

Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.

**Interview with Linda Fifield**

**August 12, 2008**

**Interview conducted by Greg Willihnganz**

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. We are going to start here and my name is Greg Willihnganz and today I'm interviewing Linda Fifeld at her home here in, I don't even know where we are, are we in Berea or?

FIFIELD: We are in Jackson County.

WILLIHNGANZ: Jackson County, Kentucky and it is August 13, 2008 and this is being done for the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association. So Linda, I'm going to have to try and get used to this seat, not make noise. In a sentence can you describe for us the, the type of work that you do?

FIFIELD: Well my current focus is beaded vessels and I'm a wood turner. I turn wooden vessels, hull them out on a lathe and then I completely encase the skin; I encase the vessel with a beaded skin. So I guess I am a vessel maker.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. So you drill out the inside of the vessels?

FIFIELD: Well, there, there is special wood turning tools that are called hollowing tools so when the chunk of wood is solid on the lathe it is turning around and you're drilling a hole directly into the bottom and then slowly scraping out all of the insides of the wood until you have a hollow form.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay and bluntly it's a lot of work to do all of that, why not just make heavier pieces?

FIFIELD: (Laughing). Um, I just couldn't do that (laughing).

WILLIHNGANZ: (Laughing).

FIFIELD: I think if you are going to do something, you should do it really well and I don't think I would get much respect from the wood turning community if I were not able to hollow out a vessel and do a good job for a thin walled vessel.

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh okay so that is part of the art for you? And it looks like you've done a lot of the wood work locally although your husband does a lot of wood work as well?

FIFIELD: Yeah, Jack does all of the large vessels for me, this is one that Jack turned on his lathe. I have a small lathe and I turn all the smaller vessels on my wooden lathe.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh-huh.

FIFIELD: Sometimes we work together and Jack will turn the vessel that I will add bead work to and sometimes he adds wood work to my vessels, so maybe he will do a lid or base or something for one of my vessels. We collaborate a lot.

WILLIHNGANZ: Maybe you can tell me a little bit about what you do and how you do it.

FIFIELD: Well, Jack likes to say that I've got the most low tech equipment in the world. Only one moving part and that's my needle (laughing). I work with a needle and nylon thread and I stitch together beads one at a time until I completely cover the vessel so I'm creating a network of beads. Actually an ancient knitting stitch that can be traced back to Mesopotamian. So it's thousands of years old and cultures have used this stitch, cultures all over the world have used this stitch. In fact National Geographic just a few years ago had an article on mummies and one of the photographs showed a mummy completely encased with this particular bead work. This particular stitch, so it has been used to cover mummies in Egyptian tombs.

WILLIHNGANZ: Let's try and do a little close up and maybe you can show me a little bit more about how this stitch works. (Pause) You work very quickly of course.

FIFIELD: Well I probably, I've worked up as fast of a speed that I'm ever going to reach in my lifetime. I have been doing this all my adult life.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now does it tie each piece individually?

FIFIELD: As I pick up one bead that is on my thread and then I stitch that to a bead in the row just below that links them together so when I pull the thread it falls into place. It, they are actually linked together but there are little knots.

WILLIHNGANZ: I see. So you use just basic, just one basic stitch is that right?

FIFIELD: Well I use a lot of different stitches but the one that I use most is certainly this stitch. When I first started out with bead work I started doing bead embroidery because I knew how to do embroidery. So I just applied the beads to the process I was already familiar with and then from there I learned to weave on the loom. So for years I did woven bead work and all that time I was kind of working on this stitch trying to figure it out because when I started this type of bead work, there were no, there were no books that I was familiar with. If they were, I didn't know where to get them. I was living in my home county of Knott County and I was looking at pictures of museums or museum pieces and looking at this stitch and trying to figure out how to do it so this has really evolved over a period of several years and it is what I do the most now. I do a lot of other stitches too.

WILLIHNGANZ: You grew up in Kentucky area?

FIFIELD: I did, uh-huh. Southeastern Kentucky. I was raised in Knott County. My mom is a quilter and continues to do her quilting. In fact she just made me a beautiful new baby quilt. I just picked it up last week. So yeah, I get back to Knott

County about once a week. It is where my heart is, my home. My childhood home is there and my mom and sister still live there.

WILLIHNGANZ: How far is that from here?

FIFIELD: It's about 100 miles.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay, well that's not too bad. I came from Detroit, my parents, my parents are no longer with us but my brother and sister are both still up there. I try to get back once a year or so but it is much harder when they are 400 miles away.

FIFIELD: Oh I'm sure. We just had a big family reunion so, I worked really hard last week because we had approximately a hundred people. We hadn't had a big family reunion for about 12 years. So my sister and I decided to orchestrate a family reunion and spend a lot of my week last week cooking food, getting ready for the big gathering.

WILLIHNGANZ: So growing up you were exposed to a lot of craft work it sounds like.

FIFIELD: Yeah it was really a natural part of my childhood home because my mom did make a lot of our clothes. She was able to make rugs, she made curtains, she made beautiful quilts. She did embroidery, she did a lot of beautiful crochet lace and my grandmother also did all those fiber techniques that were common to them, to mountain tradition. So I was really around that all the time, fell in love with the process, fell in love with the working, making things of beauty with my hands. And now I've done that all my life as a professional craftsman from my early 20's.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. And as you were growing up you were obviously your family was very important to your development. Did you also have schooling in different craftwork?

FIFIELD: No, unfortunately I've never had an art class in my life, or maybe fortunately, I'm not sure, somehow I've managed. But no, that, that was not an option for me. I never had a class in art nor did I ever have anyone teach me a craft, I don't guess other than my grandmother. My granny taught me how to do embroidery and how to do crochet. And how to do some quilting so just from learning from my mom and grandmother.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow, I'm just sort of curious as how you got into wood turning.

FIFIELD: This beaded stitch, when I saw this stitch and I knew that I wanted to do this, my, well I'll back up a little bit. My favorite thing in the world is baskets. So when I visited the Field Museum in Chicago in 1974 I saw Native American baskets for the first time. Fell in love with them. On that same day I saw bead work for the first time and those two things just came together for me and I decided that what I wanted to do was create an object of like real beauty and such intricate construction that it would

be a fascinating object to someone else. Like those objects fascinated me. So I went home to Southeastern Kentucky and started trying to teach myself to do bead work. I started doing bead first over little bottles. The first thing I actually beaded around was an Excedrin bottle (laughing). And I'm sure that many Excedrin's and headaches later I finally figured out this stitch. And from there I had potter friends who would throw for me and make clay vessels and my friend Teresa Cole did some clay vessels for me so I was able to do the beadwork around the clay vessels. But I really never liked the fact that they were breakable because I put so much time and effort into the beaded network that covers them. I didn't want them to break so Jack, let me see, that must have been about 1994, Jack suggested that if we learned to turn wood, we could probably do our own vessels. So for our 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary I bought him a lathe and (laughing) that was in November and in March for his birthday I signed him up for a workshop with Rude Osolnik. So Rude taught Jack to turn wood. And then Jack turned for about one year and kept saying you're going to love this if you would just give it a try I think. But I was too busy with the bead work. He could do the vessels for me; I was doing the bead work. And I remember it was Christmas day 1994 I went to the shop and Jack taught me to turn wood. I do love the process. But my heart is still in the bead work and it takes so much time to do the beading. I'll let Jack be the wood expert, I can turn vessels, I do turn my small vessels but I'm no where, the wood worker that Jack is.

WILLIHNGANZ: I see. What is it about bead work that attracts you?

FIFIELD: Hum. I love the texture. I love the colors. I'm pretty mesmerized by intricate work, it's very intricate. I like for things to fit together. They are like puzzle pieces. That's why I like that a lot. I've recently been doing genealogy and decided that is very much like puzzle pieces too. So I'm starting to really enjoy genealogy and I'm going to design a piece of beadwork based on genealogy.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow, how will that work?

FIFIELD: (Laughing). I'm not exactly sure yet but there is just so many threads, I mean we are just such a tapestry of lives that come together that I think I'll be able to weave up something that will make a statement about genealogy.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well that's terrific. Interesting. You obviously do a lot of patterns. I'm looking at the pieces over here next to you and you obviously have a whole way of approaching your art. Can you tell me about these two pieces a little bit?

FIFIELD: Well the designs that I've used have really evolved. I started out most focused on how to master this stitch. How to learn to keep a really smooth surface. How to increase, how to decrease. How to do the things you need to do to cover three dimensional objects. So my first pieces were really simple. Started out by doing geometrics or abstract designs and with abstract designs I didn't have to be so concerned about the pattern. But then pretty soon I was challenged and I wanted to be able to do geometrics. So I got into a period of time where I did lots of geometric patterns and my most recent attempt has been to do landscapes and to do something

that's a little bit more of a realistic image. I did several Kentucky wild flowers. And that took a really long time because you have to draw the pattern on graft paper and then you have to very carefully look back at your beaded pattern each time you bead.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow, wow that must take a great deal of time to get it to look the way you want it to and then. How do you go from a graft paper which is a two dimensional medium into a three dimensional medium, don't you get distortions and problems?

FIFIELD: Not that I've not been able to work out so far. (Laughing)

WILLIHNGANZ: When you look at these, what you see is a lot of, a lot of light and a lot of color coming out. It's almost like the land in this particular piece is on fire. Is that part of what you had in mind?

FIFIELD: Well it was my autumn colors so this was an autumn landscape and the mountains and the hills are kind of on fire to me in the fall. I've worked on a series of beaded vessels titled "Earth and Fire". And I've actually done 99 in that series and I'm working on number 100. I really like the bright bold colors. If I'd have to choose my favorite color, I would never say red or orange, I would say green. But I really like how it works on the bead work; they just came out really strong. It makes a real nice visual, which I think....

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh-hum. Do you work from like photographs or do you just work from what your conception of what it should look like is?

FIFIELD: Just from my conception. These are new; these are ideals that I'm just able to draw out on the graft paper. Otherwise, I'm, I'm kind of just winging it. It goes one bead at a time and one can hardly get in a hurry.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now this piece here is, is pretty unique and interesting. Looking at the top of it in particular and wondering what you had in mind when you put that up there?

FIFIELD: Having done the "Earth and Fire" series, for several years I had a customer that sort of challenged me I guess. She wanted me to design the vessel that was "Earth, Water, Wind, and Fire" so I thought about that for a year or so and I thought now how can I represent the wind and that's where this design came from. The idea of the wind, just the movement, the clear beads have a silver lining that reflects the light and that seemed like a really good representation of air. So this became my "Earth, Water, Wind, and Fire" piece. So that's where this idea came from.

WILLIHNGANZ: And then the base there I noticed, that's just the wood, you left the wood showing as opposed to covering that in beads, am I right there?

FIFIELD: What we found with the big vessels was that they can be heavy and we wanted them to be as stable as possible. So we learned to put a magnet in the bottom of the vessel and then Jack puts a magnet in this wooden base and when the two link together you have a nice stable piece. And it's kind of fun too.

WILLIHNGANZ: I see.

FIFIELD: So that was the motivation for that was just to provide stability and to keep these you know, make them last as long as you can. I've never had a piece break so it's not as though the vessel would likely break but I think it gives people more security if they have invested in a piece of art, they want to keep it as long as possible. Keep it safe.

WILLIHNGANZ: Maybe you could tell me about the two smaller pieces over the fireside?

FIFIELD: Well once again, kind of playing with fire with this one too. This one I entitled "Fire Ring". And it also, it has a really narrow little base. This is one that I turned. The magnet in the bottom of course connects to my stove also. But it, it does stand on it's own just fine but it is kind of top heavy and once again we just decided that if we added a magnet to the base and to the bottom of the vessel, that it provides a lot of stability for the piece. I like this one a lot. This is the first one that I started to put in stars so it's kind of my night sky. I think they have a nice reflective surface because there is a silver lining inside of the crystal bead. These are glass beads and they come from the Czech Republic. Have been coming into this Country since the late 1400's.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. When you looked at this particular piece, tell me about the, the evolution of the idea here, how did you come up with this cone shape that sort of goes into flowers or?

FIFIELD: Well I think there is a real gracefulness to a slender footed vessel. So we liked, both Jack and I like to make vessels have a grace about them. The colors represent the colors of the earth to me. A lot of my vessels are based on the idea of using the colors of the earth. The forest floor is represented by my brown beads. The forest is represented by my green beads and the sky is represented by my blue beads. So that is my earth vessel. And I've done hundreds of earth vessels now. Each one has been very different from the one before but related because of these colors. This was one that was a challenge. I like to set up little personal challenges for myself. A lot of my growth as a craftsman has been through challenging myself to grow. I wanted to see if I could bead this vessel up to the shoulder and then turn into a three dimensional standing kind of realm of fire around the edge. And I was able to do that and to continue on after I created this realm of fire colored beads. To continue on and into a kind of a night sky where I used sparkly beads to represent the stars. And then I just decided to finish it off with a flourish and it seemed like a nice swirl of wind.

WILLIHNGANZ: What are the flames actually made of?

FIFIELD: The flames are made of glass beads and nylon thread just like the rest of the vessel. I used the exact same stitch so it's just a continuation of this very same technique. But I'm adding additional beads so as I stitch in beads I add them together which kind of makes them ripple and create more of a, more movement than the glass surface but it's the very same stitch, the same technique.

WILLIHNGANZ: Interesting. That's terrific. Now you've had a lot of years to work on all of this. Was it a source of income for you early on?

FIFIELD: It's, well I should say it's always been. This started out as a way to make gifts for my family. All of our Christmas gifts were hand made from me and Jack to our kids, to our brother's, sisters and all of that. So it started out as a way to make gifts and then pretty soon I'm pretty fascinated by it and enjoy doing it so much, I'm deciding maybe I could sell these. People were starting to ask to buy pieces. I would make for Jack and people he worked with would see the pieces and ask about them. So the first place I started to sell work, it's kind of an interesting little story because I was in a shop in Whitesburg called the "Cozy Corner". Josephine and Bill Richardson received the Governor's Award in the Arts in 2003 and that was the first place I ever sold work was in Josephine's shop at the Cozy Corner. I created the award that year for the Governor's Award in the Arts, it was really coming full circle to me to be able to make this for a person who, yeah who had become my friend.

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh wow, how terrific for you.

FIFIELD: And who had the place where I first sold work. And then from there it kind of just grows. One thing leads to another. We moved here. We moved from Knott County to Jackson County and started hearing about the Kentucky Guild. Joined the Kentucky Guild, I think it was 1979 that I joined the Kentucky Guild and started doing local shows. So I did the outdoor shows, I would do for a few years and get rained on every year and swear off (laughing). And then forget and go back a couple of years later. But the Kentucky Guild really gave me a place to get started. It was really a spring board to a more growing environment. I went from the Kentucky Guild onto Regional Shows. Joined the Ohio Craftsman and starting doing Ohio Craftsman Shows. Joined Southern Highland Craft Guild, starting doing shows in Asheville, North Carolina. Joined the Piedmont Craft Guild and did the shows in Winston-Salem and then after that then started going on to more of the national show level. Started doing shows with the American Craft Council, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Charlotte.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. Have you done the St. James Art Fair?

FIFIELD: No, I've never done the St. James show. It is really big. I've visited it one time.

WILLIHNGANZ: Huge.

FIFIELD: And I just couldn't imagine being there and setting up my booth and having so many people. I enjoyed it as a visitor but I didn't think I would enjoy it as an exhibitor. And, and I decided it is really tough packing up all these things that you've worked so hard to create. You feel like a gypsy you are on the road and you're dealing with the elements, you never know mother earth is going to send you some rain. And also that makes it a real challenge. I decided to only do indoor shows.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

FIFIELD: So I've only done indoor shows for a very long time.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh-huh, okay. As you've joined each of the guilds have you gotten involved in the guild activities? The classes that they conduct on certain things?

FIFIELD: I participated in a number of classes through the Kentucky Craft Market. Different classes that were provided for learning to run a craft business. For learning how to do photography. Just a variety of different skills that they are able to help craftsman to develop.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now does photography play a part in your bead work?

FIFIELD: Very much. Without really good photography you don't get into the good shows. It is a very competitive market, to get into the shows. There is a limited amount of spaces available. In 1994 I first heard about the Smithsonian Craft Show and as soon as I read about that I knew that I wanted to do that show. So that is a very competitive show. There are only 100 spaces and they maybe get 1,500 applicants who they are trying to fit into 100 spaces. If you don't have really great photos you don't have any chance at all. The jury process happens so fast. They flash your image up there for just a few seconds. You got to really grab them. So we learned, we had a professional photographer photograph our work for several years and he moved away. So he moved to Colorado but before he moved, he taught us how to do photography. So Jack has been photographing our work now for more than a decade.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. And does Jack take his work to a lot of these shows?

FIFIELD: He does, yeah. When Jack started wood turning in 94 he really fell in love with the process and he found his true calling as a craftsman. So I was really happy that in doing something nice for him, to give him, it really gave him something that has lasted, will last a lifetime I'm sure. But yeah Jack started doing shows in 1995 I guess, 96 and has done a lot of national shows and been in a lot of wonderful exhibitions. He is a really accomplished turner.

WILLIHNGANZ: Have you been overseas much? Have you traveled much? Has that affected your perspective and your art and how you do things?

FIFIELD: No, I have not traveled a lot. I did get the opportunity to go to Europe this spring for the first time and it was truly an awesome experience. Loved every minute of it. But I can't say it influenced my art. It may have influenced my heart (laughing).

WILLIHNGANZ: What would you say has influenced you in the development in your vision of what you do here?

FIFIELD: Well certainly the inspiration from Native American baskets. I am fascinated by Native American baskets. That anyone would take so much pains and efforts to make an exquisite object really appeals to me. The idea of focusing and becoming very good at something. So certainly Native American work has been an influence and then my natural environment. I love nature. I love being in the country. I've lived a very fortunate and wonderful life so I just like to reflect on the beauty that I'm surrounded by.

WILLIHNGANZ: Have you traveled a lot out to the Southwest and looked at all of the different areas in terms of Native American Culture?

FIFIELD: I've seen some Native American work, yes. I mean a few trips to Santa Fe and the Southwest several times.

WILLIHNGANZ: I just came basically back from Seattle where I have life long friends from high school who are out there, a couple. And they are very much involved with the whole Indian Culture and they have quite a collection. In fact I did about an hour with them documenting their collection and we never quite got to their baskets. But we focused first on the pots. She has a very extensive collection; several hundred pots there of different kinds and the designs are just spectacular. Plus masks, they are very interested in the large masks and all the symbolism behind those and the what knots. It's pretty amazing to look at all that. The culture that's there, that we've been able to preserve, thank God. Okay, so these are, your creations are really pretty much strictly art pieces, they aren't, they really don't have a functional aspect.

FIFIELD: Oh they have a major function.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay sorry. (Laughing).

FIFIELD: Because I'm often asked that at shows and after a number of years that I realized, oh they have a very strong function. The function of beauty, and that's, that's a really important function (laughing). So I consider that a major function.

WILLIHNGANZ: Just elevating the beauty in the world and in people's lives is just function.

FIFIELD: Because we ask for an award (laughing).

WILLIHNGANZ: Well it does make life worth living, (laughing) that would be true. And a lot of what I'm doing right now in these interviews is going to artists homes and studios, trying to look at the, what environment they create. And I'm always impressed by the number of things that I see that reflect other artists that aren't in their medium. But they appreciate original works in oil or sculpture or things they would never do themselves. But, but there is a diversity of different media which is always impressive and it gives you a sense there is a higher esthetic that you can live at if you're wise enough to do it. And my wife and I are slowly making the transition (laughing).

FIFIELD: Good for you.

WILLIHNGANZ: From, from Sam's store art to real art and trying to support artists along the way as we go. But, but it takes awhile to really know what you're looking at and have a sense of what's good and what isn't. And we aren't crafts people ourselves; I've done a little bit of wood working but nothing that could be entered into anybody's show. But we appreciate it.

FIFIELD: Well that's good and I think it is important to support the arts and we all do it in different ways maybe. I make a lot of art but I also like to buy a lot of art. Starting out early shows we did a lot of trading and so we have a home that is filled with lots of pots from lots of potter friends (laughing) and occasionally still do trade but it's pretty rare. But yeah we also try to support our friends who are making beautiful objects.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well some of it is just amazing. I was just at Lila Bellando's, I don't know if you have been to their house. Well she has of course a spectacular set of baskets.

FIFIELD: She does?

WILLIHNGANZ: I mean they are just terrific and what is shocking to me, she explained about, this one was twelve dollars and this was eight dollars and it's just – you look at how many hours and how much the creativity went into making some of these. It is just amazing.

FIFIELD: Let's not talk about the money (laughing).

WILLIHNGANZ: (Laughing) It should be more I know, it's true. Okay some other things that I'm supposed to ask you here. Is your work more about materials then techniques? Does your work reflect another job and response to the material?

FIFIELD: My work is more about technique. I really like technique. I really like things that are intricate, things that are well done; I like things that are challenging. I love these beads but I'm sure I could be happy working with another material. So for me, it's much more about the technique than the material.

WILLIHNGANZ: You know and I look at the bead work, it just seems to me like it would take so long to do this, it would be hard to stay creative. I would think you would get bored with the process.

FIFIELD: No. Quite the opposite. What I find really difficult is that the day only lasts 24 hours (laughing). I never can catch up with the ideas I have, I'm sure that I will never live long enough to catch up with the many design ideas that I've had. It comes pretty freely; sometimes I wonder where does breath come from. Well inspiration is kind of the same, I don't know where it comes from but it flows in real naturally. So I have a hard time keeping up.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you have a hard time selling your work and giving it to someone else?

FIFIELD: No. No I certainly produce a lot of pieces. I would be overwhelmed if they were all in my home (laughing). And it does supplement our families' income just as my mother supplemented her families' income with her quilt making or with her seamstress work. So it has always been a tradition in our family to supplement income.

WILLIHNGANZ: So your bead work really isn't your primary source of income. Do you; are you teaching or doing other things?

FIFIELD: Well I have taught a number of times and it does all come together into one big family collection pool. But my husband is a dentist by profession so he provides a stable financial base for us.

WILLIHNGANZ: I see. And you do this too, basically to increase that and find expression.

FIFIELD: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh-huh. Okay. And in your craft do you strictly use, just, just the, the tools there. You said the needle is your primary tool.

FIFIELD: Yep, the only moving part.

WILLIHNGANZ: I mean I assume at some point you have to somehow nail or glue one end of this to this and to secure it. How does that work?

FIFIELD: Well let me show you a piece in progress. I do attach my first roll of beads to a piece of leather so that provides a beginning, a place to begin.

WILLIHNGANZ: So the leather is part of the work?

FIFIELD: Yeah, it provides a foundation to stitch my first roll of beads to. Sometimes I add, we are working on a new design now that I have eliminated the

leather and I simply do a circle of beads. So it is just nylon thread and a circle of beads and then with my needle I continue to build bead upon bead. And it hugs the vessel so it's like a skin that, that is created over the surface of the vessel. So it hugs it, I like to say it fits like a glove. So there is no need to glue it. It's really a custom fit. One bead at a time I'm creating this structure that will perfectly cover this vessel. So it just floats over the surface. There is no glue necessary.

WILLIHNGANZ: What kind of thread are you using?

FIFIELD: For about 15 years I was a leather smith. I worked with leather and did my glass bead work onto leather. That's when I was doing the bead embroidery. So I have many pounds of nylon tread that I used on my industrial sewing machines. So I use that tread for my bead work.

WILLIHNGANZ: I assume it has a very long life in terms of biodegradable.

FIFIELD: Nylon's known for that, yeah. And it is very strong so those two things are very important.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. And then do you use anything else in terms of shaping things or you know some of the artists I've talked to actually do their design work on a computer. And then put it into whatever, embroidery or, or weaving or whatever they are making. Do you do any sort of that thing?

FIFIELD: No, real low tech (laughing).

WILLIHNGANZ: Low tech (laughing).

FIFIELD: When I started out. Lets see it was 1975, 74 I visited Field Museum in 74 and fell in love with this idea of making beaded objects. So I came back home to Southeastern Kentucky. I was not aware of any bead books. I was not aware of any bead pattern paper. Later, years later, 10 years later I learned that there was graft paper just for bead work. But before that I was actually trying to create a grid drawing these beads. And this particular weave is a twill weave or a diagonal weave. So the beads run at a diagonal. It's not simply graft paper that is at a right angle to each other. So I was trying to draw graft paper and design my own graft paper that I was trying to draw on. And when I would color in a design I would use color pencils to color that design on paper. But if I didn't like those colors or I made a mistake, there was no backing up. I either had to totally, you know, start over and, and try a new design. But no I am very low tech. But I did later on learn there was a beautiful bead book that came out called "Contemporary Bead Work". It came out, I think that was in 1980. No, it wouldn't have been 80, 1990. I think in 1990 was a major contemporary bead book that came out. Alice Scherer and Kathleen Moss did that book. And when I got that book I was just blown away. I was amazed that there are people all over the country who were doing bead work. I mean I was isolated; I was alone doing this bead work. I really had no idea there were other people out there and they were creating incredible

objects. So that book really opened my eyes to the ideal that there is a big national movement of glass bead work and from that I started exploring further and getting into expeditions and learning about different bead shows. Alice Scherer came to visit me at my house and spent the night. We kind of became friends. Kathleen Moss, the co-author of the book wrote an article on my work. So even though I was not in their book (laughing) later I got a chance to meet those two gals and become friends with them.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. That's terrific. Now the beads that you use are all glass beads?

FIFIELD: They are glass beads, yeah. Made in Czechoslovakia. Now the Czech Republic I guess. But they come from the Czech Republic and have been made for hundreds and hundreds of years there.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you work in any other types of beads?

FIFIELD: I like to work with gem stones so sometimes I combine fresh water pearls or turquoise or tigers eye. A variety of semi-precious stones with the glass beads.

WILLIHNGANZ: So they have been made into sort of bead shapes or how does that work?

FIFIELD: They have a whole drilled in them so I'm able to string them and use them as beads. But often when they are irregular shapes or chips it just provides additional texture and surface for the beads.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh-huh. Do you use any other articles? Do you use like wood chips or cork or?

FIFIELD: Nope. Only the glass beads and the semi-precious stones or the pearls, fresh water pearls.

WILLIHNGANZ: Recent.

FIFIELD: Oh wait, I should say that I used some snake bones once.

WILLIHNGANZ: Really?

FIFIELD: Yes I did a beaded vessel, a top of a vessel and used the vertebra of a snake. Jack was walking in the woods and found this snake skeleton on the ground just perfectly laid out.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

FIFIELD: It just disappeared and left its bones behind. So he brought those bones home to me and I used those and worked those into a piece of bead work.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow, that's terrific (laughing).

FIFIELD: Thanks (laughing). I'm really dry I think I need to get a drink of water.

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh sure, I'm just going to shut down here for one second.

#### PAUSE IN TAPE

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay maybe you can go ahead and tell us a little bit about these pieces and I'll do some shooting here.

FIFIELD: With these pieces I'm working with the Czech glass beads but I'm working in gem stones, or fresh water pearls and it adds a nice texture. More of a 3-D affect. Each one that I've done so far has been an abstract which just gives me a chance to really experiment with these different materials and working them in together. This one I did some little floating patterns. I did a little design using fresh waters pearls. They are approximately the same size as my Czech glass beads. These beads are a size 10 bead; they are the smaller beads that I use. And with this one I used some amethysts, I used some fresh waters pearls, I used some African trade beads. I worked in lapis. I worked in some beads that have a coating that is partly gold. What else do I have here? Some malachite and some carnelian. So with this one I worked in a variety of different gem stones and then just did some random pattern to create an interesting effect. I like this one; it is kind of shaped like an egg. Jack did this beautiful little lip out of African Black wood for me.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. Now in those it has a certain shimmery quality to it. So that the color seems to change the view as you are turning it and it catches the light differently. Does that appear in the beads?

FIFIELD: Some of the beads have a silver lining and when they catch the light they reflect the light differently. Some of the beads are cut beads so they have surfaces that reflect the light in a different way too. So either the silver lining or the cut beads will give it more of a shimmer.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay so maybe you can show us you're other pieces there.

FIFIELD: Another way that Jack and I have collaborated is for me to just do a partial bead covering for some of his vessels. This is a piece of conifer wood that Jack has turned into a light weight hollow form. And then he carved this beautiful floral piece that looks like a daffodil to me. And around that beaded, I mean I beaded a piece around this wooden carving that he did and it just flows on the surface and it hangs there freely. It's like a little beaded collar. And this one I worked in fresh water pearls and malachite and used a variety of different gem stones. Some tigers eye, some

different gem stones to create a little pattern and additional texture. So this one is of our collaborative pieces. Another collaborative piece, I really like this one. I like this one for its real. It's simplicity. I choose this as a challenge piece for me because I wanted to see if I could would be able to do this beading and keep the bead work really smooth but have it fit perfectly into the groove that Jack had cut for the top of his vessel. This piece is shaped like a little pagoda. Jack has put this nice fresh water pearl and his carved lid and it has a nice curved shape to the edges too. So this one is a really sweet simple one but a beautiful one. African purple heart. Purple Heart not African though, I think it is actually from Central or South Africa.

WILLIHNGANZ: That is the wood you are speaking of?

FIFIELD: Uh-huh, Purple Heart is a kind of wood.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

FIFIELD: This is a piece that I created for an exhibition at the Kentucky Arts and Crafts Museum. I was invited to be apart of an exhibition called "Ritual Objects". And with the Ritual Objects exhibition a number of spiritual leaders came and spoke to a group of artists and craftsman. Talking about the different objects they used in various rituals with different religious leaders. And then after listening to them and giving thought to what we might design. I came up with the idea of doing a shaman's rattle. (Rattling noise in background). So the piece I created was inspired more on Native American but also many cultures around the world. Of course, they have Shaman's and their religious ceremonies and this is the first piece that I used, did working with gemstones and the glass beads together. Also for the ritual objects show, it was my first time to ever use a computer and I got online to research cremation urns because I wanted to do a cremation urn. So the two pieces I did for the show were the Shaman's rattle and the cremation urn. It was a piece I entitle "Heaven and Earth". And to me it just represented the thoughts that there is a connection between heaven and earth. And the idea of a vessel to hold someone's remains or cremations as they are called appealed to me.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. There appeared to be a face on the rattle? That's just my interpretation (laughing). Checking it out here.

FIFIELD: Maybe there is (laughing). Maybe there is a surprise I don't know about.

WILLIHNGANZ: You do seem to work in abstract rather than specific things sometimes, a lot. I don't know I haven't really seen the bulk of your work but.

FIFIELD: The majority of my work is abstract, that is for sure. I did several pieces, once again as a challenge. I did several pieces that were Kentucky wildflowers. So I did realistic patterns of Kentucky wildflowers. I started out doing geometrics and I

did some kind of rattle snake patterns using the inspiration from nature there. But most of them are abstracts.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you notice any tendency in your work? Are you drawn to triangles or star shapes or anything else? Or do you just sort of?

FIFIELD: I'm just drawn to putting together beads (laughing). In a variety of ways. I love them all. I really like the geometrics even though I haven't done a geometric piece in 20 years. I really like the geometrics. It seems that I just kind of keep moving you know, in new challenges, new ideas. So I've moved away from the geometrics but I do love them. The abstracts are fun. You can play with color. You don't have to be so concerned with placing exactly each bead in the proper location to create the image of a flower. I did a design of lizards. Salamander lizards actually. Two salamanders kind of chasing each other around and I had to work very carefully to place the beads in just the right location to get a realistic image. So I like abstracts because they can just let the beadwork flow.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh-huh. Tell us about this piece up above you on the wall.

FIFIELD: One of the rare commissions I've ever been willing to accept is when a couple, folks in Washington D.C who are collectors and I had met them at the Smithsonian Show and I had also met them at various other Washington, at the Washington Craft show. And they wanted me to create a piece that would be inspired from the images from the Hubble Space Telescope. So they sent me this beautiful book. I looked at lots of wonderful pictures and decided to do a spiral galaxy. I did the piece for them as a wall piece. So I wove it on a loom, using really fiery red colors and really strong contrast of colors. And then Jack created a wooden frame to, to enclose the beadwork. So this is a piece using large beads but the same idea. This one I did using an embroidery stitch. It was just an experiment. I just wanted to see if I could use large beads, a size 6 bead is much larger than the size 10's. And be able to get an image that looked pleasing in a small space.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh-huh, okay. So, you did use some inspiration from the exact pictures and, and you do work to order. Do you do very much on commission like that?

FIFIELD: No, extremely rare. It took two years for me to really get to know these folks well enough to realize that they trust me to create something that they will accept and love, so I did. But it is pretty rare that I will take a commission because you work really hard to make it be right and you can't be sure that the person receiving it is going to like it the way you want them to. So if I get to know someone and I realize that they are really giving me true freedom here to create on my own, you know I will take a commission. I've only done a couple.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh-huh, okay. Now you've gotten a lot of recognition for your work. You've gotten awards and in all sorts of museums and various places. How does that inspired you or has it made a real impact on your work or?

FIFIELD: Always when you get encouragement it just, you know, it just fires the passion to keep working. So anytime that I have received an award, it's always been an honor and it has just inspired me to be better.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you subscribe to periodicals for your craft?

FIFIELD: I subscribe to a number of periodicals. My favorite one is American Style. And I was really delighted to have an article in American Style Magazine. That just came out this spring so that was a real exciting thing for me because it is my favorite magazine. They aim their magazine more at collectors. A number of the people who have collected our work are serious collectors. We have had a chance to meet them when we travel to shows. I do the S.O.F.A. Show in Chicago. American Craft Council shows. Smithsonian Show. Philadelphia Museum show. So I have been able to meet and network with a number of collectors there. In fact network is a funny word in our house because when I think of network I think of these glass beads and nylon thread and creating a network (laughing).

WILLIHNGANZ: Well that makes sense. It doesn't have to.

FIFIELD: But I guess we also network with collectors and their buyers and of course you meet and make a lot of nice friends. That's been a fun part of this business. Also it's the opportunity to meet people from all walks of life. And we've had many collectors to invite us into their homes and we get to know them and become friends with them. That is a real pleasure.

WILLIHNGANZ: That's terrific. Now you strictly work alone? Other than the work with your husband, is that right?

FIFIELD: Yes. Yes I like to work alone. I have one friend I like to go work in her studio sometimes. My friend Jennifer Heller is a basket maker. Jennifer Heller Zurich. She does incredible willow bark baskets. So every now and again Jennifer and I will get together and spend a day either in her studio or maybe she will come here and work with me. In fact I got a scholarship and was able to go work with Jennifer for two weeks and that was pretty exciting. A real variation from what I usually do. I, I have just been so intrigued by her material. This willow bark is so beautiful and what she had done with it and the skills she has developed are incredible. So getting the chance to work with her was a real pleasure. I made several small baskets and then added bead work to the lips or to the rims or embellished them with some additional beading.

WILLIHNGANZ: That's great. Okay. You are still active in the guild. You are still participating in their fairs and what not? None at all? And why is that?

FIFIELD: I no longer do outdoor shows. It had just become too much of a challenge. There comes a point in life when you just know that you, you can choose now and there is only a limited amount of time and there are only certain shows that

really bring the audience that I need for these pieces. These pieces are really labor intensive. They require a fair amount of money to purchase one so there are shows that are aimed more at collectors and that's where I have had to set my goal, also is to be able to get out into the shows where I'm going to meet the buyers. To be able to support my work. And I can only do a limited number of shows. The most shows I've ever done in one year is seven and that was too many (laughing). Five is okay. I do lots of exhibitions. I average probably 15 exhibitions per year and I have been doing that for well over a decade. I started out, wanted to develop a resume so that I had something to show for my efforts. So I started jurying into a lot of exhibitions. Got a lot of exposure that way and was quite fortunate. And in doing the national shows as I've been out on the national scene, I've just gotten new opportunities. Things that would have never have been offered to me had I not stepped out of my comfort zone because it really is out of my comfort zone. I'm a country person. I love the country. I don't like going to big cities but I've had to go to Chicago or I had to go to Atlanta or Philadelphia or D.C. To find the buyers to support my work.

WILLIHNGANZ: So when you do exhibitions, are you just sending your, your stuff? You don't actually go yourself to these?

FIFIELD: No I send my stuff. Juried exhibitions, so a jury would choose pieces of work. Most of the exhibitions I've done are group exhibitions. I have had several one and two exhibitions. Jack and I have an exhibition right now at the Folk Art Center in Asheville North Carolina. Through the Southern Highlands Craft Guild.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. And that is of course easier for you because you don't have to go there you just send your work and.

FIFIELD: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: And that gets you, does that ultimately lead to sales of your work or?

FIFIELD: Exhibitions are always excellent exposure. I've had the good fortune of being on many show cards. You know, another way of gaining exposure for the work.

WILLIHNGANZ: How does that work? I don't know what show cards are.

FIFIELD: Show cards. For an exhibition there, usually a card would be developed that would use an image. One or more images of art work in the exhibit that's mailed out to let the public know of, course at this exhibition, is going on. So the show cards are a real good way to get exposure to the work that I've done. Some of the exhibitions have an award. So I've been able to, you know receive awards or posters. I've had the good luck of having pieces put on a number of posters. I got a piece on the Philadelphia Museum's winter schedule one year and I was really excited about that because they used a beautiful color image of one of my pieces for their schedule for

their museum. I've had pieces on posters for American Craft Exhibition. Had posters for the Kentucky Opera does a major fundraiser each year and it's a competitive exhibition. Or it's not an exhibition I shouldn't say. It is a competitive process. If your work is chosen, then your piece of work is made into a poster. So I had that honor one year.

WILLIHNGANZ: So how did that work? You did some bead work or something and they took a photograph of it or put it on a poster or?

FIFIELD: Their fundraiser for the Kentucky Opera focuses a lot on wine. So the objects, the art objects that are submitted for consideration of the poster tie into wine in one way or another. So I decided to do a goblet. Jack and I did that together. Jack turned a wooden goblet and I beaded the outside bowl of the goblet. We submitted the piece and it was chosen and turned into a poster.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh. Interesting. How do you feel the general field of craft work is doing in Kentucky? Are we basically making people more aware of craft work? Increasing the amount of purchasing of it and the education in it?

FIFIELD: Most definitely. I think we are really growing in our state. Awareness for fine craft is growing. I think the skill of craftsmen is growing. You know as we all are, many have been at this for 20 and 30 years (laughing). We have improved with time. So yes I really think the awareness for our processes, our lifestyles have grown. I think with the Kentucky Arts and Crafts museum is a wonderful organization. Kentucky Craft Market has been there for decades to help craftsman to market their work, to gain exposure on national plus a state level. So yeah there are wonderful organizations out there. The new Artisan Center in Berea is fantastically wonderful. It's just beautiful and filled with hundreds of art works, so we are really growing in this state. And I'm happy about that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do they have any of your pieces at the Artisan Center?

FIFIELD: Right now at the Artisan Center I don't have any pieces of work. They were going to consignment on the basis for the most part. And since my production is slow and I'm doing retail shows, I really don't have pieces to put out on consignment. I have to keep the work that I produce mostly to travel and do my shows. I have a piece that was given to the City of Berea. It was a Governor's Award in the Arts so the year that I did create the Governor's Award was 2003 and the City of Berea won one of those awards. It was the first time I had ever tried to work as a wood carver and I had this idea of doing this beaded vessel that would sit on top of a mountain. I felt like this represented our state and coming from the hills of Southeastern Kentucky I felt I should do a mountain or hill. So I did, I carved and sandblasted and created a three dimensional mountain form and then did a beaded vessel that set into that wooden base mountain. And did a flame that was kind of a spiral flame and called it "Fire on the Mountain." That was my Governor's Award design and the City of Berea received one of those awards and it is on display at the Artisan Center in Berea.

WILLIHNGANZ: That's terrific. What advice would you give to young people trying to start out in craftwork? What should they do?

FIFIELD: I think if you know this is really what you love to do, it's simple. You just do it. You do it and you do it until you get really good and you keep on doing it. I, I think you have to work really hard. I think that you have to have a real discipline. You have to be your own motivator; you're not punching the clock. You don't have a boss. You really are in charge but if it's what your heart tells you to do then you just do it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh. Okay. Anything else you would care to add?

FIFIELD: I don't know. I can't imagine what I might add. I guess, what could I say. I can talk about my grandmother who was truly an inspiration to make things because that's where it all starts for me. With my family was my love for my grandmother and working with her. I used to sit by her chair and thread her needles as she did embroidery. So that is where I learned to create a real skill, which was patience (laughing). So maybe I would say that is where it all started for me. Was with my grandmother.

WILLIHNGANZ: She took a great interest in you doing things? Did she help you learn how to do things?

FIFIELD: I learned from her an inner calmness. I learned from her a love of beauty. And I learned from her patience.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh-huh. Do you have any problem with just sitting alone for hour after hour doing bead work? Or any other kind of craft work? Is that a problem for you or is that just?

FIFIELD: The problem is that the day ends too soon. (Laughing) The main problem with bead work is that there is not enough time in the day. I wish I could do more. It is physically challenging and after doing it 20 or 30 years, I do occasional have aches and pains.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

FIFIELD: So I'm having to learn to have more of a balance. So I spend more time moving, not sitting all day. And I get outside and work in my flower gardens or I do some other things to break up that repetitive motion because it can be damaging. So I'm learning to take better care of myself as I do bead work.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. Well thank you very.