Oral history interview with Anne Eder, November 11, 2011

Eder, Anne
Photographer, printmaker, designer, and sculptor


Format of recording: Originally recorded as digital wav file. Duration is 63 min.

Collection Summary: An interview of Anne Eder conducted November 11, 2011 by Caitlin Davis for the Helen Farr Sloan Library and Archives of the Delaware Art Museum.

This interview was conducted for Dream Streets: Art in Wilmington 1970–1990, an exhibition held at the Delaware Art Museum June 27–September 27, 2015 on the contemporary art scene in Wilmington in the 1970s and 1980s.

Funding for the transcription of this interview was provided by a grant from the Delaware Humanities Forum.

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CAITLIN: Caitlin Davis interviewing Anne—is it Eder or Eder?

ANNE: Eder.

CAITLIN: Eder, good. So, I guess the first question is you were—before xerography, your main background’s photography, how did you get into that?

ANNE: Into photography?

CAITLIN: Yeah. Did you go to school for it or?

ANNE: Well, eight years old I got my first Brownie and from then I pretty much did always have a camera in front of my face.

CAITLIN: Nice.

ANNE: In explaining my resumé, my training, I was school-of-hard-knocks and hands-on because I did not go to school for it. I apprenticed with an AP photographer for a while, I worked in professional labs; I ended up printing for other photographers, you know, it was more of a hands-on training although I’ve been teaching photography for the last 12 years I guess in high school, but I decided I want to be able to teach at college level, so I just actually went back to complete my undergrad, which I never found the time to finish, so I’m about six weeks away from finally having my degree.
CAITLIN: Congrats. Where do you—

ANNE: Goddard College in Vermont and it has been a really interesting crossover of things happening in the past year with training and going back to school. I’ve been working with really old sorts of process, I’ve been doing daguerreotypes, tin types, really old stuff—but I’m also hybriding that with iPhone app and digital transparency negatives and all kinds of stuff, so it’s been really kind of—lots of old coming up and somehow mashing with new; it’s been really great.

CAITLIN: Where are you originally from? Are you from Pennsylvania or—

ANNE: Wilmington, Delaware. So yeah, I’ve lived in Pennsylvania for about the last 15 years so.

CAITLIN: Okay, where did you go to high school?

ANNE: St. Mark’s.

CAITLIN: Okay. I just graduated from Delaware so—

ANNE: Well, I went to NYU and then I ended up dropping out because I was actually already showing and working, and I got busy and then I also had early kids, that kind of really sidetracked—I was a single parent for like the whole time I was doing all of this—

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

ANNE: But—and I kept going back to school, I went to U of D for a while; I took courses for about 12 years before I finally gave up and then finally went back recently.

CAITLIN: Were you going to major in photography or—at the time or—

ANNE: Yeah, I was looking to get a BFA. You know, right now my actual major is alternative process and historic process photography with like a minor in ethics and aesthetics so—and I’m going straight to grad school because I just want to get the whole thing done.

CAITLIN: Oh, yeah. That’s exciting. You mentioned that Tom Watkins was the reason you came into the Wilmington art scene, could you talk a little more about that?

ANNE: I had been away from Wilmington for a while, I was touring with a band and then when I got back I was looking for what was interesting to get into and Tom was pretty much it, you know. I mean he had a place on Fifth Street at that point where he basically had a comic book shop and then a space over top of it, but he was really involved with trying to get the art scene going on and all kinds of things. Organizing shows, mounting shows—he and I just sort of immediately clicked and teamed up and—

CAITLIN: How did you meet him?
ANNE: I think I just walked into his place. It was like I need to meet you, you know? And it just—we were friends for years after that so.

CAITLIN: Could you describe the comic shop at all? Do you remember?

ANNE: Tom’s place always looked amazing, okay—because Tom, you have to say, was about six-foot-six so everything that he built was to his scale, so anytime I would be there I kinda felt like *Alice in Wonderland* because I could never—like my feet never reached the floor in the chair. I couldn’t reach the shelf to pick out anything so that’s how I would best describe it. And he would always give it his touch of hand painting things and yeah.

CAITLIN: That’s funny.

ANNE: He had a costume shop over top for a while so.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

ANNE: And then after the Fifth Street place he moved over to Seventh and we did a lot of shows out of there. It was completely illegal and you had to cross over like a—the steps were bad and we sort of built stuff to go over, but we had lots of shows up there.

CAITLIN: What did you—?

ANNE: The *Fine Times* portrait of me actually.

CAITLIN: Oh, really?

ANNE: We took a lot of pictures of each other. I have pictures I did of Tom, he—there’s pictures that I have that he did of me.

CAITLIN: That’s great.

ANNE: That’s—

CAITLIN: What—describe the place on Seventh?

ANNE: Seventh was similar to Fifth, it was like a downstairs comic shop area and then you went upstairs and Tom had—well, totally illegal living space in the back because it was commercial.

CAITLIN: You didn’t live there.

ANNE: I didn’t live there. And then we had a big open space where we would stage shows, music or—there was such an interesting core of artists in Wilmington at that point. We had scratch board people, potters, jewelry makers, everybody kinda knew each other; we’d all meet at what used to be Oscar’s for quarter taco night because we were all starving artists. And there was a lot of crossover, a lot of collaborating, a lot of promoting each other’s work so—yeah, that
space was pretty rough but we had a lot of good shows there. That picture was taken there, I know.

CAITLIN: Did you call it anything, did it have a name?

ANNE: Gallery X, that was—that was Tom’s name for most of the things. We eventually rented a space in Philly and had a gallery on Fourth Street between South and Bainbridge for a while.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: And that was also Gallery X.

CAITLIN: Do you remember any shows in particular that were at X?

ANNE: I have pictures I think, let me see if I can find some—if you want to turn off your tape while I hunt for things. I tried—

[Break in Audio]

ANNE: I think I should have a picture—my favorite picture of Tom. I know I have it on [inaudible]. Yeah, that’s my favorite photo of Tom.

CAITLIN: Ah, that’s great. He is tall.

ANNE: He was tall and he always kind of looked 40-something. Always. And dressed kind of like that, like you looked at him and like, “When is that from?” Waistcoat, pocket watch kind of thing, so yeah.

CAITLIN: I guess how would you describe his personality if you could, beside anger management problems?

ANNE: You know, probably—he—oh boy. He was a very complex person. On the one hand, he was completely obnoxious. He was the one that would drag me out. We got a show in New York because he dragged me up there to show our portfolios. I would have been too shy. But he had no problem with walking in and being like, “You need to look at my stuff because it’s awesome.”

CAITLIN: Uh huh. Where was the show at?

ANNE: A gallery. It was called Neither/Nor and it was on the lower east side basically when that was just starting to get going with galleries.

CAITLIN: And Tom just brought you up?

ANNE: Yeah. We came up, we showed our proposal, we got a show. It was that easy. I don’t think you could do that now. It was different, you know? Now people want to know where you
got your degree and where’s your master’s from? Is it Yale? So it was just different. You could actually do that at that point.

Tom was—like I said, his energy was manic, you know what I mean? He was always super charged. He would cross the line. He—he definitely crossed the line with me on many occasions. He actually locked me in the studio one time and wouldn’t let me go home.

CAITLIN: Nice.

ANNE: He did not really—like I would—we were never involved romantically, although that’s what he wanted and I did not, so it was a little crazy. He actually tied a dead bird on a guy’s motorcycle I was dating and threatened somebody with a gun.

CAITLIN: Oh my gosh.

ANNE: Yeah, he was—he was pretty much like cartoonishly large in every way.

CAITLIN: I like that. Cartoonishly large.

ANNE: But he knew what he was doing. His artwork was original. It’s not—it’s not going to see somebody else’s work that looks like his typically. He sort of force fed copiers and then I was glad he did because I really enjoyed working with them. He would—his epilepsy would flare up if he got too tired. His sort of manic depressive thing would flare up and he—he always held it together, you know what I mean? That’s why I—I—I could see it getting worse as he got older. I’m not sure that he’s still holding it together.

CAITLIN: Uh huh.

ANNE: Yeah.

CAITLIN: Why would you consider him a driving force in the [inaudible] scene?

ANNE: I think because he had that power to just hound people until they did what he wanted. He would be the one to go in and be like, “You want us to do a show here.”

Or he would—he would really get other artists like me, who were maybe too shy to promote themselves or not as good at that sort of thing and kind of get you going. He would pull people together. He—he really kind of was the center of it. We had amazing artists. We had Karl Richeson, who now does mostly commercial photography, but at the time he was doing crazy scratchboard and three dimensional work.

CAITLIN: I’ve been emailing him a little back and forth. He doesn’t—he doesn’t—

ANNE: Well he probably will not anymore respond to Horrible Karl, which is what he used to sign his pieces. He always did.
CAITLIN: He hasn’t been like really giving me that much information, but I’ve heard from many people that he was in the scene, so [inaudible].

ANNE: Very much in the scene and at one point I was showing his stuff at my little gallery on 14th Street that I had for a while and I—I put the promo out and he’s like, “Hey, you can’t call me Horrible Karl anymore. I have commercial customers who will not like it.”

So but the thing is I think that—I’ll email him. I’ll tell him to talk to you.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: He and I are still in contact and I think if I gave him a nudge—

CAITLIN: A little nudge.

ANNE: He would be more cooperative. Jane Platz is also a scratchboard artist. I know she’s still in the area.

CAITLIN: Do you know—P L A T T?

ANNE: P L A T Z

CAITLIN: T Z, oh Platz.

ANNE: Or she may have gone back to her maiden name. I heard she separated. Quartarone.

CAITLIN: Oh, yeah. I met Jane Quartarone.

ANNE: Okay, yeah. She was involved a little bit later. She wasn’t with us early on, but she was involved when we were doing gallery acts in Philly. We were showing her work up there and she was doing some gallery hours because it was a cooperative.

There were a lot of original artists, jewelry makers. I expect she’s [Olga Ganoudis] still around. She had a gallery or workspace over near Scott Street, I think. Charles Nalle, potter, [inaudible] slip cast pottery. We did a lot of things at his place. He used to own a huge building at the corner of Orange Street and Front and that was—it was like a warehouse and that was where he did his slip cast and we would have shows there, too and performances and things like that. He’s now in Florida, but I think I have his contact information.

CAITLIN: [Inaudible].

ANNE: And you can find him, if you look up Charles Nalle ceramics.

CAITLIN: He’ll have like a website?

ANNE: Yeah, he’s—he’s findable. There were numerous jewelry makers. I think Mark Tomlinson. He was doing a lot in titanium.
CAITLIN: Yeah, he gave me some great images. I talked to him.

ANNE: He was—he was sweet. He did a lot of really nice work. Kenny Perry, painter. I think I have show flyers here with me. I don’t know where they ended up because I was working too fast and things were getting lost.

CAITLIN: I interviewed John Gatti a few weeks ago.

ANNE: From the Delaware Art—actually he—he really was very helpful to all of us. Tom and I both got grants from the state. Both did shows in the city county building and the state building. He was—he was very much interested in talking to the artists who weren’t necessarily mainstream.

Yeah, I think I named most of the biggies. I have various show flyers on here and some of it’s for music and some of it’s for artwork. Yeah Platz, Richardson, Perry, Nalle, that’s pretty much most of the core people.

CAITLIN: Could you explain, I guess, what—generally what xerography is if you had to—?

ANNE: xerography, using copier machines basically to make artwork. You have to remember this was really new.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: Color copiers were brand new and it was a big deal because they were worried people would make counterfeit money on them, so there were no black toners. You had to make your black by mixing everything else together. We were really lucky because a lot of the people that had these—I mean, there weren’t very many in the beginning. We used to drive to Philly and use one that this one techy was willing to let us come in and do—do what we did and play with it. Because he wanted to know what the machine could do, so we were kind of pushing the envelope to see what they could do.

It was like we played a lot with what happened with the color balances and different functions. Putting different kinds of paper through, because we wanted it to be archival. That was usually where we ran into most problems, was trying to put heavy papers through it. and also just exploring the medium ourselves to see what it would do.

It was—it was really—it’s hard to imagine it being new and it’s so funny is when you called me, I had—I almost discredited all of my previous work as being so dated now. I look at xerography and I’m like, “It looks so dated.”

But any more dated than the daguerreotype? Do you know what I mean? After you emailed me, I’m like—sometimes you can’t see the forest for the trees. It’s like underexplored medium. The daguerreotypes got used for like ten years. Same with xerography, really was only used for 10, 15 years and then Photoshop came along and nobody needed it. You got your number here? We had to make our own typeset using stats. There was no easy text font. This was all—we would
make transparency overlays and do collage work on the copier, too. Three dimensional objects combined with printed objects. That kind of thing.

CAITLIN: How did you originally get involved with it?

ANNE: With xerography?

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: That was definitely Tom because he kind of dragged me into that screaming and kicking because I was just doing photography. Basically I ended up doing mixed media more. It was all based on photography, but then manipulated in various ways using copiers and then ending up on all kinds of things from fabric to paper.

CAITLIN: Would you primarily use black and white or did you use color?

ANNE: I shot exclusively black and white and then hand-colored. But at the time we—there was almost like an Andy Warhol-esque influence to it because it had all the bright color and you could do multiples like—like stuff like that where you would do multiple images in various colors. So it was—it was pretty bright. The—when we—it was interesting for me getting away from black and white photography and really getting into color for a while.

I have images on here. This is another [inaudible].

CAITLIN: What subjects would you primarily focus on?

ANNE: My stuff really ran the gambit. I had a series of things where I was doing strong woman in history. I did Joan of Arc. I did Cleopatra. And then just—I don’t know. People would be like, “Where did you get that idea?”

I’m like, “I don’t know.”

It’s things that would just come to me, you know what I mean? The Joan of Arc stuff—these are terrible scans, so I apologize. But it was a triptych work where it was photographically based and it was actually three dimensional objects, fabric and what have you and there were like three different triptych works that and then—and then that’s on fabric. That’s—

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: Work. And it was all heat transfer onto fabric, but that’s the one I brought with me. Actually this one.

CAITLIN: Oh, great.

ANNE: That’s another—it—it was a collage of photography and three dimensional objects placed on the copier.
CAITLIN: Did you find yourself doing more work on fabric than on paper?

ANNE: It was on both. I think—I think 50/50. And I was always still doing darkroom.

CAITLIN: Okay, so you didn’t stop photography?

ANNE: No, no. I always used it as a base.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: What happened after xerography kind of petered out is that I got—like I said, it almost felt like it was sort of discredited as a medium and then I got really sort of obsessed with making the best silver gelatin prints I could and being very traditional in the dark room and now I’ve sorted of moved back to hybridizing again.

CAITLIN: Was it basically just—did Tom teach you or was it like a hit or miss process or—?

ANNE: The xerography?

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: Well, he would tell me what he knew and then it was like we were both discovering because it was new. There was one in the DuPont Building that the techy used to sneak us in so we could use it. It was really—I know it’s hard to imagine that being cutting edge technology, but it’s—it’s—what’s interesting is that Xerox was a really innovative company. And basically Xerox operating systems were what Steve Jobs based all his stuff on to do Apple. They did it first. Xerox was the first one to come up with the interface that he ended up taking the idea from for the Apple interface. So they were—they were a pretty interesting company.

CAITLIN: Were you part of the International Society of Copier Artists?

ANNE: No and I don’t think Tom ever really was involved with it either.

CAITLIN: What type of copiers did you use? Did you primarily use the Xerox or I know there was also Cannon—?

ANNE: Cannon laser ended up being the one we did most of the work on. And it was for a long time there was no black toner. Eventually they did add black toner to it, but Wilmington Blueprint, which was on Tatnall, they had one of the early ones and they used to let us work on theirs. I don’t know if Metro Color is still down here, but those two guys were awesome. They would let us come in and spend hours in the back playing with copiers. And let our kids play on the floor while I was working.

CAITLIN: And they were called Metro Color?

ANNE: Yeah. Despite the fact that we would routinely jam up the machines with heavy paper. They were great.
CAITLIN: Could you tell over time that the quality of the inks or the copiers were getting better?

ANNE: Sure. Just like any medium, you get conversant with it and it’s more controllable. The interesting thing about xerography—and this was really, I think, really unique to that Cannon copier was the way it would kind of melt colors into the paper. It doesn’t look like a color print now.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: It actually would almost sort of bleed into the paper a little bit and sort of—you had this like high saturation and softening a little bit, so I actually ended up really loving what it did to photographs and playing with it because it just was a whole different look.

CAITLIN: Uh huh.

ANNE: Yeah, it’s not a photograph. It’s its own thing.

CAITLIN: Do you feel that Wilmington was welcoming to xerographic artists?

ANNE: Wilmington was a good place to be then. It was amazing the restaurants around here at that point were all about having shows. They would host music. They would host art shows. Lots of them. It was surprising how much they were open to it. I don’t think that the legit art scene was that open, the Art Museum possibly not that open at that point. I ended up—I did things here [Delaware Art Museum], but more as a performer than with the xerography.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay. Did you have shows at Philadelphia at all?

ANNE: We were doing shows in Philly. We did—like I said, we did shows in New York. And like I say, in Wilmington we did end up showing in the state building, in the city county building and some public areas, so I got to say it was pretty good.

CAITLIN: You mentioned that you guys both sold work at Laura Spencer’s shop.

ANNE: Uh huh.

CAITLIN: Could you explain what her shop was, because that was like the fish shop, right?

ANNE: She had like a fish theme.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: She would take any of our stuff with—

CAITLIN: Flounder Graphics?
ANNE: Flounder Graphics. She had my mermaid series in there and I—whenever I would do wearable art that had—I had this one series that had all of these brightly colored shrimp on it, she had that.

Yeah, it had to be fish oriented, though.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: She was great, very supportive. The other gallery in town at that point—Susan Isaac’s gallery, I don’t know if you are familiar with her, but she had a lot. She had John Buckland also who I forgot to mention who’s a—more of an installation artist. But a lot of us showed with Susan. We did some stuff at DCCA, not as much, but we did some there. I’m trying to think of other smaller galleries in town. I mean, lots of little places popped up and went out, so it’s hard to even remember names now of those. But a lot of the—

CAITLIN: Wasn’t one of the restaurants Crumbs?

ANNE: Crumbs, Victor Dubroff. He was so supportive. He was all about it. I’ve performed there a million times and we all had art shows up there. Yeah, he was great. I think he’s still in the area and does catering. You could probably find him.

CAITLIN: Explain your show, “She Hears Voices.”

ANNE: “She Hears Voices” I think was a show I did in the state building.

CAITLIN: Uh huh.

ANNE: So it was a series of mostly large scale work. It—I don’t think I have a good scan of the piece that the title came from. I think I just have it on a slide. This was a big piece. This was the Joan of Arc piece, too. It was Joan of Arc, but from a 60s Italian movie. It’s about five feet square roughly. And I think I have—I have a scan of the artwork that’s not—not this actual piece. It’s more like—that’s the sort of—the text on the piece.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: So I’ve got the inscription that was below Joan of Arc’s stake when she burned and that’s where the title of that show came from.

CAITLIN: Is that you?

ANNE: Yeah. I use myself as a model a lot. And I didn’t even know about Cindy Sherman [inaudible].

CAITLIN: So that whole show was about Joan of Arc?

ANNE: No, it was mixed pieces but I had the triptych piece in it. That piece was in it. There were other large scale pieces that—it was—it was just, for the most part, bigger—bigger pieces
like that one. That was a very large piece. It actually was about six feet long by four feet wide. Mixed medium starting with photographs, transparency overlay, actual bullets on the copier and did a panel printout thing together for that one. Had some of the fabric pieces in it. Some of the wearable art also was hung on the walls.

CAITLIN: How did the ink to transfer—did you just put—explain how you did the wearable art with the xerography?

ANNE: Okay, I would do the artwork or use three dimension objects, whatever I was doing, put that on top of the scanners, scan it in onto a heat transfer paper and then, like I said, I would be putting out little bits and using a tipping iron and actually applying them that way. I think I have pictures of a few of those pieces. Let me just get to it here. I’m sorry I’m not that organized.

CAITLIN: Oh my gosh, no, it’s totally okay.

ANNE: It’s a pretty hectic time for me.

I had a good series of wearable art pieces that I called moyen age wear. It was, again, Joan of Arc inspired. I’m trying to find if I have it in here or not. I had a cloak and dagger series. Literally had daggers on it. I’ll probably find it after we’re done here.

I remember putting them in here. I’m just overloaded and disorganized.

If you look at the bottom row of slides, there’s a new [inaudible] jacket or after dinner jacket, part of the moyen age wear and then two pieces that were a cocktail dress. I’ll make the—you can see if you look at the tapestry, too, it’s heat transferred. This one is done on silk and then stitched to muslin, but—

CAITLIN: It all looks great.

ANNE: And it’s all done—like I said it was small irons. This one had a couple big blocks so it was easier, but the other one that you saw was a lot of little bits that had to be—

CAITLIN: Uh huh.

ANNE: Something I seemed to have missed doing is in here. But I have— but I have electronic images of all of it. If you need anything, just let me know.

CAITLIN: Okay, that sounds good.

ANNE: The one that I have that—I don’t have a lot because eventually things all did sell and then I stopped doing it. I have the—I have this piece, the big one with the Masonite frame. I have that still if you want to see it. It’s just too big to bring with me today because it’s heavy and five feet wide. So—and I have the tapestry. I have a lot of smaller prints still and I have some wearable pieces left.
CAITLIN: [Inaudible]. Do you remember what you specifically showed at the Neither/Nor Gallery?

ANNE: Neither/Nor Gallery? I did small prints up there. Nothing large scale because we actually weren’t doing that yet.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: And I did the three dimensional stuff. Small things that I called dendees, which I don’t think I have images of with me today. They were these little demons I would do in various sort of household situations.

CAITLIN: Okay. Do you remember what Tom showed?

ANNE: Tom, I don’t think he had started the “Waitresses in Outer Space Series” yet, but that was pretty much his big series he got into later. I think it was, again, like smaller work, some of the earlier comic book looking ones with the—

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: Strips and storyboards and things like that.

CAITLIN: Would you explain his “Waitresses from Outer Space?”

ANNE: Well Tom—because Tom was always kind of a lonely guy and could not—it didn’t just work out with him and women mostly. He would go to restaurants to hang out. Like Oscar’s was his second home, Crumbs, all those places. And the waitresses were the people that he talked to and he was close to, so he sort of made them special, you know what I mean?

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: In his “Waitresses from Outer Space Series,” I know there were some of those in the portfolio. He had that. He also had a sort of obsession with serial killers, so he had that other theme.

I ended up using xerography to do portrait work for people. This was a portrait from a couple that I photographed but then again manipulated using copiers.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: I had a series of three that I just saw in here. Just because I liked the look of it. I like straight photography, but I—it’s like—I feel like sometimes when you’re doing mixed medium work, it’s like finding the medium that suits the subject is sometimes the most interesting part.

Right now I’m doing a lot of collaboration with other artists. And I’m sort of connecting my medium with theirs. So, I’m working—I’m shooting artists that are doing their work and then I’m using my process in some material way to connect to them. Like I just shot some glass
makers and I’m doing ambrotype. And a master gardener and I’m doing anthotype, which is like a plant based—plant dye. A lot of metal stuff, I’m using metal plate printing for various sculptures that I have been shooting and stuff like that. So sometimes it’s just medium and subject kind of link up.

I really love working with metal processes. These are xerographic portraits based—photographically based. It just is a very soft, saturated type color, you know what I mean?

I think I have a picture of me doing an actual art museum fundraiser in here. In my Chanson Noire costume. Back then was all French and German music from the 20s through the 50s.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: [Edith] Piaf and [inaudible]. Jazz standards.

CAITLIN: Yeah I wanted to ask you about that because that was with George Christie, right?

ANNE: Actually my main accompanist was John Southard. I used to work with George Christie also. I worked with Paul Hess. I worked with a lot of really good musicians. Oh my gosh, those guys were amazing.

We did a—we played here at the Museum. I had Paul Hess on tuba and upright bass, John Southard on keys, Skip Roehrick that has a quartet that plays Philly all the time, he was the drummer. George would play the guitar sometimes.

CAITLIN: Would different places just hire you for the exhibitions or—?

ANNE: Yeah, we—we did—it ran the gambit. With the jazz group we would play separate clubs and whatever. And then with Chanson Noire I mean, in the beginning we just played wherever we could, you know what I mean? Crumbs, we’d play there and a lot of little places in town would have me. And then we would get hired for big parties like the big art museum fund raiser. We did stuff at DCCA for events there. Yeah.

CAITLIN: What was your jazz group called?

ANNE: Chanson Noire.

CAITLIN: Oh, both of them were called—

ANNE: It was all Chanson Noire. We would just pull the cabaret material out if we—if we were doing stuff for club, generally they didn’t want to hear “Mac the Knife.”

CAITLIN: Do you have any recordings of your work from that time?

ANNE: Uh huh. Sure. They’re not real good, but we have them. We did—at Susan Isaac’s we did a show there where we did most of Three Penny Opera. I have—I have recordings kicking
around. I think this one is me here at the Pre-Raphaelite gala. This is Gary Pagano, who was another local artist and musician also, who now works for MTV.

CAITLIN: Did you just sing, or did you play an instrument?

ANNE: I play instruments, too. I play vibraphone and keyboards and after Chanson Noire, of course I’ve gone on to have other groups. We just—we put out some stuff on the—there’s a small label in California that just put out a few tracks for us. Eight years ago is the last one we did. Then we’ve been just recording on our own.

CAITLIN: So that was your main group in the 80s?

ANNE: Chanson Noire was the main group that I was working with in the 80s and 90s and then after that it was Voodoo Lilies.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: But Chanson Noire was kind of was the longest running. I had an avant-garde jazz group before that with a cellist and a saxophonist and a drummer and that was called Flamingo. That was very early 80s and then Chanson Noire for—we probably played together for 15 years.

CAITLIN: How did that get started?

ANNE: I wanted to do the material, so I just started trying out accompanists and basically just asked around and found people that first of all were willing to play for not much money, because in the beginning there wasn’t a whole lot of money in it. And yeah, it was like if you want to play a bunch of obscure songs and not get paid very much, great.

So went through a couple people that didn’t work out and when I found John it just clicked and we played together for a long, long time. He was—he was always my main accompanist. He’s a keyboardist.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: And—and we always—we would generally play with a quartet. We’d have an upright bass player, a drummer, myself and John, but sometimes we would hire on extra for bigger jobs like a trumpet player, extra guitar or whatever.

CAITLIN: What were some memorable performances?

ANNE: The one here was fun. I actually had a friend dress up like a cigarette girl and she sold candy cigarettes and I had fake moustaches and cigarette holders on the tables, so people could just really camp it up and be like, “Yeah, we’re in a cabaret. Look at my moustache.”

CAITLIN: What was—do you remember what the show was for here?

ANNE: I don’t remember now.
CAITLIN: It’s okay.

ANNE: It was some gala that was happening here.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

ANNE: I can’t remember. Like I said I had a trumpet—not trumpet, tuba player who also played bass, so he would switch from tuba to bass. And that one was really fun. DCCA was also a lot of fun. We did a couple big ones there where there were—for bigger events the room was big and there were lots of people and some of the performances there were really good.

I hired actually Gary Pagano that was in that picture, he did vocals with me on that show. So we had more than one vocalist.

CAITLIN: Get to get dressed up, too?

ANNE: Oh yeah. I did. It was a typical cabaret act. I spoke no English during that act. I only spoke French. Mostly because I was really nervous on stage and that was my way of hiding, but nobody knew that.

I think this is actually from the Neither/Nor Gallery opening. That’s the poster that went out for that. We both—

CAITLIN: Oh, that’s great.

ANNE: Show of artwork plus I played at it. Which frequently when I would play, I would have slides going behind that I had shot. Recorded this whole mixed medium thing. It was always a mixed medium show with singing and artwork.

CAITLIN: In your words describe the music scene in Delaware besides your group, if you could?

ANNE: That was another poster. They really did it up.

The music scene was pretty—it was pretty great. There were a lot of bands playing and a lot of places willing to have live music. Of course, most of us who play music, we’re willing to play for not a lot of money. But it was pretty diverse. There were rock banks. There was a pretty good jazz scene. Christina Cultural Center had a great jazz scene for a long time. Gerald Chavis is a trumpet player. He’s a jazz guy. He was on the scene probably in the 80s.

CAITLIN: Chav—how—

ANNE: C H A V I S.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.
ANNE: Gerald Chavis. Yeah, he was a trumpeter. Skip Rohrich who played with me went on to have a quartet that plays Philly all the time. There were—there was everything from jazz to rock and even me doing this weird thing was able to find a place to do it, you know what I mean? And it was not super audience friendly. It’s like—you wouldn’t walk in and be like, “Yeah, this is what I expected.”

Trying to think. There was—I was looking at old *Fine Times* magazine last night because I was like, what are some of the bands that were playing? Mostly it was the rock stuff. There was E. B. Hawkins and there was The Knoxx. It was such 80s names I was laughing. [Inaudible] Squeeze, you know. Tom Larkin and there was—[inaudible] because I was trying to throw things together. Let me see if I can find any.

CAITLIN: Did you just stick to Wilmington or did you do any places like Newark or—?

ANNE: Oh, this is actually is a review from the U.D. show.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

ANNE: Yeah, we played sets from Bacchus, what it used to be—

CAITLIN: Oh yeah.

ANNE: Played there and played in Philly and we would travel wherever people were willing to pay for the travel and we would play New York, but no place—most [inaudible].

CAITLIN: Your hair’s so short.

ANNE: It’s been both over the years. Really short, during the Joan of Arc series, it was really short when I was shooting that.

CAITLIN: And [inaudible] new wave Japanese?

ANNE: I actually studied Japanese and won the Boeing Airline Scholarship to go to Japan.

CAITLIN: Oh really?

ANNE: Yeah I studied for quite a while.

CAITLIN: Well, that’s exciting. Do you have any photos from Fifth Street or—?

ANNE: I don’t have any from Fifth Street I don’t think because—

[Crosstalk]

ANNE: It was before we—

[Crosstalk]
ANNE: So nothing from there and Tom went into one of his rages and really trashed the upstairs there he moved out, which I tried to stop him from doing.

CAITLIN: Really? Oh, goodness.

ANNE: Yeah, so mostly—I do have—like I said, I have images from the one that you saw in front of the shop. I have ones from Philly and I don’t know if they made it into the iPad, but I can send them to you.

CAITLIN: Yeah, perfect.

ANNE: For the gallery was up there.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: I’m sure I have—

CAITLIN: Explain about that. Why did you decide to leave Wilmington?

ANNE: We had a chance to take space and it was a good—I mean, South Street was really a lot different then. It was so much less commercial. There were lots of—I played music up there a lot. There were tons of little clubs to play. Grendel’s Lair was still and was not the Gap, if you know what I mean. It was—it was just—the South Street scene was a lot different. We both sold stuff up there, wearable art pieces. There were—I sold—there were a couple places in Philly I sold the wearable stuff out of. The sort of gallery store type joints, Rittenhouse Square and South Street.

CAITLIN: Did you and Tom both own it, or—

ANNE: It was actually an artist cooperative, although Tom and I were the main organizers and the ones that were at risk for money. Everybody else was willing to put in some hours.

CAITLIN: Who else was involved?

ANNE: Jane Quartarone, Karl Richeson, Kelly Kownacki, who I don’t know what happened to her after that. She wasn’t really in the scene for very long.

CAITLIN: So you guys from Wilmington all went. You just—

ANNE: Yeah.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: Yeah. Yeah, I know that I can send you some images from that. I have a bunch of those.

CAITLIN: What was the main difference that you witnessed between the art scenes in Philadelphia and Wilmington?
ANNE: Just foot traffic, you know what I mean? At that point it was more—more foot traffic. We would have openings there pretty regularly and get—it was just good foot traffic. The—the space—we—I don’t remember exactly how long we had it. We always knew it was going to be a temporary lease, so we had it maybe a couple of years. And then like I said, Tom started doing set dressing and after that I had a gallery here in town on 14th Street for a while. It was kind of more like an artist workspace/gallery where I would host other artists and we were on the Art Loop bus, that kind of thing.

CAITLIN: What was that called?

ANNE: Guy and Uri’s Art World. It was a joke name.

CAITLIN: Wait, okay, so say that again.

ANNE: Guy like G U Y and Uri U R I—Guy and Uri’s Art World.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

ANNE: It was—Because I mean Tom and I were both really—hated the pretentiousness of the art establishment. We were—we would try to make art affordable for one thing. So people could actually buy it. And usually what we would do is a series where there was a big piece that was more expensive and then we would do a smaller run of things that people could afford to buy. I know at my art opening in the state building, I think I served Twinkies and cartons of milk because I was just kind of like—you know, we were—

CAITLIN: I love that.

ANNE: It’s just like art—it can be a very pretentious thing, you know, especially if you just went through art school, it can be about as pretentious as it gets. And neither of us were really into that, so—

CAITLIN: Tom didn’t go to art school, did he?

ANNE: No.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: I don’t—I don’t think Tom went to college at all. I kept trying and quitting and finally I did go back. Boy, going back is a lot different when you’re older.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: But it’s been a really good experience for me. It actually got me thinking in new ways about my work. I’m doing very different types of material now that I wouldn’t have done. I went to Montana. I studied with one of the best daguerreotypists in the country.

CAITLIN: Oh, nice.
ANNE: Yeah, it was great. But doing—I’m back to doing hybrid work again, which is really interesting and exciting.

CAITLIN: Was Tom throughout this time still working on his costumes, or—

ANNE: He had the costume shop for a while. Eventually he closed it. He didn’t do costumes—once he was at Seventh Street he didn’t do costumes, but he did do set dressing. Like, I said, mostly for movies, he would work odd jobs, too. I think he was a union load-in guy for the playhouse and the opera house, so he would do that to make money. The comic shop he had for a pretty long time. I think once he started doing set dressing regularly he—

CAITLIN: Do you remember he owned it, well beside of Joyce, I know there was a man who worked named Craig Dawson?

ANNE: Yes! That’s who I could not remember.

CAITLIN: I’ve been trying—I’ve been trying to track him down.

ANNE: Can’t find him?

CAITLIN: Do you know—?

ANNE: He had a comic shop in North Wilmington for a long time. Okay, so if you searched comics and his name, you might turn him up.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ANNE: Yeah.

CAITLIN: Do you know if he’s still around or—

ANNE: I don’t know. I know there’s a comic place on Philadelphia Pike called Between Books, the guy there is named Greg Schauer and he might know where Craig is. Because Greg is still there doing what he does, but I don’t know if Craig is. Greg. Craig.

CAITLIN: I’m trying to get a lot of information on the—

ANNE: Before—before I came in here.

CAITLIN: Before you came, yeah.

ANNE: Did you look into Apocalyptic Productions because I know that was one of their names.

CAITLIN: Yeah. Joyce’s first husband George Stewart, who was involved, we talked to him.

ANNE: He’s around because he does a radio thing.
CAITLIN: Yeah, we interviewed him, but unfortunately he said with the comic store, he was mostly the backer. He wasn’t really involved with it. So he was like, “You should talk to Joyce.” I don’t really know—

ANNE: Really? Because they live not far. Did you look up Harvey Pekar, her husband?

CAITLIN: Yeah, because I know he passed away and I know they live in Ohio, but I haven’t really been able to find anything. She doesn’t have her own website or anything like that.

ANNE: Yeah, I didn’t think she would. She wasn’t really necessarily an artist herself.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: She was just more involved in—in organization and stuff like that.

CAITLIN: Huh. Darn it.

ANNE: Yeah, I’m not sure either.

CAITLIN: It’s a shame that Rob Jones passed away.

ANNE: Yeah.

CAITLIN: Because we’re trying to track down all of the artists that showed at his gallery.

ANNE: Who else would—you know, there’s a sculpture, Victor Spinski, did you talk to him?

CAITLIN: He’s on our list because he works at—

ANNE: He might know because he was around before me and he might now. I don’t know if they’ve kept in touch at all. He might know some of those people better than me because he was—he was there in the ‘70s and I was not there at that point. Because they were all ten, fifteen years older than me.

CAITLIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ANNE: Yeah I don’t know where Joyce is these days. I know they were in Cleveland.

CAITLIN: Yeah. A lot of people to track down.

ANNE: Yeah. And a lot of people ended up going their separate ways after the ‘90s because the scene kind of fell apart. There just wasn’t anything happening anymore. And I ended up doing—I had a gallery in Kennett Square for like ten years and then hated doing all the hours just retailing, so it’s—hated it to the point where I was like, “I can’t do this anymore.”

So I gave the gallery up and just do freelance design now. Joyce—I don’t—I can’t help as much with the ‘70s because I wasn’t here. Okay. Because Tom and Joyce and those guys were around
a good ten years before I came in or so at least. And they really did set the groundwork for stuff to happen.

It is—it’s often the way art and music really mixed it up then. It really was like—

CAITLIN: That’s what we’re really trying to show people is—

[Crosstalk]

CAITLIN: Especially, we’ve been finding that a lot of shows also incorporated dance, so we’re tracking down that.

ANNE: Yeah, it was very—really open. And if we would—we would do shows—Tom and I would do shows on Seventh Street and either I would play or we would invite somebody else to play or my shows had a visual element where I’d be showing slides or backdrops or somebody that we knew would costume it or—it was always kind of mixed medium. It was great. It’s funny, when he and I went to New York with our portfolios, they were like, “Wow, this is different.”

Because New York tends to get homogeneous and we were kind of working—we were so isolated from the real big art scenes that we were doing our own thing. So it was kind of in our favor in a way.

CAITLIN: Yeah. That’s great that you’ve saved all the images that you have.

ANNE: I have a lot more.

CAITLIN: Your background.

ANNE: And the thing is I haven’t really looked at them for a long time because I got to a point where I said I would look at the xerographic art and say, “Oh, this looks so dated.”

But this has really given me a different perspective on it, meeting you to talk about it because I realize it is kind of underexplored medium and it only got used for like ten years. And it’s no different than any other underexplored medium like the others I’m working with. I don’t know why I couldn’t see that. Right now I’ve just discovered that I can take slides and project them onto tintype because of the direct positive process, so it’s like I’m actually sort of revisiting some old themes and doing them a little differently.

CAITLIN: Uh huh.

ANNE: Right now what I’m doing most is making huge monster sculptures out of plant material.

CAITLIN: Cool.

ANNE: And then photographing them in various environments.
CAITLIN: That’s cool. How big are they?

ANNE: Like seven, eight feet tall or some bigger. I know I have pictures of some of them. I just did an installation of them for Talula’s Garden in Philly. And let me find those guys—and then I just wrote a small story based on one of the monsters and his life and I have a little movie that goes with it and stuff like that. I think I have it. Like this is one of my guys.

CAITLIN: Oh my gosh.

ANNE: He’s very huge.

CAITLIN: How long do they take you to make?

ANNE: It depends. You know, they all have a wire armature and they’re—they’re made entirely from plant material, so yeah.

CAITLIN: Oh, those are great.

ANNE: I’m trying to find my octopus because he’s huge.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: You can see how big he is because the guy’s standing back there.

CAITLIN: Oh, that’s great.

ANNE: So they’re—they’re something I’ve been working with a bunch right now is doing these plant monsters and then writing about their life story.

CAITLIN: Well, I guess this is just a back track question that I forgot to ask. Talk about being on the cover of X-ray magazine.

ANNE: I looked so hard to find my picture from that because I love it.

CAITLIN: I have—wait, I have it downstairs so I’ll show you.

ANNE: I don’t know what happened to mine, but yeah. Tom did the magazine and you know it was—I loved that. Are you kidding? I loved that picture and I had it stuck up on my dark room wall forever and then I was looking for it yesterday and I was like, “Where did it go?”

I just saw it and I can’t find it.

ANNE: Did he—how many issues did he do?

CAITLIN: I can’t remember how many issues it was exactly.
CAITLIN: Because I think I only have three that we found at—we went to UD’s library and went through all the archives of *Fine Times* and everything like that. They had three copies of that. So I don’t know if he only did three or—

ANNE: It wasn’t a ton. I think—I don’t think he did a ton of issues, but the ones he did were great because they were really packed with everything that was happening at the time. You get a good cross section of artists and musicians and what was going on. Yeah, so being on the cover was awesome.

I know I was in *Fine Times* a few times. I actually was on the cover of the art section of the *News Journal* at one point, which I don’t tell people because the article is so awful and I really cringe because it’s kind of misquoted and I was being a brat.

CAITLIN: Do you remember who wrote it?

ANNE: Penny Cope.

CAITLIN: Also, I don’t know if she’s alive or not. I’m trying to track her down.

ANNE: Well, her boyfriend actually was awesome. He wrote for the journal, too.

CAITLIN: Do you remember his name?

ANNE: What was his name? He was great. He was super nice. Oh, it’s on the tip of my tongue, too. He was a big art scene supporter. Mogor? I want to say Mogor [Gary Mullinax] was his last name and that might not be right, but—because the other thing I’ve—everything was so connected. I worked at Delaware Theatre Company during that point, too.

CAITLIN: Oh, can you talk about that?

ANNE: I was actually involved with that when it first started like it was—when it first started Cleveland Morris was the director and he started it with two—an actor and an actress that he was really close friends with from New York, Ceal Phelan and Peter DeLaurier and they wanted it very much to be a repertory theatre where the same actors would do plays and they would bring in guest people and that’s how it started.

I was in *The Misanthrope* and *Bus Stop*. I was in *Private Lives* and *A Christmas Carol*. A bunch of us actually were—I acted in those plays and I was their resident photographer to do headshots for people that needed them. Everything was so fluid.

They eventually split ways because Pete and Ceal wanted repertory and Cleveland did not. He continued as the artistic director and they actually started the one that’s up in PA now [People’s Light and Theatre Company]. I know it. I knew it two seconds ago it was on the tip of my tongue. I think they’re in Malvern. It’s a well-known repertory theatre in Pennsylvania, I can’t put—Peter and Ceal are up there and they’re easy to find.

CAITLIN: What’s Peter’s last name?

CAITLIN: Like S E A L?

ANNE: Ceal, no C E A L. Irish. Irish. And they were both equity actors that came down from New York to start this and it was an equity house. You had to be an equity member or be working your way towards your equity card to perform there. They would bring in actors from New York and we did Christmas Carol a couple years running.

CAITLIN: Does Cleveland still do it now?

ANNE: Cleveland is not. He retired and I don’t know who the artistic director is now. But he was the artistic director for many years.

CAITLIN: Okay. That’s exciting.

ANNE: It was so much easier then to be cross genre. It’s like now—I feel like the market is so pigeon-holed you have to be so specific. You have to specifically do this one thing and that’s what you do and it wasn’t like that then.

CAITLIN: What else were you involved with during this time?

ANNE: A lot. We did—I was in a performance here [Delaware Art Museum]. It was—a depression era multi-media performance. I’m trying to think what that was even in connection with. I remember singing “Brother Can You Spare a Dime” in it, but I can’t remember the circumstances. And that was probably in the very late ‘80s, like ’89, ’90, ’91, somewhere in there. What was it called? It was like some sort of multi-media show, performances; actors from DTC were here, too. I was here. They were here. We had slides and images and three dimensional stuff going on. I was on staff of U of D for a short period of time in the theatre department, on a CETA grant and so I had fingers in a lot of pies I guess.

CAITLIN: This is great. I’m glad that you were able to come today and share all this information.

ANNE: Hopefully any of that is helpful and—

CAITLIN: No, it is. It is.

ANNE: Let me know if you want to see pieces when you get to putting things together.

CAITLIN: Yeah, for sure. We just officially put it on the exhibition calendar. It’s going to be Summer 2015.

ANNE: Okay.

CAITLIN: So we’re definitely in the early stages.
ANNE: Yeah. Maybe by then I’ll be able to track down more of Tom’s work, too.

CAITLIN: Maybe we’ll be able to track down Tom.

ANNE: It’s possible. I’m in Philly all the time now. I’m doing a ton of design work up there and the last time I saw him I ran into him at Reading Terminal. And so I’m just hoping that maybe he’s still up there and I’ll just randomly find him.

CAITLIN: That’s a shame because everyone we talked to, it’s like “Oh my gosh, Tom Watkins. I would love to talk to him.”

And no one knows where he is. He kind of fell off the face of the earth.

ANNE: He did and the thing is I ran into his ex-wife when I was in Kennett. She didn’t live very far from there and she would pop in now and then and I would see her. But they were only married for like two months or something. It was like no time at all. She was the daughter of a rich banker and I think she married him to show daddy that she could marry the crazy artist guy with no money. But I did see her not too long ago. But she didn’t know where he was. She had heard that he was back in Wilmington. She said, “I heard that he was back at the opera house doing”—

CAITLIN: I contacted them and they never responded but—so who knows?

ANNE: Keep looking. The thing is really if anybody would know, it would be me and I don’t. I’m probably closer to him than any of them and I stayed in contact with him longer, but whenever I see other people they’re like, “Is Tom still alive?”

I could always tell them up until the last two years. I was like, “Yep. Alive and crazy.”

He was still there, but right now I don’t know.

CAITLIN: It’s a shame because I feel like no one before—well at least to this level, has been like, “Wow, you did a really great thing.”

ANNE: Yeah. To get the validation.

CAITLIN: Yeah, to get the validation, especially from the DAM—

[Crosstalk]

ANNE: Even me getting the call from you guys, it just felt so validating.

CAITLIN: “Oh, I made a difference.”

ANNE: Thank you for acknowledging what we did. It feels great. It feels—it does feel good.
CAITLIN: Well especially because I feel like everyone who was like a woman could not stand up definitely like Brandywine tradition and everything. But there are so many other different types of art that people were involved with.

ANNE: It was so diverse at that point, but then you had all kinds of medium going on from installation to jewelry to pottery to this stuff. Did you talk to Carson Zullinger?

CAITLIN: Yeah, we’ve been in contact and Margaret [Winslow] is close with him.

ANNE: Yeah because he—as a photographer he actually was more in the position where he bought a lot of my pieces.

CAITLIN: Oh.

ANNE: He actually owns the big version of the—do I have that on here? I don’t think I showed you that one, actually. I don’t have the version that he has because he has the big one that I had framed with chain link fencing, but I might have the small version in here. Yeah, he owns that piece.

CAITLIN: That’s great.

ANNE: It’s about four feet by five feet. It has chain link fence framing on it. He might loan that if you’re interested in—

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: He actually owns that piece.

CAITLIN: It’s great that you know where your work went to.

ANNE: Some of it anyway. Some of it I sold and it disappeared. There were a couple people that used to buy on a regular basis. There was an attorney in town, Fred Kessler, he used to buy from Tom and I both because he just wanted to support us I think. And I don’t know if he’s still around. I don’t know what the scoop is. There were a couple of other guys. I just saw his picture when I was going through stuff the other day and I can’t remember his name [Arthur Greenstein], but would buy often. He was an older patron. He would—he would climb the crazy steps to come up to shows and spend money. And a lot of the restaurant people would commission us to do stuff. I did waiter shirts for Bravo when they were open. Carucci’s I think they were called after then. They would actually hire artists to do things in additional to mounting shows.

I know when I was going through stuff I was laughing because I—I had designed epaulets for the restaurant out of like—

CAITLIN: Oh yeah, that’s awesome.
ANNE: So they had them heat transferred on the shirts. But I forgot about some of that stuff until I started looking through it. I was like, “Oh yeah, I remember that.”

But yeah, a lot of business people in town would actually come buy art. Like Fred Kessler, Barry—had a printing place—Livingstone [Levinson], I want to say, but that doesn’t sound right. The other guy’s last name was Collin and I can’t remember his first name. But he would come and buy pieces. Tom knew him pretty well. Yeah but there were definitely buyers that were figuring one of us would be worth some money someday.

But if I think of it, if I can remember any of them, I’ll send you more names and more info for sure.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ANNE: Because Carson was more involved with DCCA [inaudible]. He was more—he was a little more legit I think then they were at that point.

CAITLIN: Yeah, we’ve been in contact with—Margaret just interviewed Rick Rothrock who started DCCA so we got a lot of good articles and stuff like that.

ANNE: And DCCA was—they came on after we had already been doing things for a while. So it was—they were—they had sort of their own crowd and we were—we were nominally involved with things they did, but not as much. I was more involved as a performer than as a visual artist there. Yeah.

Any more?

CAITLIN: Well that’s great. Not that I can think of, but if you can send me some images, that would be great.

ANNE: Yeah, I’ll send you some more images. I can probably send you a couple of music clips if you want.

CAITLIN: Oh, yeah, yeah. For sure.

ANNE: When we did that stuff it was only original images and—

[End of Audio]

Duration: 63 minutes