." The worst part was that in -- I don't remember -- ninth grade I had a crush on this guy, gorgeous guy, dumb as a box of rocks. I used to grade my stepfather's -- ultimately he became my father when he adopted us at a later age. But I used to grade his papers, and this guy was just so stupid that I would give him 55s to boost his score. My dad caught me doctoring his scores.

Anyway, I learned the lessons of hanging around with the dumb guys with money early on.

But essentially I'm a product of Baltimore City public schools and proud of it. I went to Forest Park High School, which was kind of the incubator for the likes of Barry Levinson and a number of Broadway writers and producers and an incredible amount of really creative people who are in Hollywood today. Mama Cass Elliott of the Mamas and the Papas went to the school. It was just every -- a lot of the major political figures who didn't go to the boys' school, City College, went to Forest Park. It was great, and it was really at a time when a city education was it. You looked down on private schools at the time because they were just sort of like incubators for country clubs but were not really the place where you got the great education then.

In fact, I was an art major in high school and just loved doing things with my hands. I loved the art work. I think I was an art major because in the fourth grade when I came to Baltimore -- and talk about coming from a broken home before the word existed and the fact that my -- I became the teacher's pet in the fourth grade, which is really a great thing for confidence building when your life has been pretty much

shattered, given that I came from a "broken home" when nobody knew what a "broken home" was.

Then in the fifth grade I had a teacher who was incredibly talented in the visual arts. My best memory was painting -- we did this backdrop for the school show that year, and I remember painting the entire backdrop of the stage of the school with fuschia flowers. Again, it was just sort of this place that I really kind of enjoyed seeing my work. I wouldn't be surprised if doing art was in fact what led me to the work I do today, doing exhibitions, doing museum work, working with traditional arts, but also working with communities and seeing something done, going from an idea to a finished product. That is what I absolutely love the most, is just sort of walking in one day and hearing someone's idea and emerging months or years later with a tangible product, whether it's an entire museum, whether it's an exhibit, whether it's a book, whether it's a film, whether it's a tour. I love seeing the tangible.

I had a great experience the other day actually. I was at the opening of a museum that I was a consultant.

HOROWITZ: Which museum?

EFF: It was the Gibson Island [Historical Society] Museum. Gibson Island is an extremely privileged community on the Chesapeake Bay. It goes back to the 1920s. It was designed by

Frederick Law Olmstead for the wealthiest families of Roland Park in Baltimore City to have a place to sail and have their children in a wonderful nurturing outdoor environment. I was brought in about two and a half years ago by a colleague, a writer, an editor, who was from the community. They needed to take a better look at this historical society that they had in the community that went back to its founding. I basically went through it, gave them my ideas, my thoughts on how it would be a more effective tool for everyone in the community. Two and a half years later, I got the call. I got the invitation that the opening was on June 22nd and I needed to be there. I went with bells on. It's a gated community. You can only get in through invitation.

Basically I saw my work -- not even my work. I just planted seeds. They said that without my idea -- and actually, this was not the story I was telling. I said to them, "You've got to determine what stories you want to tell. What is this about? What are the stories? People want to find themselves in this museum and this space. They don't want to just look at pictures of boats and houses and look at awards. They want to see themselves." I said, "It's really about the story." They organized this entire museum around stories. It is brilliant. It was so exciting.

But at the opening I remember sitting into the evening with another woman who is a writer who I had known by reputation but had never met before. We're watching the reflected sun setting on the tip of the Magothy River by the Chesapeake Bay. I'm saying, "Look at that beautiful boat." There's this one boat that was just moving in the water, and the colors on it reflecting on it and the water and the bridge and the gatehouse and everything were just very, very thrilling to me. I said, "Do you see that boat? It's so beautiful." She said, "I don't see things. I don't see visually. I only see words. I'm a writer." At which point I pointed out that all of the masts when they were grouped together made all these Ms. I said, "Don't you see mmmmmm?" She said, "No, I don't. I only see words."

That was a real eye opener, just a week ago, for me how differently our brains are wired and that really some of us see things. Some of us hear stories and look for stories. And some of us only see words. I'm married to a newspaper editor, and I guess it was a real heads-up to me about what my husband sees when I'm seeing something. My husband loves a great sunset, however, so I think he sees --

HOROWITZ: Give him a break there. Well, we got through your high school. Before you go and you have this art

background, you end up heading into some serious academic work. What happens at the high school that you decide to go through college and graduate school and pursue that kind of a career track?

EFF: Fortunately, I came from a high school that you went right to a good college. I remember in choosing a college my requirements were that it not be local, that it be at least so many hundred miles away, that it be in a kind of somewhat -- not a huge school, that it have some Jewish population, because I was raised in the ghetto, the Jewish ghetto, of Baltimore. I really did not know any non-Jews growing up. It was just kind of this one here, one there, but it was very unusual for us. We had a very contained community. The synagogues were there. Our school -- in fact, not until I went to a twentieth high school reunion and I saw all these black kids there, and I thought, "Who are these people? Where did they come from? Were they at our school? I didn't know these people." But in fact, when I went to my thirtieth reunion I realized, yes, I did know these people. They were actually good friends, but we were so completely contained within the Jewish sort of embrace growing up.

So I picked Western Reserve University -- that was just before it became Case Western Reserve -- in Cleveland. I also

picked -- the other requirement, and this is interesting, knowing me, is that it had no sororities, because I grew up in junior high school and high school we had sororities. Though I was always a member and kind of in the in crowd, I just didn't really want to get into that any further.

So I went to Western Reserve, and my world opened up, but it opened up really significantly when -- I forgot to mention. I actually graduated from high school with Spanish and art. I've loved languages. Here's another one, the spoken word, was something that really spoke to me. I had an incredible Spanish teacher in high school named Mr. Calvin. In fact, I had him for the eleventh and twelfth grades. I took French and Spanish in high school and loved languages.

So I went to Western Reserve, and I actually was majoring in Spanish, which is kind of interesting. Little did I know how smart a move that was going to be. I took my junior year in Spain. I would say that's what changed my life. That's when I really broke out and kind of learned about other worlds and exploration, not that we were provincial. We traveled a lot. We were not -- I think we traveled a lot. This was in an era when you didn't pick up and take your kids to Europe. I was actually only the second person in my college to ever take my junior year abroad. I went to Madrid, the University of Madrid,

with the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters through New York University. I went over on the *S.S. Independence*. It was one of those symbolically great journeys. [I] befriended some amazing people just on the boat, one of whom has been a friend for life and was heading to Florence for her junior year and is now a kind of world renowned scholar of Italian cinema and teaches at Yale. There were some wonderful things that happened that you barely knew -- you know, really ever recognized.

All I can say is, I remember my classes. I remember taking a literature class, Spanish literature class, from a guy who I felt like was a contemporary of Don Quixote's. I just remember that when he spoke -- and we did read *Don Quixote*. He was transformed and he cried, and it was just this amazing experience. My art historian was Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño, who was like this well-respected and much published authority on certain works of art in the Prado. I lived -- the school was really between -- the Prado was between the school and my house. I literally walked through the Prado and through the Retiro Park every day. Wow, it was an amazing thing.

Now, that said, I went to Western Reserve, and the Cleveland Museum of Art was in my backyard. As a Baltimore child, I was raised with the impressionists, with the Cone Collection here, which was one of the premier American

impressionist collections. My love of that period of color was instilled at a very early age. But all I can tell you about my junior year abroad is that we literally left class, I would say, every Friday, but I wouldn't be surprised if it was every Thursday, and packed our little knapsacks and stuck our thumbs out on the road. I traveled for a certain period with a guy that I was seeing who I knew as Ricardo Kaplan. Only when I went back to the States, and actually had transferred to George Washington University for my senior year, and I showed someone a picture of one of my trips, and they said, "Ricky Kaplan? I know him." [Laughter]. Anyway, just sort of like this suspended world you live in there.

I befriended a woman named Conchita Thornton from Vassar, and we literally just became -- we traveled all over. She came from a traveling family, almost like a traveling circus that had houses in Mexico and other places. We would literally get on the roads, stick out our thumbs, and say, "Well, let's go to Segovia," and we'd end up on the Costa del Sol. We'd say, "Let's go to Barcelona," and we'd end up -- a ride would stop and they'd say, "I'm going to Munich." "Oh, okay." So we'd go to Munich. We went everywhere. With Madrid at the center, it was just amazing. I don't exactly know when my love of talking to strangers kind of became this sort of way of life for me, but

I wouldn't be surprised if -- well, certainly taking your junior year abroad, even going away to college, kind of affirms the fact that you're interested in "the other." We would literally just learn so much.

In those days, when you hitchhiked -- this was the late 60s -- you would travel, and everybody was so proud of their country, and the pace was so slow. There were no superhighways then, and certainly [not] in Spain. The joke was that the roads were built -- you'd get paid by the mile, so that's why they were so many S-curves and so many winding roads. But they would want to say -- they would say, "We're going down south. We're going to go through all these incredible wine and sherry districts. We want to show you the wines." So by the time we'd get to our destination we would be totally looped but had learned a lot, if we could remember it. So basically, junior year abroad, a real eye opener for me.

[I] did the whole world basically for my three- or four-week Christmas vacation, just got a flight that just kept going and going. I saw Damascus and Lebanon and Istanbul and places that don't exist any longer. I got into Jerusalem and Jordan and to Petra. I can't believe what I did, that I was so smart to have known that those were of value and ancient places that I may never see again. I gambled in the Casino du Liban in

Beirut. We would just walk through the universities and meet with the students. I don't know how we did it. Nothing cost anything. It was a gift.

When I came back to the States, I had a choice. I could either go to the most expensive university in America, which was NYU, essentially continuing my junior year and having only been to two colleges and therefore come home and work for the summer, or I could stay abroad and go to a less expensive university and one that would take a transfer in a senior year, which there were about two in the country at that time. GW, George Washington University, was it. That's what I determined to do. Ironically, today George Washington University is the most expensive private university in America. Who'd have thunk it?

I came back to GW, had exhausted the Spanish department already at my former university, and determined that it wasn't a strength at GW. So I went into their International Relations program, got a degree in International Affairs and Spanish, and had in one year probably the best education I ever imagined. I didn't realize at the time, but the smartest, the most productive, and the most committed professors all came back to Washington for some other job, often to go into the administration or some federal agency, and then taught at GW

either adjunct or full-time. I had just amazing, amazing professors.

After GW, what else would you do for a job with a BA in international relations in 1968 and having witnessed the riots? It was an amazing, amazing time. I went to New York and got a job at the UN [United Nations], of course. What would any self-respecting degree bearer do? When you went to the UN in the fall, you automatically went to the General Assembly pot. So I worked for the General Assembly in public relations, which was brilliant. They offered me a full-time job, and it was in public information, I think, but the office was in the basement. I just said, "I don't do basements." I'm what, twenty-one years old, and I said, "I don't do basements."

So I freelanced. I got a job using my Spanish with a writer. He's better known for writing the book about the making of *2001*. In fact, he interviewed me between acts in the movie theater, because he would go see *2001* the movie every day to write the book. The book that he asked me to contribute to, to do research on, it was going to be a *Time* magazine of the year 1492. Here I had the Spanish, so I could go into documents. [recording interruption].

So I did that research. I don't even remember that the book ever happened. I worked on some other little freelance

jobs. I just remember -- I got there after I graduated in September. I remember that Thanksgiving. I was in New York City, and it was the loneliest. I chose not to go home for some reason. I don't know why. It could be because -- I don't know at what point I established a work pattern of working, working, working and working up to the minute that something was due, or waiting until it was due and doing it. But I've always filled all the space possible. I wouldn't be surprised if I was involved in something.

I remember -- I don't remember where I was living or if I was staying with my sister, but I just remember walking down 3rd Avenue or somewhere in the 70s on the East Side and going into a deli on Thanksgiving and getting a turkey leg the size of Cleveland. That was my Thanksgiving, because I turned down every invitation. I was too busy. I just remember it was the saddest, saddest eye-opening experience. I had a boyfriend. I had a boyfriend at Cornell. I don't know why I chose to -- it seemed so important that I couldn't do anything.

A couple months later -- and I was still doing this work and enjoying it. I wasn't looking for a job. In February I went up to Ithaca to go skiing and took a fall and broke my leg. I went back to Baltimore to recover, which was kind of like the beginning of this going home period for these certain short

interim visits for healing or rejuvenating. I got a Kelly Girl job until I could walk and manipulate the crutches. I don't even remember where -- I remember where I worked and I remember what I got for lunch, but I don't remember what the job was. It was so meaningless.

I also got a job -- when I was in college I took a part-time job with a travel agency. What I would do is package tours for people in this day before computers. But I remember the packaging mechanisms on IBM Selectrics.

Anyway, I broke my leg. When it healed I said, "I'm not going back to New York." I lived in a shared one-room house. I had somehow gone back to get stuff. I just remember -- my bed was -- we had a room and a living room/kitchen/bathroom. I even think the bathtub was in one of those kitchen bathtubs. I just remember -- my roommate -- I used to have to sleep with my feet in the fireplace to stay warm. There was this horrible smell always of kind of -- the exterminator had been there. I remember going back for something at some point and cockroaches came out of everywhere. I said, "That's it. If I were in New York with a broken leg, I would fall in the street" -- it was the middle of winter. No one would pick me up. I would lie there until they found the bones and had to check my teeth to

figure out who I was. I said, "That's it. I'm not going back to New York."

[I] healed, had a friend in Boston who was a friend from Cornell who had gotten a job at MIT, not a love interest at all but just the only person I knew in Boston. [I] went to Cambridge and got a job in Harvard's Community Legal Assistance Office in the Spanish community. My Spanish came in -- everything I did, in a sense, I walked in the door because of my ability to speak Spanish. Within three months I was office manager, just the way things worked. I remember that they used to say to me -- and I couldn't get in early. This was like my first job. I couldn't get in at nine o'clock. Like I said, "Why should I get in at nine o'clock? The students aren't here. I get the job done. As long as we get our work done, it shouldn't be about the schedule. It should be about accomplishing the task." You know, these Harvard lawyers didn't quite agree with me, but I sort of maintained my job.

Then all these young, bright Harvard law students, of course, became my great friends. This was the 70s and Boston was the -- Cambridge in particular was the hub for antiwar activities. We elected [George] McGovern president. Little did we know that nobody else barely knew who he was. It was a very political, touchy-feely, wonderful period. Everybody was going

off to be a Nader's Raider and to work for Ralph Nader and to be involved in some project that would change the world. I learned that there was going to be a project where they needed someone who spoke Spanish to work with farm workers in California. I'm pretty sure I quit my job. I stayed at it for maybe a year or two.

But I had also gotten really interested in spinning and dyeing and weaving natural fibers and crafts. I got involved with the group at the Radcliffe Institute, which was kind of an adjunct institution of Radcliffe College, which was the sister college to Harvard at the time. [I] took this textile history course and went out and started doing field work. The whole California experience, which when I went they put me in LA, of all places. The job they actually put me in was for a book, an exposé of Governor Ronald Reagan, to dump Reagan. I was going all over the state. I remember being in San Diego and being in Visalia and all the farm areas. It was just wonderful. I remember when I got out there, they wanted to rent me a car. I just said, "That's silly. It's going to be really expensive." I needed a car. I said, "I'll buy one and I'll sell it at the end of the project."

I had a choice of two cars, a Corvair or a Volkswagen. Corvair was the car, the lemon that Nader had brought down. So I

couldn't be a Nader's Raider and drive a Corvair, so I ended up with a Volkswagen bug and went all over California in my Volkswagen bug. When it was over, it had no value, so I said, "Let me drive it home, save you the money of sending me home, and I'll sell it when I get back." Finally I just said, "I can't sell it. It has zero value. I've got so many miles on it." It was fifteen years old or twelve years old. It was a 1960 bug.

Anyway, I got back -- decided to go back, hated LA, couldn't live there but had a wonderful trip along the way, courtesy of this little Volkswagen and Ralph Nader. [I] saw the Grand Canyon and Las Vegas and lord knows what else. I traveled with a friend from the law school and came back.

I had so much money in the bank, because I was making \$10,000 a year. You could save five thousand in those days. I had so much money in the bank that I took time off. What I did was really develop this interest in traditional crafts. I did this project for the Radcliffe Institute on a very, very obscure basket type that came out of Deerfield, Massachusetts, called the Deerfield Landscape Basket. No one had ever looked at it since they were made in the early 1900s, kind of a women's craft movement, kind of the arts and crafts movement of the 1900s.

What I had actually done without knowing it was discovered a forgotten form that had gotten lost over time and commingled with "Indian baskets," so that at the time I was discovering them, bringing them out of obscurity and talking to the last survivors or the basket tradition who were women in their eighties -- Marjorie Howe, I remember distinctly, who was the scholar on the subject. I was finding baskets on the auction block that they were calling Indian baskets and was able for very little money to get them for Deerfield, old Deerfield, Historic Deerfield, which was a living -- well, dead -- museum of decorative arts and colonial homes.

That was probably my first real experience connecting an object to people. It was also in an environment where the women met and talked about not only technique but also -- I was the one person who was interested in the story far more than I was in the [object]-- well, I would say equally at that time. It was during that period -- and I would substitute teach to pick up money. I didn't need another full-time job.

But I took one. That's right. I got a job with the state in this new area called Consumer Protection, which was interesting because the only two states that had real consumer protection laws and were really kind of neck and neck with being state of the art were Maryland and Massachusetts. They put me

in a community -- they created a community consumer protection office, and we had lawyers and consumer advocates. We went into the Hispanic communities in Dorchester in the poor communities, and I got to work with a lot of the Spanish-speaking people who came into the office. It was amazing. It was this very diverse office. I was probably -- there was a young woman from south Boston, from Southie, who was total the genuine article. We had a Hispanic fellow. The office manager was an incredible black woman from Dorchester, community organizer. It was just a great place to work. It was near Brigham's ice cream place and I could get a coffee ice cream float every day. We had a ball. It was in the Roxbury-Dorchester area. I did that for a couple of years.

I guess I somehow -- I had graduated from GW and would get an occasional burst of newsletters from them. This newsletter came to me one day and it announced that there was a three-week seminar in American folklore organized through GW and a University of Virginia professor named Charles Purdue, Chuck Purdue. It was going to be held in northern Virginia near Washington for the summer for three weeks -- intensive, very intensive. I read what it was about -- traditional arts and music and story and spoken word, sung word, you name it. I said, "This is the stuff I do, what I love, what I'm enjoying,"

because I was into traditional arts and crafts. I loved talking to people. I signed up. I packed my bags and I went for three weeks to Marymount College. The diet doctor murderer was president of the college at the time. Was it Pritikin? What was the guy's name?

Anyway, I took this course. It was a residential course. It kind of was a requirement that you lived there, and it was also a requirement that the people they brought in as faculty spend -- it was designed so that they lectured in an afternoon, spent the evening, socialized -- it was kind of a closed community, though people came in from the Washington area, and then they lectured in the morning. There was an overlap with the next person who came in.

Well, if you would read the litany of who were the great folklorists and the great young Turks who became the great folklorists -- I got to hear from, learn from, sit at the side of Henry Glassie, Kenny Goldstein, John Szwed, Archie Green, Ellen Steckert. The list went on. It was every great folklorist in America [who] came in. John Burrison, the authority on southern pottery; Terry Zug, the authority on southern pottery; Alan Jabbour, who became the head of the American Folklife Center, a world class fiddler.

So there was music. There was talk. There was gossip, which, at that point I didn't know but was getting [unclear]. There was bourbon. I learned to drink bourbon, which had never touched my lips. It [the course] ended, not coincidentally, with the first days of the Festival of American Folklife, which was still pretty new. It was only in its sixth or seventh year at that point. All of these people were gathering because they had roles in it. They were the people who were either doing interviews, narrative stages, or had done the background research.

One of the field trips, among others -- actually, one of the field trips I remember we went to the Eastern Shore. We went to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, which played a role in my life later. We went to the Folklife Festival. We met all these people. I remember meeting Bill Ferris, and Bill Ferris had a profound effect on my career. I met Roger Welsch, the folklorist from Nebraska. And we got to hang not just with them but with the performers, with the talkers, with these incredible people who were living folklore -- Ray Lum, a mule trader from Mississippi. I remember the -- what were they called? The Ducks, the something Ducks, [the Duck Hillbillies] this great bluegrass country band of just like real guys who were mechanics in their real lives back in Mississippi. It was outstanding.

I got to meet all these people. Both Henry Glassie and Kenny Goldstein, who were very instrumental in programs, one at Indiana and the other at the University of Pennsylvania, said, "You've got to get a degree. You're a folklorist. Come and get a Ph.D." I said, "Ph.D.? No." I was now six years out of [under] graduate school, and I had attempted to learn Russian in the meantime.

HOROWITZ: You mean six years out of undergraduate.

EFF: Out of undergraduate, yes. I was now six years out of GW, out of undergrad, had learned about earning a living and also enjoying life in a creative fashion. Graduate school had never occurred to me, and a Ph.D. was not anything that was in my vocabulary.

Ultimately they all put their heads together and said, "You need to go to Cooperstown [Graduate Program]." Cooperstown was/is a graduate program, a master's degree program, in museum studies and folk art, and one of the leading scholars in folk art and kind of museum builders, Louie Jones [Louis C. Jones], was the head of that museum program. They basically said -- actually, Bruce Buckley was head of the program, but Lou Jones was the folk art guy. They said, "You're a folk art person. You've got to go to Cooperstown." So I go up and I meet them

and I interview them, and they say things to me like, "Well, Baltimore -- you must know the painted screens."

I kind of looked at them cross-eyed and decided that this was really interesting. We actually struck a deal that if I was ready they would make me a special student. I could not get into the program because it had a rigorous application process that was long past. This was now probably July or August and the semester started in September. If I was ready to completely overhaul my entire life and come to Cooperstown, they would get me a job in the museums and I could take classes, which was cool. So I did it.

I got a job in the collections at the New York State Historical Association, which has one of the premier -- or has had and probably still does one of the premier folk art collections, American folk art collections. I took classes. But I was a special student. I wasn't in the class. But I got to meet the students, who come for a one-year program, and spend time with them. But early on I was told by Bruce Buckley, "You're not a student. You're a special student, which isn't like an elevated position. It's actually the opposite of that, so we really don't want you coming to the students' parties and mixing with the students." It was like, "Oh, okay."

I learned what being depressed was. It actually took me back to the turkey leg on Thanksgiving. I was thrust back into this lonely world. I said, "Okay." I started dressing in black probably -- I think I really did -- and sitting in the back of the classroom. I was like this outsider. It was my birthday in November, and there was a party at the now world renowned Simon Bronner's apartment in Fly Creek in the country. Oh my God. Folklorists had to drink bourbon. Oh my God, did I drink bourbon, and I'm not a drinker. I remember that I went home with Gail Andrews, who was a student in the museum program, and Jabez Van Cleef, who was a local townie, a real incredible guy. They took me home and I basically told them I wasn't allowed to be their friends. [Laughter]. I couldn't play with them because Dr. Buckley had said I couldn't play with them anymore. They said, "That's silly. We'll see you secretly." Gail Andrews and I became absolutely the best of friends to this day. I'm her daughter's godmother. I was maid of honor in her wedding and was there at her most recent second marriage. Basically, we would sneak off to dime-a-dip suppers and to all these events.

Finally came the end of the semester, and I was giving my final paper in the folk art class, which was a very big deal. These presentations were quite a big event.

I should just say that while I was working in the curatorial department, my job -- and this was 1974. In 1974 it was the vogue among museum curators to separate paintings from their frames. Don't ask. We now know that the frame is part of the document. They are inseparable unless, of course, it has been changed. I just remember -- I had the best frame collection. They were getting thrown away. While I was going through the frames, I'd pull out one and I said, "What are the window screens doing here with the paintings?" I picked it up and I looked, and this was probably September or October, early in my arrival. I looked at it in just the right way and I see this monochromatic image of a pastoral idyllic scene in black and white kind of sfumato -- what's the word, starts with an SG or something? It's a painted screen. There were several of them. I put them back in. I got on the phone. I got in my car. I went to Baltimore. I started doing my research on the painted screens.

My mother's final words when she shipped me off to Cooperstown were, "Oh, you're going to study folk art. I guess that's like the painted screens." That matched with Louie Jones saying, "Oh, you're from Baltimore, the home of the painted screens." I just said, "I've got to put this together."

HOROWITZ: So you gave a presentation.

EFF: I started my research, and that became my folk art paper, doing research on the painted screens of Baltimore. My research went swimmingly. The original family was still alive. The sons of the family that had started screen painting in the early parts of the 1910s. I spent days with them. I discovered new artists who were doing what I called folk art, because I had to really -- I was really learning what it meant as I was going along and really making my own definition, which I challenged ultimately in my career the parameters, because I went very much out of the box, and screen painting was one of those out of the box.

I gave this final presentation, and it was rumored that the director of the Museum of American Folk Art in New York was going to be at our presentations because he was looking for new material, new shows and new articles for the *Clarion*, their publication. We all sat there and we watched these presentations and we watched the über-folklorists.

I remember it going on and on and on and on. We're all saying, "Will this ever end?"

Then I come up and I give my paper. Everybody is suddenly -- my paper on painted screens. This was something new. It was completely unexpected. Nobody knew what I was doing. It didn't relate to the stuff that they looked at every day, which most of them found the quick and easy way, and I'm traveling to do research, which nobody was really doing. It was all field based, in other words. It wasn't based on documents or certain paintings, like Simon's had been. The presentation was over, and everybody looked at me and said, "Who are you? Where did you come from? How come we don't know you?" The director of the folk art museum comes up to me and says, "Are you busy for lunch? Can we talk?" I said, "I am busy, but come with my friends." We all went to this wonderful great Dusty's Tavern for lunch. The next thing I know, he wanted to publish my work. Alas I was validated.

In the meantime, I had applied into the program for the following year. Since it was a dual program -- there was a degree in museums and there was a degree in folklore, folklife, folk studies -- I decided that I would complete the folklore program one year and then the next year I would complete the museum studies. So I stayed for two years and earned a dual

degree. I was actually the first person to do that, but also it became a two-year program. It was nothing I lobbied for. In fact, I stayed because I said, "How can you call yourself a folklorist after a year of study? That's ridiculous." [Do you want to take a break?]

HOROWITZ: No. Do you?

EFF: No, I'm fine. Press pause for a minute. [recording interruption].

HOROWITZ: So you went to Cooperstown. Painted screens were discovered. I know you went to the University of Pennsylvania, but let's stay with the painted screen story for a minute. Tell me what happens after that meeting with the person from the American Folklife Museum about the painted screens. Let's follow that strand through rather than focusing on your graduate school in Pennsylvania.

EFF: Okay. First of all, it was then called the Museum of American Folk Art. The name has actually been changed. The director was this young fellow named Bruce Johnson. The museum was really just coming -- it had been around for quite a while and it was developed by some of the great folk art collectors, and actually instrumental were some of the twentieth century folk art collectors, which was a whole new area and a contentious area. Clearly the painted screens fell into that

twentieth century because they had started in 1913 and were continuing on.

My work -- this was in '75. No, I guess it was '74 when I gave the paper in December, and then I guess the article was published in the *Clarion*, which was a pretty lame -- but for that period it was a valid newsletter. Now it's a beautiful glossy publication. I continued my research. I would come home just to meet with people and do recordings, not knowing why or what I was doing, but knowing that it was a really important subject. More important than that, my work caught the attention of people in Baltimore, allowing the screens to go through these occasional revivals. It kind of was an ebb and a flow, and ebbs and flows in Baltimore are kind of often based on stories in the paper or something on television, because the world is very fickle and it needs to be woken up periodically. I got involved in it. I kind of had to put it aside periodically.

What happened at the end of my year at Cooperstown is I really sort of emerged as a fairly undeniable force. It was kind of like the happy ending story. The happiest ending of all was that during the summer between my first and second years I was sent -- I was given a placement with the Georgia State Arts Council to explore [and] discover folk art, just to do field work for an entire summer for the first of what became -- many

states started to follow after this -- the first state folk art museum, a folk art exhibition. The Georgia State Arts Council and the Atlanta Historical Society were organizing the first state folk art survey and exhibition, and I was in on the ground floor and invited to do some survey work in southwest Georgia, which was like the hinterlands. I had to go to Plains where [President] Jimmy Carter was from. I had to go to the peanut country and kind of the frontier, the west of Georgia. I got to work with the likes of Bert Hemphill. And Gil Ravenel, the head of design at the National Gallery of Art, was a consultant. It was just this dream come true.

I got the job because my Ralph Nader Nader's Raider Volkswagen had bitten the dust and I replaced it with a Volkswagen van. [Laughter]. I didn't learn my lesson. Actually, my VW bus was great. Because I had my own lodging and transportation, I got the job because I could stay in my van. I outfitted this precious -- it was a red and white van. I had a little desk and I had a little foam bed. It just the sweetest little environment and very compact. I was incredibly organized. I traveled through southwest Georgia and made discoveries. I actually now see some of the people I discovered, their work selling for thousands and thousands of dollars. Howard Finster was discovered on this trip, and Nellie

Mae Rowe was discovered through this exhibit, some of these huge high rollers in folk art. That was my introduction.

I went back, did the second year. It was a great, great year. I finished my degree in '76. They had this tradition of the head of the program, Bruce Buckley, would vet people for jobs. Cooperstown students were highly desirable because they had a skill that was taught nowhere else, museum skills and folk art, which was a real niche. Winterthur Museum had decided that it was going to do a folk art museum -- I'm sorry. Winterthur Museum had decided they were going to do a folk art exhibition. They had never done an exhibition. This is a house museum, one of the premier house museums in America, owned by Henry duPont in rural Delaware, rural Wilmington. They actually had decided and gotten an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] grant to go through the collection and to find the best of their folk art, which they had in spades.

Winterthur, for some reason, didn't realize that it should be hiring the finest curatorial person in America and the finest designer in America, but their idea, since they were an educational institution and a teaching institution, was to bring a student from Cooperstown, a graduate from Cooperstown, to be an NEH intern for two years to make this exhibition happen. That's where Elaine Eff and Winterthur met.

Well, it just so happened that I -- I guess I forgot something there. My last year of Cooperstown, I did a thesis about research on trucker's culture, over the road truckers. I had gotten interested in it my first days of just driving from Cambridge to Cooperstown and back and forth from Cambridge and Baltimore to Cooperstown. I'd always listen to the radio and I got into trucker songs on the country and western stations, something I had never listened to before.

When I got to Cooperstown, there was a professor named Rod Roberts who was very interested and had his own little collection of truckers songs. I started collecting truckers songs and really got interested in trucker culture and I would stop at truck stops. The next thing I know, I get a CB radio. The next thing I know, I convince the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife -- which I worked at each summer, by the way, as a volunteer -- to do a whole exhibit on truckers culture, and I'm organizing it. Here I am, in my second year of graduate school. Of course, I was smart enough to know that that was my master's thesis. My job for that summer was to put together a bicentennial exhibition on American truckers culture for the National Mall in Washington and then finish that up and start a job at Winterthur. I was actually supposed to start the

job at Winterthur earlier, but I couldn't because I was committed into July.

So I go to Winterthur. I jump right in. It was kind of the beginning of a career in kind of "great-collections-of-American-folk-art-go-fish," in which I get hired to have the curators tell me, this upstart MA master's new person on the scene in folk art, no less -- folk art was always kind of the stepchild in everybody's collection -- to say, "Give me your best. Show me what you've got and we'll determine what -- it's your show." That's what we did at Winterthur. It was an exhibition that was to be premiered at the Brandywine River Museum in Chadd's Ford. It was this new partnership between Winterthur and another museum. It was the absolute chestnuts of the collection, things that were world renowned, everything from kases (armoires), painted blanket chests, Pennsylvania German, rugs, pottery, metalwork, glassware -- you name it -- frakturs. It was the best of everything, all collected by Mr. duPont mostly in the 30s and 40s, in a time when you could actually get the best at not a very big price or maybe certainly not for him -- maybe I never would have been able to afford.

HOROWITZ: Keep on going, yes.

EFF: Anyway, among the things I did was to suggest to Winterthur that even though their goal was to have each of their students in their graduate program in decorative arts have a role in working with the objects, writing text for the objects, doing research, I suggested to them that I think the world expected a little bit more of Winterthur than a student exhibition. I mean, that kind of cost me a lot because I had to contradict them, in a sense, but what I also did was to write grants. We got a grant to bring in a top designer to take the students' research, my organizational work, working with all of the curators, to present their work in the most stellar light. It was a guy named Vincent Ciulla out of New York. It was one of the most difficult things I ever did. It was a tough, tough working relationships, as I recall. I learned. For everything I do, I get that much smarter. But it was a gorgeous installation. It was a national show.

At the opening night, many of the people came from all over, from the New York art world, folk art world, from all over the country to see what Winterthur had done, to see their collection come out of the dark, out of the shadows, because 365 days a year these objects sit in room displays in the Winterthur mansion. You sometimes have to look at them with a flashlight,

particular textiles which had never sent the light of day. It was a bit of a blockbuster.

On opening night, a woman comes up to me and says, "Would you like to get a graduate degree? Would you like to get a Ph.D. in folklore?" I said, "Tell me more." She said, "Actually, Bill Ferris has recommended you to get a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to study folk lore. Are you interested?" I said, "Let's talk." Suffice to say that I determined that it would be a very smart career move and took the Rockefeller Foundation up on getting a Ph.D. in folklore, and I could go anywhere I wanted or anywhere I could get in. Given that I had a pretty good record, I could get in anywhere I wanted. Who couldn't?

I selected Penn, University of Pennsylvania. The preeminent programs then were Indiana University under Henry Glassie, which was who I wanted to study with more than anything; UCLA; Berkeley had an MA program; and Penn had a Ph.D. program; and Texas, the University of Texas-Austin, had a Ph.D. program, but I think it was in the anthro department. I knew that Penn was where all the great folklorists had come from and knew it was where you would get a really rigorous education. Lo and behold, Henry Glassie had just moved there from Indiana.

So I started at Penn in '79. I finished up at Winterthur, probably freelanced in the meantime. I just loved freelancing, and I freelanced for a lot of these state folk art exhibitions -- Delaware, Vermont, among others -- and had various roles in any of them. The Winterthur one I got -- I just did the work. I got no credit. My name is nowhere and will never be. Other people who had their names on the books will always be credited with the show, which I even named. Actually, it was called "Beyond Necessity: Art in the Folk Tradition." The name actually came, and I'm glad we'll have it for the record, from a conversation with Roger Welsch, the folklorist from Nebraska and people really trying to understand what folk art was. Nobody wanted to use "folk art" in the title of anything then. "Beyond Necessity" literally captured what it was, art in the folk tradition.

Anyway, I went to Penn. I actually got a wonderful little two-room apartment on Delancey Place in Center City across the street from Nancy and Jimmy Glazer, who I had met by doing research for an exhibition that I was doing on the heart in American folk art at the Folk Art Museum at the time. They got me this apartment, but they also kept me very much in touch with the world of folk art, which I was going to be straying from

pretty seriously at Penn, because I was really going into theory and was kind of into lockdown.

HOROWITZ: At Penn you were at the American Studies program.

EFF: No, no. There was a degree in Folklore and Folklife. There was actually a folklore and folklife program. It existed as a department from, I believe, sometime in the 60s until it was recently devalued into a -- it became an institute, and I'm not even sure it's anything now. It's a heartbreaker. So, no, I studied with Dan Ben Amos and Don Yoder and Kenny Goldstein and John Szwed and Henry Glassie. The star of my years there was Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, now at NYU.

Anyway, while I get there and I'm buckling down, and no sooner do I get there than the Smithsonian knocks and says, "Would you do a show for us?" I just said, "I can't. I'm going to graduate school." They said, "Oh, we can figure it out. This is what we want you to do." It wasn't the Smithsonian, it was a partnership of the Festival of American Folklife, Ralph Rinzler, Peter Seitel, a Penn grad, and the Renwick Gallery. They wanted to do a show just like Winterthur took out the gems of their folk art collection. I knew how to do it. This was before I learned that just because the king asks you to lunch, maybe if you're otherwise detained you have to say no. But I

said yes and went to graduate school. I literally moved between Penn and Washington. It got to a point where I had to suspend my studies. I had to take a leave and just focus on the exhibition.

While I was at the Renwick, the premier screen painter, the heir from the inventor of screen painters, Richard Oktavec, only in his fifties, who I was visiting regularly (and I was still visiting screen painters and doing documentation), dies of a heart attack in a minute, gone. It was 1979 and I was working on the Renwick exhibition called "Celebration: A World of Art and Ritual." They had brought in Victor Turner, the world class anthropologist from the University of Chicago to "be the curator," whereas I basically had done all the heavy lifting, supervised all the research, all the publications, everything. We got to the point where everything was in the can, it was ready to go -- and I should mention my office at the Renwick was in the basement, so I had learned a few lessons along the way. Anyway, it was going to be a stellar show. I basically realized that I had more important work to do.

When Richard Oktavec died, I contacted the Baltimore Museum of Art. I said, "Do you want to do an exhibition?" They said, "Absolutely." They funded me to do research. The Celebration

exhibit went on in other hands and opened a year or so later. I put my energy into the screens.

I went back to Penn to finish my coursework. I had actually while in Washington been working on a dissertation that was Smithsonian-based. [I] realized that was just a kind of an alligator pond I didn't want to swim in.

HOROWITZ: By Smithsonian-based you mean based on materials from their collection?

EFF: No, actually it was going to be about the Folklife Festival and folk artifacts and sort of the history. I just realized that it was way more political and a lot of agendas were coming in. The screens needed me at that point. It was kind of one of the first times in my life that I realized what was important and acted on it. So it was great. The Baltimore Museum of Art was funding my research. I was traveling all over the country. I had really discovered remarkable links of the screens to that one screen that I had found in the New York State Historical Association collection in Cooperstown. I had uncovered a history, a hidden history of screens that went back to the 1700s, and it was time to get it all down.

We had something unfortunate happen, and the exhibit didn't happen, but the catalog was written. I asked them if they minded if I turned it into my dissertation. So all of these

missed opportunities became great ones. That became my doctoral dissertation. I finished up at Penn in '83-'84, came back to Baltimore when I finished my coursework to finish up the research. I had the gift of being able to focus on a single thing because the Rockefeller Foundation funded me through the completion of my dissertation. I will never forget the day I finished the dissertation. I called them up and told them. They said, "What's the date?" I told them the date. They said, "Okay, that's when we'll prorate all your checks. Done. You're finished." I was like, "Wait, don't I get a reward?" [I] walked my dissertation in to Penn and came back and was in Baltimore.

In the meantime, coming back to Baltimore, I realized that my -- I remember when I went to Cooperstown, the big question at the interview was, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" I said, "I see myself as a regional folklorist working in the public sector." I don't know if I said in Maryland, but that was clearly what my region was and what I had established. So during the time I was doing my research and writing, among the indulgences I allowed myself, besides lunch every few days at my favorite Greek restaurant where I would edit my latest draft, because that was when Dell computers -- computers had just come

in and I was able to print out a new version every so many days. I would sit at the lunch counter and edit at Samos Restaurant.

I used to read the paper. I'd have my coffee and read the paper every morning, and that was it. But I really loved the business section. I loved watching -- this was the early 80s -- of what was happening in Baltimore and how it was changing. It was being reinvented. I somehow got a bee in my bonnet, went to a dedication of an event of the first new building being built in the neighborhood that I was living in, which was called Canton. It was one of the neighborhoods where painted screens thrived. What I had done was lived in several different places in East Baltimore which were kind of the ground zero for painted screens, and that's where I would do my research. I had discovered dozens of painters, living and dead, had befriended many of the people who both owned the screens, valued the screens, painted the screens, hated the screens, you name it, and did a regular census of the screens as well.

So my life had been spent in that area in East Baltimore and I was really watching it grow and change. It had as a major statistic that it was one of the most stable neighborhoods in Baltimore. It was 99.7 percent white ethnic comprised and primarily -- I think it was something [like] 79 percent women, because they had all outlived their husbands.

I went to the groundbreaking for a new senior center, a major event there, where a school that everyone in the neighborhood had gone to had been torn down. I both made the recommendation that this should be a place where painted screens are showcased in some way, because we had a one-percent-for-art program. I happened to get the ear of the mayor's first assistant, and I said -- I don't know where it came from. I just said, "What this city needs is a folklorist." He said, "And what would that person do?" I said, "That person would chronicle the traditions of the city, the ones that are alive, the ones that are gone. People will remember what neighborhoods are and why they're here and what's important and talk to the people and blah, blah, blah." This was the city of neighborhoods. Mayor [William Donald] Schaefer was the king of neighborhoods and neighborhood revitalization, kind of building a city one neighborhood at a time or rebuilding a city. Literally in October of '85 I became the Baltimore City folklorist.

HOROWITZ: How long were you the folklorist? How long did that last?

EFF: My gig lasted from '85 to '89 when the mayor became governor and said, "Come and work your magic. Do what you've done in the city for the state." The new mayor was not as

interested. Even though nobody was threatening my position, I just felt like -- you know, I was kind of still working like a dog. We had some amazing projects. We were kind of doing oral histories and documentation projects on major thoroughfares, like North Avenue, like major institutions, like the Lexington Market. It was a wonderful opportunity for people to realize that they were valued and to give back to community through public programs and events. We worked on an ethnic guide to Baltimore and worked very closely with the Greek community and did a huge exhibit at the Baltimore Museum of Art on the Greek community that kind of established my work there and at a very high level when you showcase at the Baltimore Museum. Basically it was an incredible run. I couldn't stay out of the newspapers. Everything we did was newsworthy, and that was the day when local news was really driving. They were five incredible years, and the city was incredible in that period, just growing and full of pride and a sense of itself.

Coincidentally, '86 was the year that crack cocaine came to Baltimore. So we witnessed a palpable difference in what was happening in the city. To be able to be documenting at a time that the city was both rising and falling at the same time was pretty remarkable. I got to meet -- I worked with the street

Arabbers, the street peddlers who sell produce out of horse-drawn carts.

[We] got to make a movie. We made a movie called "The Screenpainters" documenting these wonderful people. What I began to realize is you've got to capture this urgently and give it back in the best quality you can. We did a 25-minute documentary about the screen painters just as one of the elder screen painters was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He literally went into the hospital. I sat with him at his hospital bed. I said, "What do you think we should do?" "Let's make a movie." [Laughter]. I brought together -- we wrote a grant that minute to the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] and to the Arts Council on spec. We filmed a five-minute piece with Ted Richardson, who had left his teeth on the tray at the hospital, without his teeth. He was dead three months later.

We made a movie and presented it in nine months, between June or July of one year and it premiered in June the next year. We raised a hundred and some thousand dollars. It was done in 16-millimeter film. It is rich. It documented the likes of Johnny Eck, who had a career as a vaudeville performer, as a Hollywood star. I mean, he has a following in his own right. We followed seven screen painters, only two of whom are alive now. This was in 1988. We were all over the map, and people

knew what we did, and they knew what folklore was and they knew what folk art was. Again, they knew what painted screens were.

What also kept happening -- I'm still doing all this stuff, and because it was a film and you can only catch film when people are alive, I knew I couldn't wait. So instead of writing a book, I made the film. The book is the thing that is eating me up alive, because I've got to find that same window that says this is the most important thing for someone else.

So in '89 I actually created the same job with the help of the state at the Maryland Historical Trust, which is the state preservation agency. So in 1989 we created a cultural conservation program, did not use the word folklore in any way intentionally because we did have a state folklorist at the State Arts Council, and we didn't want to tread on anybody's feet. We really saw folklife documentation and living traditions as something much broader than the folk arts, which is why we called it cultural conservation. The program was designed to be community based because the Maryland Historical Trust is a preservation agency. We work building by building, neighborhood by neighborhood, community by community, county by county. We wanted to keep within that model and document living traditions where they thrived in the built environment or in the landscape.

I'm no sooner on the job -- actually before I started the job, in 1989 I said, "I can't call myself a folklorist, a Maryland folklorist, if I haven't been to Smith Island." In May of '89 I went with a couple of folklorists from Washington, David Taylor and his wife Lee Ellen Friedland, and we went to Smith Island. We stayed for two nights. Nobody did that. Tourists didn't go to Smith Island overnight. They went for the day. They took a package trip and they went and they saw what they were supposed to see and they barely stepped foot past the docks. They ate their crabcake lunch and they were escorted back onto the boat and went back to the mainland.

Smith Island was twelve miles off the shore of Maryland. It is a completely isolated community with roots back to the 1720s. The families can trace their roots to the original Evans and Smiths and Joneses that came in those years. There's been a tremendous amount of marriage within the islands of the Chesapeake. The only islands that are now like Smith Island are Tangier in Virginia, which is their sister island and a lot of the families married over Tangier Island into other families. Tilghman Island actually was another one that they married into.

So this was a watermen's island. We stayed for two days. People couldn't believe it. We went to church on Sunday. People couldn't believe it. I met people and ate incredible

food, stayed in a woman's home. She had to move her toothbrush out for guests to stay. I just remember it being one of still the seminal experiences of my life as a folklorist.

No sooner do I start my job in July of 1989 and I get called into a meeting at the Secretary of State's office -- Smith Island wants a museum. Total coincidence that I had just kind of gotten my first taste of it. I was going to be the point person in interpretation. So I walked out of that museum where I met Jennings Evans, who I had actually already met on the island, and Tom Horton, who was the chronicler of Smith Island. I met people from the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Economic Development and Tourism. It was this partnership among state and local and individuals and agencies to make this museum happen. The governor wanted it to happen. It was going to happen.

I walked out of the meeting and wrote a grant to NEA for a film and interpretive materials, and we got it. So that began a number of years. Actually this started in '89 just visiting and going out and listening and hearing what they wanted and meeting the people. Of course, meeting people in Smith Island is unlike any other place. They have a distinct brogue. They have distinct language and speak in code. It actually took me quite a while to realize -- I knew when I was really accepted when

they spoke to me in their very, very distinctive backward talk, where Mrs. Kitching, who was the hostess of the island, says to me, "I don't care for you much," which means "We like Elaine." What she was saying is, "I don't care that Elaine hears this. We like her." That's when I knew that they were actually talking to me in their native lingo.

HOROWITZ: Syntax.

EFF: Native syntax. So what resulted was a museum, a Smith Island Center. At the centerpiece of the Smith Island Center, which is of, by, and for the people of Smith Island -- it's all theirs. We brought them in to a meeting. We started actually our visit on Smith Island by showing a film. It was a film on the American Century, a television show from the 1950s hosted by Walter Cronkite, Walter Cronkite on the twentieth century, something like that, in which he did a piece -- I think it was an hour-long piece called "The Singing Oystermen." He had gone out -- he was a sailor, so he had discovered Smith Island on his own. He went out on a skipjack in the winter oystering with these Smith Islanders who would sing. They would sing primarily gospel, religious songs, while they were eating or to get a cadence together.

That had been lost because it was a television piece from the 50s. Though we were into the video era, VHS era, no one had

ever [taped it]-- it was a lost artifact. I was able to find it at the Enoch Pratt [Free] Library in Baltimore and bring it on the island, this huge reel, and show it. I showed it in the church basement, social hall. I would say that there was a member of every family from Smith Island. Those who weren't there requested that we have a next showing in the other island community of Smith Island. So everyone was there. They saw themselves and they understood what they had to give.

Then we all talked about it. The question was, what do you want people to know about you if you're going to have a museum on your island? One gentleman, Eddie Boy Evans of the island, says, "People come here, they come here for one day, and they think they know us. But we want them to know what we do the other 364 days." And I wanted to call the movie "The Other 364 Days," but I was overruled. That is kind of the subtitle, however. They told me what the film should include. We sat in the church Sunday School building, on the blackboard, and everyone said, "This is what it should be."

Coincidentally, I had already written a grant to do a film, and I had said, "This is what I think it should include." It was like a checklist. It was an absolute validation that they knew what was important and we had somehow imagined what we thought would be important. When I called a group meeting,

other than this one in the church basement, of a group, a small group of the people, I had a list of who I wanted, but I didn't want to invite individuals because I thought it would suggest that there were favorites. Every one of those people self-selected and showed up and a few others.

So the Smith Island museum opened in 1996. The showcase, the centerpiece, is a film called "Land & Water, People & Time: The Smith Island Story." They're all there. I have to tell you that most of them are gone, the people. It is 100 percent in the voice of the islanders. There is no narrator. Nobody needs to speak because it is their story and they can speak it.

That's what my life as a folklorist, and belatedly as an oral historian, has really been. When people would say, "We're going to hire somebody to be Jennings Evans and to tell his stories about what a skipjack captain does or what life [was like]," it's like, "Why aren't you bringing the islander? Why aren't you bringing the Arabber? Why aren't you bringing the housewife? That person has a voice. There is a person in that community who speaks for him or herself and ultimately for the whole community in a larger sense." I am very opposed to what the museums call living history, what I call dead history. It's taking the words off of living people and putting them in the voice and the costume of an actor, when we know that there are

people who are alive and well and can speak for themselves and tell their stories in a way that will never ever, ever be more impressive on an individual than anything else. It is the most effective means of teaching. It is what artists in the schools are all about. It's what folklore in schools is all about. It is what bringing in a person to tell their story, to have oral history in the schools, is all about.

Basically we were able to capture Smith Island, and now there's a wonderful archive, both at the Somerset County library and actually at the Nabb Center for Regional Culture at Salisbury University and at the Maryland Historical Trust.

We were brought in -- we were saving lighthouses and doing a documentation, an architectural survey of all the lighthouses of the Chesapeake Bay. I said, "What about the people?" So we did a survey of and interviews of, oral histories of all the lighthouse keepers, and there again, gone, every one of them now. An amazing archive. Projects came from all over. They came, in a sense, from the National Register nominations. They came from the governor. They came from individuals. They came from church groups. They came from endangered communities.

So as a result, ultimately we started a grant program. We gave non-capital grants. As much as \$50,000 went to communities to research, capture, and tell their stories and to hire

professional oral historians and to hire professional documentary photographers to capture the best of all of these people, to make films, to do books, to do thoughtful tours and brochures that really reflect the peoples' voices.

So I would say that in a larger sense I have literally staked my career on letting other people's dreams come true, through our grant program and the later creation in 2001 of Maryland Traditions, which is the partnership that I created -- we created at the Trust with the Maryland State Arts Council. The Maryland State Arts Council had a folklorist named Rory Turner. I was the folklorist at the Trust. Here we had an agency, state agency, that exists to preserve the architectural patrimony of our state. Here the Arts Council has the mission or preserving the artistic patrimony of our state. Well, if we married, if we merged, all expressive culture based on traditional culture in the landscape, both performance, the arts, occupation, living traditions, cultural community documentation of all kinds, comes under the same umbrella.

I'm happy to say that seven years later we are looking at an incredibly successful program that was built on small partnerships with institutions like the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, St. Mary's College, regionally-based institutions, the Ward Museum, Frostburg State University, the Baltimore City

Heritage Area, organizations, counties, Prince George's County, Montgomery County, who came under our umbrella and became our partners and put folklorists out in the field to do field work and bring back documentary work that becomes part of the permanent archive. We're now looking at a very large expansion of the program, which could happen this year, which we're very excited about. We give apprenticeships, master apprenticeship grants to people to continue traditions. We give small project grants.

We are so proud of what we've been able to offer to the whole state, that when we had our culminating event, a gathering at a showcase just a week ago in Baltimore at the Creative Alliance, and banged home the story of what is traditional culture and what is endangering it and what can we do to protect it, we literally filled the house all afternoon with people from the entire state. They came from Southern Maryland. They came from the Eastern Shore. They came from Grantsville. We gave our first award. We gave an award for Achievement in Living Traditions in the Arts called the ALTA Award, named after Dr. Alta Schrock of Western Maryland who was the [unclear] folklorist out at western Maryland. We gave awards to people, places, and traditions that represent the highest standard.

We're so excited. It's just so exciting to see something that you dream come true. We get a few of our own dreams, but I would say that more than anything, people dream that they want to document, that they want to do a book, they want to do a film, they want to do a video, they want to do an oral history, they want to do a tour, they want to do something, and we have enabled them now over these last seventeen years at the Trust and seven years at Maryland Traditions.

So I would just like to say that I have one dream. I have one dream, one real dream left. That is to write the book, create the permanent document on the painted screens of Baltimore and their ancestors all over the world. A big surprise to everyone, I think, when they see how big the tradition is and where it comes from in the decorative arts worldwide and take it up to date on what has happened since the 80s when I did my dissertation. I just was in Las Vegas for the first time and I saw the world's largest painted screen on the entire façade of Bally's Hotel. It was a billboard for the show "The Producers," and I am so excited to have seen it and photographed it, and to know that what happened in Baltimore in 1913 is something that goes back so far and will keep coming forward into the future.

HOROWITZ: Great. That's a great ending.

EFF: I guess we're over. Did we take care of everything?

[End of Interview]

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