

KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with James Middleton
Interviewer is Bob Gates
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() This symbol refers to an inaudible word or phrase

. . . This symbol refers to an interruption to the speaker

Gates: I guess I've got a cold. I went through a phase, my throat hurting and my nose (Gates, coughs) and my chest.

Middleton: It's probably the worst cold season that I can remember in long time.

Gates: I bet you're getting a lot of people aren't you?

Middleton: Yea, a lot of people.

Gates: Well, my wife is into, what do you call it . . . What's the name of it? Little bottles of liquid that are essences of different things, like cinnamon or, not cinnamon so much, but oregano. She gave me this oregano with lemon. Two drops of oregano, two drops of lemon into water and then drink it. It's supposed to be like an antibiotic? I don't know. (Laughter, Middleton) I couldn't see the drops of oregano the other night. I must have put eight drops in there and my whole mouth was burning. (Laughter, Gates and Middleton) I had to put olive oil all over my lips. Essential oils.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: Have you done much with those at all?

Middleton: No. No.

Gates: I don't know if they have any creams that . . . Oh, ready. Okay, sorry. Okay, we just toured your place and we're back at your house now. It's amazing what all those baskets that came from this area.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: So, what do you think? You said you started about twenty something years ago?

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: And who's idea was it?

Middleton: Charlie Williams, a lawyer here in town. He and I both supported our county fair and he said, " You know, we ought to have a basket contest over at the fair". People had put baskets in our floral hall, you put crafts in your county fair and people put baskets in all along, but it was Charlie's idea. We ought to do more than just have a few baskets in the handiwork division over there, we ought to have us an actual basket show, a basket contest. Jimmy, I think it'd be a good thing and I said "I think so too, Charlie". So, that's what started it and then, as I said, I was () because I'd always loved the Hart County baskets. I've got them. When I was a child my marbles, I had a basket when I was five years old playing marbles, I carried my marbles around in a little Hart County basket. My mother had a Hart County basket she kept her clothespins in out there on the clothes line, hanging clothes to dry out. So, I always had loved the Hart County basket and had always recognized them and I thought what I great chance to try to draw some attention to our baskets and then, of course, the issue about getting people to take pride in themselves and this, I saw, as a way of letting them recognize, you really have some great skills. You've got . . . you're worthwhile, you have some real talent here, take great pride in it. Take pride in yourself. To develop self-esteem, if you got self-esteem, you care about yourself, you'll take care of yourself. And that's a big problem. A lot of my folks, just don't take

care of themselves. So, that was my motivation and that's what started the basket contest and the folks liked it and showed up with it, brought their baskets and here we are twenty years later. Twenty two years later.

Gates: Did you have this plan of buying baskets and throwing up your space like you did? Or did that just happen?

Middleton: Yes. It started out, I'd say I wanted to buy the baskets. It wouldn't initial thing, when we first started, you didn't have to offer me a basket or a similarity of the basket if it won. But I asked the basket makers, I would love to display your baskets at the office. That was part of my motivation. Put the baskets up, let the folks see these () baskets and when they come in they can show their family and all the people will recognize these basket makers. So I wanted them up in the clinic. That was all part of my original purpose. And then, they're glad to have a market for their baskets, they liked the idea and so I developed, if you want to enter your baskets, we need to have the clinic buy the winners, so we can show them off to everybody.

Gates: Can we go back a little bit to growing up here? What was that like and what's your family origins here?

Middleton: My great grandfather was one of the early doctors here. My mother married my father who is a Baptist preacher, so actually I wasn't, didn't go to school here, but my daddy was a minister at First Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia and minister of First Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana but every summer of my life, I came to Kentucky. I always loved Kentucky and I loved coming back home to Apple Hill. So, when I got out of high school, I came to Kentucky to stay. Went to the University and then went to medical school and came back here. I came back here to practice medicine in Hart County. So, growing up here, every summer of my life was spent here on the farm. When we were small, we would go to the river and go swimming down at the river. We'd trap groundhogs on the farm here. Sister would put us, Mother would put us to work on the farm here. Helping out, doing different farm type chores. Getting in the hay was one of the big things we did in the summertime. (Gates, Cough) And we loved the county and loved Hart County. I have an older brother, two younger sisters. And we all loved it too, all of us came back here to live. So, that was our life and it was right here in this house. I've spent my whole life right here in this house.

Gates: So you were born in Shreveport or Atlanta?

Middleton: I was born in Atlanta.

Gates: Atlanta and then you moved down to Shreveport?

Middleton: Yea. Then daddy went to Shreveport. He was there, Atlanta for ten years and then went to Shreveport.

Gates: How long was he there?

Middleton: He was there for thirty-six years.

Gates: Oh really, so he lived down there.

Middleton: Uh huh. Yea.

Gates: A little bit of your accent come from Shreveport you think?

Middleton: I think it came mostly from Georgia.

Gates: Georgia?

Middleton: Yea. In Georgia they don't speak 'R's down there. (Laughter Gates and Middleton)
So when you're young and in a formative stage, you learn the local dialect and that's where most of mine came from.

Gates: Sure. I find that with myself and with my kids, my son was born in Baton Rouge and my daughter was born in Kentucky, but they have kind of similar, picked up different things over the years.

Middleton: Yea. That Baton Rouge accent will certainly . . . that south Louisiana accent.

Gates: Yea.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: So, you came back here and you loved this area, you said?

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: What did you love about it?

Middleton: I loved the country. We were oriented towards the outdoors. My father liked the outdoors, liked wildlife, liked animals. I had cows on the farm. I had my own cow at Glen Lily. I had a brindle cow. I still remember my brindle cow. Whenever we sold a calf, sister would give me the check from the calf and it would go into my college savings fund. So being on the farm, living with farm people, being in this small town like this, I loved it. I loved the outdoors, loved everything about it. Loved being out in the garden, loved picking blackberries.

Gates: And your grandfather on your mother's side, right?

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: He was a doctor here?

Middleton: He was a lawyer and he was the congressman in this area. He was a United States Congressman, in fact he died when he was still in congress.

Gates: What was his name?

Middleton: Cap Carden.

Gates: Okay.

Middleton: But he was a lawyer. He was originally the first, youngest sheriff Hart County ever had and then became a lawyer. Was a lawyer here and then was a politician, of course and then became a . . . in the United States Congress. My great grandfather was the early doctor

here. Doctor Hubbard. He lived across the hill on the other place here on the farm. They bought the original farm here. And so, I've still got pictures and I've got his old saddlebags. In fact, I had the experience of delivering the great grandchild of a woman that he had delivered. My great grandfather. My great grandfather delivered this lady and I delivered her great grandchild. I got a picture of all of us together.

Gates: Oh, that's great.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: Did you want to be a doctor because of him?

Middleton: No. When I got through with school, I really wasn't sure what I wanted. I'd always had in the back of my mind, an interest in medicine. I loved farming. I had an interest in farming. But I knew what Hart County needed more than anything was a doc down here. So, I decided to go to medical school and come back here to practice medicine.

Gate: Did your dad want you to come back to Shreveport or was he okay with you coming up here?

Middleton: He was happy with . . . He knew we loved Kentucky. He was happy with whatever we wanted to do. And I think he felt very good about me being a doctor here in Munfordville. In fact, daddy and I used to have kind of a fun conversation about who had the most important job. His job of saving people's souls and my job of saving their bodies and we'd argue who had the most important job. It was kind of a fun argument. Now, I'm not sure who had the most important job.

Gate: Yea, nobody won really.

Middleton: No. That's right. (Laughter, Middleton)

Gates: You're both pretty important.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: Well, so you said when you were a kid you noticed the baskets around here?

Middleton: Yes. Sure did. I remember very well my marble basket. My marble basket, I carried my marbles in.

Gates: How big was that?

Middleton: It was a little basket about about like that.

Gates: And how do you keep . . . Would you close it?

Middleton: No, it didn't have a top on it. It was just an open . . . kind of like one of those small egg baskets

Gates: Okay.

Middleton: I've still got the thing. It's over in Margaret's house right now.

Gates: Wow.

Middleton: And I remember Mother's basket on the clothesline that held all of her clothespins. And then Sister had baskets here at the house when we'd go to the garden, I'd have a Hart County basket bringing the vegetables in. I've still got a Hart County basket to bring vegetables in.

Gates: Everybody knows about Hart County now as being a basket making center, epicenter, like you said earlier. (Coughs) Did they know that back then? When you were a kid? There's a lot of baskets being made?

Middleton: There were baskets made . . . The basket trade has, as I said, it's always been a very active basket, just part of these people's lives. All aspects of their lives. But there were some people, () who were, lived in the Cub Run area who would sell baskets out of the area and there were people who they were dealers in baskets and then when the 31 E and 31 W came through Hart County and we started having the tourist trade, which started after the depressions after the thirties, there were stands, souvenir stands up and down the highway and the baskets were sold there and they were really popular with the tourists. And the basket trade really picked up with that. And then . . .

Gates: Do you remember seeing any of those when you were . . .

Middleton: Yes. Sure do. And you'd see them when ropes of baskets just dangling outside. And they had those balls, you know, those horrible balls and those Chantilly bed cover things and all this really kind of . . .

Gates: What do you mean balls?

Middleton: That was a ball, kind of like a Christmas tree ball but it was a kind of a glass type ball, remember those things?

Gates: That went in your yards?

Middleton: Yea! Yard balls. And it was a lot of pretty chintzy, kind of touristy type stuff and then there are all these great baskets, you know, that they had . . .

Gates: Right next to them.

Middleton: Yea. And the tourists would kind of like the colors and that's when they started using more dyes and they started using Rit dye then to color the baskets and that was kind of a popular thing, so with the tourists. And you'll see pictures of these baskets and I've got some down at the clinic with all this stuff out there and yet there's these baskets all over everywhere, all sizes of baskets. Also, our basket makers before that time would sell baskets. They had basket wagons. They would load up a whole bunch of baskets and travel somewhere up into southern Indiana, they would go up there and had all their baskets and sell them, they were utilitarian type things. So I've got family stories of basket people making baskets and then taking their wagons of baskets and going off into area over in . . . The Cottrell's got a story about selling baskets over there in Somerset and they are stories of children selling baskets up in southern Indiana, having those basket wagons and selling them.

Gates: Would the whole family take the wagon up there?

Middleton: Yea. And just kind of camp out and sell their baskets and then come back home.

Gates: Well, that's cool.

Middleton: It's an amazing story that one of the children tells me . . .

Gates: You're going to tell it again when we get the tape rolling . . .

Middleton: Okay. About his folks being in a basket wagon on one of these basket (tape cuts out)

Gates: And that's why the crest market, I guess, is pretty good, because it kind of got them to stand up for themselves.

Middleton: The basket makers, at one time, kind of, didn't think it was a thing of pride. It was a thing as necessity and it was a sign that we were poor folks and we had to do whatever we could to survive.

Gates: Really?

Middleton: Uh huh. So they didn't take it as a thing to be prideful of, it was almost something they were a little ashamed of, because they were so poor they had to make baskets to survive, you know?

Gates: Okay. What were we talking about before we stopped? You were going to tell a story about going up in the basket wagon.

Middleton: The basket wagons. They had these basket wagons. And it looked like a cloud, it was amazing. All the baskets were strung up on these . . .and some of those big baskets, like you saw, they had a lot of those because that was more of a utilitarian type thing than a lot of these small type baskets that you see there.

Gates: Usable baskets that you use everyday in your house.

Middleton: Exactly. You bring your laundry in type things. Well, Calvin tells a story about some of his folks on one of these baskets () things, they were out selling. They were out north of here and the dogs showed up. Their pet, the household dog shows up.

Gates: You said they were in Indiana, didn't you?

Middleton: That's what I thought. Southern Indiana, as I remember it.

Gates: And all of a sudden this dog shows up?

Middleton: The dog shows up and they know something's wrong when the dog shows up. So they go back home and sure enough, an important member of the family had died. I don't know if it was the father or the grandfather or something like that.

Gates: And the dog came up and told them?

Middleton: The dog came up there to tell them somehow.

Gates: Wow.

Middleton: Isn't that an incredible story? That's one of the most incredible stories of the basket selling stuff.

Gates: So he remembers actually going up there in the back of the wagon or something?

Middleton: His family did. Now whether or not Calvin actually did it himself or not, but he tells me about it.

Gates: And these are horse driven wagons?

Middleton: Uh huh. If you know the panels we have talking about the basket makers. On one of those panels has a picture of one of those basket wagons and that's what's. . . Calvin saw it and that's what started that discussion about it. His family had done the same thing, he said. And then brought up the dog story.

Gates: It's kind of like my family were truck farmers and they had to get everything in the trucks at night and take it downtown and sell things. You had to take it to the market. Did they get pretty good prices when they went up there?

Middleton: I don't know. I never asked them about their prices. I assume they did better than they did when they were selling to the Alvey's.

Gates: So these guys that had the ones down here along 31W I guess.

Middleton: Yes. And 31E too. Both of them major north south. . . You know there were the wigwams over there on 31E as well as on 31W.

Gates: There were two wigwams?

Middleton: There were two wigwams.

Gates: I didn't know that. Okay.

Middleton: Uh huh.

Gates: Usually when I come down 31E, I'll cross over at Horsecave, but most people keep coming down 31E?

Middleton: There were a fair number of folks who went on 31 E all the way south through Glasgow, through Hopkinsville, through that area, going south that way.

Gates: Oh, okay. I don't know if this is right, but somebody told me the idea of 31 E and 31 W had to do with different counties wanting that big route and so they kind of fought over it and instead of having just one 31 like you have in other states, it became 31E and 31W.

Middleton: Might have been. When the interstate came through there was a lot of jostling back and forth trying to get the interstate going through different towns. I know there was a big rivalry between Glasgow and Bowling Green trying to . . .

Gates: Getting 65 to come through?

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: Bowling Green won, didn't they?

Middleton: Yea. (Laughter, Gates) Yea. In fact, if it had gone through Glasgow, it would have gone right through the back of our place. We were scared to death that that darn thing was going to go right through our place here.

Gates: Well, I worked up in Cincinnati and there were a lot of blacks in the west end of Cincinnati claimed they didn't even know it was coming down the pike. It went right through the west end, it was the biggest black community in Cincinnati. Completely wiped it out. Basically, this one photographer was telling me, he had like a month to get his pictures out...maybe a couple weeks to get it out.

Middleton: Wow.

Gates: Because they were just keeping it a secret and you weren't getting in the black press. And then this guy told me he moved up into another part of town with whatever negatives he had left and then they did same thing with I 71. (Laughter, Middleton and Gates) So it happened to him twice. We're not on are we?

Camera man: Yea, it's rolling.

Gates: Oh it is. Okay. Sorry.

Camera man: It's a funny story.

Gates: Well, it's my funny story.

Camera man: well, you know, it's just recorded for posterity.

Gates: Okay. So, 31 W and 31 E were main things and 31 W is taking you mainly to Mammoth Cave, right? Louisville to Mammoth Cave from Louisville to Nashville. And they were trying to get the tourists to buy these baskets.

Middleton: That was a big market for them.

Gates: And those tourist, kind of, generated, kind of helped shape what kind of baskets were made?

Middleton: Yea. It had a lot of influence. They used a lot more dye for the tourists. It was more of a decorative thing, instead of a utilitarian thing then and so the dye in the baskets as a decorative type thing seemed to be more appealing to the tourists than just a plain split white oak basket like we were seeing mostly down at the office down there.

Gates: So one woman would get out of her car and say, "Can't you make these red?" That kind of thing?

Middleton: I think that's part of what they were just trying different things. They red ones or the dyed ones sold quicker than the plain ones. Yea. So they were just going for the market.

Gates: So that kind of drove what kind of baskets the people would make then, wouldn't it? So it changed the traditions a little bit?

Middleton: I think it did. I think they were using a lot more dye in the baskets back then.

Gates: When I was down in Louisiana there was some, I can't think of the name, the Indians, they would make double weave baskets and they said that they had made these traditional double weave baskets and beautiful things and then the army camp or navy camp was right next to the village or right down the road from them, so they started making cigarette holders. Double weave cigarette holders and that really changed a lot of what they were doing. (Laughter, Middleton and Gates) So I always saw it as a kind of a parallel to what happened here.

Middleton: You'll see a lot of that. If you notice those things that we had magazines in down at the office? That's an adaptation for basket sales probably since the fifties. Trying to market your baskets and find something, a form of basket that people would like and use.

Gates: Yea. And that wasn't new because you showed us those ones at the funeral home right? The ones that were used at the funeral home? In the 1800s?

Middleton: No. This was in 1920s, 1930s, 1910 to 20 in that era in there. We know of people who were making baskets, funeral baskets.

Gates: And who ordered those from them?

Middleton: I don't know. I don't know.

Gates: Maybe a Louisville Funeral Director or something?

Middleton: I don't know.

Gates: Okay.

Middleton: I don't know if the churches or if they just had them in the churches and they'd bring them out for the funeral in the baskets. A lot of the bodies were kept at home, too, you know. The body was at home and it would go from the home to the graveyard. I don't know.

Gates: To me, it's hard to make this distinction between utilitarian and decorative. Because even if you make something that was for work you still got a feeling of beauty out of it. Satisfaction. We were talking to Leona and she talked about how she had, when she was a little kid, she had to make baskets and make them really fast with her mom. And I asked her if she felt good about it, sounded like she did. It was like even though it was hard work, it was still, she got a sense of beauty out of it. So I think that sometimes the term's a little hard. Do you see what I'm saying?

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: Because, I mean even . . . Is a basket for a funeral home is that utilitarian? I guess it is, because you're using it for that, right? When does it not become utilitarian? When you can't use it for anything but just to look at?

Middleton: We have a hard time sometimes deciding when we have our different classes at the contest, what it is. Is it just a decorative type of thing or is it actually a utilitarian classic utilitarian, you know . . .

Gates: And I think some folklorists would say there's always an essence of tradition being brought through, that would make it utilitarian, but there is also your own part of personality goes into everything you make.

Middleton: I think so too and I think you're talking about somebody like, there will be certain people who will have a good deal more pride in what their basket would look like and the form it might have and other people are just making baskets that carry horse feed in and all they want to turn out some more baskets so they can . . .

Gates: Can't wait until they get the next one done . . .

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: But then there's some people who may have pride in it and kind of get a joy out of doing it.

Middleton: Exactly. Who have the nice splits and the nice little thing that ties it. We were looking at the handle coming out of the basket. Some people would have a lot more pride in taking the artistic . . .

Gates: About twenty years ago is when you started doing the basket making contest. What was happening here before that, in terms of basket making?

Middleton: Alvey's had done more to promote baskets because they were selling baskets. They had a basket barn up at Elizabethtown and they were selling baskets. They had markets for them. So I think they were, as far as developing the basket market, they were pretty active. They had some of the stands that we were talking about it where they were selling baskets. When the interstate came through, a lot of the sales from the baskets stands kind of died down and then the Phyllis George thing got a kind of a different group of people interested in baskets. And the basket makers started fashioning baskets that would be more appealing, people who had a interest in folk art and folk type baskets and saw the artistic, folk sense of the baskets that maybe a tourist coming down the interstate wanted a Rit dyed basket, might not have had the appreciation for. It changed again, the market. That influenced the style of baskets that people were making. It went back more to the traditional, not using as much dyes in the baskets and some of the traditional forms. And then to find a market for baskets, and this was probably helped by the Alvey's too, they started developing a lot of styles of baskets, like we talked about a magazine basket. Baskets that would be used for more contemporary lifestyles. So that, I think, occurred when people started becoming aware of basket making, the folk art of baskets probably goes back to the Phyllis George book and that era.

Gates: And that's kind of linking it to, when people thought of folk art in Kentucky, they think of Appalachia . . . Oh we've got to change battery real quick.

Middleton: I would hope that might become a () starting our permanent basket museum kind of a thing here.

Gates: Yea. I mean you're place is like a museum. But it would be nice to have one that's just dedicated . . .

Middleton: Dedicated, exactly. With baskets for sale there and demonstrations going on from time to time and . . .

Gates: A little bit more interpretation about different families and different designs and things like that. There's so much you can do with it. Before we changed and turned the battery off a second ago, I was thinking about that people thought of Appalachia where, up in the mountains is where you got crafts and this is not in the mountains, this area here. Was Phyllis George kind of bringing the idea of folk art and rest of the state out, do you think or?

Middleton: Yea. I think so. That thing went all over the state, they had people from all over the state . . .

Gates: Yea. They did.

Middleton: In her book . . .

Gates: They were looking for distinct things that were . . .

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: When I first got here in the state. People said, you've got to look at Hart County and that area along highway 31 W as being it's own traditional. Because other place you could find families that made baskets in different parts of the state. You could find people that went and learned how to make a basket, a school, you know. But this was a real place where you could trace it down the families. Is that true?

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: What are some of these families that we're talking about?

Middleton: To me, it's amazing. Everybody was making baskets. You'll find, the Childers family is the family you'll always associate with the fourteen generations of basket makers. So many of the great basket makers are all Childers. But everybody was making baskets. You can talk to folks and somebody in their family was making baskets, because it was just all part of their lifestyle. They were using them in their everyday work and to have the things that you needed to live in Hart County, particularly in the Cub Run area was baskets.

Gates: What was Cub Run like?

Middleton: Cub Run would be like Eastern Kentucky in the fact that it's small farms, more subsistence type farming, people completely living off the land. Tobacco would be the crop that would give them their cash money, but it was not mechanized. That type of farming you might

associate with farming in hill country in Eastern Kentucky. The Cub Run area is not our best ground, there's some good ground down there, but not our best ground and it's not open flat ground, it's more rolling, woody, type area down there.

Gates: Do you think it was the kind of thing where people said . . . I'm thinking in towns where you've got one or two people making baskets, that's all you need for a whole town, but you're saying around here, everybody made baskets, is that true?

Middleton: In the Cub Run area, you made it mostly for yourself . . .

Gates: For yourself. Okay. You didn't buy it from each other, you just made it for yourself.

Middleton: Yea. No money anyhow. Everybody made a basket just like they made a split rail fence. They had to have it to keep the cattle out and have something to take the feed out or get the vegetables in or that type of thing. So part of a subsistence type lifestyle and that was one of the necessities of life. Certain things to carry and have things in.

Gates: Do you think there was a period, maybe, when, in the thirties, people were driving down here to go to Mammoth Cave, that some people started making baskets and said hey I can make money doing this. Why don't you do it? Or started telling their neighbors and people started learning from each other then again?

Middleton: I think the Alvey's were the middleman. Or people like them. Most of the people that I talked to didn't actually sell the baskets themselves. They sold it to somebody, a middleman, who then sold it where ever. I don't know enough about the history, whether any individual had a basket stand out on the highway. I think the baskets were on the basket stand, largely had gone through a middleman somewhere to sell.

Gates: Yea. I remember when I was going to school in Bowling Green in 1983 that I was driving home on 31W and went past Ollie Childers' house, Lestel and they had a sign outside their thing. I wonder how that . . . that's kind of like that . . .

Middleton: Yes. Baskets for sale. I remember the sign very well. And they were capturing some of that trade going up and down the interstate. There was another Childers just a little further up the road, on the other side of the road, that had a sign out for baskets for sale. So there was some of that. But most of these people weren't living on 31W.

Gates: If you were living on 31W that was a good place to . . .

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: Did Ollie and Lestel move to 31W so that they could sell baskets? (Laughter, Gates)

Middleton: I don't know.

Gates: That's an interesting deal.

Middleton: The family could sell you, I don't know.

Gates: But the Childers' were one of the families that you are talking about. Been doing it for a long time.

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: Any other families?

Middleton: I can't think of a family that we so strongly associate with baskets as the Childers, but like I said, most of those people were basket makers that were just part of their family tradition.

Gates: And Leona was related to the Childers at one time?

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: And some of the other families, Al Prost was a Childers?

Middleton: I think separate families still, Martha Sweet, I don't think she ever had it, she was a great basket maker. Louisa Rosa, I don't think she had any relation. I don't know enough about lineages.

Gates: So there were other families?

Middleton: Oh, yes.

Gates: I remember about twenty years ago, we were trying to do a genealogy of basket makers, I think. We were looking at that idea on one of those panels. I ask, can anybody figure out what the different families were? They tried, but it was so hard to do that. That would be a neat project to have here.

Middleton: It sure would. I don't know enough about Cub Run genealogy to say.

Gates: I remember asking Beth Hester, one time when I first got here. So this area is a distinct basket making traditional, Mammoth Cave basket making tradition. What makes it different than basket makers down in Tennessee? And she said it had to do with how they attach the handle to the body. She was showing us how different families did it, but it was very different, she said, even within the whole, it was different than how they did it in Tennessee.

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: Is that true?

Middleton: Yes. As I said, I get an old basket, I got an old basket up in Frankfort that had come from this area down here. And I took it to one of the Childers and he was able to identify who the basket maker was by looking at the basket and looking at how they made that basket. For instance nails, some of them would use nails, different type of nail, in a different spot and they would identify the basket maker from a trait like that in that basket.

Gates: How would they know that if they weren't buying baskets and they weren't in contest together at that point?

Middleton: I don't know.

Gates: There must have been some way they were looking at each other's baskets.

Middleton: I'm sure they were. I'm sure they were.

Gates: It's interesting. I guess, maybe . . . maybe I'm thinking of it wrong. The other way of looking at it is everybody in the state made baskets at one time, but the only ones that hung on were in this area because of 31W. Do you think that might be true?

Middleton: Yea. Baskets were made all over the place.

Gates: Is it a white oak more available here?

Middleton: I don't know. I don't know if white oak would be any more available here than other parts of the state. It's pretty well a tree grown all over the state.

Gates: We used to have those rolley hole players down in Monroe County come up to the festival and I thought only people in Monroe played that, well, people would come up and say, I used to play that, rolley hole, but we had () at the end, we're from a Catholic neighborhood. So it was like, I guess, kind of the same thing. A lot of people played that game, but then it died out. But it stayed in some areas. That's an interesting theory anyway. When you're growing up, you saw these families making them and they weren't necessarily proud of it, you said they felt it was a sign of being poor?

Middleton: Yea. I've always got the feeling that with many of my basket makers when we first started working with them and talking about what a fabulous thing they can do. What a great piece of work it is. Takes a very talented person to make that. I don't think they looked at it quite like that way. They had looked at it as a necessity of life of having some extra money somehow. Some egg money type thing and working in the winter time, making baskets and then taking them out and somebody's buying their basket for a nickel and selling it for a dollar, you know? And it was not an art form. It was not a talent of something. It was a necessity of life and therefore, people who didn't have to do that were people who were better off economically. America's standards are, whoever's got the more money is the more valuable person and not necessarily who has the greatest art or that type of thing. So, I think that kind of thought led them not to take pride in their great artistic skills that they had.

Gates: Yea. If you asked them if they were an artists, they probably wouldn't say they were, right?

Middleton: No. That's what we had to do to have some money in the house.

Gates: Do you think doing the contests on the fourth of July at Hart County that you started twenty years ago. Do you think that has helped them changed their minds about it?

Middleton: I think so. I think it's brought recognition and our talk about what a fabulous thing it is. Something like Leona getting into the Smithsonian. Lestel being recognized as the folk artist of the year in Kentucky. Same thing with Leona, that type of thing. They started having some recognition, that yes, we really do have something here. This is a great tradition, it is something we can take pride in. Something we ought to take pride in. There's some very talented people and I think all the things that happens around our basket making guild and the website we had for them. Particularly the contest, you know? People would come in to see the contest and it would be on WBKO and that type of thing.

Gates: What station is that?

Middleton: Channel thirteen in Bowling Green. So it brought some publicity to them. Therefore they realized they did have something that was pretty neat. Other people would come in here and see it. I'd send out letters to them saying, you know, we'd have people coming in from out of the state to see this thing. You all are doing some pretty neat stuff. And they began to realize that it was really pretty neat stuff and they ought to get more money for the neat work they're doing and they ought to have more pride in what they're doing. They really have a great talent.

Gates: Their families ought to have more pride.

Middleton: Exactly. And I think that the Phyllis George book helped some. When () got that basket that went to the queen of England, you know? Things like that. And then following up on that with our baskets. It's been a combination of things over time. Making them realize they've really got a great skill.

Gates: How many basket makers . . . Did the number of basket makers seem to grow after you started the contest? Or did it get smaller?

Middleton: It's a dying art. I've lost a lot of basket makers in the last twenty years. And they're not as many young people, it's hard to get the young people started so they're less basket makers now than there were twenty years ago. Mostly because the older folks who are doing it are gone and there's not as many younger folks who have taken it up. It's the same old thing we've seen in our folk art, so many of our forms of folk art.

Gates: But yet, you see a lot of beginners getting prizes at your thing.

Middleton: Yea. We try to promote that. I've got beginners baskets and they didn't make very many baskets after that you know. But I have got a few that have kind of picked it up, but overall, I don't have as many basket makers as I used to have. And it's harder and harder to get the younger people involved in it.

Gates: But for the last twenty years it's kind of spurred competition . . .

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: And this feeling that, hey we're doing good stuff. Maybe you're getting some young people too.

Middleton: I think we've got young people that wouldn't of had without all the things that have occurred around the basket contest and the recognition that has come to them from all our efforts () Hart County baskets.

Gates: It was amazing for me and my wife to sit in the audience and see a young kid come up and smile and be so excited about making a basket when all his friends were probably watching video games or something.

Middleton: Yep. Yep.

Gates: But you're saying they're not staying with it.

Middleton: It's hard to keep them at it. It sure is.

Gates: What would help, you think?

Middleton: I don't know. We've tried apprenticeships and we've tried just the recognition, trying to encourage them.

Gates: You think if they were plugged in to a market right away, that would help?

Middleton: If there was some money in it?

Gates: And that's really what drives a lot of us anyway is money, right?

Middleton: Right. They can go to McDonalds and work minimum wage out there and make a whole lot more money than they can make making baskets at home.

Gates: So it's kind of a conundrum right now.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: If you had an exhibit here, plus your exhibit, and people came in and they had a way that they could buy a basket . . .

Middleton: I think that would help. I sure do.

Gates: Yea. It would be nice to have a shop there, where the young kids could have baskets and you'd always say, here are future . . . () not the best right now but you're buying one from somebody that's just starting out.

Middleton: Have them demonstrating something, you know. Tourists could see a basket maker making . . .

Gates: Well tourism spurred it on in the beginning. I mean in the thirties and forties right? If you could maybe get that going again.

Middleton: Uh huh.

Gates: I've thought of fiddle contests, for instance. Some people argue that fiddling contests are good, but it doesn't keep traditions going. Traditional music, because people go there and they get to play one or two songs. Do you know what I'm saying? They only have to learn these two songs and be really good at that to win a contest. (Coughs) Whereas other forms of . . . do you feel like that has happened with you guys? The competition has been good for you, right?

Middleton: I think the competition has been good. We call it a contest, I try to promote it among them as kind of a folk festival. Us all getting . . . It's a celebration of basket making. That's what I really . . . That's why I enjoy having the conversations, having people come tell the stories of it. Have them all just kind of get together, kind of a social gathering of basket makers to appreciate each other's work. That's really what . . . If you get too much competition, you get kind of competitive and maybe you don't want to share quite as much on certain things . . .

Gates: Is that why you have so many categories?

Middleton: Yep. Yep.

Gates: That helps, huh?

Middleton: And I've had some people get frustrated and not come because they didn't win, you know. It's competitive. I don't want that to be that competitive.

Gates: Leona says she's never lost. Or she's never completely lost.

Middleton: She's always had first because she's got fabulous baskets. She hasn't always . . . when she's one of the best to show a whole lot. She's very prideful in the fact that she has. And there's some people who have gotten frustrated and had quite coming because they thought Leona's going to win it. Some darn good basket makers. That has happened.

Gates: And how do you deal with that?

Middleton: Try to beg them to come back. Try to talk to them about the fact that it is a contest, but it's time for us to all exhibit what we can do. And enjoy being together and looking at each other's work and have other people see what we're doing here. So everybody needs to participate so we can show off what we can still do here.

Gates: So, it's a contest because it helps generate people . . . they're going to make some money by you buying the things and they get some pride because they won the contest, but also, like you said, a celebration. I suppose its like when you get the microphone and you interview some of the people.

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: I think that's really good, because it makes them . . . adds another dimension to it.

Middleton: Yes. I think so and having visitors there and maybe having a little press or something like that. People kind of enjoy getting a shine in the light a little bit.

Gates: Well it was good that we could make that one exhibit and give it back to you guys, so you could . . . with the Folk Life program.

Middleton: Yea. It helps, it certainly has. You know, that thing has gone down to Western, it's gone to a lot of different places and I'm hoping we could . . . I'd love to have that kind of thing up, a permanent exhibit of that kind of thing.

Gates: Yea. You need a little introduction to anything. To understand . . . So what do you think of the future of the Hart County basket making. Is it going to keep going?

Middleton: I hope so. It is still a struggle trying to keep people active in basket making and get young people involved in basket making. You know, I lost Clevy just within the last two months. One of our great basket makers. I lose more than I gain.

Gates: I don't want to waste video time on this so much, but I think this exhibit that your sister is doing combined with some way of selling it so that young and old could. . . Because I think a co op thing might help.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: I still think a lot of tourists come down the road here and don't have any idea that there is a basket making tradition here. You know?

Middleton: I think if we had something, part of our high school program, a basket making thing, mechanical arts part of our high school curriculum, I think it would be a great thing.

Gates: Have, on 65, a sign that says welcome to Hart County Home of the Basket Maker Tradition or something.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: So people, I mean . . . They did that on highway 23 every place you went you saw, that was the highway, this could be the basket making highway or something. It seems like . . . And that's what we're trying to promote at the arts council, the folk life, but we never could get a handle on how to . . . I don't know. I've always compared it to Nantucket basket or something like that. That's a style of basket, right? Well this is a style of basket that's unique, but it's really unique to this area. You should have one of these in your house.

Middleton: Yea. Yea. You're exactly right.

Gates: Do you think there's been some infighting among the basket makers that goes against that or do they work together?

Middleton: There's been a little bit of competitive business, I think, Leona has been . . . has received a lot of attention and some of the others are a little resentful of the amount of attention that Leona has received. She deserves every bit of attention she gets, she's such a wonderful person. But still, I think, some of the other basket makers feel they've been overlooked some and a little resentful. So, trying to get them recognized.

Gates: Us interviewing and her together today, her separately, made me feel a little bit like, well, who else should I be interviewing? We've lost two of them already, recently, right? Paul, a couple years ago?

Middleton: No, Paul's still with us. He had a heart attack and got laid up.

Gates: Who did we lose a couple years ago? Lestel and Clevy . . .

Middleton: Yea, Lestel was not long . . . a little further . . .

Gates: Wasn't it a husband and wife team?

Middleton: Lestel and his wife . . . Oh! Willard Glass. We lost Willard about two years ago.

Gates: Well, I guess I would like from you, or from Beth, a list of who else we should interview to really get to the core of this tradition. Because I know Leona gets a lot of attention and even her baskets are very delicate and very . . . a lot of attention. Which is a little bit outside of the tradition isn't it?

Middleton: She makes a finer basket than traditionally was made here. She uses a lot of the same forms and styles and techniques, but it's a little finer basket than a lot of our baskets.

Gates: But at the same time a tradition is a tradition because it keeps a standards that were passed within that group so there's got to be an inter-standard that you've seen in the baskets that aren't quite as fancy as hers, but they represent the tradition. Who would you say belongs to that group?

Middleton: The Childers. Mike Childers. Mark Childers, you know, you saw the different forms that Mark. . . They're really gifted basket people. Really gifted basket people. Both of them have kind of gotten away from it. Mark's had some trouble with his health and he's completely quit. He needs to get back into it for his own personal . . .

Gates: Leona said he fell off a roof or something?

Middleton: Yea. Yea. For his own mental and physical well being, he needs to get back into baskets, because he is a great basket maker. He certainly has that Childers inherited basket making skill. And his brother Mike is a great one. Paul is a great basket . . . He was raised in a family where they made baskets and he knows. . . He tells the story of taking their baskets to Alvey's to sell them and the guy would stand on there and if he could stand on them, he'd buy them, if they crunched in, he wouldn't buy them, you know. So Paul has a great knowledge of . . . personal knowledge. And he is a very, very good basket maker. He had a heart attack and has been kind of sick and he's gotten out of the circle a little bit. But I'd love to get Paul a little more active in it.

Gates: What's Paul's last name?

Middleton: Rich. Paul and Vinnie Rich. And his wife makes baskets too. She makes some nice baskets. They're very talented basket people. Those are some people right off the top . . . There's a girl that I've . . . a Pettit girl who makes a great basket and for some reason she just completely quit. She's probably in her mid-fifties now. I would love to get her back into it, I've tried and tried to get her back into basket making.

Gates: Would you say that all these people you mentioned would make traditional baskets that were part of what they made in the thirties and forties, but they've also gone away from that. Added their own personalities to it. So you can really say there's one tradition anymore can you? There's a lot of traditions that have evolved.

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: And they're evolved with individuals originality.

Middleton: Basic tradition is white oak and using the white oak to make a basket form. The forms of baskets are a whole lot . . . You still have the tradition, but our lifestyles have changed and tradition was making a basket for your lifestyle. And now lifestyles have changed, so the tradition is still there, but the style of basket is different because it's a different lifestyle.

Gates: And it's always evolving.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: And do you think your basket making contest had something to do with that?

Middleton: I think it's just a reflection of what they're doing. Now they will try and make a unique basket. There's books about baskets and different types of baskets that are made in different areas and so they'll look in those books sometimes to get ideas and then they just think about ideas their own. Like Paul's great big basket. You saw Mike's basket, that kind of weird looking basket that was next to the contemporary on the case down there. Remember Mike's basket was sitting right next to it. He just cooked that up in his head. Just kind of came up with that basket wanting to making a little different style. Something that might catch the attention at the contest, you know.

Gates: And that's a category, right?

Middleton: Yes. Novelty baskets.

Gates: Novelty baskets, okay.

Middleton: Yea. So there's a certain influence of trying to come up with a different idea that might do well in the basket contest.

Gates: Like Scott Gilbert's?

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: That was kind of a weird looking one.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: That's interesting. So you get one of a kind there. Do you ever see it catch on and become a model themselves?

Middleton: Don't see one that has come back every year, a new novelty basket.

Gates: Well, it could only be a novelty once I guess.

Middleton: That's right. (Laughter, Middleton and Gates)

Gates: Well, what I was saying is, well that's a great novelty, but maybe we'll just keep making these because people might buy them.

Middleton: If we had a bigger market, it might be maintained. Somebody might say, gosh I love that basket. I want to have that to do something with. And if it was something that caught on just like the Rit dye baskets caught on with the tourists, if there was a big enough market for them then I bet they would adapt to it.

Gates: Yea. I was with the state folklore for twenty-three years and I kept waiting to see when this was going to take off and people were going to go crazy over these beautiful baskets and it just doesn't seem to happen at the degree that we'd like it to. Is there anything you'd like to see happen that would make it happen? Is there anything that you'd like to see . . .

Middleton: Well, I don't know. I don't know what else to do.

Gates: I mean you're doing so much with the contest.

Middleton: I don't know what else to do. I think that I would like to have a permanent exhibit and kind of like a museum here and kind of have a folk art, kind of . . .

Gates: What does the elected official think about that? Do they care?

Middleton: I think they'd like it, but coming up with the money and the time and effort and that type of stuff. You almost need a full time manager of a thing like that.

Gates: See my wife's from Tiptonville, Tennessee and I work with a guy down there who made Real Foot Lake stump jumpers. It's a boat that's made for the lake. He got the national heritage award. He got all kinds of . . . we had him at the festival, but it never took off on terms of the city helping to promote it, because they could have been known as the only place that the Real Foot Lake stump jumpers was made, but its like almost a jealousy thing? It seems to me. Just like people say, why is he getting attention, why should we help him? Kind of thing.

Middleton: I think it's more of an inertia.

Gates: Inertia?

Middleton: Yea. It just takes some extra effort and extra time and nobody wants to put up that extra effort and time to make something like that happen. How do you motivate people or stimulate people, you know.

Gates: Do you think the average people around here are pretty. . .when they come to you () they get pretty turned on by these baskets, right?

Middleton: Yea, they like them. They're pretty excited about them. But they're passive about that, you know, how do you promote a little town like this? And how do you develop uniqueness of it and that type of thing. It's always a little frustrating to me that people don't want to put a little more effort into that type of thing. In this case it would be our basket tradition here.

Gates: Yea. I mean, you could equally say that you're known for your quilts, but looking at all the quilts you have here.

Middleton: Exactly. Yea. Now the 4Hers work with our quilts and the extension service, and we had a lady here who took a personal interest in it and developed a quilting group and it really helped our quilting tradition. But it was an individual who was willing to put that extra effort into it and make those things happen and kind of stimulate that interest in these ladies. That helped our quilting tradition here.

Gates: But that hasn't happened with the baskets?

Middleton: Hasn't happened with the baskets.

Gates: I don't know. Well, you're going to keep doing the thing, right?

Middleton: I hope so.

Gates: What do you see for the future of it?

Middleton: I see essentially the same thing. Trying to get my young people more involved is what I think is necessary for the future of it. Trying to bring in more publicity. Trying to get . . . I tell you Bob, whenever I do that, I get on the phone a couple of months before, just trying to call people. I'm always scared to death who's going to show up, who's going to make me a basket?

Gates: Oh, you're calling basket makers.

Middleton: Trying to get them to participate in the thing. It always. . . and then I call people, too, trying to bring people in, you know. It's just keeping a crowd there.

Gates: Your city needs a full time person who generates this.

Middleton: That type of stuff, yea.

Gates: This type of stuff as part of the job of Main Street or whatever it's called.

Middleton: Yea. Yea.

Gates: This should be. . . This should not be seen as a secondary thing in this city. In Munfordville. It should be a primary thing.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: I'm getting anxious about it. I'm getting focal about it and this is your interview I'm sorry.

Middleton: I worry about . . . I get frustrated about the same thing and of course I think maybe I should put more time into it.

Gates: Yea, but you are one of the most busiest doctors I've ever seen. How much time do you spend down there at the clinic.

Middleton: I spend 80 to a 100 hours a week every week practicing medicine.

Gates: 80 to 100 hours a week. Holy cow.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: How many other people do you have working with you in terms of doctors?

Middleton: There's seven providers down there. Four doctors and three nurse practitioners.

Gates: And you still like to work that long?

Middleton: I could work longer if I could get more time, I can't come up with anymore time. This time of year, Bob, I rarely get out of that place before nine or ten o'clock at night.

Gates: And today, you were able to do this because Wednesdays and Thursdays you're off?

Middleton: I take off on Wednesdays and Thursdays. I spend a lot of time in the clinic doing the clinic managing type things. Administrative type things. We're open seven days a week now.

Gates: Seven days a week?

Middleton: Yea, we're open on Saturdays and Sundays too.

Gates: So you're like a mini hospital aren't you?

Middleton: It's kind of . . . yea. Outpatient kind of a thing. But it's really necessary. Kids get sick on Sunday afternoon. Kids run fevers. People get to feeling . . . things happen to them. I saw sick people all Sunday afternoon. And Saturday, a lot of people are off from work and they can come in. And we're open in the evenings until 8 o'clock at night, you know. Guys get off work and men don't want to leave work and come home at five o'clock and feeling terrible and they can come down and we can get them seen or they need to get their blood pressure checked or their cholesterol. If I can make it convenient for them they'll come in and get it done. And if they don't, they don't and I end up having to deal with them having a heart attack ten years from now.

Gates: That's why I can never get a hold of you.

Middleton: Yea. (Laughter, Middleton)

Gates: Well, thanks for answering your cellphone. (Laughter, Middleton and Gates) How much time do we have left?

Camera man: Oh about 12 minutes, but I might have to do a little relighting if you're going to go a lot longer. Because we're losing all that outside light.

Gates: I think 12 minutes is enough to finish don't you?

Middleton: Whatever you say, Bob. Yea.

Gates: Are there any issues about what you've been doing? I mean, do you feel good about what you've been doing?

Middleton: Yea. I think it's been something that has helped our basket tradition. Has helped bring recognition to it. You see people like Leona. I think the basket thing has been an important of giving her recognition and her realizing what she . . . and there's a bunch of people like that. So, I think it's been a grand thing. I think our Hart County Fair and the things we've done over there have been good. Bring some understanding and recognition of what some of our local traditions are and what our heritage is here. So, I'm happy about that. I think that's well deserved. These people deserve that attention.

Gates: Why does Mary Margaret feel so strong?

Middleton: She has the same interest that I do. She loves Hart County. She loves the people of Hart County and wants to do whatever we can to bring the recognition they ought to have. Yea.

Gates: What's that?

Cameraman: That's me.

Gates: Oh. When I talk about folk culture, I talk about people who are folk artists and that type of thing. People who enable them as conservators. Conservationists. Conserve the tradition. Do you feel like you are one of those?

Middleton: When you define it that way. Yes. I think so. I went into it for the reasons I talked about. I love Hart County and I love these people and wanted these people to realize the skills and the talents that they have and take pride in themselves, because they've got a lot to be proud about. I'm proud of them. This is one small way of doing that. However that is titled . . . And I think our culture is unique and something to be very proud of.

Gates: Basket making is a part of it, quilting, farming. What other things about the county are you proud of?

Middleton: It's a beautiful place. Our environment is beautiful here. I love our outdoors. Green River, one of the ecologically diverse rivers in the whole eastern part of the United States. And our people have a tradition of living with the land and taking care of the land and I think there's a real appreciation for our environment among our Hart County people. So that's what I love about this place and I love that I have a family tradition who have been involved with it over the years. Been doctors and lawyers and congressmen. My aunt was helpful in so much of the county. So it's your family, it's your home, it's your traditions. And it's been a great place to have all that kind of thing.

Gates: Even if you talk like you're from Georgia? (Laughter Gates, Middleton)

Middleton: () Never learned to say any Rs when I was growing up.

Gates: People spot me right away and say, you're not from Kentucky. Cincinnati, yea.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: Well, it's great. You said earlier that you had some other stories that basket makers have told you. Is there any other ones you'd like to share?

Middleton: I remember Stanley Cottrell was on one of these basket making trips. He'd gone over to Somerset. Somewhere out of Somerset they were in town . . .

Cameraman: Excuse me. I'm sorry. Could you start that over again please? Just "I remember Stanley Cottrell".

Middleton: Okay. Stanley Cottrell was a . . . Do you remember the basket that was missing down there? He was a basket maker and his son , they lived on this place for a while and I know his son's well and his son told me a story about Stanley on one of these baskets selling deal. They've gone over to Somerset somewhere and had been downtown selling their baskets and they had made some of the local merchants mad and they kicked them out of town and he had a funny story about Stanley calling them a bunch of sons of bitches (Laughter, Middleton) when he got out on the edge of town and that was such a funny story about the basket makers and selling and what they ran into.

Gates: Why did they get mad at him?

Middleton: I think the local people thought they were hedging in on their business or something like that. They didn't like the competition. Some peddlers coming to town, selling some stuff there. I don't know if they thought of them as being more like gypsies or whether they were just competition for the goods and stuff they had in town and wanted to run them out because of that. But that was a funny basket selling tale. And the tales of the folks selling their baskets, having to stand on the basket to prove it was a good, stout basket. Paul tells stories about his folks.

Gates: Did they ever sell them down here at the City Hall or anything?

Middleton: We had a corner store where the local crafts people had a craft market there, kind of, there for a while through the eighties and the nineties and then it just kind of faded away.

Gates: I remember that one. I meant back in the thirties and forties when people were driving through . . .

Middleton: We had a basket stand on either end of town . . .

Gates: Oh, did you?

Middleton: And then up on Pine Ridge Hill there were two or three basket stands up there.

Gates: Wow.

Middleton: Yea. There were several here. And then of course down around Cave City and Horsecave there were baskets particularly down at Cave City.

Gates: So if you're a tourist you're driving down and say Oh, I just passed the basket . . . maybe I'll get another one down here.

Middleton: Yea. Exactly. There were several of them. And I remember those well as a child.

Gates: Wow. Must have been kind of exciting times for basket makers I guess.

Middleton: Yea. They were making those things and doing the Rit dye.

Gates: From here, how far would you go to Mammoth Cave? Would you go all the way down to Horse Cave or farther than that to get to Mammoth Cave?

Middleton: You'd go to Horse Cave, Cave City and then go out from Cave City to Mammoth Cave.

Gates: Oh ok. You had to go through here first before you . . . It wasn't a back way into it from here?

Middleton: No, it was off 31W.

Gates: Because Leona was talking about people passing their house at one time out in . . .

Middleton: Cub Run?

Gates: Cub Run, but would they go on to a different place?

Middleton: You can get to Mammoth Cave through the back, but most of the tourists, very few tourists were over there going down.

Gates: Because this was the main road.

Middleton: Yea, this was the tourist road.

Gates: People would come down, get a basket, go to TeePee Village or WigWam Village.

Middleton: Yea and this was a main north south thoroughfare. A lot of people going from the north to spend . . . to Florida in the wintertime, you know? A great tradition in this whole Eastern United States would go to Florida in the wintertime for a week or two or a month, what have you. And they would go down 31E and 31W. That was the route from a lot of central or Midwest United States going to Florida.

Gates: Wouldn't it be fun to put out a thing on the internet saying anybody whose bought a basket in their family during the thirties and forties on their way down to Florida along 31W send a picture or something like that?

Middleton: Yea. That would be pretty neat what you'd get? (Laughter, Middleton)

Gates: Have a festival with all those baskets?

(Laughter, Middleton)

Gates: Because it's hard to speculate anymore, right? What they really look like. I mean you kind of do. It would be funny. There are probably stories attached to those too.

Middleton: Probably so.

Gates: How they bought it, what they felt about it . . .

Middleton: What they were doing with them. Yea.

Gates: So baskets are more than . . . I mean, you have so many, is there a favorite one in your place?

Middleton: Gosh, I've got a bunch of favorites. Leona's basket, that lidded picnic basket is such a fabulous basket. And Mike's lidded pie basket. It's just a fabulous basket.

Gates: Because you like picnic baskets?

Middleton: It's just the form. It's the workmanship in those baskets. The symmetry in the baskets. How they've constructed them. It's just incredible basket making. Mark's got some great baskets. His big basket is always something . . . just the size of that thing. I know what the work it took to make that basket, you know. That no one has done any of that kind of work before. He was really pioneering the techniques to make splits that long and . . .

Gates: Gosh. I wonder what it was like living with him while he was making that. (Laughter Gates, Middleton)

Middleton: Most of those logs are about that long, that they used to split up. That thing was 15 and 16 foot long logs and you imagine running a split that long?

Gates: And that's what he made them out of?

Middleton: Yea. Just incredible.

Gates: I wish we had documented that.

Middleton: Wouldn't it be great to be able to film that thing? Because he as kind of doing it incognito so he could surprise us all at the basket contest over there.

Gates: Yea. And he came in . . . I thought it was five minutes before they shut down?

Middleton: It was late in the show. Yea. And I was really upset, because he promised me he was going to be there and he hadn't shown up. And he always brought a good basket and that was a important part of the . . .

Gates: I remember seeing you anxious and I was outside waiting for him and I see his big pickup truck coming in with a basket almost the size of the . . .

Middleton: Filled up the back of that pickup truck. (Laughter, Middleton)

Gates: I always tell people about that. Got anything else you want to say?

Middleton: I appreciate what you've done. Helping. You bring in resources and you bring in knowledge and you helped us understand what's happening here and put it in perspective and that's been very helpful. I'm glad the basket contest got you down here. That's a benefit of the basket contest and helping us, kind of, spread the word and get some recognition. You've been a real asset to this whole thing.

Gates: Part of the job. I have to apologize, because I felt sometimes frustrated that group didn't just go and conquer the world with that like we thought they would.

Middleton: I felt the same frustration many, many times. I know it was certainly was deserving the capture the world, you know.

Gates: It may still. I think its legacy still remains to be seen. A lot of collectors out there are getting them aren't they?

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: All over the world?

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: And people know they came from Hart County. They know the artist because of who made them. I mean, it's a really folk art here. Very strong art.

Middleton: I say the best folk art contest in the state of Kentucky is our Hart County basket contest. That's my claim. (Laughter, Middleton)

Gates: Say that again?

Middleton: The best folk art contest in the state of Kentucky is the Hart County Fair Fourth of July Basket Contest.

Gates: And everybody should be there right? (Laughter Gates, Middleton)

Middleton: Yes sir. That's exactly right. They're missing the best folk art contest of the state.

Gates: Or a reunion too, I guess.

Middleton: Yea. It's so colorful. () It's more than just seeing stuff on exhibit, you know. It's the greatest folk art contest in the state. That's my claim anyhow.

Gates: And then add to that, a blueberry cobbler . . .

Middleton: Yea, a blackberry cobbler contest following up on that thing, yes sir. Yes sir. And Leona's won that blackberry cobbler contest too.

Gates: She said somebody won it this year and she thought it was rigged this year. (Laughter Gates, Middleton)

Middleton: There's a lot of competition in that thing too, I tell you.

Gates: That's really neat. Those traditions here.

Cameraman: I'm about out of tape. I need to get a room tone though.

Gates: Ok. What does that mean? We just be quiet?

Cameraman: For 20 seconds.

Gates: Can we do that? I'll try. We can do it.

Cameraman: Roomtone

SKIP TO 1:23:24 for extra audio (Taking a tour of baskets on display)

Gates: Dr. Middleton. We're taking a tour of your place. What should we see here?

Middleton: Well, what we're going to get to see is some of the finest baskets you'll ever see. Some of the finest baskets I've ever seen. Basket making, the epicenter of it is here in Hart County, Kentucky. Basically down at Cub Run and what we have here is an exhibit of what these people can do. We sponsor the basket contest at the Hart County Fair each year and most of these that you'll see here are baskets that have been in the basket contest. There's a basket here that is featured in the Smithsonian.

Gates: Oh, really?

Middleton: Yes. There's a basket here . . . or a basket maker here that the Queen of England has one of his baskets. The first basket makers came to Hart County in around 1800s. The Childers have been making baskets for fourteen generations now here in Hart County. So it's a real tradition. And most of these people were at Cub Run. And I consider their baskets in here as good as any kind of baskets in the United States. We have some great basket makers here. So that's what we're doing.

Gates: And most of these are winners of a contest?

Middleton: They're winners or participants in the contest. Most of them are in the front room, as you see, of the blue ribbons are winners in the contest. This all started when my friend Charlie Williams in town, at our fair said, "You know, we ought to do something to showcase our basket makers", and he came to me. We have a great tradition. These people are very talented people. They are great artists and they don't recognize how great they are or they didn't at the time. And one of my problems as a doctor is getting my folks to take care of themselves and an important part of taking care of yourself is self-pride, self-image, self-worth. And I felt this was an opportunity to let a lot of my people realize how talented they are. What capable, talented people they are. Basket making in the past was kind of a way for people to survive. People made baskets in the wintertime in Hart County for some spending money and they always kind of considered themselves as poor folks because they had to make baskets to, kind of, eek out a living. And therefore, never looked at themselves as real artisans. And we recognized them as what they are: real artisans. And that was part of the whole concept of letting them recognize what fabulous work they do. What a great talent they had. What capable people they are. And therefore, how prideful they should be themselves and with pride I can get them to take their pills and take care of themselves. It's a lot easier. So that was kind of our thinking, our background behind getting the basket contest started and trying to develop recognition for our Hart County basket makers. So this started, gosh, 22 or 23 years ago and we have organized a basket makers guild, had basket makers meeting and have tried to help promote our basket makers or at least get some recognition for them. And the basket contest at our county fair has been a big part of that, which we sponsor, our clinic sponsors. And the results of the basket contests are the result of what we're going to see in here today.

Gates: So is this kind of like a museum of baskets to you?

Middleton: To me I guess it is.

Gates: Is there a way you set them up here? Certain ones in certain rooms? Or do you just kind of fill the room up?

Middleton: Just as baskets would come in we'd find another neat place to put them. We have baskets here, too, from a lot of our basket makers are gone. Over 20 years of time, I've lost Clevy Childers, just a month ago. One of our great basket makers. One who the Queen of England has a basket of. And so people who have brought their family baskets in. People have brought their grandfather's baskets in. So we try to get as many representative baskets of different basket makers over time and there have been a lot of them here in the county.

Gates: That's a way of giving people pride.

Middleton: Exactly.

Gates: If they actually come in. I mean, it's a result of it is them coming and saying well, my dad's basket. . .

Middleton: There's granddaddy's basket up there and there's momma's basket up there. And I remember great Aunt Susie making baskets and there's one of her baskets. And there's . . . I've got, one of them . . . Mrs. Ross' lunch basket, she took to school with her. It was such a pervasive part of our life here in Hart County. There's baskets for taking grain out to the mules. There's baskets for taking in vegetables from the garden. There's baskets to take your school lunch in. There's berry baskets. I've got a collection of baskets. It's amazing what an important part of everyday living baskets are. In all the different aspects of it and we have a lot of the different representatives of it. You know, here in the clinic.

Gates: Can you show us a couple?

Middleton: Sure. We're looking at some of the winners from the basket contest here. They were making baskets as decorative to sell on the interstate. When 31E and the tourist were coming back and forth. So they were using dyes in a lot of those baskets. Tourists liked the dye. And there's an example of one of Leona's baskets with the dyes in it.

Gates: Yea. Ok. She was talking about that. So she doesn't use dyes anymore. That was when she did just to demonstrate?

Middleton: Yes. That was one to show the Rit dye is what they were using. And the early ones they used walnut and things like that to dye, but the tourist liked the dye splits in there.

Gates: You guys got those up there with a drywall screw, huh?

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: It doesn't hurt them though, put it between the things?

Gates: We've got baskets that are made with non-white oak baskets. These are made with willows. The Longs. Brandon Long. Grandson of Charlene Long. He's a young child making baskets.

Gates: And she was an apprentice of Leona?

Middleton: Yes. That's her family style. She learned split white oak baskets from Leona, but this was her parents and her folks before her did those kind of baskets.

Gates: Where did they get materials for that?

Middleton: They'll get willow and then they'll get vines. Grapevine. Honeysuckle. For the materials for their baskets.

Gates: I see one of Scott's baskets. It's kind of odd looking.

Middleton. Yea, Scott has got contemporary . . . Has done some contemporary type baskets. Not so much traditional baskets. And Scott is extremely talented and we've got several of his baskets in here and that's one of his contemporary . . .

Gates: So he won the first place visitor's division. Not the most funny looking one. (Laughter Gates, Middleton)

Middleton: No that took first place. We have a fellow who comes up from Alabama. Some outside people come from out of our immediate area who come to see the basket contest and participate. We have a special visitor's division for them.

Gates: Oh okay. What is this thing? Is that a basket for a baby or not?

Middleton: Mike made that. He told me what he called that basket. Mike's a very talented basket maker, in fact, one of the really nice baskets I've got . . .

Gates: Kind of a younger generation guy, isn't he?

Middleton: Yes, he's one of Clevy's children. I forgot what Mike called that basket.

Gates: Mike's got this big one in the other room right?

Middleton: Yes! Louisa Rossis had a market basket and then there's a copy of her lunch basket when she went to school down in Cub Run this basket right up here, she took her lunch in a basket just like that. Louisa's long gone. That'd be a basket when they'd go to market. That'd be a basket when she took her school lunch in.

Gates: So yea, Leona was talking about a market basket. That just means when you take to the market to buy, to put things into.

Middleton: Right. And that's a market basket.

Gates: And here's Leona doing some more color ones isn't it?

Middleton: Yea. Now those are not dyed. That's different wood that came out of the splits. Those are some darker splits. No, that's dye. She gave those a dye. I'll show you some that are. . . There's another one of Scott's contemporary baskets. And there's a honeysuckle basket made by Charlene.

Gates: Scott's pushing it, isn't he? (Laughter Middleton, Gates)

Middleton: Now. Here's a couple variations of egg baskets. A common use of baskets was to gather your eggs in. And they're made so the eggs don't roll around as much in there. They call them buttocks, is another term.

Gates: Do you mean that each little row could hold an egg in there?

Middleton: Well, when they're made like that, you've got a whole bunch of eggs, they can kind of roll around, when they sit like this it kind of stabilizes them some.

Gates: Okay. How did the deer get up there and what's he got to do with it? (Laughter, Middleton)

Middleton: Ann Marie, one of the doctors shot that on her place and she was really proud of that deer. So as part of Hart County.

Gates: Now that basket over there. Melinda Childers one is that a laundry basket?

Middleton: That looks like a laundry basket. Yea. There's baby cribs, baby baskets . . .

Gates: There's a baby crib over there, do you see that? Mark made that too. Mark seemed to do a lot of . . .

Middleton: Mark is very good with form. He is very talented with form. You'll see all kind of baskets through here just variations on different forms that Mark's made. That's a basket for having out for your mail. You put your mail in out on the front out there.

Gates: People actually use that for doing that?

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: What about this big basket in here?

Middleton: That's Mark's basket. He said that was the toughest basket he ever made. I never will forget . . .when he brought that basket in, down to the basket contest, Mark doesn't like to show up . . . he likes to make kind of a grand entrance when he comes to the basket contest. The contest was already started and we looked up and there came Mark bringing in this basket. It's the biggest white oak basket in Hart County, anyhow. He's got splits in that thing that are 15 or 16 feet long. He said it took him a lot of work to make that basket.

Gates: That was best in show?

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: I was there that day, I remember watching the pickup truck coming down the driveway with that thing in the back. (Laughter, Middleton) What the heck?

Middleton: What in the world?

Gates: So you've got a lot of different ones in here?

Middleton: Here's a basket that doesn't have dye, but you see the different woods? That's outer wood, more of a sap wood part of the log. And the white is the inner wood in the log that they split. A log will split. That probably came out of a log about that diameter. As I said, there's all kind of uses. Fans. There's a lot of baskets with fans. That's Brandon's basket that's made with honeysuckle. There's some on the back of the wall in the churches. No air conditioning in the churches, keeping you cool in the summertime.

Gates: What's that big, long one there? Darlene Childers one?

Middleton: They call that a nut basket. I'm not sure where Darlene got that idea on that basket.

Gates: Pretty long.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: Not because she was being a nut making it?

Middleton: No. That's a fan. The Childers call that a fan basket. I think it more relates to the fan shape of the ribs in the thing. This is just kind of a standard, utilitarian basket.

Gates: That's not an egg basket, though.

Middleton: No.

Gates: Let me ask you this. This part here where this comes in, is that unique to Hart County?

Middleton: Well, the basket makers can look at that and pretty much, a lot of time, identify who the basket maker was, but everybody has just a little bit different technique there of making that. It will vary from one basket maker to another and from one region to another. But our local basket makers, I can find an old basket and I can take it to them and you'll see just the little differences and they can identify a lot of times the basket maker's long gone because of the technique.

Gates: Kind of like a signature for that basket maker.

Middleton: It's just part of their style. While we're looking at it, y'all, this is one of the finest baskets I've ever seen. This basket right here. This is one of Leona's baskets. It's a lidded picnic basket. That is a fabulous basket. You don't find any better split oak baskets. This is when she was put in the Smithsonian.

Gates: Has she ever not come in best in show or first?

Middleton: No, she hasn't won best of show every time. She's won a lot of them, but she hasn't won them all. She had baskets in that contest that Mark was in that year. Here's a Paul Rich lidded basket. You'll see different sizes of it, pretty basket. Here's one of Leona's, kind of a decorative basket. Really a pretty basket. Here's an interesting basket and a very, very nice basket. Mike Childers lidded pie basket. Put your pie down in there.

Gates: So it seems like some of these are innovative, they weren't traditional designs right?

Middleton: Yes.

Gates: In the community, somebody came up with something we need to have that? Like what is that big one there? Is that a funeral basket?

Middleton: That's a fish basket.

Gates: Oh, it's a fish basket.

Middleton: They fished with those baskets down in ().

Gates: Really?

Middleton: Yea. You see the fish goes right in there and he can't get out. It's a fish basket.

Gates: And the license plate there, is that where you open it up to get them out?

Middleton: Uh huh. Throw it in, you've got it anchored.

Gates: Let's see here's some little ties. That's not zip ties. That's kind of adding a new twist to it.

Middleton: Yea. So that was never actually used, but it's a replica of what . . . Clevy Childers fished down on () with those things.

Gates: Are they legal anymore?

Middleton: I'm not certain. I don't think baskets are legal.

Gates: I know boxes weren't for a while. It's got the weight in there and everything on it. Okay. Can we go through here and look at some more?

Middleton: There's some more fans back yonder. People going to church, you remember a lot of country churches would have a hard board that the local funeral hall or something like that would sponsor?

Gates: A picture on it or something.

Middleton: Yea. Well, our basket people had their own fans that they took to church.

Gates: I see you have a lot of quilts in here too, how does that fit into what . . .

Middleton: Hart County has also been recognized having a lot of good quilt makers. University of Kentucky did a book on quilters in Kentucky back in the sixties and there was a whole section on our Hart County quilters, so it's part of our local culture.

Gates: Are they part of the contest?

Middleton: We have the quilt contest at the fair too.

Gates: Oh, okay and do you buy those too?

Middleton: We sponsor, try too. (Laughter, Middleton) My quilters are harder to buy from than my basket makers.

Gates: Why is that?

Middleton: They just want to keep their quilts. A lot of times their quilts are made for somebody in the family. A daughter, or a granddaughter or a baby or just they want to keep it in the family. So my quilters, it's hard to buy the quilts. The basket contest, if you enter the basket contest and you win you'll either let me, the family medical center have that basket or you'll make me one just like it. So I've got some that have made them for me, just like it. Most of the time, they'll let me have the winners.

Gates: You pay for it right?

Middleton: Oh, yea. And I'm happy to pay for it.

Gates: Leona said she didn't know that the first time and somebody else bought it before you could get it. (Laughter, Middleton).

Middleton: Well she made me one, she sure did. There's a lady here, you'll see some back there. Martha, she's got one of her quilts right back yonder. Martha Martin, two years ago won first runner up for best in show at the state fair and then she had five other blue ribbons at the state fair. Nobody's ever done that at the state fair before. She's a very talented . . .

Gates: Martha Sweet?

Middleton: No, Martha Martin. Martha Jane Martin. This is one of her quilts. Right here. This won at the Hart County fair.

Gates: Oh, quilts you're talking about. Yea.

Middleton: Yea. I'll show you. I've got another one that was best in show up at the state fair from one of our local quilters. We've got a great tradition of quilting here in the county too. This is a child. Little Joanie Fields made this. She was 15 years old. That was her first quilt. That's a family tradition of quilt making in that family.

Gates: Wow.

Middleton: Little girl made that quilt pretty nice.

Gates: Yea. It looks like that puzzle. Did she try to do that?

Middleton: I'm sure there's probably . . . I don't know if that's Child's. If there was a pattern that she copied from.

Gates: So, why do you have the big building in here?

Middleton: That's a replica of Simon Bolivar Buckner's home. Simon Bolivar Buckner was Hart County's most famous citizen. He was a civil war general. He was one of the generals here at the battle of Munfordville. Confederate General. He later became governor of Kentucky and he was later a vice presidential candidate. And his home was here in Hart County and that was home. Had a log home on the river about 8 miles up the river.

Gates: So you have some more baskets in the other rooms?

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: Ok, we'll go shoot those real quick.

Middleton: There's some of Clevy's baskets and Leona's miniature baskets right there. Clevy's, he's the fellow who the Queen of England has got one of his baskets. Martha Layne Collins went to England, she took one of Clevy's baskets to the queen.

Gates: Which kind of basket was it?

Middleton: White oak basket. I'm not sure which . . . I'll show you some more of Clevy's baskets.

Gates: There's a big article about you in the Courier Journal. Did they talk about baskets in that article or not?

Middleton: No.

Gates: So you've got more baskets here.

Middleton: Here we've got some of our beginner's baskets up there. Here's a beginners winner. Jeremy Childers basket this last year.

Gates: So beginners mean somebody in their family's teaching them and they are getting to be . . . trying to carry the tradition on.

Middleton: We have a beginners contest and then we have a children's contest. And we have an intermediate basket makers, some adults who are just beginning to learn. So we have one for children, and we have one for beginning basket makers and then we have for intermediate, one just for making maybe two or three years. Little Jeremy Childers got first place. That's one of Mark's children. There's Michael Carol, he got second place this last year. That was just his second basket.

Gates: I'm not real good at baskets, but I can see there's a difference between those, in some of the older baskets.

Middleton: They're pretty good. For beginners they're pretty good. Vanessa.

Gates: What is that?

Middleton: She's a Childers in the long run, but she made that basket. She came from up at E-town but is actually from Hart County folks. Here's some more basket makers up here.

Gates: Oh so new generation, that's what this hall is about here.

Middleton: Yea.

Gates: And these are younger ones, right?

Middleton: Matthew, a ninth generation basket maker. He's probably a ninth generation basket maker too. That's a Clevy generation and this is a Lestel generation. More young basket makers, winner or participants . . .

Gates: So I see Childers and Carols. Are those names that are strong here? Waddell.

Middleton: All Childers when it gets right back to it.

Gates: I just found out she was related to Childers. Now Ella Truelock. Is that Leona's mother?

Middleton: Yea. So I've got some of my baskets from multiple generations back. Martha Sweet had been gone about twenty years and she was one of our great basket makers. There were

some nice Martha Sweet baskets back out yonder. She was a great basket . . . that's one of Martha's baskets.

Gates: So the ones in this room, are they all painted?

Middleton: Not necessarily. Some of them were baskets that local people had that I liked. Sometimes people bring baskets in here when they need a little money. I always love to get them. So they know they've got a good market in here.

Gates: Oh, so you buy them.

Middleton: Yea, you bring your basket in here and it's sold and you know it. And I'll pay for it.

Gates: You kind of just put them up as you go along, right?

Middleton: Yea. Several of these folks are gone.

Gates: I told your sister that if she got that grant and had an exhibit down the street that this should be part of it too. That people should be directed over here to get a tour, but I don't know if you've got time to give them a tour.

Middleton: Well they can sure come through here, because people come through here all the time to see them.

Gates: Just to see the baskets?

Middleton: Yea. Just to see the baskets.

Gates: I always tell people about it too.

Middleton: Yea, people are welcome to come. They always come through here. There's an interested story. Stanley Cottrell is one of our basket makers and I had his basket up there for some time . . .

Gates: The empty space there?

Middleton: Yea, Mrs. Cottrell came and got it to take it back home (Laughter, Middleton and Gates) So I don't know if I'll ever get it back or not.

Gates: Are you going to leave a space open for it?

Middleton: I'm going to leave the space open. I'm not going to let her forget it. (Laughter, Middleton and Gates) Miniature baskets. Some of the folks are more evident at making little baskets than others. One of our . . . Tony Thurman. I had some miniature baskets up . . . () There's some little bitty baskets. They were seeing who could make the smallest basket and you'll see small baskets scattered around through here.

Gates: I mean that is small. That is thumb size.

Middleton: Yea. I've got a thimble made out of basket material, out of split oak.

Gates: Wow.

Middleton: Making big baskets and small baskets is kind of a novelty type thing and there's some people who are able to sell that kind of basket who want that kind of basket.

Gates: There was a woman at the last one who had a real tiny one. You put around your neck even.

Middleton: Yea. She's a character. Here's some of her baskets right back here. Janice Fern. First time she came she won, I forgot what she got. I think she got a second place in the contest and she makes hers out of maple.

Gates: Oh okay that's why they're brown.

Middleton: Soft Maple and I think she dyed those. I think that's walnut dye she did on those. When she won, she got so happy she got up and sang. Sang us a gospel song.

Gates: I was there.

Middleton: Were you?

Gates: That was last year wasn't it?

Middleton: Last year and I've got her to sing every year since then. It was about four years ago when she won. There's some more fan baskets. They made a berry basket. That's a small berry basket. Just as a novelty type thing. But people did have big berry baskets to pick blackberries in.

Gates: What's that one that looks like a hat?

Middleton: That's Janice's. (Laughter, Middleton) That's a novelty basket. She made a UK . . . see that blue dye? She made a UK hat out of that thing. So she got second place and a third place and a novelty division with that basket.

Gates: I see back here a Lestel Childers.

Middleton: Before we leave, here's an extra basket right here. They made baskets, like I say, its pervasive in our whole way of living. At funerals, flowers would be placed in baskets like this and I've got pictures of a funeral, you'd have a casket and you'd have all the funeral flowers placed in these kind of baskets like this around the . . . Mark Childers' grandmother made fabulous, fabulous funeral baskets.

Gates: That looks pretty intricate.

Middleton: Real ornate baskets. And he won best of show with this basket. Another one of those late entries, he walked in carrying this basket. First time we'd seen one since we had since his mother back in the thirties. Grandmother back in the thirties making those things. And this is a . . .

Gates: Nobody uses those anymore?

Middleton: No. No.

Gates: What replaced them?

Middleton: Stuff that you get at the florist.

Gates: This is one too?

Middleton: This is one too. This is a different type of a . . . this came from Eastern Kentucky. I was interested because we had used this in Hart County, but this came over from Eastern Kentucky. Its split white oak, but it's a different form. It's a pull . . . These reeds are made pulled through a hole, an iron hole. They have a piece of sheet iron that they cut holes in and they'll pull that wood through those things to make that split, I mean that . . . See? That's white oak and of course they use splits too, but this is all pull basket. It's a different form of basket making.

Gates: Little nails in it too, huh?

Middleton: The interesting thing was, they were doing thins, basket makers were doing this as funeral baskets in other parts too.

Gates: Yea, that's a regional difference in different parts of the state.

Middleton: Mike did an interesting thing for us. They made baskets . . . Over time, they realized that split white oak is the best material to make baskets with. You can work it the best. It's durable. It's available. And so, you can make baskets out of a lot of different materials. And Mike has made baskets out of . . . to show you that you can make them out of all kinds of different woods.

Gates: So most of these are Mike's, huh?

Middleton: Yes. Mike made that whole exhibit up there.

Gates: Did he do it for the contest or do it just to . . .

Middleton: Just did it for me. He said, doc we can make them. And you can see the woods that are underneath them. The kinds of wood he used. There's mulberry, there's () bark, hickory, grapevines, there's red elm, there's locust, white maple.

Gates: Now did he just come up with these ideas himself or were they ones that other . . .

Middleton: Yea. Other people have used those kind of materials.

Gates: Oh, okay.

Middleton: He knew that those woods would work, because with some woods, you just can't work. But he knew enough () that those woods would work. And he just made me some examples to show that there were other materials that you can make baskets with. But they may be workable, but they may not last as well or they may not look as good or they may be a lot harder to work with. But white oak was traditionally, but it came from a tradition because it worked the best.

Gates: Is there any room you don't have baskets in?

Middleton: No.

Gates: Why don't you turn around this way, over here.

Middleton: It was John Y. Brown's wife. She did the book on Kentucky folk art that kind of helped revive the interest in Kentucky folk art. Phyllis George. Lestel was featured. Had a whole section on Lestel in her book. And that's Lestel and he was kind of the dean of basket makers in the eighties. Followed by Clevy. Clevy really promoted his baskets and worked hard and went over to Berea and sold more, but Lestel was really kind of considered the dean of basket makers back in the eighties. There's Lestel. And he and his wife were featured in her book.

Gates: Yes. Lestel and Ollie.

Middleton: There's a traditional style real picnic basket. One of Clevy's baskets. Pretty nice basket.

Gates: So is kind of because he's died that you did his picture up there?

Middleton: Well, some of his family brought it in and people would ask who is Lestel so I just put Lestel's picture up there.

Gates: Maybe you'll put Clevy's over there.

Middleton: Yea. I hope they've got a bunch of materials about the Clevy's folks. Pictures of them and all that stuff and I'm hoping would be in the exhibit they're trying to get together. That family is real interesting, bringing all that in. Some good stuff. Good stuff. We've got some more baskets. More different forms over in the next area over there. These are work and more quilts.

Gates: Yea, down this hallway down here, right?

Middleton: A quilt that was best in show at the Kentucky State Fair, one of our local quilters. That's a great quilt. That's Martha Gerald's quilt. It's a great quilt.

Gates: Yea, that's beautiful. That's a nice one too.

Middleton: Yea. Edith Avery. Cross stitch quilt. One of barns on my farm.

Gates: Which one?

Middleton: That one right up there. A classic Hart . . . It's a work basket. The boys tell me that what that basket was for is when they work animals all day long, they come in at night and give them some corn. And that was the basket that carried the corn to the mules. Mark, I told you, he has that ability for form. And there's a bunch of them. All kind of forms of baskets that mark has made up there.

Gates: Now whose that one? () That's just () putting her name there. Her middle name. Okay. He just did that one.

Middleton: Just, kind of a fantasy type thing.

Gates: That basket looks like a cotton basket that I saw down in the Memphis area, but it was thicker. Bigger, too.

Middleton: We had a person bring a cotton basket. A fellow who comes up here from Alabama and he brought a cotton basket up to the show one time to show us. There's one of Mark's. A kitty cat basket. It won the second place utilitarian, they thought that was a good utilitarian idea. A basket for a kitty cat bed.

Gates: You got a lot of baskets.

Middleton: We've got a lot of great basket makers here in the county. And George Childers is the grandfather of some of these basket makers I was showing you.

Gates: Oh, really?

Middleton: Uh huh. That's an old basket.

Gates: That doesn't look as fine as some of the ones I've seen.

Middleton: No, it's not. Wasn't as good a basket maker as some of these folks. He was prolific and he made a lot of them. Probably didn't take as much time as the rest of them did.

Gates: That's what it takes is time and the need to make them as fine as you want to.

Middleton: And persistence and artistic skill. It's a combination of things. You can take somebody like Leona, she is artistic, but she's also wants to make things good. She does a job. She wants it done right. And that pride business and that kind of thing.

Gates: Do you want to go over to your house now?

Middleton: That'd be fine.

Gates: Did you show us everything you wanted to show us?

Middleton: Yes, I think we've seen a good example . . . there's a few more baskets in there, but I think we've got a pretty good idea . . .

Gates: Do patients like coming in here and seeing the baskets?

Middleton: They love coming in here and seeing them. And they take a lot of pride in them and a lot of them come in and got family up there and they love to point out so and so's basket. Granny's basket or momma's basket or uncle so and so's basket. Yea. It's been neat, how it has kind of revved up some interest and pride and appreciation of our heritage here and they like seeing the quilts too. And a lot of the older ladies . . . we had a 98 year old lady in here the other day, still making quilts, talking about some of these quilts in here. I couldn't get her taken care of her because she wanted to talk about quilts.

Gates: That's interesting. That one as first place in Hart County and third place in Arizona. How'd it get to Arizona?

Middleton: In her later years would go to Arizona in the wintertime. We got one in here that won out at the Arizona State Fair and it won the Kentucky State Fair, first place. She was a good quilter. Best in show at our fair, first place up at Kentucky and then it got third place out in Arizona for something out there. Good quilter.

Gates: It has more of an Arizona feel to it, doesn't it?

Middleton: Yea. It's got that western . . .

Gates; Thats pretty cool.

Middleton: Yea.

END OF INTERVIEW