

KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with Jennifer Zurick
Interviewer is Mary Reed
July 8th, 2015

() This symbol refers to an inaudible word or phrase

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

Reed: ...I'm Mary Reed and I'm here interviewing Jennifer Zurick in her studio, here in rural Madison County, outside of Berea, Kentucky. Today is Wednesday, July the 8th, 2015 and this interview is part of the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association's mission to interview Kentucky Craft Luminaries in order to save their stories. Hi Jennifer, thanks for agreeing to this interview.

Zurick: Well, you're welcome, Mary.

Reed: Can we start by you telling us a little bit about yourself and your family and where you're from?

Zurick: I was born in Lexington. Lived there on the outskirts until I was about eight and then we moved to Jessamine County and I lived in Jessamine County throughout school and then in the early seventies I moved to Lee County, which is where I began my basket weaving career. But, yea, I'm one of six children. My dad was a horse vet, my mom stayed home, mom and we moved out to the country in Jessamine and that really had a big impact on me I think just being able to be out in nature, running up and down the creek and out in the woods. I mean, that's where I spent all my time basically, when I wasn't in school. So, I'm just kind of, you know, naturally into natural fibers. (Laughter, Zurick)

Reed: And to the earth. Yes. An earth person. Alright. So you're a basket maker. How did you get started in this basket making?

Zurick: Well, when I moved to Lee County this was a big adventure for me. It was moving back to the land, that's kind of during the back to the land movement and were living on a very isolated river bottom farm. To get there, you had to go down the river about a mile and across it. So there were no roads leading to the place.

Reed: You did this by boat?

Zurick: By boat. By boat. Yea, we could drive down and park at the boat dock and then take a boat down the river and across. Otherwise you could drive back roads, gravel roads for miles and miles and then walk in over the mountain. But, so it was very, you know, very remote. No electricity or running water and we farmed, horsepower and had cows and chickens and pigs. (Laughter, Zurick) Grew big gardens. Cooked on a wood stove, just, you know, kind of wanting to get back to learning survival skills and being close to the earth. And in the process of clearing river bottom. Grown up river bottoms of willows. A friend of mine and I, Pam Buckman, were, during a work party and the guys were cutting these willow trees down and then we were dragging them off and then throwing them in the river, but in the process of sitting there and resting, noticed a felled tree that the bark was flared up at the end and just started peeling it off and it came off in these long strips that were really flexible and we were like, "Gee, this stuff looks like it could be really good for something". And we thought about making clothing, actually or mats and then, you know, that seemed a little impractical. So it was actually Pam's idea to make baskets. So, we started playing around with weaving the bark. Yea.

Reed: That's interesting.

Zurick: Yea, so the first baskets were really crude. Primitive, little containers. There's one right there. This is actually one of my very first willow bark baskets, which I was proud of at the time. I actually gave this one to my dad for his birthday. (Laughter, Zurick)

Reed: And it's come back to you.

Zurick: Yea, it has. But, it took me a while to figure out. I had no instructions. Never took any classes or anything. So it took me a while to figure out, you have to have an odd number of spokes to weave so I went around and around and it wasn't weaving. And I was about to give up when I stuck one spoke in that didn't go all the way through to the other side and I've been weaving ever since. (Laughter, Zurick)

Reed: You've come a long way, baby. So can you talk about how you learned to work with this material or just it was experimental, but what did you learn, I guess?

Zurick: Yea, well it was trial and error, you know. I was really enchanted with the fiber and as I said, enchanted with that first piece and every piece I wove, I learned how to improve on the next one. So it was just basket by basket. Learning, you know, little ways to tweak what I was doing. And so for years after that I made mostly functional baskets with handles and wide spokes and weavers and then as my work evolved it got more and more intricate and refined and expensive and so I kind of got out into a different market at that point.

Reed: Can you take us through the process of how you gather and then process the bark before you . . . in order to use it to weave your baskets?

Zurick: Yea, well in the summertime when the sap's up. It's usually July is when I go out harvesting. The sap has to be up in the tree for the bark to separate from the wood. So, I'll go out and for years I've been harvesting off the Kentucky River in Estill and Lee County and I take a boat out and find the tree. I like a tree that's about a foot to a foot and a half in diameter at the base. And then I'll score around it with an axe and then get a draw knife up under, about a four to five inch width piece and then just start pulling it up. And the first strips are kind of short and then they get longer and longer until you're really stepping back from the tree and jerking, you know, this jerking, whipping motion to pull it the full length of the tree, which can be thirty to forty feet. Which is pretty labor intense. And for years, I did this by myself until I got a little bit smarter and started taking my brother and he's been harvesting with me now for about twenty years.

Reed: Is this a particular type of willow?

Zurick: It's black willow.

Reed: Black willow. So they're big.

Zurick: They are big. They're one of the tree willows. Native to the United States.

Reed: Now, when you strip the bark off the tree, does it kill it?

Zurick: It will kill the tree, you can saw it at the base and it will sprout back. So I've done both. I've taken the tree bark and left the tree, but more in the last few years as the willows are kind of thinning out and it's not really from my harvesting, they habitat has changed in the area that I have been collecting for all these years. But, I tend to cut the tree now, because now, I'll strip it standing up, but then I'll cut it at the base and then I can get the rest of the bark off the branches and the top, very top of the tree. And I always replant the branches to hopefully produce new trees.

Reed: Do you cut the tree all the way through or do you just, kind of, score it?

Zurick: Just cut it down, yea.

Reed: Oh, you just go ahead and cut it down. And then it will re-sprout, you're saying from that. Okay.

Zurick: Right.

Reed: So once you have the bark off of the tree, what do you do with it?

Zurick: So then I'll peel the outer bark off. So this is a piece of bark that I've peeled. Stripped off the tree and then peeled the outer park away. So, I've peeled the outer park away, then I've coiled it in a loose coil and then I'll take this home and put it in the sun for about a week to get it good and dry before I store it. And then I like for it to cure out for about a year before I use it. 8 months to a year anyway.

Reed: What's the purpose of curing it for so long.

Zurick: Unless you do that, it's just like it's still kind of a little spongey. It doesn't cut as easily. It doesn't weave quite as easily. It's just got a sponginess to it, kind of like it's still got . . . I know it doesn't have sap in it really, or maybe it does to some degree, but it just seems to do better if it's cured out.

Reed: Do you find that there's less shrinkage than . . . ?

Zurick: Definitely less shrinkage. Definitely.

Reed: When you cure it out. Okay.

Zurick: Yea, because if you were to weave it fresh, yea you're going to get a lot more shrinkage. That's another good reason. Something like this one. (Laughter Zurick, Reed) That probably was a little bit tighter when I wove it originally, because this was totally fresh bark and I didn't even get all the outer bark off of it, so.

Reed: So that would have been green bark basically, yea.

Zurick: Right. Right.

Reed: So there was a lot of shrinkage.

Zurick: Yea. But I don't think I wove it that tightly to begin with, but. (Laughter, Zurick)

Reed: So then once you've cured it out and then take us to the next step.

Zurick: So then I'll take this roll of bark and I'll soak it in hot water for about an hour, hour and a half to two hours actually, until it's soft and then rehydrate it and then I take my razor knife and just cut my strips one by one. And then after the strips are cut, and I did have a wet piece here. I'll have to take the outer bark. Or there's a little more . . . well, this is the inner bark, but it's thicker than what I want to weave with. So I'll skin that off and it also, it just refines the piece and makes it more weavable and once you get a piece going you can kind of split it. Kind of a

combination of splitting and cutting. And then this piece, I can clean up a little bit to make cordage out of. So I get two layers out of it. So, I'll clean that up and then I'll spin it into cordage for the handles.

Reed: Of this cordage, you're taking two pieces and twisting it.

Zurick: Uh huh. It's basically like spinning rope. So then once I get all my weaving components worked up, my spokes and weavers, then I'll lay out my basket. And this one's not wet, but it's . . . this just shows you the beginning of a piece. Of a twined piece.

Reed: Very intricate weave.

Zurick: Yea. Well, I'm going to take this around a few more times and then I'm going split these spokes in half. So I'll get a very intricate weave. And it will be more like, well, one of the pieces up there.

Reed: When you start a basket, do you finish it all at once? Or does it take you . . . are you working at it for days or?

Zuricks: Days, weeks even months. The large piece behind me took two and a half months. And that's working on it . . . well actually that one, I was trying to work just 25 hours a week, but I was right up against a show so I was working a bit more than that on that piece. And it did, it took two and half months to complete so it's large and it's intricate. And I have hand processed all that material and then the weaving process.

Reed: So how do you keep the bark moist?

Zurick: I have to re-soak it in the morning, you know. I let it dry overnight and then re-soak it in the morning.

Reed: So do you let the basket dry as well or?

Zurick: Yea, I let the basket dry. Yea.

Reed: Okay.

Zurick: And then I keep it spritzed during the day while I'm . . . I mean, I want to soak it as little as possible, so just re-soaking and then I spritz with a water bottle.

Reed: With soaking, does it darken the bark or?

Zurick: It does. Yea. So.

Reed: So can you see a variation in the color from start to finish?

Zurick: Sometimes. This piece here, do you see how it's darker at the top? I mean, before you get to that border area? See how it's darkened, yea. And that piece took about a month to clean, or process the bark then weave it.

Reed: Where do you store all this bark you gather?

Zurick: Up in the loft. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed)

Reed: Okay. And you say you like to store it for about a year before you use it or?

Zurick: Yea, before I use it, but I like to get two or three years ahead. I mean, ideally. Like, this year I actually didn't get a harvest in, so it's going to be a little tight for me. Not next year, but the following year. Because next year I will have to harvest. But I have to let that cure out for almost a year, so I may be weaving a lot of little bitty scrap baskets.

Reed: Can you buy this bark anywhere?

Zurick: No.

Reed: Have you ever studied basket making under someone or are you just strictly self-taught?

Zurick: I'm strictly self-taught. I never took any basket weaving classes until way late in my career. I mean, just in the last eight years or so. And that's because I wanted to connect with the national basket weavers in the country and began attending the National Basketry Organization conferences and I've taught at a couple of those and then I've gone, mainly because I wanted to attend, but also to take classes as well. It is fun to take class with somebody's whose work you respect and, you know, that inspires you. I finally got to weave with a Native American teacher, Pat Courtney Gold. That had been an ambition of mine for a long time, because I'm really inspired by Native American basketry. And have learned a lot of that technique through books and so it was nice to just get the personal touch.

Reed: And what are they weaving with?

Zurick: She weaves with the native fibers from the Pacific northwest and their grass and Indian hemp. Well, actually I'm not sure if it's Indian hemp. She uses a lot of string now in her warp. And then she'll weave harvested fibers around that. Cattails, I think?

Reed: Are there any unusual techniques that you use? That you haven't already mentioned.

Zurick: I do a lot of different twining techniques. Since I don't dye my bark, you know, try to set off designs with different colors. I do that by mixing my technique up. So I do a lot of plain twining, twill twining, wrap twining, three strand twining. (Laughter, Zurick) You know, plain plating, twill plating, diagonal plating and then I put a lot of cordage into my work, as well. So that's my twining techniques is what gives my work, you know, the designs and patterns. And I can set of, you know, geometric patterns with those techniques, which is kind of fun.

Reed: Do you know of other artists that work with the willow bark?

Zurick: Just a couple from, you know, couple of my friend from back in the old days. We discovered this fiber together and began experimenting with it. But there's just . . . and I'm not sure, Lisa Head, if Lisa Head is still weaving willow bark baskets or not. I know she moved to Pennsylvania and she would come back and harvest periodically and then she got into rye grass, like the old (). A traditional German coil rye grass technique and started doing more of that and then I know she spends a lot of time out in the Southwest now. So I don't know if she's still coming back for bark and producing or not, to tell you the truth. And Robin Reed is another fellow that does some willow bark basketry, but really it's not . . . actually it has not been a traditional basketry fiber at all. That's why my stuff kind of stood apart from your more traditional

basketry and became more of a collector's item because it is so unique using willow bark. I'm I've seen it used in some old Appalachian rib style baskets, where they used the willow branches for the rods and handle and then they wove willow bark in for the weavers, but I haven't seen . . . I've seen a few of those, but it wasn't a common basket tradition. Now, there's a lot more people doing the traditional willow rod basketry. The cultivated willow basketry and they're just recently starting to peel that bark and weave some of it, which I have some right over here which I got from the gathering I just taught at. I brought some of that home with me. So that's cultivated willow bark. It's very thin. It's just off of a tree that's, you know, maybe three or four inches in diameter. So you can't really separate the outer bark from the inner so much. You're going to use both.

Reed: It almost looks a different color, too.

Zurick: Yea, it is and what's really great about the cultivated willow is it comes in so many different colors. I can see where it would be real fun material to play around with.

Reed: We have about an acre of cultivated willow ().

Zurick: Well, I heard that Robin was growing willow.

Reed: Yea, it's so red. It would be interesting to . . .

Zurick: Yea, it would be definitely. Is that what you planted it for? For basketry? (Laughter, Zurick)

Reed: I don't know. That was Robin's project.

Zurick: Oh, I'd be interested to talk to Robin about that.

Reed: Yea, you'll have to.

Cameraman: Let me get a shot of that. This little coil basket?

Zurick: Yea.

Reed: I better be careful what I say. (Laughter Zurick, Reed) I spendt twenty years clearing that land.

Zurick: Now it's full of willow. Why don't you plant some black willow in there? Jeez, it'd take twenty years or so to get the size tree you would want. (Laughter, Zurick) Well, your grandchildren might like to weave some baskets. (Laughter Zurick, Reed) I wish, I really wish, back when we first left the farm in Lee County that we had planted, I had planted a bunch of willows in there because that bottom land is all grown up with maples and just think, if I'd planted willows.

Reed: Blackberries.

Zurick: Oh, and blackberries and you know copperheads, but that's the problem now, like, when I lived down there the willows were just thick, you know, along the rivers, but they were more open. It had been farmed recently. It was sunny. That's a tree that likes to grow in those conditions. And now they're all water maples have shaded them out.

Reed: Yea. Or harvesting the bark after a flood. How dirty and taking that bark out of the tree. All that river sand come down on top of your head.

Zurick: Yea, that's a messy job. (Laughter, Zurick) That's why not many people make black willow bark baskets. (Laughter Zurick) It's too hard to get.

Reed: It's too hard. I'm willing to work hard. Okay. Do you treat your baskets with anything to preserve them or?

Zurick: I just put a light mixture of mineral oil and water. So like, in a cup of water I'll just put a tablespoon or two of mineral oil, which they don't mix. I just swish it around in there and the water helps disperse the oil, kind of, lightly over the top of the basket and in the inside. It just enhances the color, basically. Seems to just give it a little bit of . . . Just brings the life out of it a little bit.

Reed: Now do you have to do that annually?

Zurick: Just one time. Yea. Otherwise I think they would just get kind of gunky, you know? Too much oil on there would just . . .

Reed: They look like they're woven tight enough to hold water.

Zurick: Yea, they don't. (Zurick, Laughter) Most water baskets were lined with some kind of pitch, like pine pitch or . . . in the Southwest anyway. I think they did make water tight basket in the Pacific Northwest. Tightly twined enough and I've heard that those double woven Cherokee baskets would hold water, once the fibers swelled.

Reed: Right. Right.

Zurick: But, yea. Mine don't. I mean I haven't tried to, you know, keep them wet so they would hold water. (Laughter, Zurick)

Reed: Seems like I've seen that in the movies. (Laughter Reed, Zurick) Somewhere along the line. Okay, so have you studied other cultures and their basket making techniques?

Zurick: Yea. Yea. I mean, I've traveled quite a bit with my husband whose **who's** a geographer. I mean I never went anywhere until we got together. I pretty much stayed home on the farm and wove and raised sheep for quite a few years. But, he's traveled extensively in Asia and I have accompanied him on a number of trips to that part of the world, where basketry is still really, you know, used in a daily, functional way. Mostly bamboo. But, yea, I've sat and watched an old Himalayan fellow weave a big, old pack basket and in Indonesia I actually worked on some coiling with a basket maker and in Nepal I spent a couple of days with a Tharu basket maker doing the coiling technique, which is really not my thing, but it was really fun to have that experience. Yea, I look at baskets everywhere I go and I buy, you know, baskets to bring home and look at and, you know, get inspired by and maybe get some ideas for techniques. I love the old . . . well, I've always loved textiles, so the tribal textiles so I'm real inspired by the textile and the fineness and the utilitarianism. Well, that's not a word, but. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed) The utility! Of these old, functional baskets. I mean those are the kind of baskets I really, that I collect, generally, are functional ones. They're not really the ones I weave, but.

Reed: Did you find that you could communicate basket language with these other cultures?

Zurick: Yea. In Nepal I actually had a little basket I was working on and sat there working on my little basket, while this guy was working on this big, bamboo pack basket. And we were just kind of looking and kind of grunting at each other, you know, nodding our heads and figured out it took me as long to make my little one as it did his big one. You know, his was an open weave, but yea, just a mutual appreciation for the work we were doing.

Reed: So what major influences have you had on your work?

Zurick: Well, a trip out west to visit my brother in Seattle back in the mid-nineties. Really put me face to face with some incredible native pieces. Pacific Northwest native baskets. And I discovered books that I didn't know existed. So I bought all these books and I came home and I just took off with the twining and the cordage and introducing new techniques. My work became a lot more intricate at that point and that really has had, probably, the biggest impact. These incredible pieces of art that were produced for function back when they were weaving, you know. I mean they're still weaving some beautiful work, but there was a lot more of it. They were a lot more prolific with it years ago. The old pieces. And then the contemporary Japanese baskets. I've really gotten turned on to those recently. So that's kind of taking my work in a more . . . less structured, kind of more organic direction. Like, I'm incorporating vines, honeysuckle and dying that with my willow bark and then weaving that through a willow bark armature and getting, kind of, some more random, it's a random weave technique, but getting some more organic, kind of, pieces, that look like you might have found them growing in the woods along the path. (Laughter, Zurick)

Reed: Well, that was my next question. Has your work changed over time, but I can see it is an evolving and especially with the honeysuckle, that's a whole new direction.

Zurick: Yea, a whole new direction there. But I fall back to what I know, you know, because it's . . . and that's what I'm teaching now, because people want to work with willow bark and that's really rewarding to teach. It's also challenging, because then I have to come up with that material. I have to harvest it and I usually have to process kits for students and that's just not something I'm willing to spend a lot of time at. So I'm trying to teach, well, I just taught two workshops. I'm teaching another one next year, but I've decided I really can't teach more than one every year or two and, you know, be able to comfortably come up with five or four . . . my work, as well as student's work.

Reed: So you have to charge for all that prep time in there too.

Zurick: Yea. Yea.

Reed: Which is a longlot of it.

Zurick: Yea. Yea and, you know, they're willing to pay, I'm finding. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed) I used to not charge enough and then I would come away feeling like I didn't get paid for the work I invested, but you know, I'm coming to learn that these are serious students that I've been teaching and a lot of them are teachers themselves and they're aware of the work involved in a harvest. And they're willing to pay for the fibers.

Reed: So how long is this workshop?

Zurick: Well, I just came back from the willow gathering. It's the fourth year in a row they've done this in Iowa. Decorah, Iowa. And it's all focused on willow, so mostly its willow rod, like the cultivated willow basketry. Like European style baskets. But they're getting really creative with the rod work as well. And two women from Denmark were the other two teachers there and then I was the bark teacher and so those were 2 three day classes. Two back to back, three day classes each.

Reed: Typically, what would one of these basket classes cost a person?

Zurick: Oh gosh, yea, I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to that, but, I think its \$500 for the class and maybe, you know, 3 or 4 hundred for room and board for a week.

Reed: So around a thousand dollars a week or so.

Zurick: Yea. And then their materials on top of that, so it gets expensive.

Reed: So you would have to be serious.

Zurick: Yea.

Reed: About how many baskets can you produce in a years time or two years time?

Zurick: It depends. If I do two or three, you know, two and half month pieces or if I do a lot of little pieces. It really goes from year to year. I mean it's different every year. My typical basket takes probably 3 weeks. 2 to 3 weeks for kind of a medium basket. My little bit larger take a month to a month and a half and these large pieces I've been doing have been taking two to two and a half months to do. So I really mix that up with the little miniatures that I used my scraps up for. That are more affordable. Because when you spend two and a half months on a piece, it's like really expensive. Especially when you mark it up for retail. Because the shows I've been doing have been the high end collector's shows that I have to travel to, very expensive booth fees, very expensive lodging. A week away from home. So I have to mark things up. I have to put that retail markup on it. So I keep track of my hours on pieces and that's the only way I know how to charge, because they're all different. You know, I give myself the hourly wage. I feel like I'm willing, you know, to work for. And then that adds up and it's just like, "Oh my gosh" and then I double that. You know? For retail. And they're high. They're high end baskets.

Reed: So give me a price range.

Zurick: My baskets range from \$500 to the most expensive piece I've sold was \$9,000.

Reed: So like this great, big basket in the back that took you two and a half months would be like a \$9,000 basket.

Zurick: That one's a little bit more. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed)

Reed: A little bit more okay.

Zurick: Yea. And I may have it for the rest of my life.

Reed: I bet you're not willing to let it go for less.

Zurick: No, I'm not. Yea. Actually the first one I made that was almost that expensive. Well, the \$9,000 piece. I thought I would have that for the rest of my life. And I was pleasantly surprised when I sold it within a year and a half from the time I made it. So that was really exciting to me, to have somebody support that, you know, support my work, that really appreciated it and had the disposable income to spend.

Reed: So when you say it takes you two and a half months to make a basket like that, is that because you have drying time in between all that or is it just the intensity of it that you can't . . .

Zurick: Yea, I can't work forty hour weeks, so I'm working about 25 and in that case I was doing about 30 hour weeks, actually. So that's five days a week. I give myself the weekend off to, kind of, recuperate and so that's, you know, about five to six hours a day in the studio.

Reed: So it's not necessary to weave so many inches and then let that dry before you continue to do the next so many inches . . .

Zurick: No. I mean once I get the basket wet, I try to weave it, you know, as long as I can that day. And then I'll put it under a fan especially in the summertime, things can kind of start to get, you know, fermented.

Reed: Grow mold.

Zurick: Right. (Laughter, Zurick) So I like to get it dry and then I res-oakre-soak briefly. Doesn't take long.

Reed: I see you have a ceiling fan to help stir the air on there.

Zurick: I do. Right.

Reed: Now do you sign, date and number your baskets?

Cameraman: I need to change the battery. We're ready.

Zurick: Yea, so there's very little shrinkage when you work it up this fine and you're doing these tight kind of twine pieces.

Reed: So the larger the bark, the more shrinkage you'll have.

Zurick: Yea, the wider the piece, the more percentage of that is going to shrink.

Reed: Okay. Alright. So, do you number and sign and date your pieces or?

Zurick: I number and sign. Yea.

Reed: But they're not dated.

Zurick: No. I mean I have record of the date, you know, for my own records, but it's getting harder and harder for me to sign the bottoms of these baskets. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed) When I have wide spokes and weavers, I could get my name in there and the number really easily, but now it's getting more and more challenging. I'm probably going to have to develop, I don't know, some little tag that I hang inside of it maybe.

Reed: May have to sign it before you weave it.

Zurick: Well, no that wouldn't work. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed)

Reed: So how many baskets have you done to date, do you know?

Zurick: I think I'm up to 770 something. Which is really not that many considering how long I've been weaving, but if you only weave, you know, a few each year, I mean that's, you know I know a lot of these people have woven thousands. I mean you hear of craftsmen working on thousands of, you know, different pieces over the years, but yea, there's been years that I've taken a whole year off where I was doing something else or traveling or just worked part of the year. Winter is kind of my most productive time. When spring hits I'm in the garden for about a month or two and then when it gets hot I come back into the studio (Laughter, Zurick and Reed) because now I have air conditioning. And then my shows are mostly in late summer and fall and then I actually have a couple spring shows too now.

Reed: So tell me about the shows that you're doing to display your . . . to market your work.

Zurick: Well for years, I did the Kentucky Guild shows. I did that for probably fifteen years and then as my work became more intricate and expensive that wasn't my market anymore. Those outdoor shows and I went to galleries, but then I felt like I really needed more exposure because my galleries were mostly local. Berea, Louisville, Cincinnati. So I applied to the Southern Highlands Guild and started doing some shows with that guild in Asheville and I had some success, but felt like I really needed even a broader audience and so applied to the Philadelphia Museum of Art craft show and a Smithsonian craft show and American Craft Exposition in Chicago area. And those have been the shows where I find customers.

Reed: High end shows.

Zurick: Yea. High end collector shows. Yea. And those are shows you have to jury into, so it's really competitive, but I've been on a pretty good run with getting into those. And occasionally even winning some awards, so that's been really fun.

Reed: Do you want to talk about those awards that you've received?

Zurick: I mean they give out a certain number of awards at every show. Best of show or, you know, best of fiber, best of glass, you know, and so I've received the Philadelphia Museum fiber award one year. The Smithsonian show I received the bronze one year. The American Craft Expo has been my best show for awards. I actually got the best of show the first time I ever did it.

Reed: Wonderful.

Zurick: Then next year I came back I got it again. And then the third year, I got it three years in a row, which was, I mean I was just totally blown away. I think the other craft artists were too. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed) It's like get out of the way. Let somebody else get this. And then last year, the last two years I've done that show I've gotten the Founder's Award. So, and those are all cash awards, so they're really fun to get, because then you know at least your booth is paid the first night or at least half paid in some cases.

Reed: Now are these awards given based on your peers or by outside judges?

Zurick: No, judges. Yea, judges come in. They are professionals in the field generally. So that's always fun. And then I've received two Kentucky Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowships. The Al Smith Artist Fellowships and a few years ago I was nominated for a United States Artist Fellowship which I applied to and got. And that was like really a major award.

Reed: Now these are also cash awards?

Zurick: Yea, that was a \$50,000 cash award.

Reed: Oh, gosh.

Zurick: Which was unbelievable. I mean I was floating. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed) For months after that one.

Reed: Yes! I can see that. It allows you to travel or study or . . .

Zurick: It allowed me to get air conditioning for my studio and I did travel some. I put some money into retirement account. I got a new computer. I got . . . what else did I do? I went to a conference, you know, that I didn't teach at, you know. Different things like that.

Reed: It sounds like you invested in your business.

Zurick: I did. Yea, I did. And I took a couple off my schedule and experimented with some ideas, new ideas I hadn't had time for. And that's when I started the large work. The large pieces that I've been doing. So it was nice to be able to take that time and not be concerned about whether this piece was successful or not. To explore and just see where that direction took me.

Cameraman: That's the end of the tape.

Reed: Okay. Well, that's huge.

Zurick: That was. That was just amazing.

Reed: Well I saw that Ike, he received one, like \$100,000?

Tape cuts out

Zurick: . . .a few years older than me.

Reed: But that was just always a fine thing.

Zurick: Oh and their baskets are amazing. They are so beautiful. They're in that Measure of the Earth video also.

Reed: Well, I saw that. That just brought back a lot of memories. Lot's of shots.

Zurick: And they both were awarded the Lifetime Achievement award from the National Basketry Organization. So they're going to be at that conference in a couple of weeks, or maybe even this week, or next week.

Reed: You're not going?

Zurick: I'm not. I'm going to be traveling.

Cameraman: We're back now.

Reed: I can't remember where we were. Are any of your baskets in permanent collections in museums or galleries?

Zurick: Uh huh. A few of them are.

Reed: Which?

Zurick: Well, the big one's the Renwick Gallery with the Smithsonian American Art Museum in D.C. I have two at the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art in Owensboro. I have one in the Portland Museum in Oregon. I think that's the Portland Craft Museum. And then there's one in the Asheville Museum in Asheville North Carolina and I have a couple of pieces in the Johnson and Johnson Corporate Collection.

Reed: Nice. Very nice.

Zurick: Yea. It's nice when that happens.

Reed: So have you received any recognition or awards here in Kentucky?

Zurick: Well, the Al Smith Individual Artist Fellowships. Yea. I'm not really exhibiting. I've only recently started exhibiting again in Kentucky. I've just been, for almost 10 years, exhibiting out of the state. And just last two years started doing the Craft Market again.

Reed: So you're juried into the Craft Market again.

Zurick: I am, yea.

Reed: Has that been worth your while to get back into that? To be involved?

Zurick: Yea, it has been. Yea, I was, you know, I feel like I'm still testing the waters, but the first year I was pleasantly surprised and then this last show it snowed like a foot and went down to zero the day we were supposed to load in. (Laughter, Zurick) And there was a U.K. ballgame one day and the show was really dismal until the last hour and then I made several sales and had a better show than I have had the year before. It was one of those shows where you're just like clinging to the very end (Laughter, Zurick) just hoping, wishing, praying, you know, you'll at least pay your expenses.

Reed: You never know.

Zurick: You never know. And it really is a matter of just two or three people coming and purchasing a piece that will make it a success for me.

Reed: Have you ever been involved with, years ago it was called the Kentucky Arts Foundation and now it's the Kentucky Museum of Arts and Crafts in Louisville?

Zurick: Yea, I was involved with them quite a bit early on, but no, not in the last, I don't know, decade I guess. I think there's just been a turnover, different people are running the show there and I don't know if they're not as interested in basketry in the state or . . . I used to get invitations all the time to do shows with them and I haven't heard anything, not a peep for years so I don't know what's really going on there. I know they've got a new . . . They newly renovated or expanded. They have a nice gallery there and I used to sell some out of the shop. Hasn't been an outlet for me or a venue.

Reed: So you said you have been a member of the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen and the Kentucky Arts Council Craft Market Program and the Kentucky Museum of Arts and Crafts in the past. Have you found that it's been to your benefit to be a part of these state organizations and if so, how?

Zurick: Yes. Early on. I mean really I got my career started with the Kentucky Guild and I've remained a member. You know, up to the present. I'm not really very involved. Their outdoor show is not really a venue for me. I've actually been intending to put some stuff in their gallery, now that they have a gallery in Berea. I've had pieces in different little shows that they've put on here and there. But I'm not really that active in the guild anymore. I guess most of my energy is going towards, you know, the national venues.

Reed: So have you been published in any publications?

Zurick: A few. The book that came along, or that was produced by the curator of the Smithsonian, the Renwick show. That's a really nice book. Measure of the Earth. It's also called Measure of the Earth. Phyllis George, way back in the '89 I think, did a Kentucky Craft Book.

Reed: Speaking of . . .

Zurick: Oh, yea. Kentucky Crafts.

Reed: I would love to get your signature.

(Laughter, Zurick)

Zurick: I'll have to sign it Jennifer Heller Zurick, I guess.

Reed: However you want to sign it is fine with me and I was kind of surprised when I pulled it out and I was researching you and doing my homework and thought, "I don't have Jennifer's signature". But I think it's because I took it to shows and you weren't doing shows then. So I thought, "I'm going to take it with me and get your signature on that". Yea. So it makes it more special.

Zurick: Nice. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed) I'll have to get yours in my book.

Reed: Alright, we can do that. We can do that. Okay. So did you find that Phyllis George helped your career by being in that book?

Zurick: Well, I don't think I ever got a direct sale from being in that book that I know of. But she helped a lot of people. I mean, she promoted Kentucky crafts and put us on the radar and started the Craft Marketing, I mean really got that going. And she bought two or three baskets from me, so. (Laughter, Zurick)

Reed: You did that first Craft Market show that was at the horse park didn't you?

Zurick: The very first one, yea, I did.

Reed: Now did you ever go to Cave Hill or Cave Run, her home, for those Derby shows?

Zurick: No, I didn't. No. Yea, the craft . . . the first Craft Market at the horse park, that was just a wholesale show. And it was just wholesale for a number of years and I realized after my first wholesale order, which I got there, that I didn't want to do wholesale. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed) That that just wasn't my thing. I didn't want to have to make five or ten or, you know, even three of one design, I just really need to make what I want to make. And then, you know, that's what keeps me happy is being creative with it.

Reed: So has you family been supportive of you through the years?

Zurick: Very. Very supportive.

Reed: How?

Zurick: Well, early on, my mom photographed my work, took care of my sheep when I went bark harvesting. My brother has been harvesting with me for at least twenty years and I really couldn't have done it without him. My sister's been harvesting with me as well. And then when I first started doing these national shows, she would accompany me and help me set up, you know, and drive into these big cities, you know, for the first time. And you know, find our way around and that was a lot of fun. You know, the time we spent together. We did that for a number of years. But now we're taking care of my mom, so she's got her part of the time and I've got her part of the time, so we can't really do things like that together anymore. And my husband has been amazing, I mean, he's just been totally supportive. I mean this work is not economically dependable work. I mean I never know when I'm going to sell a piece of if I'm going to have a good show. If what I've invested in a show, I'm going to get back and so it's always a little dicey. Not the dependable income that, you know, I would like to have to contribute, but he's really . . . since he does have a good job, that enables me to be able to be the artist that doesn't . . .

Reed: Takes pressure off.

Zurick: Yea, it does. It does. And then when I do have good shows, it's nice to, you know, do special things with that income. Put new windows in the house last summer. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed) A new stove the year before that.

Reed: So they've encouraged your work and supported you.

Zurick: He has very much, yea. He's been great.

Reed: So have there been any interesting stories you'd like to share with us? Things that have happened to you through the years?

Zurick: Along the way?

Reed: Yea. Along the way.

Zurick: Well, I mean nothing really jumps out at me. That United States Artist Fellowship was like the most exciting things, probably.

Reed: Absolutely.

Zurick: Yea. Yea and to get that in an email that I almost didn't pay any attention to, you know, it could have easily been deleted. Just to say I'd been nominated and they would actually pay me \$100 to apply, because they respected that this would take my time and energy and you know, if I didn't get it, at least I would have not wasted that time. And then to do that and put that out there and then forget about it for four or five months and then get this phone call that told me I'd been awarded this, I mean, I was just totally stunned. And they flew me to New York for this big gala event and put me up in a Manhattan hotel for a couple of nights, Dave went with me. It was just really exciting. Yea, there was a big performance evening. Because it's a lot of different disciplines, you know, it's given to composers and visual artists and, you know, architects, filmmakers, dancers and so some of these people performed that evening. It was just really fun. And then getting that big check was wonderful. That was exciting. It was also really nice, the Kentucky Arts Council sent me to Ecuador for an artist's residency or artist exchange really. And I was down there, they hosted me for two weeks down there. The Ecuador Partners of America in Quito in the Amazon. That was pretty exciting, a trip down the Rio de Napo River rafter it flooded in this kind of canoe boat, it had a motor, but it was, I mean, kind of a dugout. And you know, water racing, you know, things floating, dodging. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed) And ended up, you know, down in the Amazon for about a week. And then I traveled on my own for about another week after that, they hosted me. So that was really, really fun.

Reed: Did they have willows there?

Zurick: No, but I went bark harvesting, or not bark harvesting, but fiber harvesting with () Indian down there and worked with some of the fibers they weave with and made a basket.

Reed: What fibers were they?

Zurick: I'm not going to be able to tell you because it was Spanish, but it was like a palm fiber that they peeled off of the palm tree. And processed and then woven into these, kind of, open pieces. Yea, I've got a couple from that I brought back from there.

Reed: Do you have private collectors?

Zurick: I do, yea. I do. Steve Cole was the main fellow that started collecting my work and ended up, he's in D.C. and he had an extensive collection of specifically American made baskets, or baskets made by American weavers that harvest and process their own materials. So that's what he was specific. And contemporary weavers, so he's been collecting for the past, I don't know, 25, maybe 30 years and he donated his collection to the Smithsonian, to the Renwick gallery and they accepted it. I mean they wanted it and then they made a big exhibition that was up in the Renwick for. . . during 2014, I think. 13, 2013. So he was kind of the main collector, but I have, there's a woman that collecting my work in the Evanston area. She's bought a nice piece or two from me almost every year I've done that show. And there's another lady up there that

collects my work as well. So you know, those are kind of the main people that keep coming back for more, you know. Others, one is good enough to add to their collection.

Reed: That's a nice validation.

Zurick: Yea. (Laughter, Zurick and Reed)

Reed: Well, I think we've covered most things. Is there anything else you'd like to add to this that maybe we haven't touched on?

Zurick: Well, I don't know. You know, this has just been my life. You know, made my first basket when I was 17 and . . .

Reed: Have a few gray hairs now.

Zurick: Yea. Yea, I'll turn 60 at the end of this year. I never dreamt that it would be my life, or that I would make a career of this. So it's kind of a surprise, I guess, to me. It just kind of organically evolved, I guess. And it's been really lovely to have my work appreciated, I mean, I guess that always kind of surprised me, you know, when I would set up and people would be . . . especially most recently as my work has gotten more intricate, I mean, people just kind of get, are awed by it. And that feels, you know, really nice. It actually touches them. It's not just, "Oh those are great" but it's like, they kind of put their hand on their heart and it's like they feel them.

Reed: It's the wow factor.

Zurick: Well, yea, it touches something in their spirit that they connect with. And I really love having that experience, because there's so many people that can't afford the work and I understand that, I mean, I wouldn't be able to afford it either. But just to make that connection with people that really, on that level is pretty sweet. It's, yea, it's just kind of turned out to be my life, baskets, Basket making and now some teaching and I hope to, you know, keep at it.

Reed: Keep on.

Zurick: Slow down the pace a little bit. Not push it so much, you know. Right in front of a show, be a little more relaxed about that.

(Laughter, Zurick)

Reed: I always like to think better to ()

(Laughter, Zurick and Reed)

Zurick: Yea, it's good. And it's fun. It's fun getting out there and putting the work on pedestals and putting them under lights, because they really pop then, when they've got the lights aimed at them and the backdrop and it's just kind of fun to take them out and show them off a little bit. Share them, you know. I'm not really showing off, I think it's more of a sharing.

Reed: Well, thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview.

Zurick: You're welcome.

Camerman: Can I get room tone? Can everybody be quiet for about 20 seconds? Room tone.

END OF INTERVIEW