

Ann Vermel

Executive Director of Rhode Island from 1971 to 1976

Interviewer: Susan Neumann

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1. 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?

I think it was that the United States really should be following the patterns of the major European and some of the Asian agencies in supporting and building awareness of the indigenous arts in the United States, especially those that were remarkable either for their excellence or for their indigenous characteristics so it was to build audiences and identify and promote distinctive art.

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?

My big idea was to support artists and to help them improve and to build audience through outreach of the arts so I wanted to build audience and make people who are practicing the arts, give them some capacity building, strengthen their capabilities where they were less than excellent. I wanted to help them find opportunities to raise either their standards or strengthen their capabilities or whatever. That was sort of my general attention. I had one specific thing. I wanted to raise the support of the arts in Rhode Island. When I first came in, it was getting a \$40,000 a year legislative appropriation and I wanted to increase the expenditure to \$1 per person which would have taken it to just under a million and we succeeded in that in the fourth year but it was a combination of federal and state funds and some private. The situation was unstructured. When I first went in, there were really relatively few guidelines. The organization really was able to be pretty free because that small state appropriation meant that they were pretty much operating under radar of the state bureaucrats and the bureaucracy. Once we got up close to a million dollars, even when we got to \$500,000 we were suddenly noticed as a functioning agency with money to spend and that immediately politicized the agency and made life much more difficult. When I first came in, they were running a wonderful summer program called the Governor's School, which was genuinely an excellent training program for high school students interested in the arts. They were making major grants to Trinity Square Repertory Company and a few other excellent arts organizations and they were cultivating really excellent art. By the time that I arrived, this had led to some...not to say the least "some"...I mean it was actually some pretty overt anger on the part of organizations that were forming and had not yet established a standard of quality, particularly the opera. There were two opera companies that were kind of feeble at the time. They were new. They hadn't really worked hard. They were in many ways

vanity operations for either the producer or one or two of the singers and they had noticed that Trinity Square Repertory Company which was one of the major American regional theatres even then under the direction of Adrian Hall were getting most of the money and they were very annoyed and they wanted their share. They were also highly politically connected so the first month that I was in Rhode Island I celebrated my 40th birthday by being picketed at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum by some people who had been put together by the opera company; that it was just whimsical and unfair. So one of the first things I had to do was to develop very clear guidelines for the distribution of funds and the application for funds which had not existed before.

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?

Yes and no. I think we were in the formative years so we were able to get a whole lot done and we really exploded in the areas of community arts programming. We developed an Art for the Elders Program. We had a very active art in the schools program which is still I think going on. We had institutionalized the Governor’s School into year-round program and we had an Art in the Prisons Program and had started working with the community art councils. So we had established I think a very solid program. What we had not done and this was certainly my responsibility and I did not succeed here; I had not built a really solid legislative support base. My successor I think did work a lot on that but it was pretty well destined and I think it was certainly not just Rhode Island. I mean if you look at the history of the state arts agencies, you can see that little flurry of Camelot in the 60’s and 70’s was very effective for awhile and then it lost its support base and seemed to become irrelevant. The arts councils became highly politicized and started focusing mostly on ethnic arts and community support bases and grassroots stuff and it fizzled. It became bureaucracy like any other. I could say that I left at a high point. I had made my million dollars in my budget and I had started a lot of wonderful programs with wonderful young artists. We had also one of the first state artists in residence programs where we just hired an artist to be the resident artist for the state. We had I think four them in the course of a year and they worked 50% on state programs so they taught in the education programs or community programs or they went into a corporation and worked there on a project and then the rest of the time they were supposed to work on their own work. It was a very successful program until we made an award to somebody who used it to run away with his best friend’s wife and the state legislature found out about it and we had many fences to mend. *Did you change your mind about what was needed?* No, I don’t think so. I had gone in with a very strong feeling that the arts is like an organism and it has greater and lesser tissues or organs but they’re all essential to the operation of the whole. I was looking to find balance between supporting major arts organizations and improving some of those and encouraging emerging arts organizations and emerging artists and creating a pipeline through the Governor’s School that would allow younger people to go into the arts. I did sort of see the arts as providing service in some ways but I grew out of that.

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

Actually I spent some time on that program. I loved the artist in residence program. I thought the Governor’s School was superb. And I was very pleased to reach my dollar

goal but the thing that I loved the best about that job was that every year I would go and talk to the Providence Rotary Club and every year I would start with a poem and, by the time the second or third year rolled around, they were looking forward to my poem. And I would read them lots of different poets so I didn't read them my own work.

E. What was most frustrating to you?

Working with the government bureaucracies, I think. They didn't understand the arts council. As I said, the legislature was not wildly aware. My predecessors had set a few teeth on edge and it didn't help much coming by...you know, I was young and stupid and so I kind of assumed that everybody was on my side. I had one really bad experience with the director of administration who held up all my federal grants for 19 weeks one year which meant that most of my staff was not paid for those 19 weeks. Some of them just kept on going because they believed in the project and they kept on working, but I finally had to go to the governor and explain the situation and he was just, of course, outraged. And what happened was that that made me a major enemy in the state bureaucracy. That plus the fact that the 70's was a time when...I can't even remember the name of the program...but it was a time when Hispanic, Black, and ethnic arts and crafts were kind of on the rise in the public art scene. What I was disappointed with if not frustrated by was the fact that people did look at that as a part of the whole but they jumped on a bandwagon and, as a result, you would find that your modern dance company wasn't able to get funded this year but your lousy Black theatre company could. We actually in Rhode Island had a great Black theatre but we also had some theatre companies that just announced that they were theatre companies and that they had a minority director or somebody on board and they would make connections with somebody in either the National Endowment for the Arts or the state government and you would be forced to really pay attention to them. I subverted that by funding capacity building grants. If I had a peer advisory group that told me that this was really a rotten theatre company or a lousy dance company or a really spurious public mural project that was well meaning but not very cultivated in its artistic ability, then we would fund capacity building grants that would allow them to get stronger as organizations but we would not fund the art itself. I remember once funding a ballet master for the local ballet company because it was a really bad ballet company. God knows, that's 30 years ago so undoubtedly things have changed. But that's the way we dealt with it and we found ourselves really wanting to make quality judgments and unable to do so because we were using public funds and that was also a considerable frustration. I think everybody felt that. I mean you could say as I did once when I was working as a panelist for another arts council, I just said, "You can't not fund them. It's Neville Mariner, for god sake." They were all set not to fund the chamber orchestra because they'd already funded one. But this was an international artist; you couldn't not fund it. You have questions like that that came up all the time and that's part of the challenge of that field and, if you enjoy engaging in that kind of thing, and I did for awhile, it's fun but otherwise it can be really frustrating.

F. What was most surprising to you?

I guess the most surprising thing was the people in business suits who turned out to be deeply devoted to the arts. That Rotary Club was full of men who would call me

sometimes after the poem; bankers and said things like, “That poem took me back to my undergraduate days. Thank you.” It was more pleasing to me to realize that what I felt about the power of art was, in fact, true to people whom I, in those days, looked at as grownups and so I was being validated at a very important level by that. I would be interested in knowing what other people found most surprising.

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

NEA – When I resigned I sent a letter to Nancy Hanks telling her it had been a real pleasure to be a part of the royal opposition. Our relationship with the NEA was extremely fine simply because simply because Claiborne Pell was the senator from Rhode Island and he chaired the committee that funded the NEA so we were constantly supported by the NEA whenever we asked for anything. Coming in 1972 as I did, I think what I ran into was the increasing sense of the NEA that, if they decreed a program should happen such as filmmaking or something like that, that then the states could pick it up and sometimes the states had just sort of teetered through to figuring out how to make their budget work for the next two years and here came this thing that said. “Fund your filmmakers.” In that regard I was frequently at odds with the NEA. I was the vice president of the National Council of State Arts Agencies partly because I was somewhat outspoken about my objections to how the NEA was acting with the states. I felt that they had reached a point where they figured that the best way to deal with the challenge from the state arts agencies was to layer in another layer of bureaucracy. At the same time I got along very well with all the program people, with Nancy and Michael Straight and I found working with them wonderful because they were able to operate at the level of vision that we were not able to work at in the states.

ACA – I was a member of what came out of ACA. ACA became a private organization. The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies formed I think somewhere around 1972. ACA preceded that and Barnett Fain, my chair, was a member of their board. We had also very good relations with Michael Newton and all of that group at that time and tended to take their thrust towards working with the regional arts councils and developing a single voice for the state arts agencies that could operate in Washington. It was an interesting time because the Endowment was hanging on by its teeth in the Congress. It had its own set of problems and it needed the state arts agencies to advocate for their budget. At same time there were stresses that they did manage to put on us. It was a new time and we were all kind of groping around feeling our way.

SAA’s – It was terrific in New England and whenever we needed anything in from the Middle West. We worked with Ohio. We worked with Kentucky. We didn’t work much with California because it was going through the Reagan years and it was in a terrible state of flux at that point. We worked very closely with the other New England arts agencies and with New York and then, of course, through NASAA we also worked very close with everybody. The New England region, I mean Louise Tate and used to get on the phone about once a week and just commiserate with each other; Friday afternoon or Thursday afternoon. It was, “Hi, Louise;” “Hi, Ann.” We thought we’d do some projects together that would alleviate our impoverished single womanhood by getting a big

corporate advisory group together of only single cooperate executives. That never happened. There were days when she'd come back from the Massachusetts House and I'd come back from the Rhode Island House and we were ready to kill.

LAA's - In Rhode Island they were just getting started when I was in place. We encouraged the two that we knew about which were Wickford and Woonsocket. The problem was that nobody had quite figured out the whole business of private and corporate funding at that point and so there was tension that was set up by the NEA's effort to start the local arts agencies and that was, "Well, who's going to get what share of which pie?" and that took some dealing with and also again the issue of quality came up a lot. You'd find an art show given by a local art agency in Rhode Island most particularly interesting because, if you had a Providence art exhibit and a Newport Art exhibit and then you had one from one of the other communities in the state, you had levels of quality differentiation that were really amazing. I mean in Newport they had this incredible program of monumental art that they used the mansion for and Christo went and wrapped part of the bay; it was a really extraordinary major event in the arts world and the same thing would happen in Providence when the Rhode Island School of Design would do something. Then you'd go down to Wickford and you'd get all the ladies who painted seascapes and it would be very difficult to decide how to fund. We had the problem that you always do have when you're operating on a series of principles. If it were true that the state arts agencies knew better about what was going on in Rhode Island and Kentucky and Maryland and wherever, then it had to be true that in Wickford they knew that they had down there a master organist who also was recording regularly with Maurice Andre and we didn't know that. If you believed in the one principle, you had to follow it through and see where it took you so that's pretty much what we did.

H. (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?

Always the biggest challenge for the arts in any kind of area where public funding is involved is the value to the community of the arts; in proving that, in getting people to understand it. I think that's where you always run into that and you still do. I mean this year the city of Fresno facing serious deficit in its education budget cut all elementary school music out of its budget and they just cut it and that was the end of it. It was a big fight. I mean there was incredible noise made over it but they kept saying, "It will not deliver the test results that drilling them on math will." If we had been able to spend the last 35 years saying over and over and over again to people, "Students who study music do better in math, period, and that is proven and here are the documents to tell you this," I'm not sure we still would have succeeded. People just don't think of the arts as important. They think of them as elite. They think of them as a frill and that challenges you throughout and especially in state governments. In state governments, it's a frill; it's much more of a frill and much more of an economic challenge. In the federal government it is much more likely to deal with obscenity, with leftist thinking, with the conflict between the left and the right. Either way that arts are not considered an essential and it's very difficult when you are an arts advocate that suggests also that you may also be an artist that you end up making the case for it and making the case as

strongly as you can and as you know how, but at the same time you have such a vested interest that it's very hard to convince a football player that's never done anything but play football and repair his car and run for office. That's the biggest issue that we faced then; we still face it now. The field has gotten more sophisticated but I'm not so sure that the people who are working down at the grassroots level are more sophisticated primarily because it doesn't pay and people leave the field. I mean you get the experience and the knowledge and then you say, "Wait a minute. My kids have to go to college," and you leave the field.

I. 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?)

Rhode Island is a very small state with 425 representatives. It's as though there were a representative for every square block so everybody knows somebody is state government. My three chairmen in the five years I was there were my strongest allies and every one of them was probably more instrumental in getting the state budget allocations even than I was. I was less good at lobbying than I should have been and I learned almost all those lessons after I left Rhode Island but what I did do was build a program that they could represent. They could make their case to the legislature. I mentioned that the director of administration was not an ally and the governor in that particular episode was because the governor was a humanitarian as well as a very savvy man. The person who became an unexpected ally was the director of the budget office and I didn't know that until one day I was taking a group of purchase orders through. It was always a problem because we were not buying material; we were buying services and so there was a whole question of whether we were employing people. If we were employing people with state money, why were they all hippie artists? But one day I was taking group of invoices through and the man who was the budget officer for the agency was telling me that he had just moved to Great Barrington. I said, "Oh, that's great. What school will you be in?" And he said, "Well, we had choice of two and we chose this school because it has the arts in education program and the other one doesn't." And I looked at him and I thought, "Oh, my god, we've been fighting all these arts in education invoices these years and now, all of a sudden, he realizes they're useful." We never had to struggle with him again as the budget officer. His kids were benefiting from the program. He suddenly got it and it was good. It was wonderful and this is something I don't think, when you're going into the field, you talk about getting funded so you have to know the speaker of the house and you have to know the chairman of the budget committee and you have to have all that sort of stuff. It turned out in my experience, and this was just my experience, that very often working with the bureaucrats successfully was as important as or more important than working with the legislature.

J. How did you use your time:

1. Can you describe a prototypical day?

There were probably no typical days. At least twice a week I had staff meetings; I mean meetings with staff; one meeting a week with the entire staff that included the artist in residence and these were free-for-all thinking processes. I mean that was how I managed was to take input from everybody. We would extremely creative, noisy, fun meetings

that one day and then everybody would kind of have reviewed programs and any budgetary issues or personnel issues that might have come up. If we had grant proposals that we had to get out, those assignments were made and everybody had some say in how we approached the program that we were asking funds for. A good deal of time was spent in program development working with the program director or the education program director. Then they would go off and do things. Then we would have that kind of thing. I then spent time with my bookkeeper because we had grown so quickly that we were looking at an extremely cumbersome series of systems that were partly the requirements of the state and partly we were overwhelmed. At one point I remember signing 200 requests for funds and it was like two weeks of services. You would have one artist and that always confused them up in the budget office. Let's say we had one artist, Dickie Fleischner, and he was working for us on three programs so that meant that Dickie Fleischner got three different invoices and he wasn't employed. He just worked on those three programs whereas somebody else was an artist in residence and he was employed. And so I spent a lot of time working on guidelines and internal systems. I was one of the first state arts agency directors to enter the agency into a long-range planning process so we spent a good deal of time working with the consultants on that and getting a five-year plan put in place. That required that I go out to the legislature and to my board members and get their input and concerns and so we spent a lot of time with that. I didn't do the grant administration. I had an absolutely wonderful assistant who stayed with the company until her state pension was vested. I mean she was that good and she was just a fabulous grant administrator so I didn't really do anything more than lay out what we had to do in order to meet the needs of the government and the various reporting systems and she took care of it. I spent about between 15 and 20 percent of my time in advocacy and at least twice a week I would out to either a grantee or a program that we were running to see how it was going and if anybody had anything they wanted to discuss. I spent a lot of time writing. I wrote proposals a lot. I did speaking engagements. I did fundraising and then I had meetings. I had meetings with state arts agencies. I had meetings at NASAA. I had meetings at the NEA where I was on a panel. It was busy there was never a typical day.

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

____ *Grant administration*

15-20% ____ *advocacy/lobbying with public official*

____ *field /constituency communication*

10-15% ____ *agency strategic planning*

____ *program development*

25% ____ *fundraising*

____ *partnership building (with other government agencies, with other types of nonprofits, with private sector, with arts/cultural agencies at other levels of government)*

So you said you spent 15 to 20 percent on advocacy; did you assign percentages to the rest of these areas?

I didn't get finished with it. I'd say a good 10 to 15 percent was spent on agency planning and program development. 25% fully was spent on fundraising either at the state legislature or at the federal government or in the corporate sector. The last year I

was there, I guess actually it was in '74, we started a program of arts employment that was mostly modeled after some of the WPA's arts projects and it was out in the community and in various corporations and I had to raise a lot of corporate money to get that one rolling. The rest of the time was broken up. When you talk about agency strategic planning, I wonder if you include in that just simple things like budgeting and planning the program for the coming year and going over guidelines to make sure you're not discriminating against someone and meeting with disgruntled constituents of whom there were many.

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

Yes, it did. I got out more toward the end. In the beginning I was just trying to figure out what this agency was going to be and what it was and building the program and the staff but once that was underway and I had a program director who was making sure that everybody was showing up on time and did their job and got their paperwork done on time, then it was really necessary for me to go out and be a state arts agency director which meant going out into the community and finding out what was going on. That was the big change was that I started really networking much, much more towards the end.

K. 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?

I think that those were the salad days. We could be infinitely creative in those days. I remember one time getting an invoice from a neighborhood arts coordinator. We had a summer arts program in the ghettos that was aimed at both hiring artists to do art and to teach and to work with kids who were in underprivileged neighborhoods. One of the things we did was we had comic book artists from Rhode Island School of Design go down and do street comics. They just drew them with chalk on the streets with the kids and they would put up like a block. We got permission to close the block for the week. Nobody ever damaged any of those street comics. They were never washed down or graffitied or anything. They were so closely protected. I remember one night in that program getting a bill for a chess instructor and I called up the coordinator and I said, "Rose, I got to tell you, a chess instructor is not an artist. I can't pay this." And she said, "But that's what the kids want," and this was the summer that Bobby Fischer was so big. So it was understood that this was what the kids wanted and, if the goal was to keep the kids occupied, she was going to give them chess. So I said, "Okay, we have to figure out since the goal is also to give these kids art is how to make things work." So we put our heads together with some of the artists in residence and we came up with a dance company going in and drawing on a basketball court a life-size chessboard and then teaching the kids the history of chess and the moves through dance. They made papier mache figures with some of the old masks and stuff like that and then choreographed a chess game. We could do that kind of thing because we were not being scrutinized too closely and we had a lot of flexibility. I think a great deal of that has gone entirely out of the state arts agency movement because everybody is now simply focused on distributing the money equitably and making sure that everybody gets his or her slice of the pie. The bureaucrats have taken over the state arts agencies and very often these are idealistic people who just can't fight it and there is a lot less creativity and spontaneity in the state

arts agency movement than there used to be in those days. I mean really in the 70's going through the different states you would see very, very different programs from state to state and they were really exciting. Now I think, if you were to look at a state arts agency, you could probably take the day-to-day and transport with minor adjustments to any state and it would operate. It would just be a different number of names and maybe a slightly different emphasis. There are more writers in San Antonio than there may be in Cheyenne, for example, so you wouldn't be able to transfer the programs the same way but the basic approach I think is less creative. I do not know whether it is possible for that to be returned because I think it would take a major change of governmental attitude to make it possible again. The state arts agencies have all become what we knew they would become: bureaucrats. The Rhode Island School of Design would invite me every year to one of their classes and I would say, "Look at me very carefully and look at me really carefully because I'm your worst enemy. I'm an arts bureaucrat." That is really important to make clear is that is the bureaucracy has kicked in and it's a reality factor that needs to be acknowledged and dealt with and, if creativity is going to be restored, that has to be understood that it will come in the context of being bureaucracy. It may not be possible to restore it; it may not even be necessary but it needs to be understood what a state arts agency really can do now and it can't do what it did in the 70's.

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

I go back to Rhode Island once in awhile and I talked to a few people there for awhile but I haven't been back for a long time. I haven't really stayed in touch with the field except I've been a fundraiser all these years and general director of various performing organizations so in that sense I've been in touch as an applicant. For awhile after I first left I also worked on various panels for the California Arts Council and for the Endowment but that all sort of sloughed away.

A. If so,

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

Well, I think we've answered that, don't you? I think it started at one level with a lot of people who had really excited intentions of supporting great art and I think in some senses that became political. If you look at the European model and if you ever have anything to do with Europeans who work for state supported agencies...I just spent some time last summer in Lucerne and met an American who sings with the opera a company there and her description of how the government support for the opera company works was hair-raising. In those agencies they say, "We pay the piper and, therefore, we call the tune and we will tell you who your artistic director can be." At least the American organizations never got to that point and, if they do, I would think it would be worth destroying the whole process and starting over. What we have in some states now are major arts organizations like major symphony orchestras or chamber music ensembles or regional theatres that have to really jump through hoops in order for their funding to grow where the major emphasis will go to an ethnic arts program. In Fresno there's a situation where the native crafts program is the only program that survived the savaging of the state arts council and that was because it was an NEA-funded project and a very

successful one. What that means is though that none of the arts organizations in Fresno get government funding except for that one program. So there are serious issues facing the field and that would be answering your fourth question, "Has the field lived up to its promise?"

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

I don't know whether you call this a skill or a competency but I think a singular passion for understanding the importance of art to the quality of life of the entire nation is something that is essential because that will sustain you when it's really dark. I think that as far as skills and competencies are concerned, I think a sense of the political realities is important. You really need to be able to gauge the political realities and say, "Yes, I can do this," and "No, I can't do that," and know when to fight World War III and when not to. I think there's a tremendous need for people who have some sense of creative arts leadership. There's a book, a management text called, "Managing Genius" which I think is a really interesting book because it talks about stimulating creativity among the very highly creative employees and still managing to keep them kind of focused on goals and not scattering all over the map. It's a very good book and I think that kind of management skill goes long way in state arts agencies. The ability to work with people is essential. A lot of self confidence has to be there because you're always with people who are very volatile. Then, of course, skill with numbers. You have to be able to figure out how to slice a very thin pie very well and you have to know how to make your numbers work and how to find more money.

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

Yes, I would probably pursue a career in state arts management if I were starting out today because it was a wonderful way to get to know a broad spectrum of the arts and a broad spectrum of the community. One of things that troubles me about the field today is that it is so full of jargon. I recently met a young woman who was working with me on a project to help a troubled arts organization restructure itself. It was saddled with a board of directors made up of good old boys who really handle things the way they did in their alumni association and who had no interest in mission driven organizations and things like that. They thought it was all a bunch of hooey. Her problem was that she had been in the field for so long that she could not get off of the track of saying, "You have to have a mission statement and core values. You have to have that." It was perfectly clear they had it; they just didn't call it that. She was far too rigid with her, "It had to be run this way," and I think I find that people who are in state government these days are more like her. They're guidelines driven; they have procedures and structures and concept papers and all sorts of things that aren't really dealing with reality; they're dealing with paperwork. So I think, if I were...I've always made this a habit actually in working in the arts...I will not hire somebody who's fresh out of a management program unless they have worked in the field prior to going into the management program because, if you're going to come to work for me in my theatre, you have to know what it is to stay up all night to paint the set.

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

Yes and no. Yes, it has evolved very much the way any state-supported arts program does. I think people have become so concerned with minor agendas that they've lost track of the idealism with which the field was entered into. It's not surprising that that happened and the leadership got seriously politicized. One thing that can be said for Nancy Hanks and Michael Straight is that they really fought to keep that agency from becoming politicized and the minute that Nancy died and Michael left, it just turned the corner and went right down the path. Today the funding on that agency is less than it was in the Nixon administration. That a very, very sad statement.

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

Not really primarily because I went on to other things and I really wanted to get more in touch with the reality I was talking about a minute ago. State arts agencies are too far from the art and so it's not surprising that somebody like this young woman I was just working with would be working with an artist and trying to make this man, the artist in question, adhere to a series of rules and regulations that were expressed in a language of corporate management and it was Greek to him. He's Czechoslovakian and conducts children's choir. He doesn't know what she's talking about when she says, "You're disrespecting me." "No, I'm in a hurry." My feeling is I would rather be working with the man and saying, "When you're in a hurry and you throw your wine cup down on the piano, you make rings and it really ruins the tone, so don't do that anymore." It's much more fun.

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

I used to think they were the answer and I know they aren't now. That isn't to say that I think they should be dispensed with. I do believe that government should be supporting the arts in both the state and federal levels but I'm not sure that the state arts agency should have anything more than a review and distribution function. I don't think they can be the answer. I'm sorry.

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

Spend a lot of time with artists and listen.

V. Information about you:

A. Education - BA from Barnard in New York City; Arts Administration Certificate from Harvard; MA from California State University of Fresno

1. Educational level (has, ba, some grad, ma, PhD) - MA

2. Major/field – Theatre; a lot of miscellaneous credit towards PHD in Literature, Creative Writing

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)

First of all I was extremely well versed in the arts because I was married to a conductor for 13 years prior to going to Rhode Island. I was the daughter of a concert pianist. I was an actress and director and I had two immediate relatives who were painters and sculptors so I had been very well surrounded by extremely good artists almost all of my life and had been immersed in the arts world. People came to the house and all of that kind of thing. Just before I went to Rhode Island, I was the publicist for the Hartford Stage Company and before that I had been the head of the theatre and drama department at Westbrook Junior College. So I had a lot of the kind of logistical skill that goes with producing and directing and I had all this general knowledge of the arts which was coupled with an extremely good education. I went to Harvard and got that certificate about two months before I went to Rhode Island. I had not only been subjected to the Harvard School of Business but I had met tremendous numbers of colleagues in the state arts agency field at Harvard. So all of those things came with me. I was a great believer in management by consensus or at least by getting everybody's opinion and then making a decision and that just sort of was how I did it and that served me in very good stead. The biggest surprise I think of all was the discovery that little old arts-educated me just loved doing budgets and plans. That turned out to be a skill that I didn't know I had. It makes you a little more secure.

C. Work Experience

Resume not available

1. Specific arts management experience vs. non-arts management experience

See below

2. Did you work for a SAA either before or after your time as Executive Director?

No

3. Did you work for a public sector agency – not an SAA – either before or after your time as Executive Director?

University of California after I was an executive director. I was the development director for the general libraries at the University of California at Berkeley.

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 – very briefly worked for AT&T after Rhode Island; actually a consultant there for organizational development and office reorganization
- government agency management - No
- gallery/performance group- San Francisco Opera after I left the Rhode Island Arts Council; General Manager and Executive Director for two performing arts groups after I left San Francisco Opera
- fundraising/grant administration - put in about 20 years as a fundraiser for many groups
- performer/critic/writer - write poetry and fiction
- lobbyist/advocate - No
- nonprofit sector experience – executive director and development director for a number of nonprofits for the last 25 years
- elected office holder - No

-arts education/teacher- taught theatre arts, acting, speech, arts management at the college level
-academic
-service organization experience: national or other - St. Vincent dePaul; Humane Society

Work Chronology

D. Do you pursue any art form? Which?

Writing; currently producing theatre; although they keep telling me they want me on stage, I keep saying only in non-speaking roles

E. Demographic information:

- 1. Gender* - Female
- 2. Age range now* - 72
- 3. geographic region he or she lives now* – Fresno, California
- 4. political/partisan identification* - John Stuart Mill liberal