

## **David Nelson**

Executive Director of Montana from 1970-90

*Interviewer:* Maryo Ewell

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I. Think back on those early days of SAA's, when you were new in your job and the whole "field" was in formation.

A. What was the "big idea" behind the formation of the NEA and SAA's?

[Q: Was there someone in Montana before you?]

*Yeah, there was Ed Groenhout, who was there I think a couple of years. He had just graduated with an MA from the University of Montana. This thing was pretty well a brainchild of the University of Montana. They were the ones that saw there was going to be some money, and it was initiated there.*

[Q: Do you have any idea where Ed is?] [We discuss tracking him down.]

*Well, you know, I did a little history of the arts council. I'm convinced the nucleus was really Jackie Kennedy. She influenced Jack; she was really the spirit behind the whole thing. You can see – it goes all the way back to Truman, the progressives started to look at the arts. I'm reading more and more about Jackie; she was an amazing woman. That was, what I feel, was the real driving force; of course there's the Great Society. I still am amazed: there was the Federation of Rocky Mountain States, which was part of an economic development program, Great Society kind of stuff. I have never even sensed that same federal money flow like it did then. They were funding things the way the military is funded, or NASA is funded. I mean, there was just – the governors had access to a tremendous amount of resources they created the Federation of Rocky Mountain States out of which came the Western States ... [worries about correct nomenclature] It was an economic development*

*program. And in that process, it was really heralded by the governors. There was a regional program, it was kind of spotted over who belonged to it because there was a kind of fight over water. And the governors that were fighting over water would not partake of it. It was the first way that directors from state arts agencies got together, because there was a committee for the arts in the committee of Rocky Mountain States. That's how I meet Bob Sheets and all that. And so there was a natural progression. What happened was, it became very obvious that we were the social club, that the arts were to entertain the wives of the governors. It was all very exciting, and "tra la la," but it wasn't substantive. And the NEA was funding it, it was funding the committee on the arts of that. I became the chairman of that, and we decided that we were going to break out on our own, to create that. There was quite a war story about that, and Clark Mitze was the stalwart... Anyway, because I was the chairman of the group I signed the grant from the NEA. And then we decided that we were going to go off on our own, and all hell broke loose because certain people within the Federation really coveted the job of being art czar for the West. Anyway, Clark had the balls, I mean he, we went to the mat; I remember being summoned by my Governor, to come to Helena to be chastised for being a rabble-rouser. But what it all came down to was that, Mitze said, "You signed it, you have control over it and if you want to transfer that grant to something else, you go right ahead." And I did, and that's how Western States got started.*

[Q: We should be talking to the regionals too.]

*Yeah, regionals should be involved in this, what are left of them. That was a devastating thing that happened to the regional reps.*

[Q: How did the Montana Arts Council get started? You said it got started from the university?]

*Yeah, they were the motivators. I'll send you this little history I wrote. Key to it was a republican senator by the name of Jim Hoy who was involved in the arts, but very negative on federal programs. He was a senator, in fact he could have been Governor if his wife would have let him. It was he who really got the thing established. The part that was so wonderful - I don't know how eastern states were affected, but for a state like Montana, to have access to some federal money, to do things (and at the core of it, the most important things we did were things we never really put in grants, but it was networking, and getting people involved in the arts in the state to go places, see the rest of the world. The standard thing in MT was, you would have an arts organization and the board would be made of people who could travel all over the world. But the Executive*

*Director would sit at home, because they are being paid very humble wages, they were kind of a lackey.) When we got the programs going, these little people running little arts groups, we could find ways to get them to national meetings, to find out what the rest of the world was doing. As you probably know, working in a rural setting where you do everything is great training for the future. And that's what I delight the most, is to see how many people's lives really got changed including the chairs. We had great leadership in Montana, they'd all end up on some national committee. Once they interacted with the rest of the world, things really changed. In fact, that was my driving force when I became director of the arts council was, that it was not going to look like the historical society. By that I mean this ingrown Montana chauvinism – "We're the greatest, we don't need to know about anybody else" kind of stuff. So I got involved in everything I could that would get our people out and about, and of course Western States [WESTAF] was a great way to do that because it involved the director and the chair who would interact with other states, find out what was going on. It hindered a lot of the states. There was a time when Idaho was so constipated, so focused on itself, that it neglected everything going on around it. That's perjorative, but some of the things I remember about what can happen to a rural state if it doesn't look at national standards.*

[Q: How did the university's involvement happen?]

*Yeah, again it will be in the history. What happened is, some of the people involved in the arts in the University thought: "Boy, this is happening", and they went and talked to the governor, and they realized it would be political; and the governor the said, "The guy you ought to go talk to is Jim Hoy"*

*The relationship with the university always was interesting. Well, In fact, you remember somebody told me once that they'd been hired at the university to be trained to replace me, because they really didn't know how somebody who was not part of the university ever got to be director of the starts council.*

*In the early years, the start of the MT Repertory Theater was that the AC would completely fund the Repertory Theater. And right to the end, I remember I was always dealing with the Dean of the School of Fine Arts who desperately wanted to control me, who desperately wanted to control the arts council but never was able to.*

[Q: The Rep started at Montana University too?]

*Oh yes, yeah, that was kind of the idea, that the Rep would start and would be*

*funded by the arts council. In other words, they wanted every cent the arts council [glitch on tape].*

B. What was your “big idea” when you took your job – what was the situation in your state, and where were you hoping to go?

*I came from a background of being fascinated by seeing people who had not been exposed to the arts – be exposed to it in the best possible way. I was the Director of the Yellowstone Arts Center before this, and I can recall - it was always my joy, was to set up a situation where you very carefully and considerately exposed people to the arts without any preconditions, without any negativity. In fact I can remember, we used to have university art professors teach classes at our arts center. And more than one time, I had to take them aside and chastise them because they tended to be glib, and sarcastic – you know, college art teachers have a certain kind of princely role; they love to intimidate the kids. But when they’d come down to work on the docents, boy, if I caught ‘em doing any of that stuff, I’d take ‘em aside and beat them up. But again, the whole idea was, you know, it goes way back to community arts, and that is [glitch: art is...] basic; my theory is it’s what made us human [glitch: people needed ] to realize that there was an organization that would provide money and reach out and particularly deal with the rural areas.*

C. When you left your job, do you think you had made progress in achieving your “big idea?” Or did you change your mind about what was needed?

*I was immersed in the paradigm; it just seemed like “perpetual Christmas” - an idea came along, and you could find money and fund it. As I look back now, we were just at a very interesting time where those things could be done – it was so fertile. The ideas we came up with were just pretty obvious and practical, but we had the resources to do it. I think back, the second and third generation of arts administrators; it’s so much more complicated and political, and, you know, most basic ideas have been floated and in fact, now I see them come around again as new ideas. I don’t even mention that they were old ideas because the new generations have every right to think they are brand new ideas.*

*Well, I’m working with – I’m not on boards any more; you’re not effective because all they’re working with is money – but there’s a group providing arts activities for people with terminal diseases I remember early on the big fight about “We didn’t fund arts therapy,” but my god, the value of – when people are focused on what’s really important in their lives, and to be able to bring the arts to them – and this grant hasn’t even gotten a grant from NEA.*

[ME: There was “Hospital Audiences,” for instance.]

*Well, what I find interesting in that area – a little aside – we never had – the arts was always on the anecdotal and the emotional, we never had the science; and now, damned if you aren’t able to start applying the science, particularly now with the MRI brain activity studies. You’re going to see a tremendous amount of documentable, scientific reasons for the arts. And that’s exactly – in fact we’re producing a high-definition video for those people, to identify those things which are universally palliative, in other words, we’ve seen some of the stuff that’s really artsy – nothing wrong with it – an artist will do a mood piece, eventually they’re pushing the boundaries, getting a little weird. This is just great for a certain group of people; but what is the common denominator. In other words, if I’m going to do a high-definition video, what can I do that 90% of the people, regardless of their background, are going to respond to. And of course, nature and natural sounds emerge.*

*I think that the internet is a tremendous potential; again we were always worried about how artists could get broader audiences. Now what is a misunderstanding about the internet is, if you’re an artist and have a website doesn’t mean you’re going to be world-famous; but what it does mean, is if you have a following who is interested in your work, you have a market that can be all over the world waiting for your next piece. So potentially ...*

*I’ve always felt – I don’t know if you know about the “Creative Cluster” thing that’s so hot. Everybody is looking for – again, the cycles – talk about recurring themes – what are the latest words to use for grants, and what not. The business community has caught on to the book, The Creative Class. And this goes way back. I have a little book, which is kind of a bible, that was done by I think General Electric. The principle of the book really was that we have more capacity to produce things than we have ideas of things to produce. And if that’s so, then we really have to start understanding creative people and how they work (This was done in, like, 1960.) They did all these studies – and basically they were saying, “We probably have all the creative people who work 9-5; we’ve already contacted them. But there are a lot of creative people who can’t work 9-5 who can be [glitch: identified] and in a 2-week period create enough creative ideas to keep a thousand people busy, and maybe not do another thing for the rest of the year, so they’re worth that investment – that kind of stuff.*

*It’s coming around again. Take a look at Steve Jobs and Apple. He saved the*

*company just by applying design. We were going around preaching that to everybody; and he just did it. I'm involved in a lot of local groups, based on the whole idea of understanding the creative mind. What I find in those discussions is kind of interesting: that we're all creative, and that's true. The best plumber, if you study him, is very creative. The best whatever – they carry whatever they do to the highest level; it does appear to be an art form. And what I have to remind people is, that though that's true in everybody, the artist, the true artist, is so consumed by what they do that they identify themselves with it in a way that most people don't. It's such a rare experience in our society anymore where somebody [glitch] ... you end up with a final product, and then you stand behind it, no prevarication, no weasel words. That's become quite unique in a society that has really based itself on spin and "Oh I never really said that" and, you know. So I've really tried to make sure they know the difference between "We all are creative" but then an artist is pretty well bound to be identified that way. [glitch]*

[ME: I heard a political scientist talk about how ideas cycle around every 40 years.]

*I can remember seeing an exhibition on the Ito period in Japan. It was interesting: the samurai job was to protect the merchants. The reason was, the way Japan was structured was, the artist-craftsperson was at the top and the merchant was at the bottom, because the merchant didn't do anything. The artist created, and the merchant simply moved it around and took it to various people, and so they were considered at the absolute base of society. And to see it completely turned around, to the point where we pay great homage to the business class, and actually at the core of it the creative... And actually, I think the fascinating thing is the study of the creative person. As you were talking about it: Dustin Hoffman was being interviewed, they were, you know, laying all kinds of praise upon him, and he says, "Jesus Christ! Back off! I'm just mouthing other people's words! Take a look at the people who do the words – the writers!" And you know, I think that's a great example of society. We really praise the actor, who is basically just a well-trained liar, and the writers seem to be a dime a dozen.*

D. What were you proudest of having achieved during your time in office?

[You'd said "Seeing how many people's lives really got changed through participation" and "interacting with the rest of the world." Is that what you're proudest of?]

*Yeah...but I didn't know till I retired how important the staff was. God almighty...the ability to be in a position where you can assemble a staff, have money to pay salaries and find – it was just great fun to just the right person and give them their head – and sometimes it was crazy. You have someone like a Bill Pratt who would drive you up a wall, my god: but you would put up with a lot because he produced. And to see them go on and do things, I mean, that's a selfish thing from the standpoint of ego-tripping. But you are – I never understood – I went to some of these national conferences on management. People would start describing their management style and I would be just aghast. They would talk about basically, you know, you'd get this level playing field and you'd go out and build this little mound and you'd get on top of it with a bat. And I know why: because a lot of these arts councils were dens of vipers. You'd come in, and there'd be a whole cult there, and they'd eat you alive as a director. What a great opportunity it was to go and find the best, get them together, and give them their heads and a little bit of money and watch [glitch: what would happen.]*

[Q: Bill is still in touch with you, isn't he? I'm still in touch with Barbara Neal - Ex Dir in Colorado – she too gave us her head, and we've all stayed in touch with her.]

*The other thing that I learned, I kind of call it the “county fair” concept. And that is: you know when you're young, you go to the county fair and you're awed. And then you get a little education and go to the arts barn and see all the beer can hats and all that stuff, and turn your nose up at it. And then as you get older, you realize that your job is to go into that barn and sort through all that stuff and find the one or two things there that will knock you on your butt. That's always stuck with me. I can remember talking to artists coming in, and nine out of 10's off the wall. But you're there because one of them is going to be worth the investment. In other words, you just can't get jaded, you have to be open to that one time when “Jesus! There is something really here!” and if we encourage that person – and that happened with us he Missoula Children's Theater. So anyway, those were the kind of philosophies that I ended up applying. I guess Margaret Kingsman (sp?) – we kind of grew up together – and I always have to tell the joke that I was responsible for starting the Committee on the Humanities in Montana. Because when Ed Groenhout was orienting me, he said: “Now Dave, here's one thing I didn't get done, and that is that if a state doesn't have a humanities council, then the arts council applies and they become an Arts & Humanities council. So I guess the first day on the job we went in, talked to the governor's assistant, and he wrote a letter saying that the [glitch: the gist is that they were planning to create an arts &*

*humanities council like they had ] back East. And they, the humanities – it had been misread and the humanities didn't want that to happen at all and they immediately called the president of the university and said, "You get your ass moving and we'll create a humanities council overnight." And they did.*

*But anyway Margaret's comment was that things have gotten so screwed up with the culture wars, that actually our job is to bear witness, and to tell young people that there was a Camelot, there was a time that, with a little bit of money, remarkable things happened, and if anything the NEA should be looked at as government at its best.*

*And I think there is a lot to that. That the [glitch]. The principles were high. I still have to remind people that it wasn't the artists who started the National Endowment for the Arts, it was people who believed in the artist. I've been told in public debates that these artists went out to create this self-serving organization. And I have to say "No! It wasn't the artists at all! It was the true patrons, that really felt that a great country ought to have an organized way of supporting the arts."*

*The concept of that leverage, the matching grant, having a little bit of money you're assured of, if people will match it, is a tremendous asset. But I also have to say that it was the NEA hanging in there with state arts agencies and in many cases providing the lion's share of the money, that allowed us to exist because, when push came to shove, the thing that allowed us to survive was: "Well, if you want to turn away this federal money, go right ahead." And this argument was always enough to make sure we survived.*

*But you know, the other thing I would tell them [young people] is: We used to think that we were the beginning of the golden age and that things would get better and better. What I know now is that it's always a fight, that you hire on to be tough. I mean, that's just the way it is, and the cause is just. They're not going to have the red carpet rolled out for you. Missoula finally has a public art committee, and a percent for art program, and things are going swimmingly, and I have to tell them (I was just appointed to it), "There's nothing that will draw lightning more than public art." So you better have your process down, because when the lightning strikes, all you can do is roll out your process for how you got to where you are.*

E. What was most frustrating to you?

[NOTE: On the tape, this answer and the next are at the end – I'd forgotten to ask it here]

*Well, most frustrating had to be the legislature. These are the mistakes I made. I would only see the legislature through the hearings about the arts and I thought, "My god, these people hate the arts." Then we moved to Helena and I went over and spent time in the legislature, every committee was the same. And in other words, the same legislator who was eating you alive at the hearing was over 2 days later trying to get some money for an irrigation project and he'd be getting eaten alive. So it was the adversarial concept of it.*

F. What was most surprising to you?

*That we could take our enemies, and turn them. We also had a really remarkable individual called Frances Bargnow (sp?). who had a photographic mind and was the conscience of the legislature. He kept track. The one thing, dealing with the legislature, is there are times when you can go in, exaggerate, tell some fibs and win. If you ever did that with him, he'd be around to remember. So as long as you played straight, even if tough times - if you just twisted a little way you'd have got everything you'd want, and you didn't do that, he'd remember that. And the sadness is, with term limits, all of that's gone now, so there's no basic fundamental honoring of principles. But that's the way you got - you had to be a straight shooter; and even if it hurt you a lot, you had to tell the truth. It sounds so simple and naïve, but that was true. It saved our ass any number of times.*

G. What was your agency's relationship with the NEA like? With other SAA's? With ACA? With local arts agencies?

*Here's what I didn't know. For me, again, it was just like Christmas, because at the time I became director of the Montana AC Mike Mansfield was kind of at his zenith. I didn't know how Washington worked - the folklore is that if you call in to ask something from a federal agency they kind of have a hot list and if your senator or representative is at the top of the list, you get called back within 24 hours; but if they're at the bottom of the list, you're lucky to get a letter in a week or 2. And so I really benefited from that; in other words, I was - I was here a week or something, and someone was trying to save a ghost town. I said, "I'll just make some calls!" and I called Mike's office and he sent me to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and within a week we had money to save a ghost town - I thought that was just the way government worked! This is a generalization, and it's very typical of MT: it's a very middle class state, a*

*classic standard of Montana is the rancher who drives the most beat-up pickup truck may have the largest ranch and the most cattle. You are not intimidated by nature. You do not walk into a meeting and think “I don’t have anything to contribute, I need to size this audience up, find out who the big dogs are and find my place and be sure I fit in.” The West is a little outrageous that way because you’re just not intimidated by power or by prestige. I was never intimidated to be in the presence of Nancy, and I know a lot of people that were just trembling to be in her presence. I think you’re kind of just too stupid to know your place. So you add that to a little bit of money and you think you can change the world – and you do have a leg up.*

*My relation with the NEA was always positive. I learned early on – nobody ever trains executive directors to the fact that they’re supposed to “lead” their council: you’re support to work for them. Well, Jesus, if you don’t lead them they’re going to eat you alive! How the hell do you “lead” these people, all of which have more power than you do, and employ you. And you always have board members that try to eat your lunch, and that kind of stuff; and the NEA really would always save my butt. I remember I had an artist, just a wonder person on the Council, he was Pennsylvania Dutch – Dave Schaner (sp?), he [glitch: went to D.C. and came back and] said nice things about me, and he came back and he basically took the council aside, and said: “I don’t know where the hell you people are going, but this guy knows what he’s doing so why don’t you guys all shut up and listen to him.”*

*And then, too, you had – one of the things that was nice was you did have position with the council; because while they were your boss, you did have something to say about getting grants, getting resources from the NEA and that gave you some clout you wouldn’t have in other kinds of organizations.*

[Q: What about other state arts councils?]

*I just loved that. I credit Bob Sheets for this and the Western States. Sheets was such a cutup; that we we’d just giggled all the time. There was just no place for pomposity. I can’t remember a state arts agency director who I didn’t really adore in one way or another. There were some real dolts, but again, part of it was, we didn’t know what the hell we were – I remember when I met Ruth Draper. She got the job in Utah through a political appointment. I met her, and I didn’t like her at all; she was kind of sarcastic and surly the first time I met her (which as you know isn’t like Ruth at all). And then she completely withdrew – and I just love her to death. She caught on to what the hell was going on and what could be done and she just became one of my sweethearts.*

*Again, we didn't know what we were doing. Everybody had equal status. We no – we were a great team [via WESTAF]. I really enjoyed, loved the other state directors. I remember Ruth Draper of Utah ... I didn't like her at first ... but then she caught on to the possibilities of what could be done, all fired up, and then she became a dear friend.*

*We all came from different backgrounds, and we all, we didn't know what we were doing, and everybody had equal status. We all came from different backgrounds. I remember a guy who used to show up at the NASAA or the NACA meetings, and he'd walk around and all he could tell people was that he had a PhD in arts administration – and he was a joke! I mean, what the hell would be a “PhD!”*

*And I saw that change over the years. But early on ... One of the things we did that I think was so valuable, was we used to laugh at our mistakes! We'd get together and joke about how big our screw-up was. And then there came a time when nobody would do that for fear it would get back to their chairman or someone. I'm putting rosy glasses on this, but I do think it was a unique time. The grant money really has its role, because when you go out and raise the private side (the crap you go through, the egos you have to ... well, I never was really good at that; I have to hand it to people who CAN do that, do the suck-up stuff).*

*But what I found important was that the federal money has a critical role, and its critical role is that everybody has access. When you apply to these foundations and boards I'd love to think that they were all just faring equal... but that's crap. But that was my role, I thought, as Executive Director, was that my dignity was based on the fact that we had a fair system and any time that somebody tried to do an end run or whatever, it was my job to step in and say, “No, you don't have, this isn't your private ... [glitch on tape].” I always thought that that was your standard as an arts agency director was that you would only be there if the agency was aboveboard, if the granting was - if the panels worked, and it was the way things were done.*

[Q: What was the deal with ACA?]

*I'll have to back and put it together, but the ACA was basically what became NASAA but it included Mexico and Canada. It was Nancy, Nancy was very involved in the ACA.*

[Q: I heard that there was conflict between ACA and the NEA, that ACA wanted to be the federal presence. Is this true?]

*I know we had a fed-state paper. Steve Sell and myself and others were to write a policy paper about what the relationship ought to be between the NEA and the States. I'll have to dig back in all that because the timing gets mixed up. But anyway what eventually came of it was, NASAA decided to become the organization that was just dealing with the states, not an international presence. It was ACA that sponsored the national conferences, and that was how we would get together.*

[Q: So NASAA was a spin-off of the ACA?]

*Yeah. I mean, Clark would know more about it, but basically what I remember is the day we voted to become an independent organization from ACA. Probably NASAA was an – in fact, I would imagine a state committee of ACA, of which, again, there would be a Canadian element, a Mexican element, and so forth.*

What was the single biggest issue or challenge the SAA field had vis a vis the federal government, the regionals, other states, the local arts agencies?

*The picture that I had gotten was that Nancy Hanks knew how powerful the states could be if they were organized and that she was worried about the beer-can hatmakers and the whole thing losing its standards. And her whole dance was that NY and California would always be the base of arts in the country and that the states would be consumers. And that if the states started to flex their muscles, particularly in the Senate, they could be really powerful. Now she felt that the states ought to flex their muscle on behalf of the NEA. In fact, they used to call us the “paper tigers” because we couldn't get the budget up for the National Endowment for the Arts. The response to that was, if you really believes in the states, let the state arts agencies be kind of a mini-Endowment in the states, let the state arts agencies determine what each of the states need, and you give block grants. Because what was happening is, we'd be working with an organization, have an idea of what they needed, where they were going; then they'd shoot off a grant to the National Endowment for the Arts, get a big hunk of money, come back and look at the state arts agency and t say, “Who the hell are you? We go direct to the federal government. So we're now a federal arts project, and you're just a state arts agency.” So we wanted a very coordinated approach to where we would assess our needs, and we would then present that to the National Endowment for the Arts and the various programs*

*could look at our needs and say, “We’ll give you some money in theater for this” and so forth, but always allowing for the parallel approach. So that was always the big issue was, does the Cincinnati Museum have direct access to the NEA and therefore could care less about its local state arts agency and so on and so forth.*

[Q: In Montana, did the locals have the same issues with you, thinking you were trying to set their standards?]

*Oh, sure. We had a big battle early on – this came out of the early years of community development. There was a great network called MIA, Montana Institute of the Arts, of arts groups all over the state. They thought – that goes back to the Baker Brownell days – they thought that there didn’t need to be an arts agency, that they would simply get the grant from the NEA, they were already in existence. And so for years and years there was tension, that the arts council was formed as this bureaucracy and they were the true, pure agents of the arts.*

[Q: Did that “wither away?”]

*Yes, over time. I always paid great homage to them and did think, we gave them grants and all that kind of stuff, and eventually incorporated a lot of them into the arts.. [tape is blank for a few seconds here]*

H. Can you think of an anecdote that tells us something about the arts in the political climate of your state at that time? Can you tell us who – if anyone – was a special political ally to you in those days (the governor? A legislator?)

*What was always fun was taking a legislator, who was the consummate redneck, hater-of-all-things-aesthetic and convert them. And we did. At the core of it, they are human beings. And actually, the more angry they were, the more fun it was. The worst governor I had, was one whose mother taught ballet, and he was highly educated in the arts, and the only thing he’d ever do for the arts was tell the story: that he loved the arts, his mother taught ballet, and he didn’t do a goddamn thing! It was the governors that all of a sudden became empowered, they were looked to and could do something for the arts; so when you converted them they were much better friends than the so-called already enlightened.*

[Q: How did you convert that guy?]

*I had a “secret weapon” - Joann Daley.*

[ME: Sister Joanne?]

*She'll show up in this history too. She [glitch: created a group of advocates who just “worked the legislature over”] - how can you say no to a nun? So it was through them we got a lobbyist. I was so dumb, early on, I didn't realize that if you didn't have a lobbyist you weren't a player in the legislature. Again, thanks to luck, who did we get for our first lobbyist but the retired AO reporter who had covered the legislature forever. And had great prestige. So every successive we had had great persuasive power, and this team of women who would just work these people over in ways you can't imagine.*

I. How did you use your time:

1. Can you describe a prototypical day?

*You were a 2-person operation, and so you did everything. I can remember doing budgets and going crazy, because I'm not a figures person, (and remembering I had done an art exhibit in which we had a Burroughs calculator, one of the first electronic calculators). What saved my butt was, just then, Texas Instruments came out with a little hand calculator. And I can remember the first thing I had to do is design all the forms that we used. And getting a Selectric typewriter was a big event because you didn't have to go to the printer; we didn't have money to go to the printer. And I had JoAnn, of course, who really knew her way around, because she'd been there forever. So in the beginning, we had a little office the size of a closet on the third floor of the theater on the University campus without air conditioning; we used to have to take off work on hot days because you couldn't live up there. So we started at 0. You did everything. And if it wasn't for then the Rocky Mountain States Federation that allowed some travel – what really saved me was colleagues, finding out what was going on in the rest of the world.*

2. In a typical year at the beginning, can you give a general idea of how your time divided (in percents, roughly):

*Most of the time consumed was the granting, the budget, the mechanical aspects of the agency. Because we had people like this Jim Hoy, we didn't have*

*to do a lot of lobbying, like that, early on; that was pretty much taken care of. Since we only met every 2 years, the legislature, we never got around to that until the legislative session; then it was all about doing your testimony, lining all that up. So early on, it was the mechanics: budgeting, being on the phone with the field almost all the time and meeting with them – mostly grant applicants. Planning was a subconscious thing: you had a whole list of things you started with that you wanted to do; your council would give you feedback, but it was years before we started statewide meetings and all that. But planning's always an interesting issue. Some people live for it; for others it's just a scenario because you have to have a plan. But the fact is that most of it is targets of opportunity early on in those years.*

*Who'd have ever guessed that poetry in the schools would be so successful early on in a rural state, with the poets out there with their ponytails, all hippied up. If you were doing a plan people'd say: "They'd be shot! They'd be hanging from trees!" And the fact is, they weren't. Teachers had a helluva time teaching poetry. And these people'd come in and say "I live for words! I love word! You have any words you love? Well, that's the core of poetry!" And most teachers never ever got that; and here you had this person who lived for words, and for an hour a week in the classroom where words were the most important things that people could share. God it changed the landscape! Again, in planning to do that kind of stuff, you'd talk yourself out of it. You'd just go do it, see what would happen.*

*It's like passing audits: you know, whenever your agency'd be audited, you'd get beat up on something – even if it's because you a petty cash fund for stamps or something. You could never win, they'd always beat you up on something. So you always had to have a plan, but once you did that – it was probably subconsciously at work – I seldom went back and checked things off.*

*The whole key: I remember we hired a young woman, top of her class at the university. I put her on a task and she said: "Where do I read on how to do this?" and I said, "You don't. You just do it." And she couldn't. She couldn't. She could not fail, she could not risk failure. Her whole life had been based on "Tell me what to read, and I'll read it and pass the test." When confronted with going out and making mistakes, and learning from her mistakes, she was not equipped. And that's really what we're all about: It's doing, and responding, and sensing, and pressing on. And of course that's still the way life is today.*

[Q: Were you allowed to raise private funds?]

*There was always the pressure. But there was a certain craziness about that. And even to this day – are you competing – these groups all have to raise money, and it's so tough. The leverage was still the best: the matching grant concept.*

[Q: Were you consciously working with other state agencies?]

*Yeah. Again, if you'd find a person in an agency that was kind of young, and in the same kind of condition, you'd go have coffee. That's usually the way it started. Percent for art was amazing: that started with Peter Hero telling the legislature it could be done; but it really happened because there was a young assistant to the state architect who thought it was a great idea. That went through in one session, and I thought it had no chance in the world. Again, if you sat down and analyzed it... And that program has done more for artists than anything else we did.*

grant administration.

advocacy/lobbying with public officials

field/constituency communication

agency strategic planning

program development

fundraising

partnership building (with other government agencies,

with other types of nonprofits, with private sector, with

arts/cultural agencies at other levels of government)

3. Did your time use change in any noticeable way from the beginning to the end of your time at the SAA?

[Q: So you put about equal amounts of your time in grant administration, lobbying, talking to the field and informally in partnership building?]

*The lucky thing was, you were able to hire people to pursue these programs. And so you ended up managing your staff as far as – actually what you wanted your staff people to do was to develop their own relationships, their own prestige in their field. You hoped they would travel, you'd give them all kind of encouragement to write grants, that kind of thing. So your planning had to do with looking at the skills and talents you had on your staff, what your resources were, and then going for it that way.*

*We had what we called the Cultural Congress, and that was a big blowout every couple of years. And again, it was all about how well your staff integrated with all those people. You had to manage them; each staff person had to think his area was the most important. So you'd end up, I think, you actually became a manager where in the beginning you did most of that stuff yourself.*

- J. What else – information, stories – can you tell us that you think people in the future ought to know about your agency, or the SAA world in general?

II. Have you stayed in touch with the state arts agency field since you left your position as Executive Director?

*No, and I wish there was a way to do that. One of the things I think has been a waste of asset: If you look back at the NEA, think for instance of all the people who have been involved, served on NEA panels, all the chairmen and whatnot, that they become educated advocates. Arlie [current director] has always been good about staying in touch, but as far as the state arts agencies, her management is completely different from mine, but it was right for the period and she became very political; and that's what she had to do. She did what she needed to do to survive, and in the beginning I got a lot of howls, most all the staff that I knew had left, most with chips on their shoulder about the treatment they got. I had to stay out of that.*

*But...in fact if what came out of this is a website that was devoted to the “good old days... it's like when you get your alumnae newsletter, it tells you about all the wonderful things your university is doing now, and it doesn't mean anything – their life is based on the “now” and your life is based on the “then.” So knowing all the new professors, all the new great programs, is interesting reading, but what you're looking for is what's going on with the era that you were connected to.*

[ME: We can learn from those of you in that era.]

*If the young people of today were put back in that same era they would have done the same things. In other words, it's the way history is, it's [unintelligible]. It was the times – but it can be done again. Because if you look at history, there's going to be another new progressive movement, there has to be, because we know exactly what's going to happen these next 4 years. Paint an optimistic picture: Iraq's going to turn into a rose? The budget? We're headed for real calamity. And out of that will come a new progressive movement. And I guess*

*that's what young people have to hear, is what a progressive movement entails.*

A. If so:

1. From your experience, how has the role and the activities of SAAs changed since you began your career?
2. From your experience, what skills/competencies do you think are most important to incoming SAA staff? To SAA leadership?
3. Would you pursue a career in SAAs/public arts management today if you were starting out?
4. Has the field lived up to its promise? Why or why not?

B. If you have NOT stayed in touch with the field, why not?

[See above]

III. Think about the time when you were starting your work with SAA's. What have you changed your mind about, if anything, from then to now?

*Things have changed. It's much more political. If you look at history, things come around. There will be for instance a new progressive era ... you can see it coming out of the current political calamity. That isn't changing my mind about anything, really, so much as having a conviction that despite the changes, things will cycle. My basic belief in humanity, in humanism, is unchanged.*

IV. Do you have a single piece of advice for a young person entering the field of public sector arts administration today?

[See his "Proudest of achieving" section for this]  
[Also see his discussion of how he spent his time]

V. Information about you:

A. Education

1. Educational Level (has, ba, some grad, ma, PhD)

BA

2. Major/field

*Education and political science*

- B. What skills/competencies did you have did you bring to your leadership position at an SAA? How had you acquired these skills? (Experience, professional development training, formal degree education)

*I'm a terminal idea person, and I can accomplish almost nothing on my own. But if I can find the right people who buy into an idea, and I wasn't conscious of that, but it was always talking about ideas; and somebody would pick up on an idea and you'd say: "If I got a little money to you could you make this work?" So if you have a person who loves ideas, and put them in a place where there is some money to work with, it's kind of natural. And you're always looking for good people – you're always looking. What it boils down to is, either you can assess what people can do, and who the right people are, or nothing ever will work. You learn in working with your congressmen that the most "important" person is the congressman, but REALLY the most important person is their gatekeeper. So you spent your time with the staffs; you always knew you could do fine with the congressman but he would always turn it over to the staff.*

### C. Work Experience

1. Specific arts management experience vs. non-arts management experience
2. Did you work for a SAA either before or after your time as Executive Director?.
3. Did you work for a public sector agency – not an SAA – either before or after your time as Executive Director? No
4. It may be necessary for us to just ask them to make a list of their work experience in chronological order – no need for years - including the SAA, and then for us to categorize – jotting one of these categories after they have named the job:
  - private sector management
  - government agency management
  - gallery/performance group
  - fundraising/grant administration
  - performer/critic/writer
  - lobbyist/advocate
  - nonprofit sector experience
  - elected office holder
  - arts education/teacher

- academic
- service organization experience: national or other

Work Chronology:

*Student government leadership in college - "where I learned my management style"*

*Director, Yellowstone Arts Center*

*President of the symphony*

*Montana Arts Council*

*Retired*

D. Do you pursue any art form? Which? *Film making, video making. I have done videos for Lewis and Clark Centennial, NASA, others.* [NOTE: I got this after the tape was turned off]

E. Demographic information:

1. Gender - *M*
2. Age range now *65*
3. Geographic region he or she lives now *Missoula, Montana*
4. political/partisan identification *Classic liberal democrat*

*"At the core liberalism is that every human being is of equal value."*