

Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.

Interview with Joyce Cooper

November 2007

Interview conducted by Greg Willihnganz

WILLIHNGANZ: Welcome, Joyce.

COOPER: Thank you.

WILLIHNGANZ: (laughter-WILLIHNGANZ) Now, thank you for coming. We appreciate it, and ah, want to talk about, ah, a little bit about your history here. Ah, in a sentence, can you describe the type of work that you do?

COOPER: I cut up fabric and put it back together. (Laughter-COOPER) (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ). And that might be simple, but that's about it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay, maybe you can elaborate there. (Continued laughter)

COOPER: It--I--I'm into more quilting now than I was when I first became a member of the Guild...

WILLIHNGANZ: Ahh.

COOPER: ...because I started out with candle-making in the Guild.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

COOPER: But I've always had a love of fabric and sewing and doing more art pieces; not large quilts, not heirlooms necessarily; just some fun things, like to use color, ah, patterns. I like old style fabrics, reproduction 1930 fabrics that remind me of when I was young and a grandmother who sewed a lot, and I admired, and hopefully I'm making things she would appreciate as well.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, were you born in Kentucky?

COOPER: No, I'm from Niagara Falls, New York.

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh.

COOPER: I'm an old Yankee. (Laughter-COOPER) We moved South in 1969 and have stayed pretty much in Tennessee/Kentucky...

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

COOPER: ...since then.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell us a little bit about your childhood and family background. How did you get into crafts and all that?

COOPER: Well, I think that I lived with a mother and grandmother that was always sewing, embroidering, making nice things. My mother made dresses and things for me, and she was very artistic, and I think I just wanted to be like her. And then we moved to Tennessee. My husband went to school at Maryville College, and there with children, I found a way to make some extra money without working outside the home by sewing. And it worked out very well for us, and I continue to enjoy it. The children are gone, the grandchildren are gone, but I still enjoy doing it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you- -did you have significant teachers who helped you basically ah, ah, into the type of work that you're doing?

COOPER: Probably not. I've just more or less admired other people's work and then thought, well maybe I could try to do things like that, and I sort of maybe self-taught, more than anything else.

WILLIHNGANZ: So you didn't apprentice or...

COOPER: No.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...or go through a training school...

COOPER: No, I didn't.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...or any of those things?

COOPER: No.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. How much of your current approach has been the result of exploration by you, and how much has been contributed. How much have others contributed to your knowledge?

COOPER: I think that the Southern Highland Guild has been my biggest influence. The work in that Guild is so exquisite that you can see what people have made, what they have in the shows, what they have in the shops, and it just inspires you to go home and cut some things up, and try to put them back together in a new way. And I--I think they've been my biggest influence. Ah, in the Kentucky Guild I was only a member in candle-making, so I didn't pursue the fabric through the Kentucky Guild, but ah, Southern Highland, I--is when I branched out. I became a member there and I demonstrated their shops, I demonstrate out here with quilting and I find it lots of fun, like to talk to people, and show them things I do and ways they might have fun doing things like it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. Now you were part of the Kentucky Guild...

COOPER: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...ah, right at the start there, it sounds like.

COOPER: Mm hmm.

WILLIHNGANZ: You went to the first fair that they did.

COOPER: Yes. (Laughter-COOPER) That was quite an experience. That was before the booths were very sophisticated and all like they are today. There were no tents. You just set up a table or put things on a log, and displayed them on crates, on the ground and that sort of thing. And then it rained, and you didn't have any protection. And before long, if you've ever been out to Indian Fort Theatre, you know that in minutes you can be up to your ankles in mud and hail, and it was a real experience, with Jerry Wor- -Workman running around trying to protect his dye pots, and Jim Foose had paintings out... getting wet, I mean the rains come up very quickly out there. And I was- -the first year I was next to Bybee Pottery, and their pots and their vases and their pitchers filled up with water immediately. We had hail. It- -it was just terrible. But everybody had a good time. We worked together, we got things picked up, cleaned up, people came back, and we sold more things. In the very first fair, I actually sold \$250. Now it costs that much, I think, just to be in the fair, or something in that range. But, it was just a lot of fun. You got to know people. We were living in Bloomfield, Kentucky at that time, so we had to travel over here, and it was just fun; meeting the different crafts people and getting to know each other.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now that one word hail, was that the first....

COOPER: It was either the first or the second...

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

COOPER: I'm not sure. It's kinda, like they run together after this many years away. But, yeah, the hail really damaged a lot of people's work.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, and, ah, one of the things I have to tell you is, I just came from the interview with Walter...

COOPER: Oh, okay, yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: ... from Bybee Pottery.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: And of course his version of the (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ) Bybee Pottery rain was that they used to cover it up with plastic.

COOPER: Oh yeah, they were fine because their pottery is so substantial, you know.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh huh.

COOPER: The people with fragile items, and mine were candles... Nothing in my stuff got hurt, but people with fragile items, they were just, you know really...

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah.

COOPER: ...really hurt by it. But Bybee Pottery, they were so much fun. He would always demonstrate, and he had his wheel, 'cause he was right next to me, and he never looked down at what he was doing. He never looked at his hands. He was looking at the children and the people in the audience. And then he would finish a pot, cut it off the wheel, and hand it to a child. Well that pot is flip-flopping all around and the little kid is walking around with this, trying to get back to Mama. But they were so delightful with the people, really enjoyed the Cornelisons.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well they said, ah, they said that, yeah, they drew a lot of attention and the glass blower, I guess...

COOPER: Oh yes, oh yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...which is understandable. (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ)

COOPER: Yeah, cause they're fascinating...

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah.

COOPER: ...demonstrations. Now after the third year, I built a dipping vat, and so I could dip candles at the fair, and so that was a nice setting, out in the woods, dipping candles, hang them on a clothes line to dry, and color them, and then I would let children dip and color, too. And, so that made it fun to do the candles.

WILLIHNGANZ: I need to stop for a just a minute here. Ah, there we go. Okay, ah, let me ask you some other things. Um, have you, ah, traveled either in this country or internationally? And what impact has that had on your work?

COOPER: Okay, I've had some really nice opportunities to travel. Berea has an exchange program with a community in Japan and every year they send five craftsmen and then some delegates in October to do a craft fair over there with sixty-thousand people.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: I've done it for four years, and that was really a nice experience, and it was because of the craft. At that time I was--well I did candle-making, I did weaving, and I did some quilting with them. One year I stayed and taught in the schools for a week after our delegation left.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: And so there I was, speaking no Japanese, and the people I was staying with spoke no English, and we had a great time. It was just delightful. The country is beautiful. The people are beautiful. So then, in the spring they sent the artists here for our craft fair at the Guild. And we had the Buddhist artist, who is a National treasure of Japan, stay in our home. And she, again, couldn't speak any English, so we drew a lot of pictures and just had a wonderful time. So it's just been opportunities like that that the Kentucky Guild and the Berea community itself, and the Southern Highland Guild has given me chances to go places, and I demonstrate in the Guild shops in North Carolina and Middlesboro, Kentucky. And, let's see, I don't think I've ever demonstrated in their Gatlinburg shop, but yes, it does give you some nice travel opportunities.

WILLIHNGANZ: And have you taken classes through the Guild?

COOPER: Um, Southern Highland offers classes in Arrowcraft in Gatlinburg Arrowmont, offering classes.

WILLIHNGANZ: I have no idea what you're speaking of.

COOPER: Okay, it's ah, the craft school. The school is Arrowmont and the gift shop is Arrowcraft. It's right in the center of Gatlinburg, and it's run by the Southern Highland Guild. And they offer--well they have beautiful workshops and wood-working, jewelry-making, quilting, all the main crafts. And they offer classes throughout the year. And they have Elderhostel programs there, too. So it's a good opportunity for someone that wants to start at the beginning or who is advanced and wants to do more extensive work. And they bring in people from really all over the world as instructors.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: So it's a very good opportunity.

WILLIHNGANZ: That's terrific.

COOPER: Yeah, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah. Have you, ah, served as an officer in either of the Guilds or...

COOPER: Years ago I was on committees for Southern Highland, but as I get older I don't want to travel as much and their meetings are all in Ashville...

WILLIHNGANZ: Ah.

COOPER: ...so I haven't done much in that area.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Understandable. Does the function of the objects that you make play a part in how you create them; that is, are you doing these basically as artistic works or are you doing these to be functional?

COOPER: Yeah, I'm not so much functional. The small quilts, baby quilts, baby bibs; things of that sort. I even do bookmarks, those are being more functional, but then wall hangings and decorative pieces, ah, depending on maybe my mood or the fabric, whatever inspires me to go with it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm.

COOPER: Uh huh. But there are things you could do without. (Laughter-COOPER) Hopefully not, but you could.

WILLIHNGANZ: What would you say were the, ah, major influences on the content of your work?

COOPER: Hmm. I'm not sure how to go with that. I think just... I see things. I work a lot in the yard. I think color and nature, ah, flowers, things like that sort of get me going and I think, "Oh, now this would work well". And maybe that's how I go with it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you study quilting from particular periods, or particular areas?

COOPER: Ah, possibly the older, more traditional quilts. I appreciate them and I--I don't do so much, ah... I'm more conservative probably than free with just impressionistic kind of things. Mine look like what they're meant to be. They're not something I would have to guess, "Is this a flower or is it a fish?" kind of thing. Ah, I-I'm not an impressionist sort of person.

WILLIHNGANZ: When you do quilts, are you doing typical geometric patterning...

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...or are you doing...

COOPER: Mostly sew.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mostly sew.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. How has your work changed over time?

COOPER: Hopefully, I've gotten more precise. I don't know if that's important or not, but I--I try to make them a little more perfect each time so that corners match, things flow together well. And, I have a daughter that sews, and she keeps me on my toes. She's in Tennessee, but she and I exchange a lot of ideas and her work is far more perfect than mine, and so I try to be as careful as she is, maybe as good as she is one day.

WILLIHNGANZ: You work with sewing machines?

COOPER: Oh, yeah, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: And do all of this...

COOPER: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...through that.

COOPER: Yeah, I have one of these fancy, fancy machines that I can embroider designs and, ah, work with the computer and transfer designs from the computer into the sewing machine, and come up with things like, well, like kitty cats and...

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: ...things like that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Did you make that?

COOPER: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's nice.

COOPER: Thank you. Ah, yeah, the--the computer, I think, has changed quilting tremendously; to put the embroidery in it. You can embroider something on the machine in a matter of an hour or two. If I were doing it by hand, I might spend three months on it, and it's still just as pretty, and it gives you a way to finish things, rather than have a lot of unfinished projects.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm.

COOPER: I like getting them done. (Laughter-COOPER)

WILLIHNGANZ: What's your, ah, studio or work environment like?

COOPER: I have a room that's probably fourteen by fourteen, I have three sewing machines. The embroidery machine can work independently by itself while I'm sewing on the other machines. I've got two big cutting tables, a table to lay things out on, I've got book cases. The room is packed full. Then I have a giant walk-in closet that is the envy of everyone in Berea. I have it packed from the floor to the ceiling, shelves on three walls, full of fabric.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: Oh, yes, I'm a fabriholic. I love to buy fabric (Laughter-COOPER) and I have lots of it. I keep it arranged by--like there's 1930's fabrics, which are old traditional styles, and I had all my stuff lined up. I have color, I have browns, yellows, traditional fabrics, ah, reproduction styles, and all this from floor to ceiling, Christmas groups, Halloween, Valentines. Well, some little nieces and nephews came to visit. I'd say they were eight years old, ten years old, in there, and I was telling them, "now these are 1930's and these are reproduction, and then these are reds and blues". Well they left my house, went on to Tennessee to visit my daughter, and the little boy said, "Debby, do you know that your mother has her fabric all arranged in the closet very neatly, even by date?" And he's thinking this was purchased in 1930. I don't know how old I was supposed to be to this child, but he thought I had arranged (Laughter-WILLIHNGANZ) just by date when I bought it. I thought it was so cute, so cute. But I do have a group of 1930's fabric set as an [M B.] (Laughter-COOPER) (Laughter-WILLIHNGANZ) Oh gosh, but kids are fun.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now you know Philis Alvic? Are you not familiar?

COOPER: No, I don't think so.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay, well she's--she's, ah, in Lexington. She is a, ah, weaver.

COOPER: Oh. Okay...

WILLIHNGANZ: And ah...

COOPER ...I think I do.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...your room, although yours is actually smaller than hers...

COOPER: Oh.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...it sounds similar. She, ah--I went and did a, a fairly extensive interview with her.

COOPER: Ahh.

WILLIHNGANZ: And, ah, she has a room that's probably, oh half again the size of this room.

COOPER: Whoa.

WILLIHNGANZ: And she has four full looms set up.

COOPER: Oh, yes, she would need space.

WILLIHNGANZ: She has--she has a wall of these bins full of, of thread.

COOPER: Oh, sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, in all colors, and it's like a rainbow across there and...

COOPER: Oh.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...they're two, two stacks high across this enormous space.
(Unintelligible)

COOPER: Oh, wouldn't you love it! (Laughter-COOPER)

WILLIHNGANZ: I heard she's got walls hung with various pieces that she's done.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's terrific, yeah.

COOPER: Oh, that's nice.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, you would enjoy seeing it. (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ)

COOPER: I certainly would. (Laughter-COOPER)

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay, ah, you pretty much work alone...

COOPER: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...rather than working with others?

COOPER: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: Ah, you use any unusual techniques?

COOPER: Mm, other than the embroidery, probably nothing more that isn't just easy for anyone to do. Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Ah, and we talked a little about your main tools are your basic sewing machines...

COOPER: Mm hmm.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...and embroidery machines...

COOPER: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: ... all that, but you do use a computer in doing that.

COOPER: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: You do the design work on the computer...

COOPER: Mm hmm.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...itself?

COOPER: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

COOPER: And of course a lot of artists have come up with designs that you can purchase, and then you can use them or change them, adjust sizes and--add you know, borders and things to them, but you can purchase designs to use as well, so...

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm.

COOPER: Th--it's, it's a whole new world when you get into the embroidery.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, how long have you been working on the computer with the embroidery?

COOPER: Since '99. Yeah, I bought the machine...We had a store in Berea, in Old Town for fourteen years, and then we decided, my husband and I wanted to travel, and it's hard to travel with a seven day a week business, so we sold the business, and for my gold watch, I purchased the sewing machines and just jumped in with both feet and love it, yeah.

I sew into nine o'clock every day.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: Yeah, I--I have a good time with it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you do this for money, or do you do this primarily just for an expensive...

COOPER: Money is the number one, (Laughter-COOPER) so that I can get on that cruise ship. Ah, yes, I sell a lot of things to the artisan center and the five guild shops, and a couple of shops in Berea in addition, and then that's probably all since the last few years. But we--we had a large wholesale business in candles, woodwork, quilting while we had the shop. And so we did retail and wholesale, both. My husband's a woodworker.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hmm.

COOPER: And they sell a lot of his work here as well. He didn't get into the guilds until, oh, into the seventies. And I think in the Kentucky Guild, it was about '86 that Jerry became a member. Of course he worked and didn't have the time that I had, so ah, but we sell a lot of woodwork and quilts and then we get on a cruise ship and go have fun. Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. Ah, let's see, do you exhibit your work at various places? Well, you said you had some here.

COOPER: Right. And they purchase outright here, but then when I come to demonstrate, we--we come on a whole day basis, and bring a lot of things for people to see, and I don't let other people use my sewing machine, but if they want ideas, or "how-to" kind of information, I'm always glad to do it. I teach classes over in Lexington at a quilt shop. And that's about all I teach right now. Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm. Um, are you still exhibiting at fairs, and doing those?

COOPER: Not any more.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm.

COOPER: I think we stopped about '92, '93 and just said, "you know, now you've got tents to carry, tables, you had to have back drops, a whole lot of stuff goes

into doing a fair display now. And it's big business, and we just said, you know, "don't want to do that anymore". Sold the tent, so that I was sure I wouldn't do it anymore, sold all our backdrops and it's much easier to come out here with things than have to set up in the woods anymore. Even Southern Highland, the indoor fairs, it's a lot of work, you know, hauling tables and hauling backdrops and curtains and everything, so some things you just say, "ok, been there, done that, let's do something else".

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. You talked a little about how you promote and sell your...

COOPER: Mm hmm.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...work basically. Um, what kind of recognition have you gotten from your work? Have you--er, I don't even know, honestly, if there are shows for quilters or if there are...

COOPER: Yeah...

WILLIHNGANZ: ...competitions for quilters?

COOPER: There are. I don't really enter competitions; I don't think I'm at that level. Ah, my work is more of a practical basis, the exhibitions and the competitions now are just way out there. I don't want to work that hard to do it. Ah, I've--like the trips to Japan, they were really wonderful and just a nice experience. The--the things I've don't through Kentucky and Tennessee, North Carolina, that's just been fun, and not something that stresses you out to go do it. It's something you can relax and have a good time, enjoy the people that come to see what you're doing.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. And you belong to the Southern Highland Guild...

COOPER: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...and to the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Crafts.

COOPER: Right, I'm kind of a past member of Kentucky Guild, since I haven't done the shows. We just aren't active members anymore.

WILLIHNGANZ: Right.

COOPER: So...

WILLIHNGANZ: Are there other organizations that you're a member of?

COOPER: Um, some minor quilting groups, but not really organized, it's more like just go and have fun sort of thing.

WILLIHNGANZ: Um hmm.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. And, ah, what do you think are the role of these organizations in terms of promoting craft work and craft depreciation?

COOPER: I--I think that with the Guilds especially; they show people what good work is, and everything you find at Kentucky fairs, the July fair that they've had here for like twenty- five years, the Southern Highland fairs, the work is perfect. It--It's very good, and I think that shows people that you take time and make it look nice, work on making it as good as you can and not be sloppy about the things you present. You can go, and I don't like to put people down, but you can go like to a flea market or something and see the difference in the quality of the work you would find in a Guild. They--they really strive for nice product.

WILLIHNGANZ: So you believe pretty strongly, I take it, in the jurying system.

COOPER: Really, yes, yes. In fact, and it sounds like kind of snobby, but we wouldn't do a show that wasn't juried, and we never have, simply because, well say we never have, early when you're starting out, you try a lot of things, you think, "uh-uh, it's not worth it", because if you go with some fine work, your prices, of course, are a little higher, and if you're next to someone who is doing just shoddy, fast, put-together, cheap fabric, (I don't use cheap fabric either) ah, there's a difference, and you don't want to have your work pulled down, so to speak.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm.

COOPER: But, fabrics now are very expensive. When I was little, I'd go with my grandmother. You could go in Lincoln's department store in Niagara Falls and here would be these fabrics. They were seventeen cents a yard. I'm now paying ten, ten fifty a yard.

'Course, I'm a little older, too. (Laughter-WILLIHNGANZ) But, you know, it's expensive and the big issue here in Berea is that Wal Mart went out of the fabric business. Well they were selling fabrics at a dollar and two dollars a yard. I don't want to spend my time sewing that kind of fabric, so I personally won't miss Wal Mart. But, ah, y--you have to use good product, good materials, if you're gonna have a good finished product.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, one of the controversies in the whole craft field, not just in quilting, although I'm sure it's there too, but in pottery and a lot of other areas is sort of the mechanization or mass production of alleged craft products and you sort of...

COOPER: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...it's not a question simply of this a manufactured good and this is a handmade good...

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...there are various gradations in between. Ah, how do you feel about the manufactured or semi-manufactured quilting for instance?

COOPER: You can see the difference. Like if you go to a department store to buy a quilt that has, shall we say even imported... You can see the difference in the workmanship and in the price. And I think that what has been made on an individual basis and not run through enormous machines, you see a difference. And you just appreciate fine things and the kind of things you purchase here at the Artisan Center; you can tell none of these have been mass-produced.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hm.

COOPER: Even the pottery, I mean I know a good potter can flip out pots really quick, but you see the difference in what Sarah Culbreth makes or what Theresa Cole makes, compared to what would go just, you know, to a store that's got mass-produced goods. And their coloring is different, their glazes are just finer. It--it's just--they're just, everything about the kind of work you find here that's well worth getting.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hm.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. Ah, let's see here. What services provided by agencies, institutions or organizations have you participated in?

COOPER: I make a lot of quilts for the Linus Program. It's a program of making baby quilts that are donated to hospitals, police cars carry them, and most counties, I know Madison County has a very active program, and so they have about three events a year and I go and demonstrate and make quilts there. And then I make at least one quilt a month to give to them, and, ah, just little baby quilts done on the machine for a little child that's in distress, and that's some comfort for them. And then I have made probably a half a dozen quilts through a quilt shop in Lexington that we send to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington for soldiers that come back that have been wounded and just need a little touch to know someone cared. And so I-I enjoy doing them, and so I set aside certain fabrics and like maybe one day a month, I do them and deliver them. And there's a lady in Richmond who collects the Linus quilts and she distributes them to the various agencies that need them.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm.

COOPER: So, I just feel good when I make a Linus quilt or a soldier quilt.

WILLIHNGANZ: How many hours a week do you spend quilting?

COOPER: Oh my goodness! Probably more than I ever worked in my life. Ah, like I'll start sewing sometimes at nine in the morning and finish at nine at night.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: But in between I've maybe made a batch of cookies, 'cause I can work at home. Um, cut the grass, or pull the weeds or something like that. But we just have a very simple life. We--one reason my workshop is small, we have downsized into a smaller house, and, ah, my husband has a workshop in the garage, and I've got my room and he goes to his end of the house, I go to mine. (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ) (Laughter-COOPER). We get along fine, we meet for meals, you know, then there's no hassles all day long. So that's very good.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yes, my wife and I, well we sleep together, but...

COOPER: Yeah, we do meet at about eleven o'clock at night.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...we have separate bathrooms...

COOPER: Oh, absolutely.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...and upstairs we have separate offices.

COOPER: Yeah, we do too.

WILLIHNGANZ: And ah, we meet down the halls and...

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...and at dinner. (Laughter-WILLIHNGANZ)

COOPER: Yeah, well, you know we had four children and they all became teenagers at once, and we survived it. (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ) But having one computer did not work.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: We each have our own computers in separate rooms. Very important.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah.

COOPER: And works out good. (Laughter-COOPER)

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, that's the truth, any more you have to, that's true. Ah, do you subscribe to periodicals for your craft?

COOPER: Lots of 'em, yes. (Laughter-COOPER) (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ) I think about four different quilt periodicals, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do they give you a lot of new ideas...

COOPER: They do.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...new avenues, things to do?

COOPER: They do, they're just full of them. They're a specific quilt magazine, American Quilt Society, and then Better Homes and Gardens has a couple of good ones. Fons and Porter is another good one. I did a cruise with Fons and Porter, a quilting cruise, and you go to Miami. My husband went, too. Ah, there were fifty-five of us, and we did sewing on the days we were at sea. And then the other days you go and do land tours and things like that, and then meet again at night, and sew at night, or just sit around and talk. And so that was a fun week; eight days with fifty-five sewing women. So that was another opportunity. But they have a magazine as well... the group that sponsored it. and good ideas. And usually it's ideas you don't copy specifically, but you bounce off. Like they might have a cute rabbit design and you think, "Well, this rabbit could be doing something a little different" and you do other things with bunny rabbit, and then you have your own original things happening.

WILLIHNGANZ: Have you written articles for these magazines?

COOPER: No. No, I don't think I've ever submitted anything like that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm, okay. Are you involved in teaching?

COOPER: Yes, I do teach at Quilter's Square...

WILLIHNGANZ: I see.

COOPER: ...a shop in Lexington and there's a quilt shop here in Berea. He's approached me, but I just haven't had time to kind of put that together. I teach, ah, making quilted clothing, and I've done that out here. Ah, I should have worn something like that, I didn't think of it, but it's too hot to wear a vest. But I do quilted clothing and things like that. University--ah, Eastern Kentucky University offers classes and I've taken classes there and then you sort of get into the point where during the class you end up doing some of the teaching, which is fun; so you kind of work together.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. And ah, you started with the Guild right along, early on...

COOPER: Mm hmm.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...and were you pretty much a steady member...

COOPER: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...through all these years...

COOPER: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...and you're still--you still go to their events or...

COOPER: Occasionally.

WILLIHNGANZ: Occasionally.

COOPER: At one point when we moved from Bloomfield to Tennessee, we kept a, an inactive membership, because they don't have members out of the state, or they didn't at that time. But then when we moved back, Jerry Workman I think was the president or somebody and he says, "Oh Joyce, you've gotta get your active membership again!" So I did and ah, so we were just gone, oh maybe five, seven years that we were out of the area and that's all. Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. What did it mean to your career as an artist (knock on door) to be in the Guild? Let me get that, see what we got here. (Unintelligible conversation) Oh thank you. Okay.

COOPER: Okay, you're gonna keep busy all day, huh?

WILLIHNGANZ: (unintelligible) (laughter- WILLIHNGANZ)

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, ah, what did it mean to your career as an artist to being part of a Guild?

COOPER: Well, I think Richard Bellando got me started on the right foot. I had made candles the very first time when I submitted them to the Guild, and they were accepted. And I came here to Berea for some reason from Bloomfield and met Richard, and he said, "Joyce," he said, "one suggestion I have is change your colors", 'cause I have done like yellows and pinks and soft colors, pastels. And he was in the

weaving studio, for some reason we were in there, and he pulled off this skein of yarn that were all burnt colors like burnt orange, deep reds, ah, colors that seemed, greens and yellows, that seemed to have more of a black tone to them. And so I went home, and I mixed my own dyes for the waxes, and I threw black in every single dye pot that I had. And that muted all the colors, took them right down to the same colors that Richard had given me, this bolt of yarn, kind of all tied together with all the different yarns. I carried that around with me. We moved various places. I'll bet I had that thirty years. I know I've thrown it away now.

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh.

COOPER: But I always thought of Richard. He put me on the right track with coloring and that was, I think, the biggest influence in the kind of work that I did, was going back and I kept that ball of yarn hanging with all the different shades in it and thought of Richard all those years. (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ) But ah, then, you know, you would go to a fair and get reacquainted with the different ones. And even now, you know, you just, "oh" you know, "here's different people that you knew way back then".

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm.

COOPER: So it's just been a good experience. And I think the Guild was what kept me on the right foot as far as what I appreciate, ah, in a product. Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Did you feel it gave you new opportunities and challenges?

COOPER: Oh, yeah. Especially at the beginning, because it--it gave you credibility. We had a friend that, he always said, "Credibility was the thing" and I always think of him. But I think being in the Guild did give you that sense of credibility and you felt you were doing good work. If you put something in a booth, for instance, at Southern Highland, they judged them before every fair, and if there was something they thought was not quite up to par, you might kind of mad, but you would pull it off the shelf, and you would realize this isn't up to the standard that they want to have. And so it kept you with your work up to the standards.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hmm.

COOPER: So...

WILLIHNGANZ: Ah, she says, "what does it mean to belong to a new organization for artists--artists and craft people"?

COOPER: A new organization?

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, I'm not sure what she means by that.

COOPER: Yeah, I'm too old to be new. (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ) (Laughter-COOPER).

WILLIHNGANZ: I think she's trying to think back to when the Guild started...

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...and how it was back then.

COOPER: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: Because, you know, part of this is the history of the Guilds coming together, sort of.

COOPER: Sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: Ah, I believe, correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe the, ah, the Southern, ah, Highlands Guild was the older of the Guilds.

COOPER: Right, that's right.

WILLIHNGANZ: And, ah, then the Kentucky Guild came up and it was never quite as large...

COOPER: No.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...but it was more local.

COOPER: That's right

WILLIHNGANZ: And so it brought a new force in, and then, ah, there was a lot of energy when they had the, ah, the craft train going...

COOPER: Yes, yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...going around. And ah, ah, the fair started up and whatnot, and then, ah, it's sort of gone back and forth over the years...

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...after the train stopped

COOPER: Yeah, that happens, you know, sometimes things just go down hill a bit and then they perk back up again, depending on maybe membership and how committed people are and how much time they have to put into a group, and sometimes life itself doesn't give you a lot of time to be real active in things at different times in your

life. But, ah, I think the Guilds are what put me on the track of looking to make a nicest product I could make. So I appreciated them for that. Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh, that's good. Okay. Did the Guild significantly change the way people viewed crafts?

COOPER: Oh, I'm sure they did. Because they had the reputation, if you go to the Guild, you're not going to a flea market. And you will find nice work there. If you're looking for everything from jewelry to pottery to fabric items, woodwork, it'll be good.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you think it's changed people's tastes for what they appreciate?

COOPER: It could very well have. Because, you know, the bottom line is the items are expensive, and if you're going to spend several hundred dollars on a piece of work, it's going to be a focal point in your home, and you have to have other things there that will kind of work with it, so I think it just kind of upgrades the way we have stuff.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, I'd, ah,--I've gone to quite a few different fairs over the years and my experience (Laughter-COOPER), most often, unfortunately, is I go to the St. James art fair for instance, and...

COOPER: Yeah, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...you know, these people are at such a level, it's like I can't even imagine being this talented.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: And it's intimidating.

COOPER: Uh huh.

WILLIHNGANZ: Ah, you know, and ah, my wife and I have fantasized about possibly doing some crafty things when we...

COOPER: Sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...get, ah, when we get really retired, but ah, but the level of competition is so high and some of these people are so gifted...

COOPER: Yeah, they are, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...in doing this, it's, ah, kind of intimidating.

COOPER: Yeah, we lived in Louisville for four years, ah, quite a while back, about '80--'80 to '84, and I did St. James twice, and that was an experience. It really was. You almost had to have someone die for you to get in and get a spot. And I guess someone died (Laughter-COOPER) 'cause I was in it two years, but that was really an experience. And the reason I was able to get in to show there was I was a member of both Kentucky Guild and Southern Highland. Otherwise, I don't think I could have even been approached, you know, to be in it. They--they wanted background that...

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: ...that made you legitimate.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hmm.

COOPER: So, they must have thought I was, but then we moved and I never went back to do it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hmm.

COOPER: Yeah. That--that was a neat show, though, that was fun. And of--of course over all these years I've collected pottery... Back in the beginning you used to barter, and you swapped things back and forth. I've got pottery that today would be worth a fortune, but we traded things like, you know, well if I tr--you know, if you would like this, I'll trade you for this and this went back and forth. And now you don't do so much of that anymore. Everything is a little bit more, I'm doing this for the money. This is my livelihood kind of thing, but in the early days, oh my goodness, we had fun trading. Th--that was really... You'd come home and you had money that you had earned, but the most fun were the pieces you had swapped with others. And I still have lots of nice things like that. The pottery...I never had a desire to make pottery, but I loved to collect it. And so I enjoy that. I've got Bybee pottery, too, that's very old. (Laughter-COOPER) (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ) Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, I went into their shop today, earlier...

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...and ah, I ah, actually shopped. Ah, throughout the visit, she's, "go anywhere you want".

COOPER: Oh yeah, yes (untelligible)

WILLIHNGANZ: So I went into the back, into the actual 1808, or whenever...

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...it was room, where I'm banging my head, of course...

COOPER: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...because I'm too tall for the room...

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: And ah, it's just kind of amazing when you think the history that's gone on there.

COOPER: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: And ah, that they've been able to sustain that...

COOPER: Mm hmm.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...this long in that--in this relatively rural location.

COOPER: Really, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's just amazing.

COOPER: Yeah, they're something else.

WILLIHNGANZ: It really is, they ah, they are very impressive...

COOPER: Mm hmm.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...and that's the truth.

COOPER: They truly are.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay, ah, anything else you'd like to comment on, or...

COOPER: I don't know. You've kind of picked my brain all the way. (Laughter WILLIHNGANZ) (Laughter-COOPER) But ah, you know, just being in the Guild has made a whole difference in the kind of things that I've done and been exposed to, and I've just really enjoyed the craft, even when I had my shop, I had a lot of items for sale that other craftsmen had made, as well as our own work. And it's just been fun.

WILLIHNGANZ: That's terrific.

COOPER: Yeah, good thing to do, and I ended up with a son who is a carpenter, a daughter that's a quilter, and another daughter that's a woodworker, who sells things here at the Artisan Center, and so all of our children were influenced by the Guilds.

They would come to the fairs and we'd spend a week at the fair and really enjoy it. It was a good family experience.

WILLIHNGANZ: Terrific.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, we'd like to do one more thing before my three o'clock.

COOPER: Okay.

WILLIHNGANZ: I'd like you and I to walk out and find one of your quilts (unintelligible). Tell us a little bit about these, ah, these quilts.

COOPER: Okay, this is an appliquéd baby quilt with frogs hopping around and bright colorful fabrics, and this one could be either a wall quilt or a lap quilt, and this has embroidered birds with a pinwheel quilt design.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm hmm. Hold it up higher, so I can do a little closer shot of it. And I know artists always get upset by this question, but how long did it take you to do this? (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ) (Laughter-COOPER)

COOPER: Right, that's always a good question. This one, the embroidery, of course, took a little longer. So I probably spent maybe three days.

WILLIHNGANZ: So each one of these birds is individually embroidered?

COOPER: Right. And these are designs that, ah, I have purchased, but I have digitized them, so that they would be the size that I wanted them for the quilt, and then I did the writing on it with my embroidery program.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: That's a combination of piecing and embroidering, but everything on it is machine-done.

WILLIHNGANZ: Terrific. Okay, maybe we can put the other one (unintelligible).

COOPER: Okay. This is just soft, little baby quilt with appliquéd bunny rabbits, and these are the fabrics I was referring to as 1930 fabrics.

WILLIHNGANZ: Ahh.

COOPER: And they're my favorites. And the colors are just soft and nice, and I just like a simple little quilt. And the binding on this I like, because I've used different pieces of it; pieced it so that binding has a little bit of color interest as well.

WILLIHNGANZ: That's terrific.

COOPER: Okay.

WILLIHNGANZ: Thank you so much.

COOPER: And here's something here that do a lot of for them. These are woven bookmarks that I do on a small, ah, Scottish style loom and the colors in these are quite fun. They sell a lot of them.

WILLIHNGANZ: (Unintelligible) How do you make these?

COOPER: These are woven on a small inkle loom, which is a Scottish loom, ah, an ancient really kind of style loom for weaving that they used, oh, centuries ago in Scotland to make bands for their animals and harnesses. And my husband makes the looms, and adapted it to a size that I can take around to do demonstrations.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

COOPER: Yeah, so they're kind of pretty.

WILLIHNGANZ: That's great, that's gorgeous.

COOPER: And I put a little story on each one so that makes it interesting.

WILLIHNGANZ: Where do you get the stories?

COOPER: I made it up. (Laughter- WILLIHNGANZ) (Laughter-COOPER) But it tells about the loom and the background of the inkle weavings.

WILLIHNGANZ: That's nice.

COOPER: Mm hmm. And I demonstrate this out here as well. When they need a demonstration, they call me and say, "Do you want to sew or do you want to weave? And so I say "whichever you like".

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

COOPER: But, ah, this is really a nice place to have so close to home.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm. Indeed.

COOPER: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Thank you so much.

COOPER: Good to meet you.