

Robert Sheets

Executive Director of Colorado, **1967-80** formerly CCAH, now CCA

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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?

They came to pass separately. The NEA was of course generated on a federal level, on a national level, of trying to establish a governmental opportunity to recognize cultural values in the country and to preserve them. (At that time, there was no real consideration of having state councils or state programs.) It was an effort by people who were involved – a lot of it grew out of the Kennedy Center movement to create that, and then also it was generating out of New York when places like the Lincoln Center opened (It's interesting how facilities of that magnitude will often generate people to say, "Well gosh, let's take a look at what is going on, what should not be allowed to go by the wayside – and maybe we need more than just building buildings: we need more, not just financial support, but a national recognition that there are – well, you can compare it to the national preservation of historic sites program; we preserve historic sites because they remind us of who we were and who we are – the same is true of cultural institutions, be they museums, ballet companies, artists themselves, poets. There is a need to preserve, and you preserve them by supporting them. So there then became this national movement to get the federal government involved, supporting and recognizing the cultural heritage of this country, and the need to preserve it. Then, when it entered the political arena, as it often does, politicians will stop and say, "Well, yeah, let's do what we can to save the Metropolitan opera?, but what about the opera company in Lamar, Colorado, of course which there is none – but there might be someday! But then the politicians start to say, "Well, are we going to build roads in my

town also, or in my state?” And there then became a push on the federal level to say, “Well, let’s take some of the money, let’s go to the governors of each state, and say, “Tell us what is out there in your state, that should be, maybe can be, supported on a federal level.” That was when they gave each governor so much money to help write a report, a survey, report, and proposal, to support statewide cultural activities, and then if so, possibly – and of course the key word was possibly - there might be federal funds to support a statewide initiative. And that’s why in Colorado, Governor Love asked a group of us, who were formed as an ad hoc cultural group across the state (and of course, you look at a list of the people on that ad hoc group – they were some of the great cultural leaders of this state whose names will forever be enshrined as the real motivators and creators of the CO Council on the Arts & Humanities). At the same time, which was interesting, there was a plan afoot to establish a program to go along with the winter Olympics that CO had proposed, to be held here in 1976. This program was developing clear back in the middle-1960’s; and the committees were being organized to try to bring, at the same time, to have the Olympics (which of course were scuttled and that’s another whole political issue that we could go on for hours with) – but it was too bad, because it was going to be a magnificent program and people worked a good 10 years to make it something successful, and it was just trashed – a worldwide cultural program, and people were working their tail off to make it something successful.

Well, this was going on, this momentum, at the same time the Governor was asking a group of us around the state to survey our local areas (I was living in Colorado Springs at the time and wrote the chapter for the statewide survey – I wrote the chapter on the Pikes Peak Area) surveying what was there that needed to be supported, and could be supported, and what was once there that was no longer there, such as, we surveyed in the Pikes Peak area the number of opera houses that were still standing that were not producing opera; the number of theatres that were still standing that were not producing theatre; facilities that lacked opportunity, that lacked facilities, and what we found was, that missing in this whole mix was the need for coordination. The key item of coordination which, you look at any civic, or community, or statewide and even federal activity such as public schools, highways – whatever you’re talking about, coordination, knowledge of resources and coordinating those resources, is a key item in the possibility of leadership to solve problems. So then we created this report for the Governor, which became the report he took to the Legislature. And while all of this was going on, the Endowment then came across with the plan to state that each Governor was to create a state council on the arts and each state was given \$25,000 to create it. You could call it huge, but it was sort of laughable. Colorado took the \$25,000, and made it, it was

federal money of course, made it their budget for 3 straight years, out of which came of course the salary of the director, the secretary, expenses, everything – grants, whatever you did with that money, it all came out of \$25,000 for 3 straight years.

[Q: Len Rhodes was your first director?]

What was created, then, before the legislature voted to create it – the Governor created it by his own declaration from the Office of the Governor, what was called the Interim Council of the Co Council on the Arts & Humanities – the Interim Council. And Walter Helmich (sp?) was the Chairman, and Dr. Bill Rhodes, who was chaplain at the University of Denver – the University gave him leave of absence to become Interim Director. And the goal was, once the legislature created the state agency with the powers therein, there would be hired a fulltime director and a new chairman. So with that report, and with the legislature in Colorado, as well as in other states, these councils were being created and established as state agencies. There were 50 of them created, and they all had 50 different characteristics. You know, they came from various different profiles, various different motivations, and various different baggage that sometimes the baggage encumbered a council, sometimes it helped. So there was this wide variety of motivations and people to do the motivating. And during this period, there was the Associated Councils on the Arts, ACA. You may recall, one of the early presidents was a gal by the name of Nancy Hanks. And the ACA found that one of the things that was going to be necessary, if all of these 50 varieties of state councils, and if the responsibility of these state agencies was going to have any impact with the relationship of the National Endowment for the Arts, which was created in 1965, they were going to have to have some universal goals that they can come together and deliberate issues, present issues, go for solutions, as a more single voice, not only with the Endowment but with Congress. Because what always surfaces when you do something like this, is you recognize the power of working with individual state congressmen and senators to improve the legislation in support of the National Endowment. The lobbying effort of states meant that we can't have just 50 divergent opinions and thoughts floating out there; we need to speak with a universal voice. So ACA started holding institutes, or training seminars for state directors. She [Nancy] came to ACA from - she was Nelson Rockefeller's secretary.

[Q: This was when the NEA was being formed, when you were brand new?]

[NOTE: much of this answer also relates to the “relationship with the NEA, ACA” question below.]

Yeah. In 67, the CO legislature created the CCAH, and they went through the search, and I was brought in December of 67 - I was teaching school in CO Springs. And I was brought to Denver to be the Director in December of 67, and in February of 68 I went to Buffalo, NY, with – oh gosh, there must have been 28-30 new, green state directors of this octopus with many tentacles. We went in there for about a week, almost 2 week, training seminar. It was marvelous, fabulous! We started from scratch on who we were and what we could be. And out of it came – I would say, that is when the seeds were planted. There had been a training seminar in 67 for those states which had already passed legislation. Ours then passed it in 67 and I went to the one in 68 so I went to the second seminar. It not only introduced each of us (and we all came from this fascinating varieties of career – Wilburn West who was the new director in Utah had been head of the Dairy Council and the Governor was a good friend of his so the Governor made him head of the Arts Council. It was priceless – what a fine man he was. You had people coming from all these different varieties – the head of Idaho, she was a reporter on the newspaper. So you had all of these freshmen to the business, put through the paces through a marvelous program, put together by ACA, which really planted the seed for a fraternity of purpose among all of these state directors. It's interesting, the names of those people, when you see the list of who all those people were, and you realize, “God, that was the guts of this national organization which eventually became a very powerful lobbying force, a very prominent role player in the activities of the National Endowment for the Arts. And it led eventually, we found as state directors who were associated with ACA in New York and we attended their national conventions each year, it became very obvious to us that we had to become a little bit stronger by forming our own association. And that's when the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies was formed. And it was interesting, when we first formed at St. Éclair, it could have been 69 or 70, when we were in Chantclair (sp?) near Montreal for the ACA convention – when we broke away during that Canada meeting – there were lots of sparks over that one, because Nancy was just furious that we were going to break away (and I could tell your stories about some of the backroom meetings with Nancy that are fascinating) – we formed – gosh, I can't remember the title of it right now, but it included Canada and Mexico. And Senor Guadiarojo (sp?), the head of the Mexico Arts Commission, was there with his interpreter – it was marvelous, it was just a great experience. We operated for a year including Canada and Mexico, and then we realized that we were going to have to – if we were going to be a strong lobbying force with Congress and with the Endowment itself, we were going to have to become the National Federation of State Arts Agencies – just the US .

[Q: Clark was telling how his chair, Adams, went to ACA, and he wanted to be the voice of the arts in America. Is that how you remember that?]

No. And this is interesting. This is one of the things that all of us are guilty of, but it is also is a valid way to garner what the real picture was, is to get all of these different opinions through the eyes of these different people, because we all look at it through our own experience. Let me say that those training institutes, that ACA put on, the reason they were a success was because of Howard Adams. He was the director of ACA, and Nancy was the chairman.

[Q: Did you see conflict between ACA and the Endowment?]

I didn't see that Howard Adams wanted to be the voice of the arts in the nation. I did see that ACA, justifiably, wanted to hold on to the base of its participants. Nancy and Howard both reacted very harshly when we wanted to pull away from ACA, the state directors, because we were reducing their individual memberships; but we also pledged to stay members of ACA while we had the creation of our own federation. And this is the key item: that we in the arts – hell, it's like any – the highway department, parks, trash collection – everybody has their own trash barrel. And people don't want to let go of their own territory, and that's OK.

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?

It's just like all during the time that my experience with the council in Colorado, beyond giving grants, beyond recognizing companies, and giving support by awards, or grants or recognition of any kind, and generating support to the legislature, politicking and all that stuff – one of the major motivating activities of all state agencies like the councils (and this is where I think CO lost the ball in the last few years – they lost the ability to become the motivator, peacemaker, conciliatory, understandable, power of, working with) – our job was not to be selective as to which dance company was the best but was to make possible interaction, intersupport, inter-recognition in the participation of all dance efforts, not matter who might be the motivator of any particular dance studio or company, it was to keep the waters flowing, and not divert funds to any one company, thereby putting the others out of business

[Q: Was that the organizing principle of your administration?]

We were the primary inspiration that existed among those early council members and staff, we saw our job was to keep the candle lit, not let it blow out. And not let it blow out because companies were fighting with each other, not let it blow out because our programs might separate and make one company better than the other, one artist better than the other, but was to be the motivators for a broader acceptance, participation and accessibility and opportunity for audiences and artists, no matter what the discipline, to flourish, grow and improve throughout the whole state.

You know, gosh, when I think back to those early days: that staff we had: the Judith Wrays, the Barbara Neals, the David Struthers, the Joann Marks Kauvars, those people worked tirelessly to make something survive which was bigger than one individual or company that we were dealing with.

[Q: You left in 1980; Ed Harrison was acting director for a year or two?]

I went on sabbatical in 79, came back in 80; he was acting director when I was gone (because he was assistant director at the time). When I came back it was for a very brief period of time. There was so much in the pot that I jumped out. He was acting director until they selected Ellen.

I'd sum up by saying that the primary inspiration of the early council and staff was to "keep the candle lit" – not to let the candle blow out because of infighting among the companies, but rather to be the motivators for broad participation, opportunity for audiences, artists, to flourish throughout the state, no matter where. The staff we had, they were incredible. They worked tirelessly to make something survive which was bigger than any one individual or company.

B. 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?

No, didn't change my mind. One of the things that was important, we never lost the recognition that we needed to evolve. And to evolve meant you were going to get more money, which meant you were going to foster more problems and the need to be more circumspect on how you handled the problems. We saw that one of the things that was growing was going to be the fight politically and emotionally between the major institutions fighting for their share of the pie. We tried for years to not even discuss or talk about the share of the pie – we wanted everybody to be at the table, at one level or another, and that's why we tried so hard and maintained it for a good 10 years, the business that we were

the inspiration and the opportunity for the arts to participate and grow and become established; and therefore any grant that we gave was a grant that helped an to help an artist, a company or a community to establish something, and over a period of three years the grant would diminish and go out of business because the goal was to create the opportunity for strong local support. And then would come the time: how are we going to deal with what one might call statewide or regional companies that need – because of economics – a larger means of support? We always helped them to the prospect that they had to have a plan; that companies should not just walk in the door and say, “We are the Denver Symphony, therefore give us some money.” Now one of the most unique things about this, in the history of this whole inter-artistic history of the National Endowment for the Arts and the state arts agencies is that, when they went to create the NEA in Washington, was that the people who lobbied the hardest against it was the Nat’l Assoc. Of Museums and the American Symphony Orchestra League. They fought it, and fought it, and fought it, because they were not going to be dictated to, the kind of music to play, the things to show in museums, by any federal agency. As always happens, history will show you that once it was created, they were banging on the door for their share of the money. Don’t call me a whore, but don’t let me stand on the street corner. And that was happening here in Colorado. We saw that the tide was going to come, when the major institutions were going to be at the door for flat financial support. We fought very hard to – if we were going to support the Denver Symphony, it was to go out in the regions of the state, giving concerts to children throughout Colorado. We toured the Denver Symphony all over the Marvelous thing. Of course, I don’t think they do it any more.

We would go out with them. One of the things we did was, we looked upon the major institutions as partners, and not as grantees. And we the staff, and members of the Council, the Bea Vraedenburgs, the Bob Yegge’s, Bob Silver, Marj Christie from Canon City, Selina Smith from Julesburg – these people took it as their responsibility to not only attend Council meeting and help the staff make the selections and distribution of funds and program ideas, but to represent a statewide constituency by going out with our partners, be it Chautauquaua or the Denver Symphony or the Denver Art Museum taking different exhibits to different towns throughout the state ... you know this is interesting: the first modern art show at the Denver Art Museum was from a grant from the CCAH.

It was when the Denver Art Museum was in an old automobile garage. Right on the site of (in fact part of the old automobile garage is right where the café is, at the Denver Art Museum. It is the old garage. We had – god, you’ll love this! –

we forced them, through plotting with some staff members at the art museum at the Denver Art Museum – because Otto Bach did not want a modern art show. He was from the old school. We dearly loved Otto, but he was stubborn as anybody with the name Otto Bach could be. And they wanted money from the CCAH, and we said “Fine, and you’ll put on a modern art show. All of the great modern artists were in it, Andy Warhol, the whole schmear. We opened it with national arts leaders from the endowment, people coming in from around the country to attend. The opening was a banquet where you had had tables set out throughout the art show. I can remember the centerpieces on each table was an artistic stacking of tomato soup cans with candles on each can. And it was a black tie affair; it was marvelous, it was catered, and Bill Baum of the Petit Gourmet, now the premier catering company, had just started his catering business, and he had 2 trucks and he pulled them in to the alley behind the automobile garage, set them up and served the dinner out of the alley behind – bringing the food in which was just superb. As we were leaving this very successful opening of this magnificent show – and of course the staff of the art museum was thrilled to death - Otto Bach said to me, “Did you get your money’s worth?” I said, “You bet your.. you know.”

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

Boy, that’s tough: it’s like, “Which of your twins do you like the best.” I can think of a couple of them, and they’re audio and they’re visual. One is: I remember standing outside the tent in Rangely, CO, of the Chautauqua performance of the ballet – Nancy Spanier’s dance company out of the U. of CO. All across the back of the tent, it was a hot night so all the sides were taken down so it was open, all across the back of a packed tent of about 400 people, it would seat 400, stood a row of oil workers, all with their hard hats on, their sleeves rolled up, and their plaid shirts. A group of us were standing out behind them during the company and we all said: “Look at that scene.” What an image, and that’s what it was all about. They were the loudest applause in the tent, were those oil workers. It showed you that the goals of access and availability – you’ve heard politicians use the term “everybody should come to the tent, nobody should be denied entrance to the tent, no matter what the situation, and the tent needs to have something going on in it” – and that is what was happening.

Another great image I have is when Pat Donohue – marvelous on the Garrison Keillor Prairie Home Companion – Pat toured with us just out of college, and his band out of Boulder auditioned to tour on Chautauqua, and they toured a

couple of years with us. A couple of years ago, I was attending down at Swallow Hill, a couple years ago, his annual concert that he still gives at Swallow Hill. I was standing with Harry Tuft, a former Council member, and David Struthers [former staff], and Pat Donohue was talking to a large group of people in the lobby, and signing autographs— the concert was over – no, it was half-time, intermission. He looked over and saw David and myself and Harry, and he said: “Oh, Bob Sheets, David Struthers: you people should know that they were with the state arts council, here in Colorado, and they were the ones that put together the Chautauqua Touring program. That was the best year of my life.” Harry Tuft turned to me and he said, “God, that must make you proud.” And it’s those experiences.

I think of Bob LeDonne (sp?) who, when the national association of arts & crafts people had their convention here in Denver, this was probably 68,69, I was at a reception in somebody’s fancy home in town. This came up to me and said: “You’re the head of the arts council. You goddamn people, you sonofabitch, you don’t do a thing to help us craftspeople, you – bla bla” ... embarrassed everybody in the room. I said, “You know, you and I have got to talk, come see me.” So he came to my office later on; he ended up one of the closest friends I’ve ever had in my life. We followed our careers together across the country. He became a marvelous friend, and supporter of the arts, and a great craftsman and artist in our state. You know, it would have been so easy for me to tell him to go to hell, or to become very pompous. I’m not saying that I’m the one that had the answer, all I’m saying is, It’s isn’t what we do, it’s how we do it. And I think that, down to the bottom line, and this is where government comes in to play: we were trying to make a statement that, not only are the arts valid, but government is valid.

Government is not the enemy, government is the people. And we the people need to massage, develop, create, support, the governmental process to make good things happen. And you don’t make them happen by becoming pompous, selective, autocratic, dictatorial. You make it happen because you, very elementary, you hold hands throughout the process. When artists in this state – we found, by getting to know them personally – were having a hard time paying taxes, knowing how to pay taxes, knowing how to keep records, knowing how to promote their painting, we created seminars and held them throughout the state, free and open to any artist in that region, to come and learn how to pay taxes.

[Q: You saw it tied up with good government and democracy.]

Absolutely. Absolutely.

D. What was most frustrating to you?

I think the most frustrating thing was the process by which the legislative support required that we do a tap dance every year to re-address the issue of who we were and what we do. And that was probably the most exhausting, tiring aspect of being a state agency – going back again, and starting over every year with the joint budget committee. Some of the stories I can tell you were so demeaning, so awful, it goes back to the heart of the issue of why do a lot of good people not want to go into government. You're treated like a 12th class citizen by legislators – and we were accused of being communists, we were accused of being deviants, we were accused of peddling pornography – you get to a point where you feel that you, as a state agency, and your staff and your council members and the people you serve were rising to a great new level of achievement and yet members of the legislature was not doing the same.

E. What was most surprising to you?

Most surprising ... not so much surprising, but inspirational: it was that the bedrock of this country, it was working with the communities across the state of Colorado. The opportunity to work in partnership with local leadership – be they schoolteachers, housewives, businessmen, mayors, city council, county commissioners, whatever those people might be, and especially the local artist effort, that as a state agency, walking in with a smile on your face and the opportunity to work as partners with them to make something beautiful happen for their community – that was probably one of the most inspiring things, to see how hungry people are for good things to happen. Working with the poets in the schools, the filmmakers in the schools, going around with Judith to those programs, and having come from public education, having been a teacher and an administrator and knowing how difficult sometimes it is to break into that “territory” (and schools can be very territorial, and certain teachers and administrators can become very threatened by anything that might come in and expose the fact that maybe they're not providing certain things they should be providing)– finding the teachers and principals and school board people around the state who were hungry for the opportunity to make something new happen. That was very inspirational.

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

I think – one of the interesting things was, and this is a point to consider, is that when we all started, from 65 to 75, as we said, we all came with different colored buckets and experience. But we – at the national level as well as the state level – with people like Clark Mitze in that position, he made possible (because he knew where we all were coming from, because he came from where we were), how important it was – we could call up Clark on the phone and say: “Clark, there's a chance for 3-4 states to get together, and do a project like the Michigan ArTrain. What do you think we could do, we need to have a meeting to pull together on a cooperative program, and we're wanting to get together in Minneapolis, could we ...” He'd say: “Sure, we'll fund it.” That was probably one of the key items. It was that attitude. Clark wasn't the only one, but Clark led, he demonstrated how it could work. Leonard – in the poetry office - when we started doing the Poets in the Schools programs out here, and Colorado was one of the first demonstrated states on how that program could work and Judith Wray was teaching at Loretto Heights; and I called her one day on the phone and I said, “We have a chance to get a demonstration program of poets in the schools, would you want to come over here and help us put it together?” and of course she came over here and helped us put it together and stayed.

There were people at the Endowment, and Nancy also, she's got to be given a lot of credit for wanting to take a chance, and that's the key item – to take a chance on something and not be afraid that something was not going to work. There were programs that we tried that didn't work. There were activities that happened that didn't work. Fine! You drop it and you go on to something new.

And that spirit in relation to the Endowment pervades all of our activities through those early years. That started to disappear.

It was very interesting: very early on when we formed the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and we realized that very soon after that, because the community arts councils that were the bulk of the membership of ACA once we pulled out, we were recommending that they form a national association of community arts agencies also.

I've got to tell you, also: we were formed as an arts & humanities council. There were probably about 12 states in the country that had humanity tie-ins; others were just straight arts commissions. We saw in Colorado that to get a

good humanities program, we were going to have to have a humanities council separate from the arts. That idea came in our office. We were meeting in Washington, DC, the Mayflower Hotel, and in my room were Amy Roosevelt my assistant director; Bob Yegge and myself, and we sat there and we said, “You know, the National Endowment for the Humanities needs a state-based program, like the Endowment for the Arts has. So there in Washington we went to them, met with them, and proposed that a state-based program be created, modeled after the Endowment for the Arts and that grants be given to state humanities commissions for humanities programs.

What’s interesting, between you and me, is that the humanities people in Colorado don’t know that. And you know, they put on Chautauqua at Greeley, and their brochures said they created the Colorado Chautauqua program, and I was at one of their performances, and was talking to their director after one of the shows there on the lawn in Greeley, and I said, “Did you know that the Colorado Arts Council started the Colorado Chautauqua touring program? He didn’t have time to talk to me. He froze up and walked away from me.” Gosh, don’t let that out!

[Q: Can you think of an anecdote that embodies CO politics at the time?]

There were lots ... John [Governor] Love was superb. As I told him at Ann’s [wife’s] funeral, I told him how much I loved working for him. That not only did I respect him, I knew that he respected us and cared for us. He was an honorable man and gave us the opportunity, the freedom to be the departments that we were created to be. He did not come around and say “This is what I want you to do.” This cannot be said about some current politicians.”

[There is also a good story about Ann found below in the “Time Use” question, below]

- G. [this can be a probe question from g above] 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?

[above]

- 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?)

[Above – info about Ann Love, first lady]

I. How did you use your time:

1. Can you describe a prototypical day?

I had a secretary, myself and a secretary for 3 years. Being new meant that you were being sized up by not only artists and arts organizations, but by other state agencies. You were being put on the table and everybody's taking a look at you. "Who are you, what are you going to do and what are you going to be, and how are you going relate to us?" whether it's an artist asking that question, or a Mayor, or a county commissioner, or a legislator or the Department of Travel & Tourism. Very early on we became partners in providing to the Dept of Travel & Tourism the opportunity to enhance their program by recognizing and placing the arts and cultural activities in the forefront of value, be it the Creede Repertory Theater and travel and tourism in the Creede area, be it the preservation of the Central City Opera House and the activities that go on there. Everything started to tie in, that the arts are an economic vaccine for the body politic and the wealth and activity of the whole state. That if the arts are not injected into the picture, the picture becomes less attractive and less viable. So that infusion needs to take place.

[Q: So injecting your programs was a good survival strategy?]

Exactly, which goes back to partnership. [A good example was] the state fair art show. John Love was interested in what we could do to help them improve their statewide constituency. So we were asked to go down there and start by meeting with the head of the state fair, here with the Dept of Agriculture here in Denver. We eventually worked a deal: I went to IBM and got money to hire a national, one time an international, juror, to come in and jury the entrants to the state fair art show. I had to start by going to Pueblo and meeting with the Pueblo Art Guild which had dominated the state fair art show for a hundred years – you know, little poodle pictures and cat pictures and little pictures of vases with flowers. It was very locally-oriented and it was one of the problems with the state fair itself was that it did not have a broader constituency throughout the state. So I had to go in there and pave the way and hold a lot of hands and tell them "Its going to be all right, the Pueblo Art Guild will not go out of business. Y'all are going to be part of the process. We created committees, we got all of the ladies involved in the activities down there

and we brought in a guy from Atlanta – he came in, head of the art show because IBM gave us the money to do it. We brought him in. He met with all the Pueblo artists long before the jurying of the show, and he became their friend, and they were all so happy to have him that we ended up not having anyone upset with the process. All of a sudden we announced this regional art show, statewide participation of artists from all over the state of CO, juried by these people year after year. I did it for 8 years. I went down there and spent 2 weeks during the state fair, working with the art show, and the jury process and being there every day at the state fair. Well, that was partnership, sheer partnership.

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

[Q: I hear from other directors about the ebullience of the time, rather than about strategic planning. Was that true for you too?]

Yeah, I think so. The horse had not been invented yet, so there was nothing to fall off of. So we could get out there and ride forever! So there was not the fear base, of “Oh gosh, what if we give a grant and the legislature gets mad because there’s a nude in it and we’re put out of...oh gosh let’s not do that!” We were charging ahead with enthusiasm, abandoned, joyful, courageous attitudes of anything’s possible. [He refers to a story about the Denver Arts Commission that we had talked about last year.] It would have been so easy to have them, when Art Lizering (sp? With that shoebox full of photographs and said “Help me save the Molly Brown House,” I could have said, “Go to the historical society, that’s not our business.” Instead, their first grant was \$2000 from the Colorado Arts Council. Very few people know it, but you really don’t need to know it. When Judith, Barbara, David, Joanne [all former staff] and I get together, we just giggle. You look at Telluride and all of the stuff going on down there, nobody knows that it all started because of the Colorado Chautauqua touring program. The jazz festival, the film festival is down there because after the Co Chautauqua, Janus Films came into our office and said “We would like to start a film festival in Telluride.”

[short personal digression]

grant administration
advocacy/lobbying with public
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: By the time you left, was it more structured or was it still that joyous charging ahead?]

We could feel that things were starting to change. I think as a staff, we were concerned that as new members were being appointed to the CCA by the governors they were more self-serving, there were people being appointed to the council who felt they were being appointed to represent the organization that they came from.

[Q: So your work became more political?]

Very much so. We were starting to have people on the council who had very minimal arts organization, art activity, art experience. And they were more political appointees, they were wives of contributors to governors' campaigns, and they started to change the dynamics of how the council members themselves viewed their responsibility. As I mentioned, in the very beginning – we had a thing in Durango. And you'd be amazed at the number of council members who went down there because we had given a grant to a project in Durango. God we drove down in that snowstorm, and Ann Love, we were all in the car together – that was unique too, because Ann Love, she wasn't a member of the Council, she was just the wife of the governor – she took upon herself (for a very specific reason, it had nothing to do with politics – an active participation with everything the council did.)

I should tell you this also – you talk about moments of pride. I was with Ann just before she died. I had a unique relationship with Ann. John [Governor] often could not go to events because he was busy. So she'd call me up and she'd say, "Would you take me to this banquet, to this thing?" and I would do that. There were times when, after they left and went to Washington, she'd find out I would be in town for one of the national art meetings, she'd be in touch with me and say, "Let's go to this event at the Kennedy Center" or something like that, and John was unavailable, so I would escort her. We had a very good

relationship and it all started because in 1969 – well, in 1968 I had done the national YWCA arts seminar in Aspen; I had put that together. It was out that that we said, “Wouldn’t it be fun to have a governor’s arts festival in Aspen the next year, 1969.” So I went to Ann, not knowing her too well but having met her at many of those arts functions, especially in those Olympic cultural festival planning meetings. I went to her and said “Would you be our chairman of the first Governors Arts Festival?” and that started it. After that it was a very close personal relationship. She said to me many times, and she reiterated it just about the day before she died, she said to me, “The happiest moments of my being the wife of the Governor was the Colorado Council on the Arts & Humanities.” So it’s those statements that you – for all the things she did, she was involved with everything – but she said it was the CCAH that meant the most to her – those are the things that make you feel like all the abuse you take from the joint budget committee was worth it, to hear something like that.”

- 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?

I’m still in touch with the old directors. Jim Edgy all the time, Ray Scott who is in very bad health, Francis Poteet in Albuquerque, Terry Melton in Oregon. You think about those people (and this is something I didn’t bring up) – the fraternity of purpose that we all shared created friendships that are among some of the closest I have in my life. I have to say, and Francis Poteet and I have talked about this 100 times, it goes back to Howard Adams’ seminars that ACA put on in Buffalo, New York.

A. If so:

1. From your experience, how has the role and the activities of SAAs changed since you began your career?

The point I was going to make, that had gone out of one side of the brain, was: All of us who came from these divergent disciplines, we saw the possible need to

have schooling for future state directors and administrators of governmental support of the arts. And out of that came Sangamon State and David Sennema who was the director in S. Carolina, who then was hired to be at Sangamon State University and create that program for public arts administrators degree, and we all went back and taught classes at Sangamon State and helped teach these young people the art of government and the arts – and we created monsters. We really created monsters – professional bureaucrats.

The one thing about all of us – from the David Nelsons to the Terry Meltons, to the Ray Scotts, on down the line – we refused to be bureaucrats. It changed the dynamics of the people who were being hired to run these programs, because they say their job was to run agencies and not to support the arts. We saw our job was to support the arts by running agencies. I said to Nancy Hanks, sitting in the hotel in San Francisco at the ACA meeting when she was going to announce that she had been hired as the national chairman of the Endowment for the Arts. She was terrified of the job; she was scared to death. I'll never forget it. We were sitting behind a partition in the ballroom of the hotel. She said, "Robert, I don't think I can do this. I'm scared to death, I don't think I can handle it." And I was trying to convince her that she could handle it, that she was superb, and we were talking about who we were, and what we were doing in the business of government support of the arts. And I made the statement, I never forgot it: "Nancy, the only thing that scares me about this new journey that we're all on, is that we might someday become government." And indeed I think that's what's happened. And that's why I think that the CCA, as you and I have talked about before, and you have written so beautifully about, is that the CCA became government and it being government was its only goal. And therefore it lost its constituency, it lost its personality, it lost its support

2. From your experience, what skills/competencies do you think are most important to incoming SAA staff? To SAA leadership?

[see below, advice to new arts administrators]

3. Would you pursue a career in SAAs/public arts management today if you were starting out?

Probably not. I'd have a hard time doing it, just because the water is flowing in another direction, not only in the business but also in my own life.

4. Has the field lived up to its promise? Why or why not?

In many respects, we fell into the trap and we became “ordinary” instead of “extraordinary.” Therefore, we’re losing the opportunity to take the movement in a new dimension.

[Q: What would it need to do that?]

It takes the swing of the pendulum. You mentioned 40-year cycles. We are probably back to the point where some good people are going to start stepping forward again. There’s nothing that gets something motivated than opposition; once you feel like the opposition has mounted a strong enough force, it calls the people forward that need to stand up and speak for it, and champion the program and take part in the revolution.

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

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?

[this is inherent in his replies to other questions]

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

Start drinking more! [he laughs]! I can remember at the ACA meeting up near Montreal, when we were pulling away from ACA – I’m sure David Nelson and all these people would remember this – we were all in this big, hard meeting and everybody was so serious. And Ray Scott stood up and he said, “Ladies and gentlemen, the drinking lamp is lit! I have heard enough!”

I would say, Roll up your sleeves, put on your sandals and enjoy the journey. Don’t think you cannot do it – your dreams are as big as the possibility of making a difference in the world you live...more so probably than in most professions and businesses in our society. Nothing is as vital to the health and welfare and spiritual life of the people on the planet than the creative arts of all societies. Nothing. Nothing compares to it.

V. Information about you:

A. Education

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

BA, Teaching certificate

2. Major/field

History and sociology

- 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)

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?
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:

[I have paraphrased and condensed]

Marines

Taught school in Texas and Colorado (junior high history, English, lit, drama, art)

Administered Title 3 arts program to help bring arts into classroom and helped create Pikes Peak arts council during this time; was president of the PP arts council. Started attending Olympic Cultural Festival meetings, met Governor Love.

CCAH

Began a writing career in San Francisco; and co-founded (with Dale Kobler from NEA) Kobler Associates Consulting, assisting a wide range of organizations and communities in the arts management arena

Moved back to Denver; writing and working on "historical projects in Boston"

D. Do you pursue any art form? Which?

Writing, might get back into painting and sculpture where I began

E. Demographic information:

1. Gender *M*
2. Age range *70*
3. Geographic region he or she lives now *Denver, Colorado*
4. Political/partisan identification *Democrat (though was a*

*republican when I started working for the CCAH)
though have never voted straight party.*

*It was tough working with the legislature, and the vicious,
dirty way the republicans and the joint budget committee
and the legislature were playing their games; it's still going
on. To be sitting there, to be accused of being a communist,
to be socializing the arts – it soured me on my own party. I
became an independent until just a few years ago, then
registered as a democrat because of what was going on.*

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