

KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with Tim Hall
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

Cameraman: Okay, Mary. We're rolling. Whenever.

Reed: Okay. We're rolling.

Cameraman: We do have bird noise, if you care.

Reed: Oh, I think that's nice since he's a bird carver. I think that's very appropriate to hear that in the background.

Hall: Listen, if I start to get this to work on it, to show her the steps, where should I be, right here?

Cameraman: That's fine. If you . . . I think we're going to try to get a little bit of you doing that afterward. So if you want to pick it up and show her, you can point to stuff. But actually work on it?

Hall: Well, I won't be working on it. That's kind of a demonstrating piece that shows the different steps.

Cameraman: Yea. That's fine.

Reed: My name is Mary Reed and I'm here with Tim Hall in his studio in Ravenna, Kentucky. Today is July 8th, 2015. This interview is being done for the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association and it is our mission to record the history of our craft luminaries. Thank you, Tim, for agreeing to this interview. Can you start off by telling us a little bit about yourself and your family?

Hall: Well, I've lived here in Ravenna all my life. My family came to Kentucky in 1779. They came to Boonesboro, so I'm a seventh generation of Halls that has lived from here to Boonesboro. My father worked on the railroad here in Ravenna. So I've lived all my life here.

Reed: And your immediate family?

Hall: I have two daughters and a wife. Couple of grandkids and they keep us pretty active.

Reed: How did you get started in woodcarving?

Hall: Well, I started out just doing some carvings as a, kind of like a hobby. I wanted to make some decoys to duck hunt with and I thought I would make some out of wood. That didn't go too good. (Laughter, Mary) Wood decoys are pretty heavy. So I was just doing it as a hobby. After I married, I made a living as a carpenter. We framed houses and did any kind of carpenter work. And the carving was just, as I said, something just kind of a hobby. Then in the late '70s, early '80s, I guess you would remember the interest rates went to over 20% and we went from having all kinds of work to do to not having any work to do because people weren't framing houses and building houses. Market just quit for a while, so I got out of work and about that time my wife, she was pregnant with our youngest daughter and she got to where she was going to have to quit work and I got a job at a little woodworking place over in Stanton and made very little money. Less than 4 dollars an hour. But we took care of us. We got by and I was, like I said, doing the carving on the side. I was mostly doing ducks. And the eighth carving I made, I sold to a guy over in Lexington for I think about \$200, which was a pretty good sum to me at that time because I was working out in the hot sun for \$200 a week, so I realized there was a market for

my work if I could just tap into it. So I started trying to get into the Kentucky Guild and I did get in the Guild about, I guess, maybe '79 or somewhere along in there. I started doing a few fairs. I didn't have a lot of success then. But that's pretty much how I got started. It was not where I just quit my job, I wouldn't have done that, you know. But it was just circumstances and always feel like the Lord made an opening for me to pursue my carving.

Reed: Are you self-taught or did you study under someone?

Hall: Self-taught, you know, I'm still learning. I still try to improve everything I do and I'm fascinated with nature, you know, I always am inspired by what I see out in the natural world.

Reed: I can hear birds now. (Laughter, Reed and Hall)

Hall: My models.

Reed: As an artist. What inspires you?

Hall: Well, like I said . . .

Cameraman: I'm adjusting something. Go ahead.

Reed: Want me to ask again?

Cameraman: No. No, that's fine.

Reed: Okay.

Hall: Well, like I said what I see out in nature. I've always been an outdoorsman, you know. Hunter, fisherman and birdwatcher and what I see out there, the beauty that I see in nature is even though I'm close to 60 now, I'm still thrilled with what I see out there. I'm still fascinated, I'm still just like a little kid when I see things that interest me, you know. I did a pileated woodpecker one time and it was because I was watching it in the woods through binoculars. It was up in a tree and it keep dipping it's bill in a little hollow in the tree and that hollow held water and it was like its own private little drinking fountain. Way up in a tree. And I came home and carved that and it was a pretty monstrous piece, really. Something that hung on the wall. I carved a section of the log and the whole nine yards. And when I got it done, I told my wife, I'll never sell that and I sold it pretty quick.

Reed: As an artist, do you have a hard time letting go of your work once you've finished it because you're so attached to it?

Hall: Well, my family has this habit of eating (Laughter, Reed) so in order to support that habit, I've pretty much had to sell everything I've ever done. I don't have a collection of my own work. People don't believe that, but I don't have a collection of my own work. Have to sell it, you know. It's a living, you know. That was always my goal, to make a living. I didn't want to be famous. I didn't want to be the best woodcarver. I just wanted to make a living. You know, there's a scripture in the bible that says, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. Mind your own business and work with your hands" and that's pretty much what I've done and it suits me just fine, you know I sit out here in this old shop and work and maybe listen to books on tape or radio or something. Pretty much at peace with the world.

Reed: Tell us a little bit about your studio. It's a little, small comfy space here.

Hall: (Laughter, Hall) Well, my studio is disguised as a beat up old garage out behind my house which is what it is. When I started carving, thank the Lord, I have a very understanding and supporting wife, you know. I started carving on the kitchen table in the house. Of course, there's quite a bit of dust involved and that kind of thing. It never bothered her. She never fussed about it or anything. Once I started doing better and selling more work, I realized I had to come up with a better place to work. So I moved out into the garage here and this thing was built back in the twenties so it's seen better days. At that time the floor was pretty much on the ground and part of it, when we got a hard rain, would actually flood. There's been a water puddle in the floor and not wanting to hurry in to anything, I guess that's kind of my motto. I worked like that for a lot of years, you know. Finally, I bit the bullet and took off work and used some of my old carpenter skills to put a new floor in this place, which when I did that it puts you closer to the ceiling so real tall people, kind of, have a hard time getting in here. The top of it is kind of like a suede back mule, it kind of bows in the middle. So if they come in on one end, they might be able to stand, but when they get to the middle, their head's hitting the ceiling, but it suits me just fine.

Reed: (Laughter, Reed) It's your man cave.

Hall: Right.

Reed: That's a great story. Can you take us through the process of how you start one of your carvings?

Hall: Sure. I start out with a square block of wood. I use bass wood to carve from. The first thing I do is a lot of study. I look at a lot of photographs and I make two patterns. I make a top view or a plain view, as they call it. And then I make a profile view. And I draw those patterns on the side and on the top of the square block of wood. Then I take a band saw and I cut out the top view and I save those pieces and put them back on there. Then I turn it up on its side and I cut out the profile view. That gives me something that looks like that. So I've got two dimensions. I've got the profile and the plain view. Then I start to use an old tool that belonged to my grandfather. He was a fellow that could do just about anything. He worked on guns, made gun stocks for hammer handles or whatever you needed, he just made with his hands. So I have an old draw knife that belonged to him and its real good metal, really an old tool, but it will . . . You can get it razor sharp. I start to cut these edges off and round the bird down to get the . . . Starting to get the overall shape here you can see. After that I sand that smooth and I draw a feather pattern on the block and then I relief carve each one of those feathers. I use rotary tools now. When I started out, I had a five dollar set of Exacto knives and I dug that wood out of there and I came up with a better way of doing it. The rotary tools actually do a finer job. But I relief carve each one of those feathers and then I sand those down smooth, then I come back with a real fine line wood burner, these little lines you see here, each one of those are individuals strokes of a wood burning tool. It actually burns down into the wood and gives it a texture. Then I take a soft brass brush and go all over the carving and brush any loose carbon out of those cracks there, the slots that I've burned. And then I paint over that with several layers of oil paint. I like artist's oil paints. It gives me time to blend the paint.

Cameraman: I want to get some cutaways, some close-ups of you with that. If you could just run through that process again. Quickly. You don't have to do every detail, but I just want to get your hand moving over stuff you're describing.

Hall: You want me to do that one?

Cameraman: No, that one. That way, if the editor wants to cut in . . . I don't know what's going to be done with this.

Hall: I mean, do you want me to do it with a pencil or something?

Cameraman: No, no. Just how you were doing it.

Hall: Just go back through the whole deal?

Cameraman: Yea, like I said, you don't have to go through every detail. Just roughly.

Hall: Okay. I start out with a square block of wood and I draw a pattern on the top and I draw a pattern on the side. I do a lot of study and look at a lot of photographs to get those patterns made. Then I cut that out on a band saw. I cut it out this way, and this way. That gives me the two dimensions, the plain and the profile view. Then I start to use an old draw knife that belonged to my grandfather to round the bird shape, rough it out. And after I get it roughed out, I sand the form down and draw a feather pattern on here. And then I relief carve each of these feathers and sand down smooth and then I come back with a real fine line wood burner. Each one of those lines you see there is individual strokes of that wood burning tool. And I take a fine brass brush and brush that carbon out of those slots in the wood and I paint over that with several layers of artist quality oil paint.

Reed: The eyeball.

Hall: The eyes are glass eyes. Those are taxidermy eyes. I drill a hole in the head larger than what the eye is and then I fill that with an epoxy or plastic wood and put that eye in there and bring some of that out around the eye that will hold that in. And then you let that set up and then you have to sand that down and if you hit the eye with the sandpaper one time, you start over because you've scratched that eye. Get out the rubber hose.

Reed: Is carving a flower different?

Hall: Quite a bit different. They have a lot of the more intricate ones are several different pieces of wood. I've gotten now where I use a different kind of wood on those. I use tupelo, which is a little bit softer and doesn't break as easy. I started the flowers, kind of on a, I guess a dare from my sister. She got interested in wildflowers way back in the seventies, early seventies or probably late sixties and early seventies. She would go out in the woods and take pictures of the wildflowers and take me with her and I got interested in them then. I fixed a flower for my mother. It was a flocks. It was pretty crude. I was just kind of flat. We were discussing it and a lady slippers was one of her favorite flowers out in the woods. Pretty impressive. They're a wild orchid that grows in Kentucky.

Reed: Is that a lady slipper?

Hall: Yes. It is. A pink lady slipper. She said something about you couldn't ever do one of those and I guess took it on myself to prove her wrong, so. That was in probably the late seventies that I made the first lady slipper that I'd ever made. I'd never heard of anybody carving flowers before. You know, I'm pretty sure that I originated that. It was original to me, I don't know if any other people were doing them. So I started doing the flowers, which were kind of a unique piece and then I started combining doing wildflowers with birds and that's been pretty popular for me.

Reed: They're beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. You do your ducks and your birds out of basswood and your flowers out of what kind of wood?

Hall: I use a lot of tupelo now. I still use some basswood maybe on the leaves or something. The stem on that lady slipper there is a piece of hickory because it's real tough. That flower there is all wood. It's 100% wood.

Reed: Is tupelo a local wood?

Hall: No. Probably you can find some of that in western Kentucky. It's a member of the gum family. Grows more in swamps and swampy areas than it would here, you know.

Reed: Right now, I feel like we're in the swamps, lots of rain. (Laughter, Reed) What are the tools that you use mostly?

Hall: Well, I use anything to get the job done, you know. I saw some guys one time that were making some walking canes and they were telling me about how they cut the tree down with an axe and then split the wood out and work it all down just with hand tools and how many hours it took them to do it. But the deal was that they had so much time in it that it wasn't practical. I use whatever it takes to get the job done. The first thing I use is a band saw to cut the outline out. Then I use a draw knife, which is a pretty ancient tool. It's just a blade about ten inches long with two handles that you draw towards yourself. It's an excellent tool for roughing things out. You've got a lot of control on it. I've made things to work with. In fact, I've got one tool there I made out of a washing machine motor and a flexible shaft and it's got a sanding drum on that. I use that for some rough sanding. And then I use a Fordham tool, which is a tool kind of like something similar to what a dentist uses. It has changeable bits in the hand piece and I use that for detail work and then I do a lot of wood burning. They've come a long way. When I first started out, all the wood burning tools were the old fashioned kind that kind of got warm. They didn't really burn very well. The first thing I did . . . The first wood burning I did, I used one of those, old type, and then I experimented with making a wood burner out of (). And that worked a little better, but not a lot better. And then eventually, they came out with more of a modern one, like I use today. They don't have a heating element up in the handle. They have the wire that you use to burn with is actually the heating element and you flatten that out and it's flattened out almost like . . . I sharpen it just like you would a knife, so you can get real fine detail with it.

Reed: Yea. I can see that. And I understand about the handles of those old ones . . . those cheaper ones I guess, get very hot.

Hall: Get pretty warm.

Reed: Yea. You can't hold on. You have to quit and go away for a while.

Hall: It's important to me, because, you know, there are many days that I came out here early in the morning and all day long I've got that wood burner in my hand, you know, until 6:30 or something at night. So I do that on a regular basis.

Reed: So you've been carving for how many years?

Hall: Let's see. I started carving in the late '70s just as a hobby. I've been doing it full time as my sole occupation since about 1981. I got the start of that . . . We never did finish talking about that, how I got started. I was pretty discouraged about the work because I did an art fair or two and I guess I was expecting to sell quite a bit of work and didn't do it. The job I was telling you about a while ago, it was a woodcraft place over in Stanton that made chairs and that kind of thing. Well, lo and behold they were going out of business and here again, always try to give the Lord credit for taking care of me. When my youngest daughter was born in Estill County Hospital if that tells you anything. That was a long time ago.

Reed: When they still delivered babies.

Hall: Yea. Doctor Virginia Wallace. Of course, we were just paying it. Hadn't paid for it, you know. I think she charged me, I think it was like \$500 or something for the hospital and I forget what Doctor Virginia charged. It wasn't much. But anyway, as I was going up the steps to go see my wife after work, there was a guy I met on the steps and he said something about, "Don't you make those ducks and thing?" and he said, "I'd like to get one". So, there right when I needed some money. To me, it was just like God was handing me that money when I needed it, you know. Lo and behold, about the time my wife was getting ready to go back to work, she's a beautician, the place where I worked went out. And it was in the winter, you know, and there wasn't a lot going on, you know, carpenter work slows way down in the winter anyways. So I was going to, when the spring came, get out and get some kind of job regardless of what it was. I've done all kinds of manual labor and things in my life. () carrying and building barns and that kind of thing. So I was ready to do, you know, whatever it took. But then I got an invitation to a craft show that at that time John Y. Brown was the governor of Kentucky and his wife was really interested in arts and crafts and she saw the things that people in Kentucky were producing and she thought, hey people need to know about this and we need to connect these people with people that can afford to buy it. When I heard about it, they were having this show over at the horse park over in Lexington. And if it had cost anything to go, I wouldn't have went, you know, I wouldn't have had the money and I told my wife, I said, "I'm going to give this one more shot, with my carving". Because I was, you know, pretty discouraged about it as far as, had know no idea you could make a living, living in Ravenna, Kentucky, being a woodcarving, you know it's just so alien the thoughts of everybody and even to me and my wife was always supportive, you know, she never was, "Get out and get a job" or like that. She was always, you know, a good critic for me. She would tell me what didn't look right, which is very valuable for an artist. Get somebody to tell you what's wrong with something.

Reed: Sounds like she believed in you. And still does.

Hall: She did! Why, I don't know, you know. (Laughter, Hall and Reed) They had that show there and I said, "I'm going to give it one more shot. I'm going to go to that show." And I had a pretty good collection of work put together and it was run by the state and to be perfectly honest, you know, I was not too high hopes about it, because I've never had any kind of political connections or anything like that, I was really, you know, not expecting much. When I went in over there, I asked them where I was to set up and the lady told me, said "Well right there at the front door". Which was the primo spot, you know. There were some people down in the basement, you know and . . . But anybody that came through that door had to walk past my things. I think I sold about \$1700 worth of carvings there at that show. And that was like \$17,000 to me now, you know, I mean that's still . . . It was a lot of money to me. When you're making you know, \$200 a week. That was a lot of money to me. More than the money, it was an awakening to me that there was a market out there for my work and it was kind of like, you know, if you're raised with the mentality of not seeing a lot of art or knowing that it's valued, you know. It was a real eye

opener for me, like hey, people really do like these things. There are people who are willing to pay for that. So that was a () awakening, plus it was a financial boost to me. It encouraged me. When Phyllis George saw the success of that show, it just cranked her up and she actually wanted to help people, you know. I can't get over that she was so interested and so she started trying all kinds of different things. She started, I think it was called the Department of the Arts at that time and they decided that they were going to have these shows on a regular basis. During that time they had two shows. They had one in Lexington and they had one in Louisville. Two a year. On the side, she was a . . . I know we met somewhere, I forget the details, somewhere in Frankfort one time, in a parking lot. She had a bunch of people bring some things and she had buyers from maybe Bloomingdale's or somewhere and we met in a parking lot down in Frankfort and sold some of our work, you know. But she started having those shows, two, like I said, two a year, for a while. And they were highly successful. They had buyers that came from everywhere. It was a steady market for my work and I realized that I could . . . There was a demand there and it was a viable option for me to make a living, you know. In about 1984, there was a company called Takashimaya that has a chain of big stores in Japan, plus they have a store in New York, I'm told, maybe other places in the country. But it's a big chain of stores and some of those buyers came by and saw my work and started talking to me. And they put together something they called an American Fair. And they asked me if I would go to Japan and show my work over there, demonstrate it. I had to say, I was a little apprehensive about it, you know. Japan is quite a ways from Ravenna, Kentucky, but I did it for the money. You know, I have to say, I did it for the money. (Laughter, Reed and Hall) I needed a new vehicle and pretty much the proceeds from that trip bought us an old station wagon so I sucked it up and went. And there were, I think, maybe four or five craftspeople from Kentucky that were selected to go. They came here . . . It was really funny. When they were talking to me about going, there were, I guess, four or five Japanese gentlemen that came here to my house, you know, and maybe one of them could speak English and they were in my shop. It didn't have a floor in it at that time, you know, or just partial floor. And I decided I was going, you know. I prayed about it, you know. I decided I was going. It's really funny, I make all these devices and things to hold ducks while I'm working on them and that kind of thing. They came out here in my shop and they were measuring the bench, you know, getting the height on the bench. They took dead drawings of some of the holding pictures that I had made to hold the ducks to work on them. I shipped a bunch of wood over to Japan. They were already cut out, you know, roughed out on the band saw. And when I got there, they had a bench to the correct type. They had a holding device for those ducks that looked a whole lot better than the one I had. It was all nice and neat and they had that all set up so I could just start to work there. I was in four different cities in Japan and I pretty much demonstrated the carving and it was a big draw for their stores that was the thing, not so much to sell my work but as a draw. And the Japanese people were very, very interested and extremely polite. They treated us like we were, you know somebody (). They were really nice to us, but what really got me was the respect and the interest they showed in my work. They just made me want to stay longer and put all I could put into it, because they treated us so nice.

Reed: How long were you there?

Hall: I think about 3 weeks. Like I said, we went to four different stores, or I was.

Reed: Now, did you sell there or were you paid to go to different shops?

Hall: I wasn't paid anything to go. They bought a certain number of pieces from me and they had like a display of those pieces. I think it was probably about maybe four ducks in each store.

And I don't know if they later sold them or what. They didn't really pay me anything, like a wage or anything, but they bought, I think it was \$5000 worth of work from me, you know.

Reed: Did you have a host family?

Hall: No, we stayed . . . They put us up in nice hotels and we rode the subways to work and we were treated first class.

Reed: Now, did your wife travel with you?

Hall: No, she didn't.

Reed: Okay. Have you been back?

Hall: No.

Reed: Once was enough? (Laughter, Reed)

Hall: Well, I liked it real well, you know, but it's just, you know, I like the country. I don't care much about those big cities.

Reed: So, over the years, approximately how many carvings have you done?

Hall: Well, I sign and number everything I do. I put 'Made by Tim Hall with God's Help' on the bottom and early on I started numbering each carving. And to date, I've done a little over 2030 some carvings.

Reed: Do you date them as well?

Hall: I do date them. I sign them. I burn that inscription on the bottom and then I sign them in ink and put a date on them. Usually I put a date.

Reed: Do you keep a log of all the carvings you've done?

Hall: I do have a log of most of them, you know.

Reed: You don't really have any production line, you just more each one's a total individual.

Hall: Pretty much. It's kind of changed over the years, you know. At one time I did almost exclusively ducks and now I don't do many ducks. Ducks, for a while, were a big thing. Now they're not as popular.

Reed: Are they too common?

Hall: I don't know, you know, how things change, you know.

Reed: So, you're more into the rare type birds.

Hall: Well, song birds, you know, a lot of people like songbirds. I do hummingbirds also, with flowers. I do doves. I do some larger pieces, you know. Things in flight. I don't have any here today. Most of those are done on commission. I've done quail, doves and ducks in flight. I did a

life size pheasant in flight for a fellow one time. I do just about any bird. I do some fish, carved a few fish. I've done some animals, you know.

Reed: What kind of animals?

Hall: Well, I've done like a bobcat. Head for a bobcat. I did a small big horn sheep for a fellow one time. Mountain lion. I did a mountain lion for somebody once. I've done a moose. Elk, on smaller versions of course. Just about anything anybody wants, I'll try it.

Reed: Have you ever done a Kentucky wildcat?

Hall: Just the head. Well, I did some small Kentucky wildcats one time. I think I did about 2 of those. I do have one piece that belongs to my wife, it's a Kentucky . . . Well, it's a wildcat head, I don't know . . . I got the inspiration for that, I was out in the woods one day scouting for turkeys and I was in camo, you know and I was sitting down in kind of a little depression just being real quiet. I had a pair of binoculars. This bobcat went by me, going down the hill and there was a little creek down there and I was listening to turkey on the other side of the creek and I don't know if that cat was stalking that turkey or what. But what I picked up on, they blend into the woods so well you can't hardly see them. But it was going away from me and on the back of their ears there's a white spot. The back of their ears are black and white and from behind that will show up pretty good in the woods, especially if they move it. Well, that cat went down towards the creek and I just sat there watching it through binoculars. I looked and here it came back, started to come right back up through there. And it was going to pass by me probably about twenty yards away, so I started making a little noise, you know, in my lips like a mouse or something, you know. Well, that caught that cat's attention quickly. Here it came. It started stalking over there, you know. And I was watching it through binoculars and it kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger and I thought, man that thing's getting awful close. I took the binoculars down and it was, I mean it was close and it started twitching his tail like that and I thought uh oh, I'm getting ready to get jumped. So I stood up then and my nerve failed me. (Laughter, Hall and Reed) I stood up and when that cat, it was making leaps, I believe they were twenty feet getting out of there, you know, I scared it pretty good. I knew right where it was standing, you know, I'd marked a spot. It was a greenbrier or something there, pretty obviously spot. It was 13 steps from where I was sitting. But what got me was the nose on that thing. It was pink, looked like bubblegum or something, you know. So that's really what inspired me. It had nothing to do with the Kentucky Wildcats really.

Reed: Did you have your camera with you to take a picture?

Hall: I didn't have a camera then.

Reed: That would have been great.

Hall: Yea.

Reed: (Laughter, Reed) Approximately, I hate this question myself, but how long does it take you to complete a typical piece?

Hall: Well, a lot of things that I do are around a week, you know. Some things if they're large, something in flight, you know, some of those may take three weeks to a month or more. Everybody always asks me that question, like you say. Last year I think I did maybe 45 pieces

for the whole year. It just depends on what I've got orders to do, you know, if it's smaller things I might do more or bigger things I might do less.

Reed: Okay. And you have to build inventory for shows or?

Hall: I do that. I try to have a few things to take to shows.

Reed: And you take orders off of them or?

Hall: Right. Plus, I have a book that has photographs of about everything I've ever done. People look at and I get some strange requests, you know. People ask me to do . . . I've done puffins and quetzal I guess you call it, is a bird from South America, did one of those, or central America. Resplendent Quetzal I guess is how you pronounce it. And I told the guy, I said, if you can give me enough pictures, you know, I can probably do it. So he was pleased with it.

Reed: Do you find that commissioned work inspires your creativity? Takes it to a different level?

Hall: It really does. It's something new, you know. I really get to be creative. I'm at my best when I'm doing that, you know. Having to do the study and the internet of course has been a godsend for me because of the . . . Used to and I still use, look at magazines you know, a lot of wildlife magazines. I have a world of books, you know. You can get book on . . . I've got whole books on great blue herons or Atlantic puffins. But now, in addition to that, if you look at images online, you know, you can see thousands or hundreds of pictures of a species. There's no substitute for study on doing these carvings because you can see a picture of a certain bird and you think, well, that's what it looks like, but there's a lot more to it than that. It might be a young bird. Of course, it could be a female, you know, in a molting plumage. So the more references you get the more you can determine what the bird really looks like.

Reed: The male birds are always so much more colorful. Correct?

Hall: Smarter too.

Reed: Oh, smarter too! (Laughter, Reed and Hall) I'll write that one down. What's your price range?

Hall: Well, the low end of things I do are like in the \$300 range and then it goes up from \$850 is kind of a medium price, I guess. Especially like the birds with flowers and they go on up there to several thousand dollars, you know, depending on what it is.

Reed: So, you work a typical day? 6 or 8 hours?

Hall: I usually am out here about 8:30 and I work until 6:30, you know. With the advent of the internet, which you have to do now, but I consider pretty much wasted time, you know, I started earlier than that checking emails and all that business, you know. But that's a pretty typical day for me, you know.

Reed: So you're at it every day, all day.

Hall: Oh yes. That's a great mistaken idea that people have that if you work for yourself, well, you just work when you want to and take a lot of time off and do what you want to do, but that's

just not the way it is, you know. If you're going to make a living, you've got to have enough self-discipline to put the hours in, you know, or you don't eat.

Reed: Have you ever taught classes or had an apprentice study under you?

Hall: No. I never have. That doesn't appeal to me. I'm so work focused, you know, I pretty much have to put the time in. I'm not interested in doing that.

Reed: Do you do any exhibits with your work?

Hall: I've done a few exhibits, you know, over the years, but mostly just do shows. I go to art and craft shows to market my work.

Reed: Is any of your work part of a permanent collection in a museum or gallery?

Hall: There are a few places where my work is collected like that. I guess, one of the best known one would probably be, a few years back I did a Christmas tree ornament for the White House for the Christmas tree at the White House and that goes in the permanent collection up there, you know.

Reed: Do you have private collectors or repeat customers?

Hall: Well, that's probably what's kept me going over the years, you know. Of course, just like in everything there's ups and downs in the work. Collectors are what has really kept me going, you know, because they have several pieces of my work. One that immediately comes to mind is some old friends of mine that now live in Arizona. My wife and I went out and visited them and stayed a few years ago and I was just trying to count how many carvings that I could see in their house and it was up around 24 that I could see, you know, and I knew that wasn't all of them.

Reed: That's a collection in itself.

Hall: Pretty good. Yea. They moved that collection from Louisville to Tucson.

Reed: Some of your carvings have been purchased and given to dignitaries. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Hall: Well, early on, after the Craft Market got to be so popular, the governors for a few generations there . . . whatever you want . . . administrations I guess, they did give some of my ducks to heads of state and that kind of thing as gifts, you know. I didn't always know where they were going, you know, I have a few photos. Sometimes they would send me a photo. I guess the one photo that I have, I assume it was when they were negotiating for the Toyota plant in Georgetown. They gave one of my ducks to one of the heads of the company there. They gave one to Arm & Hammer who was a big art collector back in the day. Someone told me one they gave one to the Queen of England and ambassadors. I really don't know all of that, you know, where they went. They did give them on a pretty regular basis for several years.

Reed: You have talked earlier a little bit about Phyllis George Brown and how she got the movement started, the appreciation of Kentucky crafts. Did she also collect your work?

Hall: She did. She bought several pieces from me. She gave some of them as personal gifts. She was a real jewel to us, you know. One thing she did that I thought was, you know, above

and beyond. During Derby time, you know, they have a lot of Derby parties, you know and those are always filled with celebrities and she would have one. They lived at Cave Hill in Lexington, which is an old mansion there and she would invite some of us to come over there during that Derby party. It would be the day after the Derby and just set up like out in the yard or whatever and I met a lot of people there. Some that come to mind, let's see, Henry Kissinger. I sold some ducks to Larry Hagman, which was a big star at that time. Dallas. Kenny Rogers.

Reed: Country music.

Hall: Yea. And Gregory Peck was there one time. You just never knew. Walter Cronkite, he didn't buy anything from me, but I remember talking to him. Andy Warhol was there once, you know, he was a pretty good artist, or well-known artist. (Laughter, Reed)

Reed: Make that distinction. That's personal opinion. (Laughter, Reed)

Hall: Well, a lot of different people, you never know who was going to be there. And the thing was, she treated us like we were one of the guests, you know. She wanted to know about our comfort, make sure we got something to eat and it was just super nice of her. She didn't have to do that. I sold a lot of work there. I sold a bunch of things to Ed McMahon, he was there on a regular basis. I sold some work to him. I can't think of all of them, but that was another big bonus for me, you know.

Reed: Now, did she also start what they called the Kentucky Museum of Arts and Crafts? No, the Kentucky Arts Foundation out of Louisville?

Hall: She was instrumental in it. There was a couple there that was very interested in it. Alfred Shands and his wife. Maybe her name was Mary Shands and they bought work from me early on. In fact, there's probably a few of those pieces in that foundation yet, that they bought from me. But they were super nice people, they really were instrumental in that. They had parties down there that were geared for selling the art, you know.

Reed: It's Al Shands. Mary and Al Shands have both deceased now and it's my understanding that he left his art collection to the Speed Museum. So you might want to check that out sometime.

Hall: Well, the things I was doing back then are pretty crude compared with what I do today, so if I could get them just to take my name off some of those. (Laughter, Hall)

Reed: You do find that over time you continue to improve when you look back at something you did years ago and you think, "I haven't changed" and then you see an old piece and it embarrasses you sometimes.

Hall: Right. Exactly.

Reed: Yea. I know exactly what you're saying on that. Have you been published in any books or publications?

Hall: Well, Phyllis George did a book in the early '80s where she went around and interviewed, maybe it was late 80s, I forget.

Reed: Mid-eighties.

Hall: Mid-eighties? Which, I know you're in that, Mary, but she came around or sent somebody around in some cases and interviewed and did a story and some photos on different craftspeople in Kentucky. I guess that was a major one I was in and since that time, you know, back when she was really promoting things, I think I have an article, there was a picture of one of my ducks in Redbook or . . . I've kind of lost track of where . . . I've been in several Kentucky magazines and papers. One time I did an interview, it was a Kentucky . . . a home based business thing that they used to . . . In congress for support for home based businesses so I've been interviewed a few times. The latest and greatest, I guess, was Bluegrass Backroads. They came up a few years ago. A real nice story on me and my work. That's been a real positive thing for me. In this past year, the Herald Leader did a nice article on my work. It's kind of a bittersweet article, I guess. They did it because I was the last man standing was what they said. The original craftspeople. I was the last one that had been to all the shows, you know. I think it was 32 years or 33. 33 years and I'm the only one left that's left that's done all of them. I told them, I said, "Well, it shows that I'm probably the dumbest one of the bunch". (Laughter, Hall)

Reed: I think it speaks a lot about your dedication. 33 years in one show is a long time.

Hall: Well, it's an economic thing, with me. I've got to keep feeding my wife.

Reed: But it also shows that you're still successful and that's why you go back each year.

Hall: Well, it is and you know, I'm thankful for it. I probably haven't said enough about what that program has meant to me, because as you probably can tell, you know, I am not really very astute when it comes to marketing or social issues or anything like that. I'm pretty reclusive in a way. I'm a quiet guy. I like the woods and a lot of things that I don't understand and they help me about marketing, you know. That was, to me, a real government in action type thing because it wasn't only me, you know, there was a lot of people. I messed up early in life, I made some mistakes. I didn't get a good education and of course, as you well know, Eastern Kentucky is a great place to live but it's not exactly the land of opportunity, you know, there's not a lot of jobs floating around. So from what I learned from them, I was able to go on and do other shows. They taught me about presenting my work. I didn't have really any good ideas about that. And they were very nice about it, you know. Fran Redmon would say, "Now, Tim, you need to work on a booth" and she had insight there in how to present my work better, so they really, really helped me. So I've done shows like in Connecticut and those places and the network of people I met, just friends, the Connecticut show, you probably don't even remember this Mary, but you were the one that told me about that. You know, I wouldn't have gone up there. I mean I was scared to death, you know. I loaded that old station wagon up and the idea of being in New York traffic and when I saw that Tappan Zee Bridge, it was white knuckles.

Reed: Bigger than the Irvine Bridge? (Laughter, Reed)

Hall: A little bit. I think it was about two miles long or maybe a mile and a half. It's like 8 lanes and I thought about the scripture of the bible about the quick and the dead. (Laughter, Reed) Up there you're either quick or you're dead, you know. But people up there treated me real nice and accepted my work real well. So that network and what I was trying to say is the networking with other craftspeople like you told me about that place, so, therefore I went up there, you know, so that helped me branch out. It's all been addition to allow me to make a living, you know.

Cameraman: We need to change tapes. Before I got a few seconds left on this. I just want to be quiet for a few seconds because I need the sound of the room. So I'll call it room tone. Ok that's good.

Reed: I love hearing the birds.

Hall: See, I can't hardly hear them anymore. My hearing's about shot.

Reed: Yea, well, I have Robin on a hearing aid but I've got to keep reminding him to wear it and then sometimes it doesn't seem to have any affect. (Laughter, Reed)

Hall: Well, he's just got selective hearing. I went with a guy, I went on a bird walk this year, have you ever been to that Mary Wharton, what is that . . . Cliffview?

Reed: Cliffview, yea. Wolf County.

Hall: No, this is over right across the place from Natural Bridge. Cliffview or something. Let's see what is the name of that? Anyway, they've got trees over there, they say 650 years old. But it is a woman that wrote the first, we used that book, I know you know her name. Mary Wharton Roger? They did the first books on like Kentucky wildflowers and things like that. It was published by the University of Kentucky.

Reed: Barbour did the wildflower book and then Tom Barnes has put out a more recent version of it.

Hall: Yea, but that Barnes guy and this Mary Wharton were coauthors. Anyway, I went over there to a bird walk they had this year and I was watching this Kentucky warbler and it wasn't very far away and that you could see it, singing its heart out and I couldn't hear a word of it, you know.

Cameraman: We're rolling.

Reed: Okay. Oh, we are rolling? Okay. (Laughter, Reed)

Hall: Oh, we are?

Reed: So this program you're talking about, this is Kentucky Crafted and that's part of the Kentucky Arts Council now?

Hall: It is. I think there were some kind of revisions up there and they may be blended them together, you know, but they're still on the job, you know and they still sponsor those shows and as we were saying, you know, 33 years now, they've been doing them. After a few years, they went from doing two shows a year to doing only one and for a long time it was in Louisville at the fair grounds and for the last, I guess 3 or 4 years it's been in Lexington and still a very viable program.

Reed: Are there any other arts and crafts organizations that you've been a member of and that have influenced you or helped you in any way?

Hall: Well, early on, I got in the Kentucky Guild and I wasn't real successful at those shows I did, but I'm sure part of that was because I really didn't know anything about marketing my work.

The work was not what it is now, you know, so I probably didn't stay in it long enough to really get a good response there. And I am a member, now, a non-exhibiting member of the Southern Highlands Guild. I got in that Guild a few years ago, but other than those are the only . . . And of course the Kentucky program, I'm a member of that.

Reed: Have you found that it's been important to your work to be part of these organizations and the networking that it opens up for you?

Hall: Sure. That's the way you find out about different shows. Maybe you want to try and craftspeople . . . Artists and craftspeople have a network like you're saying. A camaraderie. I've never seen much of the mean spiritedness. People are wanting everybody to do well is my experience, you know. And they're willing to share the feedback on a show that they do or they're ready for you to go to. And some of them are very limited to who they'll take, but I've never had, you know, it's a juried process now, it takes so many artists, but I've never had anybody that, you know, was worried about them about them not getting in because so many other people were applying or anything. Everybody's always just been super nice about that.

Reed: I think it's important that you mention that, how arts and crafts people are out to help each other and it's just so different than what you experience in the corporate world, where it's all about the individual and not about the group or the occupation.

Hall: Well, I met some very interesting people, you know, kind of like a second family too and you really, probably don't see each other that much, but you know people would do anything to help you, you know, concerned about each other. It's a good thing to be a part of.

Reed: Are there any interesting stories that you'd like to share with us?

Hall: Well, you know, it always humbles me, you know, I have . . . Not to be boastful or anything, but I have sold work to some of probably the wealthiest people that you can think of, you know. I used to sell work on a regular basis, and I met him at Phyllis', the fellow that owned was the CEO of American Airlines, you know. But what really humbles me is there are other people that are not really wealthy people, but they appreciate the work so much, that it's probably, or undoubtedly a sacrifice for them to purchase it. But they do, because it means so much to them. (Laughter, Hall) I kind of hate to take money from people like that. I pretty much have to, but one of the stories that I've told before that I always like to remember is there was a lady that bought a little small loon from me one time and she gave it to her son and she called me one day and she was in 90s, you know. She was calling me Mr. Hall, you know. Real proper and everything. She was telling me that she had given that away. She had given that to her son. But she said, you know, she said, "I miss it". That's what she said, "I miss it". And she says, "Will you make me another one?" And she went on to say, now if I die before you get this done, my son ought to make good on it, you know. (Laughter, Reed) She wanted to make sure that I had got paid. That really touched me, you know, that it meant that much to her, you know. And I had a lady in Louisville and she was just, you know, not a wealthy person. I think it was her 20th, her and her husband's 20th wedding anniversary and she wanted a pair of bluebirds and it was pretty expensive and one of the birds was in flight and everything and she saved, you know, she talked to me like two years in advance about doing it and she saved the money up over that time, where she could get it before her anniversary. And then her husband wrote me a really nice letter about what it meant to him. So I really remember those things. And there's a few people here in town, you know, I hardly ever . . . You don't expect to sell much art in Eastern Kentucky. And that's not reflection on anybody other than most of us, myself included, have to take care of the practical aspects of life. We may appreciate art, but as far as

purchasing a lot of it, we're just not, we don't have a lot of extra income for that kind of thing. But there are a few people here in the county that have bought some pieces from me over the years. That's meant a lot to me, you know, because they've known me all my life and they appreciate it enough to purchase it. It has value to them. That's something that's hard to overcome, especially it was hard to overcome for me early on, you know, because when you tell people you're going to be an artist, a woodcarver. First off, you don't call it an artist because they think you're getting uppity or something. (Laughter, Reed) You're just an old carpenter, which is fine with me. I'm glad to be a woodcarver, you know. I don't need any titles or anything like that. But people just don't understand it, you know. They think you're off base, don't know what you're doing, or something it wrong with you or something, you know. Because they aren't familiar with it or don't understand it, it's not real to them, you know. I'd been making a living doing this for several years. I was talking to you earlier about this. My father in law, they don't live here, but they live in Eastern Kentucky and he asked me one day if I had ever gotten a job. (Laughter, Reed)

Reed: A real job?

Hall: Yea. A real job.

Reed: You also mentioned earlier something about visiting a train here in Ravenna?

Hall: I do vaguely remember that, you know. That was, I guess, in the early sixties and there was a couple of cars. I guess they were converted Pullman cars or something, that the Kentucky Guild would pull off on a side track here and we'd walk down there from school and I remember walking through there and seeing things . . . I don't remember exactly what they were, probably baskets and weaving and more of the traditional crafts from the mountains. And I remember going to see that, you know, and that fascinating me. And I thought of something else, another thing early on. We took a field trip once to Bybee Pottery, you know. Which had been in existence since back in the 1850s. And actually, one of my great grandfathers had worked there, Bybee Pottery, you know. I remember watching people working with their hands. And then my grandfather, he was kind of a jack of all trades on doing things, you know. If he needed something or if something needed repair, he's just make it or repair it or fix it, you know. I guess I've got a lot of that in me, you know, the grandkids, if they tear something up, they say, "Pa can fix it" you know, regardless of what it is, whether I can or not. They believe I can, you know. They believe in me.

Reed: Is there anything that we've missed and not covered that you'd like to add?

Hall: Well, Mary, the only thing I can think of to tell you is, you know, I never can say this enough, but it's a reality for me. The turning point in my life was after I was married, you know, I got in church and got saved and it was an actual conversion for me. The bible talks about a new creature and I asked the Lord, you know, first off, help me raise my kids the way you'd want them raised. I studied the bible and I tried to pattern my life off of what I read in that bible and I asked the Lord, guide and direct me. You know what's in the future, you know what's best and I would have never, you know, I talked to a friend of mine recently, he drives back and forth from Lexington every day. He's my age. I've got more than one that does that and they're wore out with it. I had a lot of solutions in my mind. I thought, you know, I need to work on the railroad or something like that because that's what my dad did. Those guys that now are up in the retirement, they hate it, they hate what they've done all their lives. And I am so blessed and it's not because I'm smart, it's not because I'm a really gifted carver. I've learned a lot, you know, but I believe with all my heart that the Lord has made a way for me and I would have never quit

the job, making \$3.70 an hour, but it was more than I had. I would have never quit it. I had a family to take care of. I would have never quit it and started out on this. I'm just not that kind of person. So the Lord, I feel like, has made things work out for me. And I told a guy last night, I feel guilty sometimes. I'm such a blessed person, I can't get over if I die tonight, I don't have any complaints because I've enjoyed my life. I couldn't have set down and planned out a better life for me. You know, I'm just really thankful for that. Can't tell it enough.

Reed: Beautiful, beautiful. Tim, thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

Hall: You're welcome.

Reed: Well, we went over an hour.

Reed: Well. (Laughter, Reed) You bring out the worst . . .

END OF INTERVIEW