Oral history interview with Steven Roberts and John McDowell, October 25, 2013

Steven Roberts and John McDowell  
Snakegrinder and The Shredded Fieldmice band members

Size: Transcript: 34 pages.

Format of recording: Originally recorded as digital wav file. Duration is 74 min.

Collection Summary: An interview of Steven Roberts and John McDowell conducted March 6, 2012 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.

The transcript of this interview is in the public domain and may be used without permission. Quotes and excerpts must be cited as follows: Oral history interview with Steven Roberts and John McDowell, March 6, 2012, Helen Farr Sloan Library and Archives, Delaware Art Museum.

CAITLIN: Caitlin Davis interviewing Steve Roberts and John McDowell on March 6, 2012. So, I guess either of you can start, jump in whenever you feel like it. Explain your backgrounds. Who wants to go first? Just like are you from Delaware, did you go to the University?

ROBERTS: I was born in Baltimore but my family moved up here when I was about three months old. My father got a job working for the university, so I’ve really lived in Newark my whole life. I did go to the University for a couple of years but I dropped out when I won the draft lottery when my number for the Vietnam War came up real high. Oh, I don’t have to stay in college anymore. I’ve been playing music since Junior High School. My first instrument was a ukulele that a friend of mine [inaudible] a few cords.

CAITLIN: Really?

ROBERTS: Yeah. By the time I hit college I had been playing in folk music in the early 60’s and late 60’s and then when I got to college then decided I’d take up a rock and roll instrument. I sang bass in choirs, so I took up bass. It was all downhill from there.
MCDOWELL: It’s funny because I also won the draft lottery but the opposite direction. My number was six and at that point I guess I had just dropped out of my first semester of college and was sort of panicking about that. Then a couple months after that I got a letter from – no return address on the letter from Philadelphia where somebody had raided the draft board and burned all the records. My records were gone and they just sent me a letter saying, “Don’t worry about it.”

ROBERTS: Really.

MCDOWELL: Yeah.

ROBERTS: I didn’t know that. That’s not fair.

CAITLIN: So if you had a low number that was bad?

ROBERTS: They decided that they were just going to hold a lottery for the draft because people were accusing the system of being biased and everything. So they said, “Okay, we’ll just do it by birthday.” So they just drew 365 balls for every day of the year and mine came up 312 so that was pretty good because they probably weren’t going to get past maybe 150 or something.

CAITLIN: And you were six.

MCDOWELL: I remember my mom was about ready to pack my bags and ship me to Canada.

ROBERTS: Yeah, I have a couple friends who went there.

CAITLIN: Well I guess you can start with your background.

MCDOWELL: I’m pretty much from Delaware. I was not born here but my dad was military so I grew up down in Dover. I came to University, studied there for a while. Started off with computer science and then switched to philosophy. Philosophy got me thinking, why am I here? So I left school. My first year at school, which was what kind of got me into the music scene was a friend of mine from high school was in a band. So I started doing sound with them. They mostly played on campus; they played the student center, frat parties, that kind of stuff.

ROBERTS: What band was that?

MCDOWELL: They were called Nashville East.

ROBERTS: [Inaudible].

CAITLIN: What did you play?
MCDOWELL: I was the sound guy. I think the high point of that band’s career was they opened for The Birds at the Fieldhouse.

ROBERTS: Right, I think that’s [inaudible].

MCDOWELL: My great story about that is that they were setting up and the guys were in the back talking to The Birds and explained to them what they were going to play and asked me if it was okay if they played some of their songs. I was helping to get set up and then sat down and [inaudible] the seating and it turned out that their sound guy had been waiting for me to come up so that he could show me around the board and all that kind of stuff so that I could do the mix. I didn’t know that he was waiting for me, so I just sat down. I missed that opportunity.

CAITLIN: Oh, that’s a shame.

MCDOWELL: One of the guys from that band hung around Newark and started some other bands. Donny Challenger, I don’t know if you’ve come across his name or not.

CAITLIN: Yeah, he – wasn’t he in the band The Commotions?

MCDOWELL: Yep.

CAITLIN: Because I talked to Jerry Grant.

MCDOWELL: Okay, yeah.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MCDOWELL: Yeah, Jerry ran a record store down in Newark.

CAITLIN: Yeah, “I Like it Like That.” So what bands were you – well I guess you were involved with Nashville East, but what were you in before Snakegrinder. I found Primordial Slime.

ROBERTS: Yeah, Primordial Slime, that was Tommy Epps.

CAITLIN: Joint Chiefs?

ROBERTS: Yes, that was one of the first bands I was in. That was – when was that exactly? That was the successor to National Freestone, digital [inaudible]. That was actually an influential band in the sense that George Thorogood loved the band. Mainly he wanted the necklace that our lead – bone necklace that our lead singer wore. In fact last time [inaudible] saw him up in the – [inaudible] played. I guess it was over in New Jersey whatever that big place is in Camden. Gary took up a replica of the bone necklace and presented it to him. He was just delighted and he’d been on stage apparently at the – he said National Freestone Rocks.
CAITLIN: That’s really funny. So National Freestone and then you were in Joint Chiefs.

ROBERTS: And then the Joint Chiefs. I’ve been in so many bands but –

CAITLIN: Those were the main ones.

ROBERTS: At the time, yeah.

CAITLIN: At the time. Then you were just involved with [inaudible].

MCDOWELL: Yeah, [inaudible] there was a big gap in between there.

CAITLIN: How did you guys meet?

ROBERTS: I actually don’t remember.

MCDOWELL: Just hanging out in Newark. I used to come and listen to the band all the time.

CAITLIN: Same with other members, you guys just all hung out in Newark together. Did you know each other from high school?

ROBERTS: No, we didn’t know each other from high schools. I knew Larry Adams from college, kind of mutual friends in college. He was a folk singer too. What was it – Debbie Dawes [inaudible] from Youth Incorporated, I do remember that. They asked Larry to play a set of music at one of their Youth Incorporated concerts and Larry didn’t want to do it by himself particularly, so he asked me to play with him. That quickly launched into a, “Well, this sounds kind of dry, let’s find some other musicians.” I was going out with Carol DiGiovanni at the time and –

MCDOWELL: Oh I didn’t know you dated her.

ROBERTS: Yeah and –

CAITLIN: The truth comes out.

ROBERTS: Her 15 year-old brother John played drums. Even though we were 19 or something, or he was 16 and I was 20, I can’t remember anyway, but he was a pretty good drummer so we did this and then – I forget where we ran into Dave. That was probably at Eat at Joe’s, that coffee house in the Presbyterian Church. I think the three of us were playing there and then he was in some other – I don’t know.

CAITLIN: So you were all around Newark, hanging out.

MCDOWELL: Very organic.
ROBERTS: Very organic.

CAITLIN: What year did the band officially –?


ROBERTS: Yeah, we – I think the first concert was at Rockford Park, August of 1970.

CAITLIN: Where do you guys practice?

ROBERTS: At the time, for that one we were practicing in the barn of an old high school friend of mine in Newark until his grandmother came for a visit and threw us out. Then at that particular concert, George, one of the original members, George Christi had his equipment stolen so he was out of the band.

CAITLIN: Oh yeah, I read that.

ROBERTS: Right yeah, and sorry, I have nothing to play on. I have no money and no equipment. We would practice wherever we could. What really got us into a groove was an old farmhouse out in Pennsylvania. I don’t know what town it’s near, it’s not Landenberg exactly.

MCDOWELL: No, it’s country near Landenberg.

ROBERTS: Called Medford was the name of the farm. A couple of guys named Tom Daniels and –

MCDOWELL: Clancy?


MCDOWELL: Not Tom Clancy, he’s a writer. I just know him as Clancy.

ROBERTS: Yeah, I think his first name is Dennis, helicopter pilot in Vietnam. They rented this farmhouse and they owned a little store on Main Street right behind now what is Rainbow Records I guess. No, Wonderland Records, called The Leather Tree, where they just did custom leather belts and things. Anyway, they rented this house and it became the scene for a couple of years of lots of parties and [inaudible] and just kind of a gathering place. I wouldn’t call it a hippie commune, but I guess it –

MCDOWELL: It was close to that.

ROBERTS: It was close to that, yeah.
MCDOWELL: In fact one of my first philosophy classes, one of the women in the class offered to take us on a fieldtrip to a commune. It was [inaudible], but the bus driver got lost trying to find it.

ROBERTS: That’s where the band spent a lot of time rehearsing. That’s where we started to get interesting, or good if we were ever good [inaudible], but we would practice. For about a year we practiced in people’s basements. It was just wherever you could.

MCDOWELL: Right, where there was space, electricity, and toilet paper.

ROBERTS: And toilet paper, it was loud.

CAITLIN: How would you describe yourself as a band? Why were you different than other bands in Newark at the time?

ROBERTS: Do you want to try that first?

MCDOWELL: My take on it I guess would be –

CAITLIN: Well obviously your name.

MCDOWELL: Well yeah.

ROBERTS: Do you want to hear the origin of the name?

MCDOWELL: Yeah, go there first.

ROBERTS: We were trying to think of a name in that first [inaudible] that I was mentioning because we [inaudible] needed a name for that first concert. No one could come up with anything that anybody liked. That’s always true for all bands trying to name. Someone suggested, Shredded What as a name. Well, if nothing else works. Then someone said, how about The Field Mice? Why? Then after about an hour and a half, or it seemed like a long time, Larry was fed up, and was hungry. There was a place on Main Street called New England Pizza. They had something that was called a grinder. I can’t remember what it was; it was like a meatball sub or something. No, it was – they had various grinders, I forget what they were, but there was a steak grinder, it was one of the things on the menu. Larry said, “Okay, I’ve had it, I’m going to go into town and get a Snakegrinder, I mean a steak grinder.” We said, “Oh, it’s a Snakegrinder so [inaudible] shredded field mice.”

CAITLIN: That’s a funny story.

ROBERTS: So anyway, yeah, back – you were saying.
MCDOWELL: What was I saying, where was I going?

ROBERTS: I don’t know.

CAITLIN: Why were you so different than other bands at the time?

MCDOWELL: From my perspective it was more the emphasis on original music as opposed to –

CAITLIN: Covers.

MCDOWELL: Covers, yeah, basically.

ROBERTS: Which, oddly enough was not our [inaudible] people came for. We ended up playing at least half, more than half covers.

MCDOWELL: I think that would depend on the venue, when we would play bars and clubs and that sort of thing, where it was a stock 40 minute set, you know 40, 20 kind of thing. Then, yeah that’s what people would come for, but if it was more of a party or something like that where there were no restrictions on what you had to play, then –

ROBERTS: Yeah, because things were pretty restrictive. I’m sure it’s the same way now, though I’m not sure that bar owners would just want you to play stuff that people [inaudible] because they thought they could get more people. We were a conundrum to them in that sense that after a while we had a fairly large crowd of people that would come to hear us, but we weren’t playing all the stock songs. Unfortunately most of our crowd wasn’t heavy drinkers, at least not paying in a bar. They’d go sit out in the car and smoke or drink out there, and then come in. Bar owners would attract people but they wouldn’t buy enough alcohol.

MCDOWELL: They didn’t make any money on it, right.

ROBERTS: I think what made us different than most of the people around there were the improvisation. Now they call them Jam Bands, but that wasn’t the term at the time. We would just go off on these flights of fancy on various songs, whatever we felt like, and just improvise for extended periods of time sometimes. We got pretty good at it. I think that’s – I think that’s very exciting when you can have improvisation that works, old friend.

CAITLIN: Oh, that’s so – because I was talking to Margaretta [Frederick] today about how I was interviewing people and yada, yada, yada, and [inaudible].

ROBERTS: Anyway, for me I think why we stood out around here was just the improvisation. We managed to do that and we did it fairly well most of the time. I think that’s exciting for people, whether they realize it or not, I mean to have something that’s spur-of-the-moment creativity that they’re a part of, because that was the other thing. I
never – I barely liked the word performance. It’s like we were just kind of a catalyst I thought, for an experience where the people that were there were just as much a part of what was going on as the band. It wasn’t just audience, band. I didn’t like that. If you want those – the reason I asked if you could send those videos because my favorite parts of those videos are the shots of the people, not the band, because everyone looked like they were having a good time and it was a pretty gentle thing. Fights never broke out when we played. It was just an experience for everybody, and that was the fun part.

CAITLIN: How would you describe what type – I guess you kind of answered that, jam band type of music.

ROBERTS: We weren’t. We would play songs, I mean straight songs.

CAITLIN: What were most of your songs about, or did they vary?

ROBERTS: They would vary.

CAITLIN: Did you guys collaborate on writing?

ROBERTS: Most of the writing, the original stuff came from probably Dave and Larry. I did a little bit, but mainly it was a – that was the other nice thing; mainly it was a group contribution. No one would come down and say, “You play this, you play this.” It’s like here are some ideas and then everyone would work on it as a group and it would take form with everyone’s contribution that was going on.

MCDOWELL: Each person had their own – the influences that they – the music they liked, they brought those influences into the mix too. It was a nice thing that way.

ROBERTS: John was always a good sounding board for what worked, what didn’t work.

MCDOWELL: What worked, didn’t work, yeah.

ROBERTS: You have to have some objectivity too.

CAITLIN: Yeah, definitely. Where were some of the places you played around this area? I know you played the [inaudible]. Bill Stevenson raved about you guys and he said to say hi to you.

ROBERTS: Oddly enough, the bastard, he left us out of his book. He never mentioned us in his book.

MCDOWELL: You’re going to carry that for a long time.

ROBERTS: We were probably the biggest draw [inaudible] local music, and he left us out of the – I’m not really that angry, I’m not angry at him. I just thought it was ironic that he never mentioned us.
MCDOWELL: We in a way changed the course of how he ran the place I think.

ROBERTS: Yeah, I think we did. So we – there weren’t a whole lot of places to play regularly. For a while there was an old, now it’s a hillbilly bar out on Route 40 called –

MCDOWELL: Was it Triple Nickel?

ROBERTS: It became the Triple Nickel.

MCDOWELL: Yeah, but what was it –

ROBERTS: It was the club when we played there.

MCDOWELL: Oh that’s right, yeah.

ROBERTS: With that guy that carried a gun as the owner.

MCDOWELL: Bob Moore.

ROBERTS: Bob Moore, right. I can remember George telling me when Nima played there. When he went back to get his money, he gave him $50 or something like that, and he said, “No, there was a lot more people there than that. We should get more than $50.” Then Moore took his gun out of his vest, put it on top of the desk and said, “How much do you want to take?” George said, “We’ll take the $50.” Really there weren’t a whole lot of those catch us catch can. I don’t remember there were any other real regular.

MCDOWELL: Joe’s up in West Chester.

ROBERTS: Oh yeah, Joe’s.

MCDOWELL: Joe’s Sportsmen’s Lounge.

ROBERTS: Then there was that bar up on, what was it, Mary’s Road?

MCDOWELL: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. What was that place called?

ROBERTS: I don’t remember. It was a bar on [inaudible] Road.

MCDOWELL: It was a tiny place, not much bigger than this room, it seemed like.

ROBERTS: Then there was the one in the Fairfax Shopping Center.

MCDOWELL: Hormell’s?

ROBERTS: Hormell’s, right.
MCDOWELL: That was the first place I saw Thorogood.

ROBERTS: Right.

MCDOWELL: We all went there one night to see him. I hadn’t seen him play before, but he was starting to make waves in the local community so we all wanted to go see what he was all about.

ROBERTS: He was fairly unimpressive.

MCDOWELL: Me too, I remember walking out of there saying, “What’s the big deal?”

ROBERTS: Mainly it was festivals and parties, blah, blah, blah that kind of thing. It’s probably still not –

CAITLIN: So a lot of college house parties or –

ROBERTS: We didn’t do a whole lot of college related stuff.

MCDOWELL: There were some commons areas parties, not so much frat parties, but the [inaudible] Commons.

ROBERTS: We played at the – when we – that gay and lesbian group organized on campus. I forget what they were called at the time. They came out and at the time that was fairly daring to do that. We played their first shindig.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay.

MCDOWELL: I don’t remember that.

ROBERTS: Yeah, it was over in one of the dining halls over at Russell I think.

CAITLIN: That was my dining hall my freshman year.

ROBERTS: I think we got some flak for that.

MCDOWELL: Really?

ROBERTS: Yeah, there was some – well you know –

CAITLIN: Controversy.

ROBERTS: Yeah, the crap that goes on. Yeah, we did stuff like that. I remember playing out back of the student center a couple of times.
CAITLIN: So mostly your big thing was Stone Balloon in the area.

ROBERTS: That was always the big thing because that’s where we’d actually make the most money because making money was a rarity.

CAITLIN: Did you open for bigger acts or would you have the night to yourself?

ROBERTS: At the Balloon, I remember we opened for Herman’s Hermits.

MCDOWELL: Oh that’s right, yeah.

ROBERTS: - when they came through. Remember over at that college, not Del Tech, but the one over near Stanton?

MCDOWELL: Delcastle?

ROBERTS: Was it Delcastle? Yeah, there was a concert there where we opened for the Mahavishnu Orchestra. John McLaughlin, [inaudible], you’ve never heard of him before.

CAITLIN: [Inaudible].

MCDOWELL: They were very humorous and they were highly influential.

CAITLIN: Repeat what the group was called?

ROBERTS: The Mahavishnu Orchestra. John McLaughlin was a very famous guitarist, that was his –

MCDOWELL: He was famous back then; obviously he’s not that famous now. Sorry.

ROBERTS: We opened for them. I don’t remember opening up for [inaudible]. Maybe we did open for somebody else at the Balloon, but I don’t remember who.

CAITLIN: It was usually just – you had the night to yourselves.

MCDOWELL: Yeah, usually.

ROBERTS: Except for battles of the band and festivals which I hate, having to change – you’ve gotten bands over the course of six hours and schlepping all the equipment on and off, that’s a pain in the butt. When we would play in most places, yeah, we were probably the only one.

CAITLIN: Explain your experience with Stone Balloon.

ROBERTS: It smelled like a bar. It was full of smoke at the time.
CAITLIN: I guess, how did you first get started playing there. Did Bill see you guys playing at another venue?

ROBERTS: No, when he was going to open it, he kind of – I think the word went out that he did want local people to play there. So we went and I don’t know whether we gave him a tape or talked to him. Nick Norris, who was our agent at the time, our manager at the time, I think he went and talked to Bill Stevenson because he had heard he wanted to get local people in there. I think we were either the second or third band to play there.

[Inaudible]

MCDOWELL: For the longest time I thought we were the first, but then you said that Whale played first.

ROBERTS: I think somebody else played before we did. I used to think we were the first, but then when I thought about it or somebody –

CAITLIN: One of the top five.

ROBERTS: One of the first bands [inaudible].

CAITLIN: You were – in the first year you played there, in the first couple months.

MCDOWELL: So he would give us semi-regular gigs there, but he was more interested in trying to get more regional and internationalized bands, so the local bands after a while kind of took a back seat.

CAITLIN: Okay.

ROBERTS: For a while, and then when he realized he was losing money on trying to get regional, national acts on there, then he went more back to the local bands.

MCDOWELL: Right, I remember seeing some pretty good shows there though.

ROBERTS: Oh yeah.

MCDOWELL: I remember seeing – we saw Captain Beefheart played there.

ROBERTS: That was the best time I’ve ever had at a concert was Captain Beefheart.

CAITLIN: So you also hung out at the Stone Balloon.

ROBERTS: For music, for special music. No, I [inaudible] hung out at a bar.

CAITLIN: And Captain who?
MCDOWELL: Captain Beefheart.

ROBERTS: Really, you’ve never heard of Captain Beefheart?

CAITLIN: No.

MCDOWELL: Captain Beefheart was essentially a protégé of Frank Zappa.

ROBERTS: Well they were – they knew each other from California. They both kind of grew up out there.

MCDOWELL: I think Zappa got Beefheart started. That’s always been my perspective.

ROBERTS: Unclear, but in the same way they were –

MCDOWELL: Yes, there was a relationship there.

ROBERTS: There was a relationship there, but Captain Beefheart morphed form this quasi blues pop music, he got stranger and stranger and stranger and incredibly strange, the strangest ever. You should listen to some of his music. His most famous album is called Trout Mask Replica.

CAITLIN: I should write that down.

ROBERTS: You should look that up just for your own personal [inaudible].

MCDOWELL: That’s probably one of his most inaccessible ones too.

ROBERTS: Yes, but it is absolutely –

MCDOWELL: It [inaudible].

ROBERTS: A definitive album of his.

MCDOWELL: Yes, yes.

ROBERTS: Anyway, I went to hear Captain Beefheart, I saw him four times. At the Balloon it was incredible because it was such a small venue.

CAITLIN: Yeah, you were really right up there.

ROBERTS: It was really exciting. I don’t dance at concerts, but I danced at this. By dancing to this music, it’s really –

CAITLIN: I’ll definitely look into that. How was your recording process? I know you sent me a CD I guess a while ago. Explain how – I guess the original one was the record
– how that went down. How long after you started did you guys decide that you wanted to put a record together?

ROBERTS: Well, we actually didn’t decide to put a record together until the band was going to break up. We decided we should get – we should put this on vinyl before it all goes away. Then after five years of work –

MCDOWELL: We’ll have something to show for it.

ROBERTS: Yes, we’ll have something to show for it. I mean we had tried recording some stuff. I can remember taking the mixing board out back and running the snake down into the basement and trying to do all that and recording stuff.

MCDOWELL: We would record a lot of gigs too. We did a substantial collection of recordings from different places, live stuff.

CAITLIN: Oh, you still do?

ROBERTS: Yeah, on the CD, the last four songs on there were live. They weren’t on the record but the last four were just [inaudible] managed to – that we managed to scrape together. When it looked like the band probably would break up, we decided we would try to record something. Larry at the time was working at the – what’s that child over at Delaware State Hospital?

MCDOWELL: Oh – yeah.

ROBERTS: Anyway, there’s a – over at Delaware State Hospital there’s a facility for children, for damaged unfortunately children. Larry was working there and one of the women he was working with, her husband owned a recording studio up in North Wilmington.

CAITLIN: Okay, do you remember what it was called?

ROBERTS: Oh yeah, Quaudio. Q-U-A-U-D-I-O.

MCDOWELL: Quad, audio, quaudio, because it’s a four track studio.

ROBERTS: So we negotiated with him for some time because we didn’t have a lot of money, but John and I decided we’d put up the money to do this. Nobody else had any money and we hardly had any.

CAITLIN: So you were the main – the two main pushers for the record.

ROBERTS: Yeah, so we spent about two days, I guess it was.

MCDOWELL: Did we do all that in two days?
ROBERTS: Yeah, I think we did all that in two days. I think it was a weekend, doing the album. Then six months later after the band had broken up, but before our first reunion Christmas concert, we went back into the studio, the same – well the studio had moved, but it was the same studio, and recorded another couple of songs to round out the album because we had only done three, and that wasn’t enough. We did two more. [Inaudible] to go with the other ones that we had done.

CAITLIN: That was your complete record.

ROBERTS: Then we had enough for an album.

CAITLIN: What was that year?

ROBERTS: That was ’75 when we did the first recording, I think it was the spring of ’75 and then we did the rest of it the end of ’75, around Christmas of ’75.

CAITLIN: You already had your songs for that. You didn’t do any new songs since you were breaking up, correct?

ROBERTS: Well, when we got back together for a couple years there annually and we would try to learn a couple of songs, but it’s nothing major, just the same old stuff.

CAITLIN: Okay, so I’m kind of – or not, I don’t want to say the word confused. I’ve read about – and I know I already asked you in an email and you said you weren’t around. The Eddie Day situation with the ghosts, explain that story.

ROBERTS: That’s my favorite story.

CAITLIN: Explain that.

ROBERTS: Have you talked to George at all, George Wolkind, the singer?

CAITLIN: Mm-mm.

ROBERTS: It’s maybe just as well.

CAITLIN: He’s on your website that he’s in Colorado,

ROBERTS: He’s in Colorado.

CAITLIN: Hunting spirits or something?

ROBERTS: [Inaudible].

CAITLIN: Yeah, I’m moving out there, maybe I can interview him.
ROBERTS: He is in – not Boulder.

CAITLIN: I’m moving to Fort Collins.

ROBERTS: Is that where the Air Force Academy is?

CAITLIN: No, Colorado Springs.

ROBERTS: Okay, that’s where he is. He’s in Colorado Springs. George is a very interesting person. I don’t know whether you have much history on him, but at one point he was a radical political activist.

CAITLIN: I read, I guess it was Steven Leech. On his website he was mentioning how he was going to run for mayor.

ROBERTS: This is the article, I don’t know whether you have this, I assume you do; the article that Steven Leech wrote that came out. I’m surprised he didn’t send this to you.

CAITLIN: [Inaudible]. Oh, okay. Yeah, I think this is the article that’s on his website. Explain – so Eddie Day was originally the singer?

ROBERTS: He was – he always – like Spinal Tap had exploding drummers; did you ever see the movie Spinal Tap?

MCDOWELL: This is Spinal Tap, Rob Reiner.

ROBERTS: Yeah, it’s one of the best parody documentaries you’ll ever want to find. I think it’s hilarious, especially if you’re a musician you’ll think it’s hilarious. It’s a classic comedy from the late ‘70’s I guess, the early ‘80’s.

MCDOWELL: Somewhere in there I think.

ROBERTS: Rob Reiner produced it.

CAITLIN: I’ll look it up.

ROBERTS: Yeah, look it up, Spinal Tap. Anyway, they had an exploding drummer. They could never keep the same drummer. He’d always explode on stage or something. Anyway, we had exploding lead singers. We always tried to do our own singing from the original band, but we were never very good at it. So, we [inaudible]. The first person that we got to fill this was Eddie Day.

CAITLIN: Then how did you – was he off the local Newark, just hanging around?
ROBERTS: Just hanging around. He too had sung some with the Primordial Slime. Primordial Slime which was the band Tommy Epps also came from. He had sung some with them, so when we got Tommy we also invited him. He was okay, he was always – Eddie was always Eddie. I really liked him but he wasn’t the most reliable person in the world. If you’ve read the story of his demise of consuming too much mind altering substances and hanging out at the Deer Park one night, he and a friend of his, I forgot who it was right now, and two ladies left the Deer Park. When they left they got in the car and then he turned his car onto the tracks.

CAITLIN: He turned onto the tracks.

ROBERTS: Which just happened recently again.

CAITLIN: I know, I feel like within the four years that I was there, three times it happened.

ROBERTS: It’s amazing.

CAITLIN: Dangerous location for a bar, right near the railroad tracks.

ROBERTS: Anyway, they got out of the car but he got it into his head that he should flag the train down so they wouldn’t hit his car.

CAITLIN: Not thinking clearly.

ROBERTS: Not thinking clearly. He was on the tracks trying to wave the train, but you can’t wave down a train that’s doing 60 miles on the track. Anyway, he went away. Then George – George explains it, and I have – like everything that George claims I have no reason to disbelieve it.

MCDOWELL: I would question whether you [inaudible] disbelieve it.

CAITLIN: At that time did you – what was the transition, you no longer had a lead singer. Did you still keep on playing without a lead singer or –

ROBERTS: Snakegrinder went through various periods of being together and not being together, playing and not playing. It was just one of those ebbs and flows. It would come and go and that was the nature of the band. It was never a hard and fast business organization. If it wasn’t very rigid it was as fluid as the community that we were playing for. At that point I think Larry went off to California, or Dave went off to California. Dave went off to California and Larry went somewhere, I can’t remember where, so our band was in one of our non-existent periods and George claims his apartment – he and his girlfriend Jenny were sitting there, and George’s dog Meatball started barking. Meatball was a very calm and quiet dog. He started barking at a corner in the room. They swear that this glow of light came up in the corner of the room. Actually I think Steve talks about that in here. George swears he – I don’t know whether
he saw him or at least very clearly heard the voice that he was [inaudible] telling him that he would become the lead singer for Snakegrinder, he would take his place, in a year.

CAITLIN: Are you skeptical?

ROBERTS: If you knew George, you would take everything he says –

CAITLIN: With a grain of salt.

ROBERTS: He regularly communes with aliens.

CAITLIN: Oh, oaky.

ROBERTS: He’s seemingly sane, [inaudible]. So you never know [inaudible] you’re going to know. George was [inaudible] song, [inaudible] blah, blah, blah.

CAITLIN: Because he was now on the political [inaudible].

ROBERTS: He was getting out of it. He was realizing that social change should come more from culture rather than political action. He was shifting his attention from radical politics to doing more social change. Then a year goes by. Dave comes back from where he was. He and I were talking about getting the band back together, and trying to talk Larry into coming back from wherever he was. We said, “Well, we’re going to need a lead singer.” We were thinking, well who could do this, we really need one. I don’t know which one of us said it, but we said, “Well how about George Wolkind, he was always a big fan of the band.”

CAITLIN: Okay, so you guys knew him, he went to a bunch of shows.

ROBERTS: He was a big fan and we knew it. He would come up and play kazoo every once in a while. We knew he could sing, or at least I had heard him sing. So we went and asked George if when the band got back together he would be the singer and he looked dumbfounded because it was exactly a year according to him a year, to the day, that Eddie had appeared to him, that we came and asked him. I didn’t know anything about the vision.

CAITLIN: I was going to say, what was your reaction when –

ROBERTS: I was like, “Okay George.”

CAITLIN: Whatever you say. How – did your music change at all after he became the [inaudible] singer?

ROBERTS: Not really because he just wanted – he was just so thrilled doing it, that whatever we wanted him to sing he would sing. So it’s like, it was [inaudible] to come up with the music.
CAITLIN: Was he a better vocalist than Eddie?

ROBERTS: I don’t – both of them were not professional singers. I wanted to compare. They both had their styles. They both had their good points, their bad points like the rest of us. There’s no comparison.

MCDOWELL: From my perspective, I think that the music did change a bit. When George became the singer of the band that’s when I became affiliated with the band as well because the band became more of a formal entity in my perspective.

CAITLIN: Were you just a fan before as well?

MCDOWELL: I don’t know if fan is really the word, but I would hang around and go to see them play. I think at that point too, you guys had just bought the sound system, so you needed somebody to run it, that’s why George came to me.

ROBERTS: Ah, right, yeah.

CAITLIN: How did you get experienced with that?

MCDOWELL: Well, I’d had some experience before, but up until in between I really hadn’t done anything. I was sort of an audio tech-nut at the time.

CAITLIN: You learned as you went.

MCDOWELL: Kind of, yeah. I think there was also a decision at that point to try to make the band a going entity and maybe learn cover songs at that point because you really hadn’t done covers before.

ROBERTS: No, not a whole lot, no. So we decided okay, if we really are going to be a band I guess we will have to compromise to some degree here and learn stuff [inaudible]. It wasn’t a really good compromise as we were never really successful in bars, but at least we got in some and we did try to do it.

MCDOWELL: Right.

CAITLIN: Very interesting story. I know, when I first read that I was like oh, goodness.

ROBERTS: Really, if you feel brave enough you can talk to George. Honest to God, he really believes aliens. He’s talked to many of them. They’ve even planted something in the back of his neck.

CAITLIN: I just won’t ask him about things like that.

ROBERTS: His wife who’s also very nice and very sane, channels ancient spirits.
CAITLIN: Oh okay, it’s not his girlfriend from the time, Jenny?

ROBERTS: No, no, no she went off with somebody else. His wife is Paula, I forget her last name. They’re both nice people, they’re both seemingly sane, except that they truly, truly believe and channel spirits.

MCDOWELL: George loves to talk, too.

ROBERTS: Oh George loves to talk.

CAITLIN: Are you guys still in contact with him?

ROBERTS: Yeah, once in a while he’ll call me or I’ll call him.

CAITLIN: So then if I mentioned your name that would be like –

ROBERTS: Absolutely, yeah.

CAITLIN: No bad blood.

ROBERTS: No, not at all. Just that it would be an experience [inaudible].

CAITLIN: Definitely, maybe I’ll visit him when I’m in Colorado.

ROBERTS: That would –

MCDOWELL: That would be an experience.

CAITLIN: Seeing him in person, oh goodness. Okay, you mentioned in an email when I asked you if there was any competition between other bands and you guys. You said not really.

MCDOWELL: I wouldn’t say competition because there was a lot of interaction, people from different bands people would get together and play and jam.

CAITLIN: Okay, so at the time it was –

ROBERTS: There were a limited number of resources for bands to make money, absolutely, but I don’t recall ever feeling I was competing with them. Other bands who were more into the bar scene and really trying to make a living from it, whether they felt more competitive, that’s quite possible, but that was never our – it was always competing goals for us. It was, well do we do this for a living; do we do this to try and make money, or do we do this because we enjoy the music, or do we enjoy just playing, being a catalyst for people. Those are competing goals in a way. It’s difficult – it was always difficult just to balance that. We weren’t very good at it.
MCDOWELL: Plus there wasn’t anybody else around playing the same kind of music.

ROBERTS: No.

CAITLIN: Okay.

MCDOWELL: There was a lot of variety in the styles of bands.

ROBERTS: Once we even merged with another band at one point. I don’t know whether you’ve heard the band Martha Lidd.

CAITLIN: Yes, actually Scott Birney from Sin City told me that I should contact Jeff, is that his – Jeff Bove?

ROBERTS: Yeah.

CAITLIN: To talk about that because they were I guess right on ‘69, ‘70 so right in the very beginning of the dates we’re starting with.

ROBERTS: He’s a lawyer; he was one of the original members of it. Maybe it was Jeff Bove. He had a big article in the [inaudible] Journal about a year ago, he had some debilitative –

CAITLIN: Yeah, and now he’s better, he got a heart transplant or something like that.

ROBERTS: Yeah, he was one of the original members. He wasn’t a member of the band when we were hanging around with him. I think he had left by that point. At one point Snakegrinder and Martha Lidd had tried merging and becoming one band – two drummers, a bunch of guitar players, and what didn’t work was having two bass players. That was really hard, and Bob Collin is a wonderful bass player. We even played one gig as the same band.

CAITLIN: Okay, where was that at?

ROBERTS: That was at the University of Delaware, it was at another one of the dining halls, it was probably Harrington I think. Yeah, we tried it just as a community only because we would end up playing a lot of the same places and having it out together. Unfortunately the experiment didn’t work and our musics were just too different. Too many odd things going on, but yeah so you should –

CAITLIN: They’re definitely a band that I would like to contact. What other bands do you remember from that time? Did you listen to any local music? I guess no.

MCDOWELL: I’m just trying to think of where to start.
ROBERTS: I found this – this is a flyer from one of the places that we played. That lists other bands that were around at the time.

MCDOWELL: There’s Nima; Loose Goose, that’s the one – Johnny Neel’s band from down in the Elkton area.

ROBERTS: Oh yeah, then there was Icarus, [inaudible].

MCDOWELL: Are you mostly interested in rock-type bands, or any type of performance?

CAITLIN: Really any type of performance. I guess I mean –

MCDOWELL: There was the Lisa Jack Band from back then.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I’ve been trying – this is, I was showing Steve earlier, this is who is involved; who I contacted, and then this is who I still need to contact.

MCDOWELL: Right, [inaudible], Johnny Neil, Jack of Diamonds played the Stone Balloon a lot.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I talked to Ed Shockley.

ROBERTS: And Whale.

MCDOWELL: And Whale.

CAITLIN: I don’t – okay, Whale.

ROBERTS: Oh yeah, they were a big band.

CAITLIN: Who do you remember who was in that, like a name?

ROBERTS: Oddly enough, my dentist. He was one of the members of Whale. I can’t remember who the main person was but he would be great to talk to. Michael Hazuda, H-A-Z-U-D-A.

MCDOWELL: It’s funny, his brother Dave is in the band too, and Dave is my ex-wife’s first husband.

CAITLIN: Everyone in Delaware’s connected [inaudible].

ROBERTS: So yes, [inaudible] is a dentist over on –

CAITLIN: And Whale, just like W-H-A-L-E.
ROBERTS: They were still getting back – some group, parts of them are still getting back together once a year to go march around Christiana Mall at Christmas, playing music. I don’t know if you ever saw that in the paper.

CAITLIN: No, I’m not originally from here.

ROBERTS: Yeah, they’d be good, Whale.

MCDOWELL: Canyon, do you remember Canyon?

ROBERTS: Oh yeah, I can’t remember who was in it.

MCDOWELL: That was Bill Russell, Rick Hamilton, and Carlos Alejandro.

ROBERTS: Oh, Russell and Hamilton, I found –

CAITLIN: That name, Carlos Alejandro, is he a photographer right now?

MCDOWELL: Yep.

CAITLIN: Okay, because I contacted him to talk about his work because he was involved in photography at that time as well. Now I know another thing about him.

ROBERTS: I found a Goldie’s doorknob poster.

MCDOWELL: Oh really?

ROBERTS: It was stuck to a piece of paper which is why I didn’t bring it. It was advertising Snakegrinder was one of the advertisements [inaudible] and Russell and Hamilton were –

CAITLIN: Who drew that for you guys?

ROBERTS: This – the guy that did, not this one but the guy that did all these was Mike McGuinness.

CAITLIN: Was he a friend of the band?

ROBERTS: Yeah, he was a friend of Dave’s, Dave Birney’s.

MCDOWELL: Here’s the flyer for the first reunion.

ROBERTS: Oh right.

CAITLIN: How soon was your first reunion after you guys broke up?
ROBERTS: We broke up around August of ‘75 and got back together at Christmas.

CAITLIN: [Inaudible] really fast.

ROBERTS: We played at the Stone Balloon, and we also played the next Christmas at the Stone Balloon.

MCDOWELL: We played at the Deer Park one time.

ROBERTS: Then a few years later, I guess it was the ‘80s, I think we played the Deer Park and the Stone Balloon in one weekend.

MCDOWELL: Right, right.

ROBERTS: That was ‘87 or something like that.

CAITLIN: That was the last time you played?

ROBERTS: That was the last time we played in public. We were going to have another [inaudible] in 1994, a guy named Rob –

MCDOWELL: Rob Schmidt.

ROBERTS: Rob Schmidt, yeah.

MCDOWELL: I have a letter from him actually. This is – in ‘94, this was him putting together a proposed set list for [inaudible].

ROBERTS: Oh right. He wanted us to get back together for a reunion. He said he was willing to pay to have something – like Dave fly in or wherever.

CAITLIN: Who is he?

ROBERTS: He was a fan of the band. He’s actually in one of those videos. I saw him dancing on the floor. We rehearsed at his house for several days prior to supposedly having this reunion concert that was supposed to take place up in Arden at the Gild Hall. Unfortunately he got the Gild Hall on the premise that his softball club was having a banquet there. I don’t know why he just didn’t say – because they didn’t want –

CAITLIN: So you played at a softball banquet?

ROBERTS: No, when they found out that it wasn’t just some music at a softball banquet, it was actually a concert that tickets were being sold for, the Arden Gild Hall cancelled it, which was too bad because we were actually sounding very good. We had gotten to play together three or four days in a row, and we were starting to sound good. Anyway – I think George wanted to kill him.
CAITLIN: That’s a shame.

MCDOWELL: What’s so ironic about that was he’s an attorney, so you’d think that he would know not to –

ROBERTS: [Inaudible]. This artwork that Mike did was really original I thought.

CAITLIN: Yeah, did you tell him how you wanted the posters to look [inaudible] whatever?

ROBERTS: He would just come up with all these interesting characters and things. Some of this stuff is incredibly detailed. This is just marvelous stuff, [inaudible].

MCDOWELL: There’s a lot of [inaudible] influence I think.

ROBERTS: There’s definitely [inaudible], but it’s fairly original. He still does stuff. He did the covers for Hangnail Phillips’ last two CD’s. You’ve talked with [inaudible]. He still does artwork around town. I think he might even have a website. Yeah, his stuff –

CAITLIN: Mike McGuinness is his name?


CAITLIN: What memorable shows do you remember, if any? Do you have a favorite performance?

MCDOWELL: I think my favorite was the last official Stone Balloon gig.

ROBERTS: Yes, the one we took the video at. That worked out very well. Even though we were a little rusty, it still was a great time. I just really enjoy watching the people and we did play well enough. I think that was the most people the Stone Balloon ever had in it at the time. I think it was about 1100 people or something like that.

CAITLIN: How long were your sets?

ROBERTS: It would depend. If we were playing a regular bar, it was the 40 on, 40 off rule. If left to our own devices we would just go until we got tired, then we would take a break and then we’ll come back and play again, so much to the consternation of the people that like to dance because they’d get worn out. There was no time [inaudible], when we felt like it.

CAITLIN: How would you describe, I guess this is just general, the difference in the music scene in Delaware at that time compared to Philadelphia. From what most people have been saying, it’s a very small community, everyone knew each other; everyone supported each other.
ROBERTS: Yeah, generally speaking I’d say that’s true. I don’t know, I didn’t really hang out in Philly. The only time I would go to Philly to hear music would be for nation things, [inaudible] may occasionally get local people to open. I remember hearing Woody’s truck stop which was a local band that Todd Rundgren started playing in when he was about 15 years old. Other than that, I’m not really too familiar with the Philadelphia music scene.

CAITLIN: Okay, and my last question, why did the band end? How did you know something was up?

ROBERTS: Like I said, the band ebbed and flowed periodically through a period of five years there. When Yoko came and joined the band, I make a joke. You know who Yoko was [inaudible]?

CAITLIN: Yeah, sorry.

ROBERTS: Larry – I don’t know whether they got married right away, he coupled with a very wonderful woman named Janice, and I think she had ambitions beyond her husband playing in a rock and roll band. She wanted to go get her Doctorate in art and was going to do it at the Chicago Art Institute, and Larry –

CAITLIN: Went with her.

ROBERTS: He went with her, and when he got there he started to work on his Doctorate in psychology. Better for them, but that was kind of – because we had really, for a period of about two years there, I think we really tried our very best to be a successful band and try to make it work. It just [inaudible] wasn’t with it because that wasn’t our nature to do that. So I think Larry recognized, we do have to move on here, so I’m going to move on with my –

MCDOWELL: We did get – as far as I recall, we did get close that one time we were down, when you’re talking about places to play I had forgotten about The Bottle and Cork.

CAITLIN: That’s in Dewey, right?

ROBERTS: Oh yeah.

MCDOWELL: I remember there was one time we were down there for a few days and some woman came from Washington and she wanted to be our agent or something.

ROBERTS: Really?

MCDOWELL: Yeah, you don’t remember that?
ROBERTS: I don’t remember that. Oh really?

CAITLIN: Man.

MCDOWELL: She wanted to make lots of changes to the band, and we weren’t going to change. We weren’t going to alter our identity, are you kidding?

ROBERTS: We are who we are. Suck it up.

CAITLIN: This is just a question that came into my head. Did you guys have day jobs at the time or was the band your full priority?

ROBERTS: It would [inaudible] the band was kind of the priority. When it was the priority it was the priority. As I said, we had these ebbs and flows, but we all had to make money through other means. For a while I was working at this club for teenagers in Stanton called the Electric Gramophone, which is how I met the guy that we bought the sound system from because I was working for him. Then I ended up doing sound for – because he would rent sound systems, I ended up doing the sound at the university for several acts, like Arlo Guthrie, and Mary Travers from Peter, Paul and Mary.

CAITLIN: I know them.

ROBERTS: Various people like that – just catch us catch can.

CAITLIN: Okay, then what about you?

MCDOWELL: Yeah, I had a day job. The band obviously wasn’t going to support us. For a while I was working at the Newark Coop, I did that – I was the manager there for a few years, and other various ways of making money I guess.

CAITLIN: Then I read that – I don’t know if you guys were involved, but there was a Dick Uranus – is that you? Was that a shoot-off?

MCDOWELL: Where did you find that? I thought we had buried that.

ROBERTS: That is – oh we don’t want to go down that path.

CAITLIN: That was just something you were involved with after Snakegrinder.

ROBERTS: After Snakegrinder went away and still wanted to play music. By this time I had become friends with the guy that owned the recording studio. I was hanging out there a lot with some fantasies of maybe producing other bands, that kind of thing. I still wanted to play so we tried to get an amalgamation of musicians together for whatever. Who was that – who were the original people that – it was James and Jimmy and –

MCDOWELL: Was it Paul?
ROBERTS: Not right away.

MCDOWELL: Okay.

ROBERTS: Then Joe Pinzarrone. So we tried making some music as a band called the Altar Boys. We never played, we got about three or four things recorded. Then Dave went off and joined the circus, literally.

CAITLIN: Wait, like Circus, Ringling Brothers Circus – what did he do?

ROBERTS: He was playing tuba in a circus band. That would have been his high school instrument. Actually John went off too, Giovanni, he played drums. Anyway, so here we were, just some of the musicians hanging out. The guy that owned the recording studio said – and we said, “Well, what do we do for songs?” Dana said, “Well, I have poetry.” I said, “Okay fine, we’ll make music and you can recite your poetry.” Why not, we’ll do that. It really became fun doing that. When we were looking for, “Well gee, I guess we’re kind of a band now and we should all have names.” Dana, who had never really played music and had just been an engineer said, “Well, what kind of name should I use?” You’ve got people with made-up names like Freddy Mercury. That’s a made-up name. He said, “Well how about Victor Venus?” Naw, Dick Uranus. So he became the character and that became – the original name of the band was Dick Uranus with the All Night Vibrators.

CAITLIN: What was this late ‘70’s?

ROBERTS: This was late ‘70’s.

MCDOWELL: ‘77.

CAITLIN: You were involved in this?

MCDOWELL: I was the engineer, I was in the booth doing all the –

CAITLIN: Did you guys play?

ROBERTS: Yeah, we actually managed, and it was absolute, total improvisation. Everything was. There was absolutely no thought of what we were going to do ahead of time.

CAITLIN: Do you have any recording of that?

ROBERTS: Ooooh you don’t want to – we have so much recorded it’s ridiculous. In fact if there’s – there’s a website, did you go look at the website, www.DickUranus.com. It’s out there. You can see it. So for years and years we would just meet every Sunday afternoon or whatever and just play and record whatever we felt like.
CAITLIN: Fun, friends, making music.

ROBERTS: A lot of the stuff, if you listen to it, there were little snippets of things that actually sounded coherent. Those were things we’d take out and we’d put them on a CD or whatever and –

MCDOWELL: I remember Linda came up a few times too and she was involved with some stuff. Linda Moore, I think you interviewed her too.

CAITLIN: Yeah.

ROBERTS: Yeah, and Debbie Lemon because Debbie was Joe’s girlfriend at the time.

CAITLIN: Yes, I’ve talked to both of them.

ROBERTS: You talked to Deb, really?

CAITLIN: Mm-hmm.

ROBERTS: Wow, [inaudible].

CAITLIN: She is in, oh my gosh, I’m going to forget what she said.

MCDOWELL: Last I heard she was in –

ROBERTS: Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

CAITLIN: Yes, and she is running her own dance studio. She sent us a bunch of images and footage of her dances I guess when she taught at the University, new space [inaudible].

ROBERTS: Yeah, one of the things [inaudible] was hanging out was Joe Pinzarrone, and that’s who she was living with. He was one of the founding members, as it were, of Dick Uranus.

CAITLIN: I’ll have to – the next time I talk to her I’ll have to mention you guys.

ROBERTS: She even came on stage with us once when we played at the student center. We were doing one of those all night telethons, or radio-thons and trying to raise money. Dick Uranus performed, as it were. She put on a blonde wig and stuffed some balloons down her blouse and went on as – what did she, Dolly, she called herself Dolly something.

CAITLIN: Dolly Parton?
ROBERTS: That was the spoof but – yeah.

MCDOWELL: Wow, you talked to her. If you talk to her again, say hi.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I’ll tell her that you guys say hello.

MCDOWELL: Absolutely.

ROBERTS: If you really want to know about Dick Uranus, there’s – that’s a whole other two hours’ worth of stuff. It’s late ‘70’s, ‘80’s, ‘90’s, we’ve got so much on tape it’s ridiculous. I don’t think you want to go there.

CAITLIN: Another time.

MCDOWELL: The New Space Company – when Linda was doing performances I would do a lot of audio recordings for sound tracks for what she was doing. One of my favorite ones, and it didn’t turn out very well but doing it was back in [inaudible], the gym before they renovated it, there was a pool in the bottom.

CAITLIN: Oh my gosh, what is it called, *Pitwork*?

MCDOWELL: Yes.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I have footage of that.

MCDOWELL: Oh do you really, okay, yeah.

ROBERTS: Wow.

CAITLIN: It was when they emptied out the pool and then they danced, or improve dance or something like that. We’re also incorporating; we’re trying to incorporate dance and theater into this as well. I think the Delaware Theatre Company started in the early ‘70’s, and then there was just a lot of cool dance things that were going on back then too that were really innovative for the time.

MCDOWELL: Right, and Debbie and [inaudible] were definitely part of it. Rick Rothrock, did you talk to him?

CAITLIN: Yep, because I know they did a dance too called *Under the Moon* [*Moon*] or something where he had a sculpture and they danced around it and stuff like that. I think it was a wood telephone pole type structure. I don’t remember exactly.

ROBERTS: I don’t remember seeing that one.

MCDOWELL: Yeah.
ROBERTS: [Inaudible].

MCDOWELL: [Inaudible] seen performances at Delaware Theatre Company when it was in the fire hall before they built their existing building. There was a gallery over there too.

ROBERTS: Yes, there was.

MCDOWELL: I forget what that was called.

ROBERTS: Did you ever find Tom Watkins?

CAITLIN: Yes.

ROBERTS: You did.

CAITLIN: Yes.

ROBERTS: Where is he?

CAITLIN: He is living in Philly. He up until a month ago was still in Wilmington, which upsets me but I’ve been looking for June and since June and just found him the other day. He called, I talked to him, he’s alive and well, excited about the project. Said he’s going to pull a lot of things out of storage.

ROBERTS: He has a lot of things.

CAITLIN: Yeah, what is it, what was your relationship with him? I know – I have an article from Emergency Illustrated that you guys –

MCDOWELL: Yeah, [inaudible] the same one.

ROBERTS: [Inaudible]. Is it this one? There’s an article about Tom in here somewhere.

MCDOWELL: See if there’s a table of contents. This was the brainchild of Ed Wolzowelski mainly. He had a lot to do with it. He owned the house where my wife and I lived in the other half of the house and Snakegrinder practiced in the basement all the time. He was very, very tolerant and supportive. He is the guy that did the video at the Stone Balloon. It was [inaudible], you should mention him. He died.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I heard he passed away. Wasn’t his nickname Stretch?

MCDOWELL: Stretch, yeah, right. Anyway, this was some of his main projects.

CAITLIN: Did you hang out with the group that Tom Watkins hung out with at all?
ROBERTS: No, not really.

CAITLIN: Joyce Brabner.

ROBERTS: Yeah, I met her. Dana, Dick Uranus, Dana Smith knew Tom better than I did and had more to do with him.

CAITLIN: I heard he’s really tall.

ROBERTS: Yes he is, he’s quite tall. There it is.

CAITLIN: There it is – that’s the article I have.

ROBERTS: In the unreadable print.

CAITLIN: I know, that’s so – [inaudible] four pages, special eye strain page. We have magnifying glasses downstairs.

ROBERTS: You would need one; it’s like printing from the 1700’s here.

CAITLIN: Where are you guys? There are you. Yeah, you’re not in here.

MCDOWELL: That would be my wife.

CAITLIN: You have [inaudible].

MCDOWELL: I did.

CAITLIN: You guys all had long hair

MCDOWELL: Yes we did. I do have a picture of me with it actually.

CAITLIN: You met Tom Watkins through your neighbor Ed, right?

MCDOWELL: Well, yeah Ed was friends with him, Stretch was friends with him, and then Dana Smith the [inaudible]; he was friends with him. I remember Dana and I went to one of Tom’s famous gallery parties.

ROBERTS: Do you remember that one?

MCDOWELL: Oh yeah.

CAITLIN: Did you ever go to Fifth Street Gallery with Rob Jones?
ROBERTS: Yeah, we played there once. [inaudible] played there once at Rob Jones’ Gallery. Dana and I got all dressed in black and put on ski masks and took instruments to one of Watkins’ parties and his thing, and we did a duet as Ninja beatniks. We just crashed their [inaudible] and co-opted the stage for about 15 minutes and Dana read poetry while I played bass.

CAITLIN: Oh that’s cool. Was that your only experience with Fifth Street?

ROBERTS: Yeah, that was.

CAITLIN: Then did you hear about his Sleaze Convention?

ROBERTS: Yeah, it was [inaudible].

CAITLIN: Did you go to that?

ROBERTS: No, I never went.

MCDOWELL: I remember being there once.

ROBERTS: You do? Was it sleazy?

CAITLIN: Probably.

MCDOWELL: It was interesting.

CAITLIN: Then John Waters was in that crowd with Divine, very interesting, such a great picture. Everyone has long hair.

MCDOWELL: That was the style then. When you mentioned finding Tom in Philadelphia, it reminded me, have you found Susan Rosenberg?

ROBERTS: Oh yes, she’d be good.

CAITLIN: Flash?

MCDOWELL: Flash, yeah. Is she still Flash?

CAITLIN: Yeah, well it was really hard for me to track her down because I kept typing in Susan Rosenberg. That was a very common name. I probably contacted Susan Rosenberg’s that were like, “I’m not that person, sorry.” Then one Susan Rosenberg that I talked to said, “I think you’re looking for Susan Rosenberg who changed her name to Flash.” So I typed in Flash and then I contacted her. Yeah, I talked to her. She’s actually coming. She still has family in Newark and she’s visiting them at the end of March and wants to come in for an interview.
MCDOWELL: Well tell her I said hi.

CAITLIN: Oh, okay. I didn’t know that you guys knew that whole group.

MCDOWELL: Are you kidding? Newark – have you been to Newark?

CAITLIN: You’re right, everyone knows each other.

MCDOWELL: It’s a very small state.

CAITLIN: Well, it’s been great talking to you. I’m glad that you were able to come in and share with me your memories.

ROBERTS: I’m sure there’s a lot more interesting things and I just can’t remember.

CAITLIN: Well, you have a few years to think about it. Yeah, so if you leave today and you’re in the car, you randomly think of something feel free, call, email. Anytime, I’ll be around even when I move to Colorado, I’m still having my email. I’ll be fully involved in this project no matter where I am until 2015, so I’m your contact person, yes.

MCDOWELL: Well, definitely keep [inaudible] the data of what’s going on with it.

CAITLIN: Definitely, I’m just trying to get in as many interviews as I can.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 74 minutes