August 2006

Art Keeble oral history interview by Suzette Berkman, August 29, 2006

Art Keeble (Interviewee)

Suzette Berkman (Interviewer)

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 SB: —29th, and I am interviewing Art Keeble, who is the Director of the Arts Council for Hillsborough County. Thanks so much Art, for being here today and for allowing us to interview you.

AK: Well thank you for coming, I’m honored that you would think of me.

SB: Great. Well, we would like to hear more about you personally first, if we could. I know you’ve been in Tampa quite some time, and I was wondering if you would fill us in. What brought you to Tampa?

AK: Sure. I’d be glad to. I’ve been here 22 years. I never thought I would live anywhere that long. But I had been Director of the Arts Commission for the State of Tennessee, and to be honest, supported the wrong gubernatorial candidate. And the elections were in November, and in January, I was looking for a job.

So I took some time off just to visit friends around the country, and I was in California and went to see a spiritual advisor that was a friend of a friend. And she was Joe Montana’s spiritual advisor, so I thought, if it’s good enough for Joe Montana, it’s good enough for me.

SB: How interesting.

AK: So, among other things, she said, "I see you driving a red convertible, I see you writing a book, and I think you’ll live on the West Coast." And I laughed and—

SB: Oh my gosh.

AK: —said, "there’s no way I would live out here, it’s just—you know, the West Coast of the United States is not appealing to me.” So I came back to Nashville and got a call from the guy who was the Director of the Arts Council here. And said that he was—

SB: Who was that?

AK: Skip Schreiber. He said that he was resigning and wondered if I would like to throw
my hat in the ring. So I did, and that was April, and I was hired in June. Lo and behold, it was to the West Coast of Florida.

SB: [Laughs]

AK: So I had— I called her a couple of times after that and said, you know, "What else do you want to tell me?" I’ve still not owned that red convertible—

SB: Oh, OK.

AK: —But I have three cookbooks that I’ve printed.

SB: That’s terrific.

AK: So two out of three is not bad, you know?

SB: When did you do that? When did you write your cookbooks?

AK: I decided a few years ago that that would be a good Christmas present. So that’s my Christmas card to people—

SB: OK.

AK: And I work on it all during the year—

SB: That’s great.

AK: —Then Thanksgiving weekend I finish it and give it to the printer—

SB: What attracted you to this— I mean, we know why you came to this city, but what did you know about the Arts Council when you came?

AK: Very little as a matter of fact. I had known a lot about arts councils as you know, agencies throughout the country, having been head of the state agency. And prior to being director in Tennessee, I was the founder of the Knoxville, Tennessee Arts Council. And you know, got involved in all of the national committees and national organizations of arts councils. So I knew pretty much what arts councils did throughout the country. And they’re all pretty similar. Some are private, some are government, and some are not-for-profit. But most of them provide the same services to the community.

I’ve always loved Florida. So I was excited—

SB: Well that’s good.

AK: About coming here. I had taught school in Jacksonville, back in the sixties.
SB: Where did you grow up?

AK: I grew up in a little town outside of Knoxville, Tennessee. Between Knoxville and the Smoky Mountains. Grew up on a farm. And—

SB: What—
AK: Went to University of Tennessee to college. I had gotten a degree in Journalism. And had always been involved in something cultural. I studied piano for about ten years—

SB: That’s good.

AK: I was in theatre in college and in the University Singers.

SB: But it was really writing that appealed to you?

AK: Not so much the writing as so much of finding the story.

SB: OK.

AK: I’ve always been a snoop—

SB: OK [laughs].

AK: And I really want to know what’s going on behind the scenes. And that was I think the big appeal to me. And eventually I ended up back in graduate school for television. But—

SB: [Was] that in Tennessee?

AK: In Tennessee. But never pursued that as a career because luckily I got a job working in the arts and have been here ever since.

SB: OK. And then in Nashville, that was your first arts job?

AK: As a matter of fact, it was. I answered an ad in the paper in 1970-something.

SB: OK.

AK: And—

SB: How, how long were you there?

AK: Well I was at the first job for about three years. And that was working for the Tennessee Arts Commission on an Office of Economic Opportunity program, which was
a federal subsidy program, to try to keep—create—economic opportunity for poor people.

SB: OK.

AK: And Tennessee had gotten a grant to find indigenous crafts people up in the hills and hollers of Tennessee.

SB: Oh neat.

AK: And my first job was covering sixteen counties, to go find people who primarily were folk artists—they were untrained. And they made quilts, they made penny whistles, they had a lot of—there was a lot of woodworking, basketry. Really an incredible introduction to me—

SB: Of folk art.

AK: —Into folk art and into—in some cases into my roots. Because I had grown up in the country, and those people were in the—in the area, but not people that I interacted with. And so I had a chance to get to know some of them quite well.

One woman that I met and became a very good friend with was Pearl Bowling. And Pearl made dolls out of corn shucks. And their hair was the cornsilk. And Pearl grew her own tobacco, which she chewed. She always carried a little cup full of Kleenex, and that was her spittoon. And I became Pearl’s driver when she would go to exhibits or to teach classes. Her work is in the Smithsonian Institution. And she lived out—way, way out in the country in this little wooden house, with a potbelly stove, and she kept that stove fired just about year round.

SB: It was cool.

AK: It was cold. Always had a kettle of water on top of the stove. But [she] just became a really good friend. And I learned so much about her, about just lifestyles. And that sort of sparked my interest in finding out more about folk artists and untrained artists.

So I did that until we had discovered enough of these people to start to market their work. So I went to Nashville then as Director of Tennessee Craft Marketing. And we opened up gift shops in the state parks and sold this work. And then I became kind of a quilt expert, and I think it was because I was the only one in the office that had a truck.

SB: [Laughs]

AK: So I would load up 300 trucks and drive—I mean 300 quilts—drive to Chicago, and bring an empty truck home. To sell the—

SB: To the craft fairs?

AK: To primarily retail stores.
SB: Oh, OK.

AK: We did a big exhibit at Marshall Fields—

SB: Interesting.

AK: —We did an exhibit in a department store in Indianapolis; one in New Orleans. And for so many of these people, that $200 they made off [of] that quilt was more money than they had seen—

SB: Oh gosh.

AK: One woman bought her first set of teeth—

SB: My gosh.

AK: Another bought a washer and dryer that she had never had. And later on, we kind of discovered that we had in some ways had created a monster. Because we were giving people money which they weren’t accustomed to having, with no training of what to do with it, how to spend it or how to save it. So there were some interesting problems that, that arose out of that.

SB: My gosh. Did you—were your parents from Tennessee?

AK: Oh yeah. Yeah, my mom was a first grade school teacher. She taught first grade for probably forty years. And my dad worked at the Aluminum Company of America.

SB: Wow. Were they first generation? Second? I mean, are they—what were—

AK: Probably third or fourth.

SB: Third or fourth.

AK: Yes. I mean we don’t have any roots that we know of that we can honestly trace back to Wales or to England or—

SB: Were, were they involved in culture?

AK: Yes. I came in—I grew up in a musical family.

SB: Oh, that’s great.

AK: Everybody went to church, everybody sang, we had a piano from the day I was born.

SB: Was that—
AK: And we were—my sister and I were encouraged, you know to pursue any kind of talent. Whatever it was you wanted to do.

SB: That’s wonderful.

AK: We were encouraged to do that, very academically driven. I mean there was no question that, you know, you would do well in school and that you would go to college. And—

SB: Do, do you have just the one sister?

AK: One sister, who still lives in Tennessee in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where they discovered the atom bomb. And she has three kids, all of whom are musical.

SB: Oh, that’s wonderful.

AK: Her oldest son is—has been, for the last six years, in the touring company of *Les Miserables.*

SB: Oh my gosh.

AK: Her daughter is a band director at the local high school. And her son is the Minister of Music at a church in North Carolina.

SB: So it certainly took.

AK: Yeah.

SB: Do you, do you maintain your musical interest?

AK: My interests, but not pursuing it.

SB: OK [laughs].

AK: I was somewhere recently and there was a piano there, and I, you know, played a little something—but no. The spark is gone.

SB: But now I hear you’re a singer. [Laughs]

AK: Oh, hardly, hardly. I like to think I can, but you know, too many years of smoking cigarettes.

SB: Are you an artist?

AK: No.
SB: Do you dabble in that?

AK: I dabble in everything, I always have.

SB: OK, OK.

AK: I have failed miserably in everything I’ve tried. So I think that’s why I’m in arts administration, as opposed to actively applying the art. I have a deep appreciation for it, and a pretty good knowledge of several art forms—

SB: You’ve, you’ve—

AK: I just don’t have, I don’t have the patience.

SB: It does require patience, for sure.

AK: Yes, yes.

SB: It does.

AK: I’ve—oh I was looking at a Bruce Marsh painting not too long ago, and I think Bruce is just one of the best artists in this area. And I just marveled at how anyone could have the patience to paint ten thousand pebbles on the beach.

SB: It’s incredible.

AK: I just, you know, it’s not in me.

SB: It’s, it’s, incredible.

AK: It’s not in me. And the same with actors who can, you know, learn three hours of script or, you know—

SB: It’s amazing.

AK: Potters who can turn out five thousand mugs. You know, it’s just not in me. But I’ll fight to my death for their right to do it!

[Both laugh]

SB: You have made your mark—

AK: Well thank you.

SB: You really have, you’ve made a huge impact.
AK: I think I came to Tampa when I needed Tampa. Maybe Tampa needed me. It was a—it has been, a very good partnership, a very good relationship.

SB: The arts council began when?

AK: Nineteen sixty-seven.

SB: Sixty-seven.

AK: The same year as the National Endowment for the Arts.

SB: OK.

AK: Doctor Richard Hodes was a state representative. And when the state was informed that the federal government was setting aside money to give to each state if they would start an arts council. Dick Hodes said, “If we’re going to start one for the state, I’m going to start one in Tampa.” So he wrote legislation that created the Arts Council of Tampa in 1967. There was no money attached to it, but the bill was there. And within a short period of time, if I’m remembering history correctly, they had hired a director, and they opened a little gallery over on Florida Avenue, in the back of the Tampa Theatre.

SB: Oh wow.

AK: And shortly thereafter, they established a relationship with the Hillsborough County School Board to put artists in the schools. And some of the artists that we revere today actually got some of their start with us in the, in the school’s program. Bud Lee, a photographer, who now unfortunately has suffered a stroke, but you know, was a very famous magazine photographer. He taught in our schools for a long time. [Then there is] Jerry Bickel [of] Bits N’ Pieces Puppet Theatre. They sort of started with the school’s program. You know it’s really been nice to, to see these people grow into their own careers.

SB: It, it began with artists in the schools primarily and I was looking at your program book, and it has evolved to include innumerable programs. Different programs.

AK: Oh yes, yes.

SB: Did that—

AK: Originally, the “artists in the schools program” was more of a residency program. We would send Bud Lee to a school for half of the year and he would work with the teachers and the students. That—

SB: Was that on a weekly basis?
AK: Like two days per week.

SB: Two days per week.

AK: Yeah. And I wish we had the money to do that now because you know, we send an artist into the schools for an experience for the kids, but that’s all they have is just an experience.

SB: So they go one time?

AK: Many, yes, yes.

SB: To a school—

AK: Not too often. But if we had, if we were able to put artists in residence so the students get to know them, they get to work with them, they understand how they live, that they’re not this strange person that comes in and entertains them and then leaves. But you know, with the growth we’re experiencing in this county and the number of—we’ve had sixty schools built—

SB: That’s extraordinary.

AK: In the—just the last few years, and no increase in our appropriation to provide artists for those schools.

SB: Where is your funding source?

AK: For the Arts Council?

SB: Yes.

AK: Primarily the Hillsborough County Commission. But we have a contract with the school board. We also get money from the magnet school program, because we do a lot of extra work for magnet schools. The art magnet schools.

SB: I was so impressed with the number of schools that you reach. Is that part of the mandate? That you go into as many schools?

AK: We want to.

SB: All the schools?

AK: We want to go to all the schools. So much of that program is driven by the interest of the assistant principal.

SB: OK, interesting.
AK: If that person is—if they, you know, have seen the light and they understand what, you know, a heavy cultural education will mean to a student, then they will request more artists.

SB: And do you go into schools that are just primarily primary schools? Middle? High schools?

AK: The concentration is in the elementary school. But we have a lot of middle school. Very little high school. There’s no time in high school anymore. You know it—

SB: Do they have their own programs?

AK: Most of them, yes. All of them have the visual arts program, they have music, and they have you know, some of them have theatre programs. And—and they’re quite good. But they don’t have time to do field trips like they used to or have visiting artists, it’s just—

SB: I notice you do field trips.

AK: Yes.

SB: You sponsor them? You fund them?

AK: We contract with performing companies who are adjudicated by educators, to make sure, number one that what—that their product is suitable for students, and number two that what they’re presenting, in some way, complies with the FCAT standards, the Sunshine State Standards, so the kids are learning something at the same time they are, you know being entertained. Those companies then are listed in a field trip guide. And the schools choose which ones they want to go to. And the kids pay a small fee and then the company actually makes pretty good money. I think last year we generated about $400,000 for arts groups.

SB: And you—where did you generate the funds?

AK: From the fees the kids paid to go see—

SB: Okay, okay.

AK: Yes, three dollars, [or] $3.50.

SB: That’s terrific. So it’s almost in a way self-sustained?

AK: Yes, it’s a real economic boost for those companies.

SB: But I know you provide grants as well. Do you not?
AK: Yes, yes.

SB: To artists?

AK: We have a—

SB: To the schools? To—

AK: Well, we provide grants to all of those. We have an Art Teacher’s Incentive Grant, which is up to $500 to do an in school project or to do some professional development. And that, budget’s about $10,000 per year.

Then we have an Individual Artists’ Grant Program. That’s a $3,000 grant. And it’s for artists to do something that will significantly change their future. Now that may be buying a piece of equipment, it may be going to study somewhere; it may be creating a demo CD for a musician. We’ve had some really nice success stories out of that program.

SB: Who, could you—

AK: Frazier Smith, who is a wood sculptor in South Tampa. He makes wooden quilts as a matter of fact.

SB: Oh gosh.

AK: We bought him some electronic tools in one grant. In a second grant, we helped him build a studio. And Frazier is now in heavy demand around the country—

SB: Isn’t that something.

AK: Just had a one-man show in Houston—

SB: Gosh.

AK: And was a featured artist at the American Quilt symposium, even though he was the only artist that did not—

SB: In wood!

AK: Make in fabric.

SB: [Laughs]

AK: Then we have a Cultural Development Program, which is [an] organization. And that’s about $750,000 a year for everything. From the small groups up to the Performing Arts Center and the orchestra.
SB: Are you affiliated with the state arts?

AK: Yes.

SB: Council.

AK: Yes. We are members of the Florida Cultural Alliance. And the Florida Association of Local Arts Agencies. And many of us on staff here have served on panels for the Florida Arts Council, which is the state cultural agency. It’s, it’s a small field. You know, there are maybe two-thousand arts councils in the country, and most of us know each other. That’s including those of us who have been in the business for so long. You know there’s a lot of camaraderie and there’s a lot of sharing of information.

SB: You’ve been here how many years?

AK: Twenty-two years.

SB: Twenty-two years! And what changes have you seen?

AK: Oh lord.

SB: Both professionally and personally, actually?

AK: [Laughs]

SB: It’s a big question, I know! Let’s do professionally first.

AK: I used to have hair! [Laughs]

SB: Okay! [Laughs]

AK: I remember driving into Tampa the first time, down I-275, and the Lykes Tower was our skyscraper at—well, I think there was one under construction. And I thought, well I’m, you know—here I am in the big city.

SB: [Laughs]

AK: Well you look at the skyline now and it’s, it’s completely different.

SB: It sure is.

AK: I think something that, that troubles me about our growth in the arts, or lack thereof; we’ve lost quite a few arts organizations in these twenty-two years.

SB: For instance?
AK: Well the Playmakers Theatre Company, Tampa Players Theatre Company—just in the last year there have been five galleries that have closed. There’s no longer a Tampa Ballet. I think a lot of that, you know, was growing pains. I think some of the groups tried to be too much, too soon. And strangled themselves. Which is an unfortunate result of artistic egos being bigger than artistic realities.

SB: Were those growing pains as well?

AK: They’re more like dying pains.

SB: Dying pains [laughs].

AK: Because nothing is replaceable. You know, Stageworks Theatre Company has maintained at a very slow growth level all of these years by doing quality work without aspiring to be equity, 100 percent without being in a big theatre. And they’re just right—the right size for this community right now. And the Spanish Lyric Theatre has been here—the oldest Hispanic theatre in the United States. I think [they] just celebrated their fiftieth anniversary.

SB: Gosh, wow.

AK: And they do it, and Renee Gonzalez will tell you, “We are community theatre and we don’t want to be anything more.” Because it would kill us.

SB: Were there too many theatres for the size of the city?

AK: No, it’s too much competition.

SB: Okay, all right.

AK: There was an excellent—

SB: Not lack of interest, per say?

AK: Nope, no.

SB: By the community, just too many?

AK: Just too many, and I think with the Playmakers and the Players, they both wanted to be the eight-hundred pound gorilla. And you know, aspired to do more expensive shows, to be more equity, and there wasn’t—this town isn’t ready to pay the price for a ticket it would cost to maintain those companies. And nor should they. Government support back then was not a lot. It’s not a whole lot now, but you know that’s just—

SB: Will that—
AK: Just the facts of life and that—

SB: Will that always be for the arts, do you think?

AK: Oh yeah, yeah. I don’t think—

SB: Continual problem.

AK: I don’t think the arts will ever be self sufficient. I don’t think they ever have.

SB: There was a trust fund for the state, an arts trust fund, as I recall.

AK: Yes.

SB: Was the arts council involved in that? What happened?

AK: We helped to lobby to get that passed. It was a—a way to dedicate money each year legislatively, into a fund that would support the arts. And then the governor decided that trust funds—

SB: The current governor?

AK: Yes. That trust funds weren’t the answer. So he virtually eliminated all of the trust funds. Not just for the arts, but for roads, or schools or hospitals, whatever. So as a result there wasn’t that dedicated money, so it was harder to get through the legislature to replace those dollars with new dollars.

SB: So basically each year, you’re, you’re in the same shoes.

AK: Each year is—

SB: Having to raise money.

AK: Yes, yes. And we still haven’t gotten back up to the 2002-2003 funding level.

SB: How much of your time is spent fundraising? What, what is—

AK: Very little.

SB: Oh, okay.

AK: We’re not a fundraising agency. We—

SB: What does your—
AK: We don’t want to compete with our constituents.

SB: Sure. What does your job consist of?

AK: I spend a lot of time putting people together. If someone calls over and [says], “I need this,” then I say, “Well, I know where you can find it.” I get them together. I spend a lot of time working on specific projects that are going to bring visibility to the arts council, or to the arts in general. I’m very much involved in non-arts things in this community. Jan Platt and I were the founders of the Ybor City Saturday Market.

SB: Oh my goodness!

AK: Because that’s just a, a love of mine. I love outdoor markets. I’ve been on the Ybor City Chamber of Commerce Board. I’ve worked with the Kaleidoscope Children’s Festival in South Tampa.

SB: What is that?

AK: It’s a festival in March of each year to expose children to cultural things. Everything from drum circles to painting and drawing, to—

SB: Is that Robert Rowen?

AK: Robert Rowen. He was the founder of that, yes. I do, it seems like a lot of advocacy work, but you never know if it’s enough. You know, it is a political—

SB: The arts desperately need that of course.

AK: It’s a political arena, and—

SB: Do you serve on boards? The arts boards?

AK: No, no. We fund those people. So it’d be a conflict of interest if—if I actually had a seat on the board.

SB: But I see you went to all the arts events, and you [are] obviously representing the arts council.

AK: Oh yes, oh yes.

SB: At these events.

AK: Yes. I don’t go to as many as I used to. After twenty-two years, I don’t have to. Because that’s what pays you!

[Laughter]
SB: Well, you do so much. I again refer back to that program. I was in awe in terms of the numbers of programs, the number of people you reach. Would, would you like to share that? Any of the numbers?

AK: Oh I don’t—you mean the artists in the schools?

SB: The numbers of children that you reach in the schools, the numbers of schools—

AK: I think it was—I don’t have that right at hand, but I think it was like 240,000 kids and parents.

SB: Incredible.

AK: Were somehow touched by our program. 85,000 kids took field trips. But I have to contribute all of that to the staff.

SB: Yes.

AK: They make that happen. I don’t.

SB: Well how large is the staff?

AK: Artists in the Schools staff is three people.

SB: OK.

AK: We have two in my office and one at the school board.

SB: And then the arts council itself?

AK: We have eight employees.

SB: OK.

AK: But we also run the Tampa Theatre downtown. So that’s another eight or nine employees.

SB: OK.

AK: We manage the theatre under contract with the City.

SB: I see, OK. And you have a board? You have a separate arts council board?
AK: Yes. 15 members, appointed by the County Commissioners. Then we have five ex-officios. And we meet once per month, every third Thursday. And it’s primarily a policy making board.

SB: Meaning what direction?

AK: What direction…?

SB: You will move?

AK: Yes. They make decisions on who gets the grants; they—we’re in the process right now of doing a community cultural plan for the next ten years. So they will be very—

SB: That’s quite ambitious.

AK: —Yes it is! And time consuming!

SB: Wow.

AK: But the board will be instrumental in getting that plan out into the community and getting people to endorse it. It’s a school board, it’s a volunteer board.

SB: Who, who is your chair?

AK: The Chair is Leslie Osterweih. And she will be chair through 2007.

SB: OK.

AK: And our Vice Chair is Jay Trezevant, a US Attorney. And the treasurer is Bobby Davis, who—who is—

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[End Tape 1, Side B]

SB: Let’s talk about individual artists that you’ve interacted with, [and] how the arts scene has changed in Tampa.

AK: Well, you know it’s, it’s an interesting place for individual artists. And you know, some say they stay here because of the light. And some say they stay here because they just love each other, you know? I think we have probably more performing artists in Hillsborough County and more visual artists in Pinellas County.

SB: That’s interesting.
AK: And there again, it may be the light, you know, I don’t know. But there was a time when Tampa—in my 22 years here, there was sort of a peak when artists were sort of at the top of Tampa’s list. Ybor City was thriving with artists—

SB: When would that have been?

AK: That would have been late eighties. I came in ’84, yes, about the late eighties

SB: OK.

AK: And there were regular art shows, street shows in Ybor City. There was a group of people who took over the, the whole cigar factory out there, they call themselves Titanic Anatomy. And—

SB: I’ve heard of them.

AK: There were probably 12 of them. And they moved into the, that warehouse, or factory—

SB: On 7th Street, or—

AK: No, it was like 2nd—2nd Avenue, and maybe 19th Street? Just a rundown old beat up cigar factory. But it was their studio. And they had wonderful parties and wonderful exhibitions. Most of them had just graduated from USF, and I thought one day, You know, this is purgatory for those people. They finish school, they’re looking for the next step. And it’s not here. All of those people, with the exception of two, are now gone. Elsewhere, not dead!

SB: Yes!

[Both laugh]

AK: They moved—no, they’ve moved on!

SB: Who are the two?

AK: Brian Taylor is still here. And he may be, as a matter of fact, he may be the only one. But others moved to New York, some moved to California, one to Ft. Lauderdale, all pursuing you know, a better career, [and] better jobs.

Recently I talked to one who is thinking about coming back here because California is very expensive. You know. He’s kind of made a niche for himself out there, but it is such a huge community, how do you ever—unless you’re, you know, number one—

SB: Right.
AK: —how do you rise up in that artistic community? And I think he sees, as he’s matured, opportunities for his personal involvement in his community. To be better in Tampa, than in Los Angeles. And so—

SB: That makes sense.

AK: You know, I hate to be trite, but you know, big fish in a small pond—

SB: Right.

AK: —You know, sometimes, [it] actually makes you feel better about yourself and your work. I wish that there was still that ongoing purgatory for artists. If it is, it hasn’t surfaced—it’s more underground than it used to be.

SB: Could you explain what you mean by that?

AK: That purgatory?

SB: Yeah.

AK: That was sort of the holding ground—

SB: OK.

AK: —you know, where you’re tested to see if you’re deserving of moving on to the better world.

SB: OK.

AK: [laughs]

SB: OK.

AK: I see a, you know, in our universities are turning out just incredible artists.

SB: That’s good to hear.

AK: We have the best dance school, probably south of the Mason-Dixon line. The best dance facility—

SB: That’s very good to hear.

AK: —for sure. There’s not one job for them—

SB: At the—at the university?
AK: —At USF. There’s not one job for them after they get out of school.

SB: OK. They need to go elsewhere then?

AK: They have to go elsewhere you know, unless they’re going to open a private teaching school or unless they’re going to do something that’s not on stage. We were just talking earlier about a former USF dance graduate, Andy Noble, who has been in California for several years now, [and] has done quite well out there. And [he] is coming back this fall to choreograph a piece for the fall dance concert.

SB: Why would he come back, because it’s home? Because he can be a—

AK: Oh, who doesn’t like to be celebrated?

SB: Well known?

AK: Yeah. Who doesn’t like to be celebrated in your hometown—

SB: OK. That’s terrific.

AK: It’s—I mean why would Patrick Wilson come back? You know, its home.

SB: Right.

AK: You know, he can be a star wherever he goes, but—

SB: At this point—

AK: —the hugs are better at home.

SB: Sure, absolutely. Well we’re lucky to have him come back.

AK: Yes.

SB: For sure.

AK: Yes. But I’m hoping—and perhaps through this cultural plan, we’ll be able to generate interest in the business community for opening up those spaces where artists can be free to create, to host shows. There’s a wonderful example in Miami, and for the life of me I can’t remember the exact name of the neighborhood. But it’s an old warehouse district that was pretty rough. And nobody went there, particularly after dark. And some artists moved in, and it—almost overnight, it became the design district. Trendy, little retail stores are in there, manufacturers have moved in there. There’s such synergy between the residents now that people are literally running from business to business [saying], How’d you do this and where did you get that?
SB: This is Miami?

AK: This is Miami.

SB: Is there an equivalent happening here?

AK: No, no.

SB: Channelside?

AK: Channelside is all residential.

SB: Ybor [City]?

AK: Ybor has a possibility, but I think Ybor is it’s own worst enemy. Economics is an ugly bedfellow.

SB: Fact of life.

AK: There are, and have been, some available buildings out there, and even some homes. But they’re priced out of the market so quickly, there’s no time for what would be, “homesteaders” to sort of move in and, and make it happen before—they can’t even afford to consider it, you know? There may well be, you know, a district in West Tampa or in Drew Park—

SB: Seminole Heights?

AK: —Seminole Heights is getting pretty trendy itself. So, if we’re going to look for this artist’s renaissance, like happened in SoHo, and downtown Louisville, Kentucky, it better happen fast. Because there’s going to be nothing left.

SB: What, what will keep art, artists here? And—and do you see your role as, you know, helping with that?

AK: Oh, I think everything we can do through giving them grants, to helping them find exhibitions, to helping them find work, to just promoting the fact that they exist—we’ve got several ideas with this plan to, to get—

SB: Terrific.

AK: —artists involved with making a living. And I—I guess, too many times when we talk about artists, we’re referring to visual artists. You know, painters or craftspeople—

SB: That’s very true.
AK: —but, you know, musicians—I don’t know how the musicians in the Florida Orchestra make a living.

[Both laugh]

SB: It’s very difficult!

AK: They’ve got to have second jobs—

SB: They do!

AK: —if they have a family, and—

SB: They do.

AK: —you know, two cars and all of that—

SB: Yes.

AK: And talk about a labor of love, I mean, they’re probably the most dedicated people in any community.

SB: And what would you say the quality is?

AK: Oh, it’s top notch.

SB: It is certainly top notch.

AK: It is top notch.

SB: It is.

AK: I’d like to see them do a little more pedestrian music perhaps for the younger audience.

SB: OK.

AK: Because you know, we’re all getting grayer—

SB: And the pops really don’t qualify.

AK: Vikki Carr is not pops.

[Both laugh]

AK: To me. I don’t know who is. You know the, the—
SB: I’ll, I’ll tell you what you missed then—the Pink Martini.

AK: OK.

SB: That was the youngest audience I’ve ever seen. The Florida Orchestra. All ages, but you know, it, it brought a totally different crowd, and they were phenomenal.

AK: Yes. And you got a little—

SB: So I think that might be what you’re talking about.

AK: Yes, and you got to give it back to them. You know, a Pink Martini once a year.

SB: Yes.

AK: To get these kids to come.

SB: Yes.

AK: I was in a meeting recently with a woman from Durham—no, Charlotte, North Carolina. And she’s the Director of Development for their arts council, which is quite large up there. And we were talking about the orchestra, and I said, “How do you get the younger crowd interested?” She said, “iPods.”

SB: There’s Seattle Orchestra—the Conductor there, has been very innovative. He is beginning to use this as a way to attract the younger audience. She’s absolutely right.

AK: She said, she said, “These kids communicate on their cell phones, their iPods, their—you know, whatever these little hand-held things are. And at four o’clock in the afternoon, somebody will say, wear purple, let’s meet at XYZ restaurant, and go to the orchestra.”

SB: That’s terrific.

AK: And 500 people get that—

SB: My gosh.

AK: —within two minutes.

SB: Incredible.

AK: And all of a sudden here, these purple people show up.

SB: Amazing, amazing.
AK: She said, “They don’t listen to the radio, they don’t read ads in the paper. They’re certainly not subscribers. But it takes one person to start the ball rolling.” —

SB: Sure. Now you, you—do you foresee the other arts areas having difficulty attracting younger people? I know Richard Florida was here, how many years ago? And he—

AK: About four, four or five.

SB: He inspired quite, quite a renaissance for the arts in, in Tampa. A lot of thinking, a lot of discussion.

AK: Well I think theatre companies like the one at the Performing Arts Center—help me with the name—

SB: The theatre—oh, phooey—I’m having problems—Jobsite!

AK: Jobsite, yes! David Jenkins.

SB: Yes, yes.

AK: They’re attracting a huge—

SB: Younger?

AK: —youthful audience.

SB: Terrific.

AK: Younger audience.

SB: That’s wonderful.

AK: Galleries like Covivant, which just closed unfortunately, we hope it’s a tentative close—they were attracting—

SB: OK.

AK: —a huge younger audience. There is the Gala Corina, which is the big art happening every November—

SB: I’m not familiar.

AK: And it takes place in, in an abandoned building somewhere that needs architectural help, because most of the organizers of Gala Corina are architects.
SB: This is a younger audience?

AK: It’s a younger audience. Thousands.

SB: It’s thousands?

AK: Gala Corina is open for about two weeks.

SB: And what is it?

AK: It’s an art exhibit.

SB: OK.

AK: And, for opening night there will be performances, but mostly it’s photography, painting—

SB: And—

AK: There’s an architecture component. I was a judge last year for the architecture element. And the winning entry, as a matter of fact was a floating Tampa Museum of Art, on the river, because no one knew where else to put it!

[Both laugh]

AK: But it was, it was a very, very good presentation of what a floating museum could be.

SB: Would we consider this a segue into perhaps talking about the museum?

AK: Sure, sure. But I would like to say that you know—

SB: Oh, OK!

AK: —regarding the younger artists—I think every discipline has probably an element that is going to attract these younger people. But I think we’re seeing more and more young people getting involved in the more technological side of the art.

SB: OK.

AK: Digital stuff—

SB: Sure.

AK: —you know, animation, game-making.
SB: Many orchestras are putting large screens in, you know, in back of the conductor so that the cameras can focus on the conductor or the musicians. They’re finding some success with that.

AK: Yes.

SB: That there’s evidence to support that comment, for sure.

AK: You know, right here in downtown Tampa, we have Tri-Dimensional Studios, which is an animation business. I think they’re working 24/7…

SB: Oh my Gosh.

AK: —to fulfill their contracts.

SB: Contracts that emanate from all over the country, or…?

AK: Yes, all over the country. A lot of their stuff is Christian cartoons. You know, the Christian message.

SB: How interesting.

AK: But they’re employing 25 or 30 young—

SB: Right here in downtown?

AK: Right in the heart of downtown.

—Young artists who are at their computer all day long, doing animated films. It’s, it’s incredible.

SB: That’s very interesting.

AK: We just got a report from Americans for the Arts that was done by Dun and Bradstreet. Hillsborough County, in 2005, ranked 6th in the country in the growth of creative industries; and ranked 4th in the country in the growth of creative industry employees.

SB: That’s incredible.

AK: It was very, very incredible. And what a nice thing to happen right when we’re doing this cultural planning—

SB: Oh, sure.

AK: —we’re saying to the community, we do have a vital and serious cultural and creative industry in this county. And we’ve got to support it. We’ve got to make sure
these people have jobs, got to make sure they have homes, they’ve got to have good schools for their kids, and transportation to get to and from work and wherever else they want to go.

SB: Yes.

AK: I mean, I think that’s the most critical issue in this community, is transportation—and the lack thereof.

SB: Yes. Our mayor has certainly addressed that and talked about it a lot.

AK: Someone, someone came up to me at the Ybor market a few weeks ago and they were staying at the Hilton Garden Inn, right there in Ybor City. And this was on a Saturday, and they said that on Friday night they wanted to go down to the Performing Arts Center to see whatever was showing there. They couldn’t get there. They didn’t decide to go until it was too late to call a cab. And there’s no other transportation.

SB: Oh no. Oh, that’s sad.

AK: Isn’t it?

SB: That is so sad. Obviously affecting the arts and activities—

AK: And affecting restaurants and you know—

SB: —and everyone else.

AK: —It’s—

SB: That’s—that’s a shame.

AK: It’s the social capital that we’re losing in this community.

SB: Would you not feel that as there are condos being occupied downtown of necessity, there will be transportation issues addressed?

AK: There has to be, there has to be. I mean, I drive through Channelside now and I see what appears to be, you know, hundreds of condos going up. And I’m assuming each of them will have two cars. I don’t see one new street—one, except Meridian. But how are—how are all these cars going to drive on the current streets we have, if that’s the only transportation they have to get to the Performing Arts Center or to the Tampa Museum or to, you know, Plant Museum? There’s got to be some kind of circulator transportation to move people around. We’re find more and more—

SB: That’s, that’s definitely true.
AK: —people say, I get home from work, and I stay home—it’s not worth going back out.

SB: We can’t have that.

AK: You know, because it’s just that—

SB: It’s a shame.

AK: —the sprawl and the growth and the congestion. You know, but if you could get on a little train—

SB: Sure.

AK: —and get off downtown, and get on the little bus and go to the Performing Arts Center and back home on the train, your quality of life would be a whole lot better.

SB: It’d be better. And certainly would affect the arts, dramatically, I would think. Would you comment about the individual venues for the arts that have made a difference to the quality of life in Tampa?

AK: Oh, I think there’s no question the Performing Arts Center is, has just been a phenomenal, phenomenal thing. I remember when it was just a hole in the ground over there. And they put the Christmas tree on top—you know, to top it off—

SB: [Laugh]

AK: And it, too, had it’s purgatory there for a while—

SB: Sure.

AK: —you know, but then it caught on. And Judi [Lisi] has done an incredible job.

SB: She has.

AK: And [so has] the rest of the staff.

I’m very encouraged that Stageworks is finally getting a home in Channelside. They’ve been an itinerant theatre in their own home town for probably 25 years. I’m excited about a new Tampa museum, if and when that happens. I know there’s a lot of, lot of discomfort about locations, locations, locations. The city and community seems to be split over what’s the best place for it. I would like to see more attention given to what’s going to be in the museum than what it’s going to look like or where it is. You could have the most precious building in the world that was on the cover of every architecture magazine in the world, and if you didn’t have anything in it, nobody’s going to go.
SB: A second time.

AK: Right, a second time.

SB: Yep.

AK: You could have a Butler building, and if you’ve got a Picasso showing there, people are going to go. You know, now those are the two extremes.

SB: Yes.

AK: But there needs to be some happy medium about the program being the first priority. I mean just recently there was a column in the Tampa Tribune by Daniel Ruth. And he had gone, I guess on a Saturday or Sunday to the Tampa Museum. He said, “I was out of there in 20 minutes.” And you know, I—for someone who—who is so widely read—I won’t say respected, but widely read—you know, we don’t need that kind of comment. There’s some great stuff in the collection of the Tampa Museum. And I know the passion is there, among members of the board, and the community, to make a great museum. I just hate to see anything stand in the way of that happening. And I think at some point there needs to be a divorce between the museum and the city. Because it’s just—you know, you can’t work for two masters.

SB: It’s hard.

AK: It’s very hard. And the museum has struggled. I think—well it’s only 25 years old. You know and that something else about this community. I think sometimes we’re too hard on ourselves. The University [of South Florida] is 50 years old. The orchestra is probably less than that, as—in it’s current—

SB: Yes.

AK: —configuration. The museum’s 25 years old. There’s probably not a grandparent in this town whose parents took them to a cultural event in Tampa. Because there were none.

SB: That’s a shocking thing to think about.

AK: I mean does that make sense? If you, you know?

SB: It’s true. Yes, it does, actually.

AK: I was driving through my little hometown in Tennessee a few years after I moved here. And I was at this traffic light, and I looked on the corner, and here was the sign for the local college, Established 1798. And all of a sudden it sort of came together. You know?
SB: That is interesting.

AK: I went to the 200th Anniversary of the Theatre Department at the University of Tennessee.

SB: Oh my gosh. So, we’re young?

AK: We’re young, we’re young.

SB: That relates back to your comment about our expectations being so high.

AK: Well I—you know, I think we ought to expect an aim toward the best. But it’s the legacy that isn’t here among our older wealthier, influential families. You know? If, if—

SB: You have—you—

AK: —Grandma had been a member of the symphony board—

SB: There’s a legacy.

AK: —and her mother had been a member of—

SB: Sure.

AK: —the symphony board, or a member of the Tampa Museum, and they left their collection to the Tampa Museum, those—you know, it’s not here.

SB: Yes.

AK: Now someday it will be, you know.

SB: Yes.

AK: But it—

SB: Are you, are you in favor of building the museum in parts to accommodate the growth?

AK: Sure. I just want a museum.

[Both laugh]

SB: OK.

AK: I mean, you know, it’s been—seems like several years, and I was in the museum just the other day, and there was water dripping onto the carpet from a leak in the ceiling.
You know of course they’re not going to fix the ceiling seriously, and then tear down the building.

SB: Right.

AK: So, something has to be done. Every time there’s a threat of a storm, I think of the museum’s collection being in the basement, right on the river.

SB: Scary thought.

AK: You know, it’s a very scary thought.

SB: Scary. Would you like to comment on the growth of art or the status of art in Pinellas County? How does it relate to Hillsborough County? What is the relationship—is there a relationship?

AK: I think there’s a—there’s an element of both counties that think nothing of driving across the bridge. You know, I know people who go to Ruth Eckerd Hall a lot. I know people who go to Tarpon Springs a lot, particularly to the Leepa-Rattner Museum, the new museum up there.

I think St. Petersburg—number one because of its marketing program, has sold us on that they are the city of the arts. And it’s happened in spite of the city. It’s almost back to those mavericks and those homesteaders on Central Avenue. They moved into those old burned out buildings, and opened something and got away with it. There wasn’t a code enforcement guy there to shut the door, until, you know, the thing caught on.

There’s some great stuff happening in downtown St. Pete. But I think the—well, let’s take the Florida Orchestra, who is another touring arts organization in it’s own hometown—three venues per concert. That’s unheard of around the country. And it would probably put a lot of orchestras out of business because of the cost of doing that. I think their biggest support comes from St. Petersburg. And their—their biggest financial support. Their biggest audience is probably in Clearwater. I’m not sure.

SB: Maybe.

AK: Is it also in St. Petersburg?

SB: It is.

AK: OK, OK. I’d hate to see the day when economics dictates that all of us in Tampa drive to St. Petersburg to see the Florida Orchestra, but for the sake of the orchestra, that may be the answer. You know, I mean I’d rather—

SB: It’s complicated.

AK: —I’d rather do that than lose them.
SB: I’m glad to hear that.

AK: You know? I know they’ve always had a problem getting dates at the Performing Arts Center. In retrospect, possibly there should have been another hall built. They had a chance to, to partner with Blake High School and have an auditorium there that would be sufficient for them. But you know, for whatever reason that didn’t—that didn’t work.

SB: I think it was too small.

AK: Yeah.

SB: But it, it is interesting to see art being developed—inspired—in the different communities. And one does seem to bear on the other, unless I’m seeing that incorrectly. Do you, do you attend meetings in Pinellas? Do you interact in any way?

SB: Oh yes, yes.

AK: Judith Powers Jones who is Director of the Arts Council in Pinellas County and I have worked together for the last 15 years, closely. And we have tried, so far in vain, but we’re not giving up, to establish some kind of Tampa Bay Regional Arts Consortium.

SB: That’s terrific.

AK: And we’ve met with the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council on numerous times to try to develop programs that would serve the whole Bay Area. I mean, we’re publishing a calendar for Hillsborough County. Judith is publishing a calendar for Pinellas County. We have a website. They have a website. We’re 20 minutes away. You know? It’s like Minneapolis and St. Paul. I don’t think there’s the same separation of, of interest in that city as there is here, just because of the length of the bridge. And so, I think if anything’s going to bring the two counties together, it might be the arts, culture and history. Because it’s something that’s safe for everyone but adds to the quality of life of both counties.

SB: That’s a powerful statement. Would you consider that part of your legacy? I—

AK: Regionalism?

SB: —I always like to ask, what would you like your legacy to be, when it’s all said and done?

AK: You know to be honest, I think it would be something more like, “He got the art off the stage and into the streets.”

SB: Oh, I love it! That’s a great, great, statement.
AK: I’ve always thought artists get a—of any discipline, get a short shrift because of what they do. People are either in awe of them or scared of them. And as long as you’re only seeing them in their tuxedo with their violin under their chin, or in make-up in a costume in a play, or behind the tent in an art show, you’re never going to realize—that could easily be your neighbor, who you have beer and hot dogs with on Saturday afternoon. There’s nothing unusual about that person. And I’ve encouraged artists to get involved in their neighborhoods and in their community, and encouraged organizations to—however they can—break that barrier.

[End Tape 1, Side B]
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[Tape 2, Side A]

SB: You were talking about how you’d like to see people in blue jeans go to the orchestra. Would you like to elaborate?

AK: Well I, I just like to see people go to arts events in whatever, however they feel comfortable. If you want to wear a costume and come to my play, that’s fine. I think with, you know, today’s changing values and today’s changing world, people don’t have the same—that do I want to say—they don’t have the same fear of fitting in, perhaps, that they used to.

SB: OK.

AK: So if it’s a, a new ticket buyer, and a new potential subscriber, I think you should be more than welcome.

SB: I agree.

AK: We were talking about how you lure the younger audience; I remember a story, Ron Jones, who is Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts at USF told. They used to have this noon-time art thing. You know, you could see a little exhibit, you might see a dance, or you might see a little piece of theatre. It’s for an hour. And it was like every first Wednesday or something like that. They would have—

SB: This was in the college?

AK: Yes.

SB: On, on campus?

AK: On campus, on campus.

And they’d have ten people come, twenty people come—so he got the idea, and one day, put up a big sign that said, “Free Pizza!”

SB: [Laughs]
AK: They got pizza donated by all of the pizza companies—

SB: Sure.

AK: —around the university. They had over 100 kids.

SB: That’s great.

AK: So it became sort of our mantra. That if you want to get audiences, new audiences, and you want to appeal to young people, “free pizza.”

SB: OK—interesting.

AK: And, and I’m wondering how that would happen, let’s say at a Florida Orchestra concert, if it said, “Free pizza if you’re under 40”—

SB: That’s an interesting [inaudible].

AK: —or, “Free pizza if you’re under 30.”

SB: Of course the parks concerts.

AK: Yes. They’re packed.

SB: The food isn’t free, but they, they are. They’re pretty packed.

AK: I love going to those concerts.

SB: But they’re free, and I believe that’s the key.

AK: I don’t think people will mind paying for a ticket. There’s got to be one more little lure.

SB: OK.

AK: So—

SB: Something—

AK: During our planning process, we had a town hall meeting at Tampa Preparatory School. And the announcement for that meeting said, “free pizza and chocolate.” But you get it after you’ve sat through the planning session. We had over 100 people.

SB: Oh my gosh.
AK: And they all stayed for free pizza and chocolate. But I just keep thinking of Ron’s story, and how—and we’ve talked about it in many meetings. The Tampa Museum, or this first Friday, third Thursday event they have—you know, they had talked about free pizza. And then we talked about, Wouldn’t that be a great name for an arts open house night?—

SB: That’s an interesting idea.

AK: And you went from the museum to the Performing Arts Center—

SB: Sure.

AK: —to Clayton Gallery, to the Plant Museum. “Free pizza.”

SB: Would you talk about the Tampa Theatre? We didn’t really—

AK: Oh sure.

SB: —touch on that, and you—

AK: The second most important structure in the City of Tampa.

SB: It’s a beautiful structure.

AK: The first being the Henry B. Plant Hotel.

SB: OK.

AK: Tampa Theatre is celebrating its 80th birthday this year.

SB: Wow.

AK: 1926, [the] first air conditioned building in the State of Florida. It’s a beautiful, beautiful facility. This community needs to own that building, which they don’t. We’re working on that right now.

SB: Who owns it?

AK: It’s owned by several people. The—

SB: Privately owned?

AK: Yes. There’s a partnership of about eight different people who own the office tower above the theatre, which means they own the ground that the lobby sits on. And then there were two different families that owned the land under the auditorium. Well this past year, we were able to buy half of the land under the auditorium.
SB: We being the Arts Council?

AK: Tampa Theatre Foundation.

SB: OK.

AK: People think the City of Tampa owns the building. They own the contents.

SB: OK.

AK: [Laughs]

SB: Interesting.

AK: They own the seats—

SB: I see.

AK: —they own the projector—but if you don’t own the land on which your house sits, you don’t own your house.

SB: Right.

AK: You’re just renting.

SB: And it’s non-profit?

AK: Oh yeah, Tampa Theatre is [a] non-profit. There are you know, some great futures for the Tampa Theatre, and we desperately need another screening room. We have lost so many good films because we can’t move one to the other screening room and put the new one in.

SB: Typically they show old movies. What, what [else]?

AK: Well they show classic movies.

SB: Classic. Foreign films?

AK: They show foreign films, and we show first run films when we can get them. And I’ll give you an example. We have 1400 seats. Most of the new multiplexes have 100-125 seats. Now a distributor in Hollywood who wants to get a whole lot of money the first week for his film looks at the number of seats that people can see his movie. Tampa Theatre starts to rise right up on his chart.

When *Brokeback Mountain* came out, they called the Tampa Theatre and said, We want to open; we’ll give you an exclusive for two weeks.
SB: Oh my.

AK: So for two weeks, we had a line around the theatre. We sold out. That’s 1400 seats—that’s 1400 paying subscribers. We showed that film to more people in those two weeks than any theatre in America.

SB: My gosh.

AK: Because of the size.

SB: Yes. Wow.

AK: You know so many big halls don’t show movies anymore. You know, they’ve become performing arts halls—

SB: I’m just curious how had they heard about Tampa Theatre?

AK: Because we’re good to them.

SB: OK.

AK: We’ve rented lots of movies from them. But it was—and it was not Brokeback Mountain, but another film we had, and I can’t remember the name—we had a contract for two weeks. No, we had a contract for two weeks for March of the Penguins.

SB: That’s a good film.

AK: Then we had a movie similar to Brokeback Mountain that we could have moved in, but we couldn’t move March of the Penguins out, so we lost the second film.

SB: That’s a shame.

AK: So if we had a second screening room of 200 seats, we could keep that film longer. And still bring in a new product.

SB: Who designed the interior? It’s just so beautiful.

AK: John Eberson. John designed Tampa Theatre, the Gusman Theater in Miami, a theatre in Pensacola. He was kind of known as the “atmospheric theater architect artist” of the twenties.

SB: And is the organ still played?

AK: Oh yes, yes.
SB: Is that before—or when is it played?

AK: Before every film. Rises up out of the floor.

SB: And who plays that, is that—

AK: Members of the Central Florida Theatre Organ Society, CFSTOS. They have been working on the organ and the pipe system there since before I came here.

SB: That’s extraordinary.

AK: And every week they come in and they tweak something. And you know they may get a new whistle to go in, or they may find a new chord because it’s constantly repaired.

SB: Have the acoustics been tweaked in, in the facility?

AK: Only by the sound system itself. We put in new speakers a few years ago so we have Dolby Sound now. But we can’t do anything with the interior—

SB: Structurally.

AK: —structurally. I mean, if we hung up a bunch of drapes it would certainly affect the acoustics, but then you’re not going to see all of the wonderful [inaudible], and the doves, and the flowers—

SB: It’s very special.

AK: It is a special place.

    In February or March of next year, we will have an 80th Anniversary Gala.

SB: Wonderful.

AK: And the people who are planning this are asking everyone who comes to tell their Tampa Theatre story. A lot of first kisses happened at the Tampa Theatre!

SB: Oh my gosh! Any weddings?

AK: Oh yeah, we still have weddings.

SB: Do you really?

AK: Yes.

SB: Do you rent it out—

AK: Yes.
SB: —the facility?

AK: Yeah, yeah. We have quite a few weddings every year. You know Richard Giunta?

SB: Yes, sure.

AK: He used to be an usher at the Tampa Theatre.

SB: Oh my goodness.

AK: Or, worked at the concession stand, his first job.

SB: Extraordinary!

AK: Yeah, you know it, we always laugh and say—

SB: Oh, I hope he’ll be there!

AK: —you know, Kash n’ Karry started at the Tampa Theatre!

[Both laugh]

SB: Gosh, there’s a lot of history, lot of history.

AK: Yeah, yeah.

SB: Lot of history.

AK: It’s a beautiful place.

SB: And it’s certainly part of the cultural scene.

AK: It is.

SB: I can see why you’re involved.

AK: It’s such a—fragile building. As old as it is—

SB: It needs to be preserved.

AK: —Just two weeks ago, a pipe burst on the fourth floor of the office building, on like a Sunday morning. So it ran all day and all night until people came in, you know. Well the water started running down, inside the walls, completely flooded the flower shop next door to the theatre. And we had water dripping out of the light fixtures in the mezzanine.
SB: Oh no.

AK: And running down the, the mirrors in the Grand Hallway. So we don’t know, and won’t know for several months what kind of interior damage may be had [been] done to the plaster.

SB: Such a shame.

AK: And it will, if there is any damage, it will work its way through the plaster until it just pops off, so—

SB: Oh my. And this happened when?

AK: About two weeks ago.

SB: Two weeks ago, what a shame.

AK: Yeah.

SB: That can be costly.

AK: Well, all the more reason that we need to stabilize that building.

SB: Sure.

AK: Because it’s such a treasure for Tampa.

SB: Oh, incredibly so. I can’t think of another building that has that—well, as you said, the Plant of course. And I’m forgetting the year for Plant—

AK: 1888. Something like that.

SB: These are two treasures for sure.

AK: But Plant Hall, and I don’t mean any disrespect, has had a lot of preservation attention—

SB: Sure.

AK: —for a long time.

SB: Oh absolutely, definitely.

AK: You know, we’ve only had the Tampa Theatre since 1976. So—
SB: There’s a strong effort to fundraise for the preservation, is there not?

AK: Yes, and more to come.

SB: Would you—would you like to focus on any other area [or] art in terms of—again, I repeat, you have made such an incredible impact on the cultural scene in Tampa.

AK: Well thank you, it’s made a big impact on me, that’s for sure!

[Both laugh]

AK: I don’t know that there’s more I can say that I haven’t already said, I mean you kind of drained my brain!

SB: Oh, OK! Well I can’t thank you enough, you—

AK: Thank you so much.

SB: You’ve made a difference in the lives of children, and certainly in the lives of artists. And for that we thank you.

AK: That’s—that would be a nice legacy right there.

SB: Sure would.

AK: “You made a difference in the lives of artists.” You know, or just made a difference in someone’s life.

SB: Yes of course.

AK: The legacy that I’ve sort of written into my own personal memorial service, is one that I learned many years ago when I was reading Mother Jones Magazine. She was a labor organizer of coal mines in Kentucky. And her philosophy of life was, “Bloom where you are planted, no matter where you are.”

SB: That’s just beautiful.

AK: You know, and I thought, Well that means something to me.

SB: That’s just great.

AK: Since I have moved around from job to job and did this and did that.

SB: Sure.

AK: And I thought, well that’s—that’s good. Bloom wherever you’re planted.
SB: Well you’ve bloomed!

[Both laugh]

SB: And we thank you for that.

AK: Oh, thank you.

SB: Take care and again, many thanks.

AK: Well thank you Suzette.

[End of Interview]