

## Neon Days Cast and Crew Talkback

Neon City Hall  
September 11, 2004

**John Malpede:** So, we've really decided that this conversation will review, among all the different, although it took many people to do this project obviously, and some of them are here... and a lot of them have done, worked like crazy, so I thought it would be a time for just other different people who've worked on the project to talk and then other different people their feelings who have done a lot of work on the project that are here and we could just have a conversation with everybody. So, I will let's see I think... so briefly I guess I will just... Briefly I'll just introduce everybody and they can reintroduce themselves, something like that...

Jack Faust of course was our fearless Kennedy. Don was another great cast member, who drove, had to drive two hours to get to everything we did... We could never have pulled off half the big ideas without a huge influx of interns in majorly able bodied and skilled folks, half of them, two thirds of them which we call the Dutch contingent, and Marloes is number one in the Dutch contingent... among one of the other things, Marloes, along with Michael Hunt, designed and produced the RFK in EKY Times, volume number one... Sitting next to her is Harrell Fletcher, who had been, originally when we came down here four years ago, Michael and AFP invited a bunch of artists down here, and Harrell and I came down here together and we had a bunch of ideas which we floated and eventually I lighted on this one... so Harrell's been in on it from the beginning, it was his idea for the memorabilia exhibit and for the broadside and he was here a month ago and really helped us take the ideas and move them in the direction where they could actually get done right now... and next to Harrell is my wife, Henriette Brouwers, who is herself an amazing performer and director, and who was the associate director on this project, and also did tons of the producing and work sort of like twenty-four hours a day, and made me do a few things too...

**Henriette Brouwers:** I brought cappuccino to eastern Kentucky...

**John Malpede:** And now it's in every gas station... Nell Fields, Project Coordinator, we're really... one of the great... things that happened at the beginning of the project is Robert Salyer and I interviewed Nell at the very beginning of the project when we were trying to generate something to talk about the project, and then, much later, she came on as the Project Coordinator, and without her we could never have done anything that's going on... And Robert Salyer's also been involved since the very beginning, he was working with Michael when Michael was running the AFP and doing documentation and he and I, uh, for people who were up at Vortex, when we were up on the road there before the performance center the other day I was talking to Jack and Frankie Taylor and Robert came up and said, uh, déjà vu all over again because three years ago we were up there and met James Ulmer Mullins who lives right next

door to the church and that's where he pointed out where the school had been and all this stuff, so um, Robert's contribution has been invaluable...

And Michael's been fortunate enough and unfortunate enough to earn the obscure designation of dramaturg on the project because its really been from the very beginning its been uh a conceptual circle between him and me in making this thing happen... and if you see our fabulous website, he and his son, Brendan, have been responsible for that... etcetera, etcetera... and Rebecca Shepherd is uh one of... was brought to us by Jan Cohen-Cruz because she's a New York University student... Jan vouched for her, and you can always believe Jan...

(voice): Except when she's giving you directions...

**John Malpede:** That's a problem... and Heiner is a German posing as a Dutchman, and he is also a graduate student at the Frank Mohr Instituut in Groningen, and he's responsible for putting together the memorabilia exhibit and uh a lot of other stuff on the project so he's been wonderful to have him here... And Andrea is from Tennessee, well now from Georgia, but living, going to Antioch and a student of Chris Hill's and she was our intern over the summer and figured out, she masterminded the digital archive, because this is really the tip of the iceberg what we have here... how many gazillion images do we have?

**Andrea Kubilus:** Close to three hundred now... but now we have...

**John Malpede:** And now we probably have another... eighteen million... Menno is our very shy retiring Dutch intern who is also been our tech wiz... he did the really beautiful sound installation at Cushing Hall at Alice Lloyd... he put up all those signs for people like Jan and Linda... as well as designing them he traced the route several times so we could actually keep to a schedule which is really surprising how the whole project, and on and on and on, so thank you Menno, and... Steve Brewer, a shy retiring actor, we heard how he completely transformed cause it used to be when he was in Head Start, he was just the quietest guy you would want... and um Doug Dorchug is the man with the golden ear, our fabulous technician, and who else? Mat Schwarzman has been down a couple of times covering the project and gonna write about it, about a sort of uh, a document of the process in a certain way... Linda Burnham who um I've been saying recently, over the past year I've been saying I wouldn't even have a career without Linda Burnham... has been down an wrote a piece, was at a press conference the first time we were at City Hall with Kennedy last February, and she wrote a fabulous article about that... and uh, I guess I guess I'll stop now... over here...

(voice): You have one more actor...

**John Malpede:** Where?

(voice): Robert Choke...

**John Malpede:** That's right, where's Bill? Bill Arnone. Bill Arnone is a, how'd you get involved in this project Bill?

**Bill Arnone:** I read her article... then I called Peter Edelman and I said, is this for real, Peter, and he said, it's for real. And it was real.

**John Malpede:** Bill was in Kennedy's New York office, he was the youngest person in the office in '68, and he played a role in the show, and what else would I like to say, I don't know, oh yeah, I wanted to introduce, for people who weren't here earlier who missed the fabulous presentation by those two folks who are talking over there... Jill Hatch and Aleece Jones, who runs LKLP Head Start... I guess um, I gotta mention one of, my great friend David Michelak, who's down here photographing... and also, Jim Webb, who did such a fabulous job on MMT... and Joe and the whole film crew of Robert's, Joe has been, and Tony, who double dutied as an actor... and a sound technician... and Laura Doggett who set a new standard for invisibility by hiding behind the reclusive Menno... so I'm going to give my seat up to Steve Brewer and then maybe in any order you want you guys can talk... and everybody can also... talk.

**Steve Brewer:** Oh, I've gotta go first?

**John Malpede:** You can do it.

**Steve Brewer:** I believe I could might do it, I've made a speech or two in my lifetime... I just think it was fantastic working with the whole crew. I think everything went fine, went smooth... I was amazed that we was running on schedule, but uh, I know a whole lotta hard work went into everything. I know that a lot of dedication went into it, and I was amazed when I seen that it took four years to put this together, cause we're always, like Nell said, at the last minute and the night before putting something together, but we get it together at the last minute, but four years all I got to say... all the new people I've met, I hope we become friends... me being from the mountains of eastern Kentucky, it don't take me a lot of time to meet friends, to make friends, cause we don't have a lot of time here, so we try to go ahead, when I meet you I either like ya or dislike ya and there ain't no changing it after that... I hopefully met a lot of new friends, a lot of people who've done a lot of good work, and I want to thank John and I want to thank everybody in the whole thing for putting this together and asking me to help em. Thank you very much.

**Henriette:** OK, Nell.

**Nell:** I'm like Steve, I'm set to be good to Linda, like she's good to John, um, I can never express what a commitment, what an honor it is to be involved in

something that has been so challenging and so rewarding at the same time and me not seeing what the rewards were coming before the challenges... it was different, and I've never worked with people like John and Michael and Henriette who's hearts... and I've always been told by my family when you work to the good of others, you'll be rewarded, and that's what they were doing, working for a bigger picture and looking at a bigger picture, and the rewards have been wonderful, and I thank God how I got to be part of it.

**Henriette:** Oh, well, what was it...? Say would... I'm learning how to speak English still... come say a word... and sometimes actually sounds like Kentuckians... well, I really don't know even how to start... at this point it has been really for a whole year, twenty-four hours a day, and I'm just really scared about when it's over, because, what then? But yeah, I fell like we've been working on it for four years, so we can work on it four years more really, and um, a lot of things that also happened with the schools, we already made arrangements to go back into schools, there are teachers who have made this project the topic of their semester, next semester so, we will be back and continue and I've been really, everybody has been really so incredible, its really, has been incredible working with everybody, and I think that it, really to me... you know you can't do anything by yourself, especially if you do something so big. I've been really trying to produce it and to get everybody to do what they had to do and at a certain moment I was confident that everybody was cool, what they were doing and I felt myself go with the stream and could focus on what I needed to do and it has been incredible to me to be able to rely on so many people doing all this work and I think that really for me that's a big part of what this project is about... if you speak about change which is for me a big part of what this project is about... it will come from all of us together and it's not one person trying to make as much money as he can, as she can, it's people listening to each other and trusting each other and giving the energy and the energy comes back and it becomes bigger than you ever imagined and that has been wonderful, so thank you all very very much.

**Harrell:** In 1988 I was an undergraduate art student, and I happened to catch a performance that John Malpede put together with the Los Angeles Poverty Department at the art institute, and that was the most amazing thing I had ever seen up to that point because there was a sort of out-of-controlledness and humanity and sincerity and it really changed the direction of my work... it took me years to figure out how to apply what I learned from that experience but eventually I did, I started to do that and getting a chance to work on this project with John has been pretty much a dream come true. And today, as we started to get this exhibit part together and everything was completely crazy, I was feeling like we're in this kind of John Malpede zone – it's gonna all sort of work out even though I did kind of stress about it, it was suddenly great, this is just perfect, exactly how its going right now, and then we had the Head Start meeting after that, the discussion, and it was just the most amazing thing, and I really, I'm so glad I've been able to be a part of this project.

**Marloes:** When we first heard about this project it was through our teacher, Sjoerd, who should have been here, but couldn't be here. We came instead of him because we were after him, you are doing, you are doing a project what is it? It's John Malpede, it's site specific theater, a tour for two days, what is it, it's kind of vague, but he sent us a whole (consequent tour) – although we didn't really know what it was all about, because he was explaining also the things with it, he was like, go there and experience it because it's a once in a lifetime experience you have to do it. I can't go, but you have to go, and that's like, yeah, he was totally right, it's what you the people that I met, the whole, yeah, just the whole experience, yeah it's incredible... you'll take it with me, I'll take it with me all my life. As an artist and as a person. I would like to thank you for this... yeah...

**Donald Quillen:** It's just great being a part of this... originally born in Pikeville, Kentucky... six months after I was born, much like my character, they had to leave the area, and it's brought in perspective a lot of the journey to me the people have taken that have left the area... and meeting the people and all the people involved in this has just been has just been great, fantastic, and I'm just honored to be part of it.

**Jack Faust:** It was only about six weeks ago that I had a message on a cell phone and my secretary, I was out of town, and she left a message, said that Appalshop called and you need to call back Henrietta, and something about a Kennedy project and it was a Monday morning when I called back and I called back to say I couldn't do it... but then she explained and I said, oh, I'll come down the afternoon, I'll just come down in the afternoon and we'll talk about it. And the more I learned, the more I wanted to learn, and John and I had the discussion about his physical characteristics...

**Rebecca Shepherd:** ...Tell me...where do I go to learn more about this? And, anyway, to make a long story short, I ended up here. But, I think the point is that before I came here, the concept of community-based theatre is just, it was abstract to me. Like, it was like I could see videos of other people doing the work or whatever, but I didn't really understand what it really means, like, community involvement. And, coming here, I mean, I've just met people who, through talking about the project, they have stories to tell you or they want to give what they have to contribute. You know, a man at East Letcher Ministries gave so much of his clothes for this project, you know. And there were women working there who were saying, "He was my hero. He was my hero when he came here." And, you know, "Where is this happening? I want to be there." So, this project has inspired me so much. I don't really feel like I can put it into words at this time, but I am very thankful to have come here and met you all. Really.

**Henriette Brouwers:** And this is Ginny here. And Ginny, yeah, you Nell...

**Nell Fields:** Well, when I finished speaking a little while ago I really felt a big lump in my stomach because I hadn't thanked all the other – I mentioned four – and the truth is, it's phenomenal how many wonderful people have been involved in this. I mean, we couldn't fit everybody in this building that's stepped forward in some little way. But, we just had three more wonderful people who've been very, very involved, including, well, we'll start with Ginny Norris who was our Volunteer Recruiter person who worked so diligently in helping bring all this together and it's certainly – I couldn't have done it without here.

**Ginny Norris:** Well, it was kind of a family affair for us. My husband played one of the roles and we drug the children to a lot of stuff. We just moved to Letcher County in June. Just moved back to Appalachia from a ten-year absence. And it was really exciting for us. I left yesterday with a great sense of accomplishment, but I almost felt like we needed a debriefing. It was a reminder, really, of growing up and knowing the families that, when people were talking about not having food in their cabinets, thinking about my own mama not eating so that we could eat and thinking about our neighbors who, you know, that didn't eat so their kids could eat. And I work for Southeast Community College now and I can guarantee you there are several of my students who are eating biscuits so their kids can have the best food at night. And so, it was really one of those moments yesterday, after it was over, to really think about how much has changed and really, RFK went home and a lot of people like Nell Fields and a lot of people that I've met since I'm here who stayed here and made this happen. And I think that we need to remember that most of the changes that've been made here for the best were not made by Robert Kennedy, whom I greatly admire, but were made by – and not by, necessarily, the people who were represented in the testimonies – the judge executives. They were mom's who were tired of their kids going to bed without anything to eat and, you know, I think that the heroes are the people who still sit among us, rather than the people who came from 'on high'. And so, I really appreciated the experience. And it was a good way to come back home, to be involved in this.

**Robert Salyer:** I'd like to turn this over to Michael Hunt for a second here.

**Michael Hunt:** Um, I really like this project because I think that, more than any other project I've ever seen, it's exactly what we should be doing in communities in terms of art because it created a recognizable and honorable transaction between people, using art as a way to open up all kinds of really stunning truths. And this project started in so many different places. It didn't start at one point at one point in one time with one person saying, "This is what we're going to do." And we've often remarked to each other working on this, if we had known what this project was gonna be, none of us would've started it. If we had thought about what the end had to be it would've seemed too impossible almost. But, you know, the work that John did for years in L.A. came to this. Everything that Henriette's done came to this. Nell, you know, gave such life and meaning to this project. And everybody was there when it started. Everybody was there. It was

important. And I think, you know, I've learned a couple of things, because I don't want to say, "It was a great project. Thanks..." I like learning stuff and this project has taught me more than another project or any other portion of my life involved in the arts has taught me. And number one, you know, John also likes, you know, to sit back there and not talk a whole lot all of a sudden... But, you know, the thing I think that has been most important about why this project worked the way it did the last 3 days is the absolute commitment to truth – that there was this honorable truth that was discussed in 1968 between this arguably great man and the people who put the tour together and the people who came and were true heroes for testifying. Whether you agree with them or not, they spoke what they truly believed to be the truth. And I think about that as being the main organizing point in this whole project because people who had never acted before, people who never thought that buildings on their property could be turned into these deeply meaningful, spiritual installations. They got the truth. And they – every place that this project went people brought back so much truth to the project. Watching the people in the project change because of this. I mean, and everybody watched this. You know, Jack, during those two days of performance, he was totally transformed. I mean, not that he was a bad guy before that, but it wasn't because, you know, John forced him to portray Robert F. Kennedy and, you know, do the hair thing and go to a gym and work out and all of that stuff that Kennedy would require. You know, he spoke what was true and you could tell. That was his connection to it. And that's what carried through. And it became more and more eloquent and in some points it became his own words. And it was amazing to see. You know, Don followed this project all, you know, all over the place and, you know, he talks about going – we had some bad sausage at Wolfe County Senior Citizen's Center and it had to go back to the grocery and, you know, Don took it and he came back and I had also just gone to the store because we also needed forks and plates and stuff so... And he comes back and says, "Did you meet the butcher?" And he and the butcher had gotten into this conversation over green sausage about Robert Kennedy and the butcher just hated the Kennedy's, right? But it was a conversation and this project has brought so many different people together in ways that I think have been really good. And I think if we look at this project next week and next year and, hopefully, in five years, these connections will remain. And I'll say the other thing I've learned is, because one of the things I wanted was a project that at long last I wanted to see. You know, I've seen so many things that on paper were great. I've seen so many things that – even – they're so right, they mean the right thing, but, you know, they didn't have time to research, they didn't have time to develop a project, they didn't have time to network with, you know, people living in a trailer fifty feet away from the one-room school. You know, they wouldn't even have time to think about them as being an integral part of the project. This project had – and this is, you know, if you're writing about this project or thinking about what you need to tell people about it – it had the time to grow organically. It had the time to connect and really become a transaction of truth between the people who were doing it. And, hopefully, it will have the time as we go on to keep track of all the things that have happened because of it. All of the people –

and this has been really important to me from that beginning point – I really do believe in the expertise of people about their own lives. They know everything about where they live, who they are, what happens to ‘em. And they should be allowed to share that. And this project did that. The other thing is, you know, John came here from somewhere else and this is a big point in community arts – artists from outside come here and they do some thing and they get all the glory and then they leave. John didn’t just visit. He moved here. John moved his wife here. And, you know, in one year she became a master gardener, which is amazing. But he committed to this community and to this whole project in a way that I’ve never seen an artist be able to. The other thing, you know, he put it together because he went around, you know. He found Kennedy’s route and for a year he drive around and wherever Kennedy had been he stopped and just started talking to people. And I have never seen anybody more gifted and more gracious and a getter listener than John about going into a place and talking to people. And he found out amazing things because of that. Things that people didn’t know they remembered. And the other thing – the thing that matched that equally – this whole project couldn’t have happened with just that but it was Nell, who has worked here for ever and ever and ever for anything that is good and right and just. Not just what would pay the bills, but for anything that was good and right and just. And, I can’t tell you how much it means to the project to have somebody as respected as her and somebody as well-connected as her and somebody with the dogged determination as her, that she’s on the phone for eight hours a day for six months, you know, dragging people, who have, really no idea what she’s talking about, into this project. This woman drove around looking for a strip-mine, and those of you who were with us on Thursday, I mean, this project had spectacle because she drove up, found the guy who owned that B&W, Inc. and talked him into letting this performance take place on his site. It was probably illegal. It was really stupid in terms of insurance, but it was also important to us that somebody like him get to speak in this project. And that he be given the space to do it and, you know, there aren’t too many projects that have so many contradictory points in them. But Nell and John together found a way to organize this massive number of people into something that was bigger than all of those people. And I – that’s worth noting. Well, I’ve talked a long time – a lot of new people are here. I think we should mention somebody whose not here today – the fourth of the Dutch contingent Marieke, who is responsible for the dead cows – such greatest hits as the dead cows out there.

**Linda Burnham:** What dead cows?

**Hunt:** The dead cows you drove by but might not have noticed.

**Burnham:** She killed them?

**Hunt:** And that’s why she had to leave the country... No, one of the apocryphal stories in all of this, and, you know, because we’ve learned also that memory and history can, for all their truth, also be, maybe, made up. Certainly constructed in

some way. But there was a story that, to show off for Kennedy, one of the coal-operators had a fixed up strip site, threw some grass on it. He drove over to Pound, bought a bunch of underfed cows, threw 'em up on the strip site. They way overate, foundered, and dropped dead right at the time Kennedy's driving by. And, the story was never, like, proven or disproven. It was an amazing story. Henriette, in a way I've never seen a person fall in love with a story fell in love with that story. So, we did the RFK in EKY project anyway, even though she wanted us to just do the dead cows. But, Marieke created them. They were out on a strip-site that was being reclaimed in between Neon and Hwy. 15 when you left the Head Start.

**Norman Frisch:** You could see it from the road, but if you knew when to look.

**Malpede:** Steve Brewer called it in on the radio yesterday as we were leaving the Head Start.

**Hunt:** And so, and then we have – Representative Carl Perkins has arrived. There's another intern here who did a lot for us – Barrett.

**Brouwers:** Barrett is here?

**Hunt:** If it wasn't for Barrett – he's a Hazard boy – we would not have met a lot of the people that showed up in Hazard and told their stories. I mean, he knew where they were and he went out and found 'em for us. And God bless him for that because they were great stories.

**Nell Fields:** I'd like to add a little bit to your... I'd just like to say one other thing, following up on something Michael said, and that is I have never, ever felt so proud to be who I am – and not who I am as me – but who I am as an Appalachian person, as I have in this project. Because of the wonderful responses that I've had from all of the people in every community and every county, county government level, every person that we've approached, all the people that we've talked to. There've been a few minor ones who may not have been 100% there, but that's OK – we love 'em anyway. But I have to say that it's been the most heart-warming and wonderful feelings to understand how easy it is for people to love and appreciate each other when they're given the opportunity and to help each other. And this project did that, so it's been great.

**Ginny Norris:** I wanted to follow up on what Nell said is that, um, when I got involved in this project I talked to – 'cause one of my jobs was to recruit volunteers, so if you've spent any time around me in the last two months it's been, "What're you doin' Wednesday, Thursday, an Friday?" – is how well informed people are. And Andrea had a great story about talking to someone about your piercings and the woman saying, you know, "You can't work at the state park because of those piercings." And, you know, we often confuse poverty with ignorance. And going through this, talking to people – people's thoughts –

not just on Kennedy – but talks I had with people about segregation. And talks I had with people about how all those programs that we talked about in those hearings yesterday don't exist anymore – that all the social welfare progress that we made is gone now – and people who really understood that. And people who talked about the war. You know, people who you would not think had an opinion one way or another, and talked, not only about how they felt about the Vietnam War, but about the current war. And so, I just think it's really important. You know, one of the things that it taught me again was, you know, poverty and ignorance are not the same thing and that there are lots of people who have a lot to say and have absolutely no venue to do so. And I think that was the important thing about Kennedy's visit. One of the disappointing things for me was that during Kennedy's visit the perspective of women was really lost. We heard from the father trying to feed the fifteen kids, but we didn't hear from the mother who'd had those fifteen kids. We heard a lot of talk about jobs for men, but nothing about the economic empowerment of women and unfortunately, you know, I still don't hear that conversation going on in many of our communities. And so, you know, I hope that the next time that we have a government representative come to our region that it will be, the majority will be women that are there testifying and that, you know, that we'll hear some women's voices. But, I got to hear and learn so much. And Nell Fields, when I left the University of Kentucky to come here, the first thing one of the librarians – two of the librarians said – is, "You gotta meet Nell Fields when you get there. Just meet Nell Fields, you'll be OK. So I went to a potluck as soon as I got here, to specifically meet Nell Fields and got drafted into the project. So I'm gonna sit down now, but thank you, it's just been a wonderful experience.

**Frank Taylor:** Well, I got here a little bit late so, I don't know what the topic is, as they say. But I did plan on comin' over here and uh, and since I was in the cast with all the rest of the people I thought that it was a possibility that I might get called upon to say somethin' and so, of course, I prepared something to say. And that was that I don't know what this was, thing whole thing – really – but it was successful. And at times it seemed – it really wasn't a play – it did seem a little bit like a movie at one time to me. You know, location to location and old cars and costume and things, you know, bein' kind of crazy. And when the floor in the school out there gave way I pretty much thought maybe it was a movie and I, uh... Well, I've had a great time doin' this, really. And bein' able to express Carl Perkins' words. You know, there's so many people that grew up with him that I've met who – like this lady here, over here, said she had a letter that she had wrote to him – just personal things like that that it was, it felt really nice. So, I don't know. I've been involved in a lot of community events over the years and I think what Nell was saying right then that anything that makes you feel the best you've ever felt in your life is a pretty good thing. And that's gonna give you a charge for energy for other things that are comin' up in your life and the people that are around you and involved in your life. So, my gosh, what more could you want. But I was especially impressed immediately out at Vortex the other day, you know, when things got kicked off there. And I didn't really have a feel, I

guess, maybe, for how things were gonna be and it just, as soon as the first word was said, I had no sense of it being, like, a re-enactment or anything staged or anything. It seemed very real to me. Very true and so, it was just nice to participate in that.

**Steve Brewer:** I've got to say something about Nell. I was – I'm pretty active in our community and doing a lot of stuff and right now I'm really doin' a lot of stuff and... So, the phone rings and it's Nell and Nell says, Steve, I want you to this." And that's basically what you said, wasn't it? "I just want you to do this." And I said, "Well, all right." So after I got off the phone – we was a little, kind of a get together there discussin' – we're building a beautiful monument up here right outside of Neon, it's a coal miner's monument in honor of the coal miners and I their Communications Director and it's really took a lot of time. But, anyway, Nell called and she said, "I want you to do this." But, basically, I said, "You got it." Get off the phone. The group said, "Who was that?" I says, "Nell Fields." "What'd Nell want." I said, "She wanted somethin'," I said, "I'm not for sure what it was." They said, "Well, you said you'd go ahead and do it?" And I said, "When Nell Fields calls, you go ahead and do it."

**Nell Fields:** You'll hear from me next week...

**Brewer:** Is that good or bad?

**Fields:** Oh, I got lots of things...

**Robert Salyer:** Well, first of all, one of the coolest things I saw was Frankie showin' up with these, like, white socks. That was one of the coolest little touches of everything. Anyway, I'm not really good at this, and that's usually why I stay behind the camera but I just wanted to just a say a couple things. I grew up around here and I've been at Appalshop for about six years working on films and the last two days really reminded me why I do this. You know? And, also, one thing I remembered, you know, John and I, like, early on we were in Vortex and we met James Elmer. And James Elmer directed us to the house of a woman, her name was Tody. And he said, you know, "If anyone knows what happened in Vortex, Tody knows." And so we had to get direction to Tody's house. Tody was her name right? Yeah. And I think she was probably in her, what, 80's maybe?

**John Malpede:** Yeah. She died, actually, this winter.

**Salyer:** Yeah, she passed away. And we sat there in her living room and talked about the hearing in Vortex and she had a couple memories, but she couldn't remember much. And then she invited us into the kitchen and she had all these sweets like strawberry shortcakes and cookies and, you know, on and on and on. And, you know, I didn't really know John that well, you know, at that point, and, you know, she sat in that kitchen and she kept, like, pushin' cakes on us. And

John just kept eating more and more cake. And I know that he probably wasn't hungry anymore at that point, but he was, like, you know, he didn't want to turn it down. He kept taking all this cake and eating it. And he was just like, amazingly, just, you know, really gracious to this woman. You know, I have to admit, you know, being from here, the whole idea of someone coming in from the outside to do a project... You know, at first I had some doubts about it, but, you know, John changed all that for me. He came here and he lived here and I've just, I've never known anyone quite like him. I really can't believe that we, like, pulled this thing off and he and Henriette and these... I mean basically I showed up those two days with, like, five film crews expecting to film something and it was just, it blew me away, like, at every step. Hearing people from here, like, say the things that they were saying, you know? To hear them talk about, you know, the war, to talk about poverty, to talk about things that, you know, really matter and to feel like they were in a place where they could talk about them. I met a woman in Vortex who was playing her mother in the re-enactment and she was wearing her mother's dress. And she said that when I approached her, she knew that she was gonna do it because she didn't want anyone else to play her mother. And she said that, you know, I asked her, like, how did it make her feel to do that? And she said that, you know, that she had never felt so proud of her mother, who had been gone for awhile, that she was, like, a person that Robert Kennedy came to listen to so she could tell him about what was goin' on. And, you know, just looking at her face and, just, the way she said that to me, you know, it was just so real and it was so intense and she was right in that moment. And it's really rare that, you know, you can have, like, a camera and be able to talk to someone and have them say those kinds of things. I mean, I just feel, like, really, really lucky to have been around this project and to know Michael Hunt. I feel very lucky to know him. Because Michael had this vision for the kind of work that can happen around here and I think that allowed a project like this to happen. And I just thank him for all that.

**Norman Frisch:** Doesn't anyone have anything the least bit... it's like a big love-in for the past hour...

**Henriette Brouwers:** Well, you wanna know how many wrinkles I have under my eyes or how I haven't had my hair cut?

**Ginny Norris:** She makes cappuccinos at every meeting. And it's really hard to come in angry about what was done or wasn't done when a woman is standing in the kitchen saying, "Would you like a cappuccino?" They fed us really well, I think that, you know...

**Harrell Fletcher:** I wanted to tell this story about an experience I had here in town about a year and a half ago when I was here doing a little research on the project. John had just dropped me off and my friend Dana. And we were just walking around town and asking people if they had any recollections about when Robert Kennedy was here. And the people I was talking to were mostly too

young to have memories themselves, but they all kept saying, “Well, you need to just go and talk to Maynard Hogg, because he’ll have something to say about this.” And I said, “Well, where am I gonna find this guy?” And they said, “Just go down the street...” and they identified what office he would be in. And so, and as I was going walking along I would ask other people and they all kept talking about Maynard Hogg and so I was curious about who this was gonna be. And I walked into this office and there was a woman who was, sort of, a receptionist at the office and then an older man sitting in a chair. And I said, “I’m looking for Maynard Hogg.” And the man said, you know, “Why are you looking for him?” or something like that. And I said, “Well, I’m working on this project about Robert Kennedy and I hear that he’s the person to talk to. And the receptionist said, “Well, this is Maynard Hogg who is sitting right there.” And I said, “Oh, well, you’re the person I should talk to.” And he said, “I have nothing to say. I’m a republican and I’ve got no use for democrats,” and just went into this little tirade about that. And I was like, “Oh, OK...” like, sort of getting ready to leave. And the receptionist was looking sort of perplexed and, then, as he was continuing to, sort of, go on this tirade about democrats, she walked into this office and came out from behind him with a photograph in her hands and then walked up to me and handed it to me and it was a picture of Maynard Hogg with Robert Kennedy in ’68, sort of arm in arm. And he sort of turned around to the receptionist and said, “why did you have to go and show him that?” And then he said, “OK, I’ll tell you the truth.” And then he told me about how he had been selected, since he was the sheriff here, to accompany Robert Kennedy on the tour. And then he stayed with him, held onto his shirt sleeve the whole time, and said that he was very skeptical about him when he was coming here. But during the process of spending that time with him, that he had, sort of, transformed his opinions, and really, sort of, in some ways, kind of fell in love with Robert Kennedy. And he told me that his mother had told him that if he ever voted for a democrat he would go straight to hell, but that he was going to vote for Robert Kennedy in the presidential election. And then just pray a whole lot.

**Malpede:** I was hoping Jim Webb would speak because I was listening to the radio the day before yesterday driving down the road and he was commentating on the project and it was just really inspiring, what he was saying. And, I think, you know, I think because, like, you know, the whole crew and everything were costumed and Jim was costumed over at the, over at – yesterday – over at Neon, I think the resources of Appalshop, the configuration of Appalshop with the radio station and the filmmakers... You know, obviously the realization of this project, I mean, it was such a configuration that...you know what I’m trying to say.

**Jim Webb:** Yeah, I would like to join everybody else in reflection upon what has just transpired here because I remember when I first heard of the project. I have a bit of a strange sense of humor and, if you look at the mats and Chinese restaurants, I’m, depending on the year that I am, on a map at a Chinese restaurant, I’m eccentric. And when I first heard of this I thought, “What an amazing idea and what a wonderful idea, but, surely to goodness, how on earth

would it ever happen?" Well, I've kind of watched it and it's been a great adventure, 'cause I've mostly watched it, you know. All of these other folks – I heard Robert talking about being 'embedded' in it. I started thinking about it. Well, it is a little bit about a war, and it's a little bit about Vietnam, it's a little bit about Iraq and it's a little bit about what's happening right now in America, and what's happening in America and Appalachia in 1968. And it was just chilling. The first day, Thursday, I did have the, what I now consider the honor – at the time I was a little bit wore out. I got tired of saying, "RFK in EKY taking place as we are speaking. And I don't know quite where they are, but I'll get an update." And so it was... But then, when it started happening, with the live thing with Bill Gorman in Hazard – the Mayor – who, interestingly enough, was my senior group – he and his wife were my advisors at my senior group at the Presbyterian Church in Hazard. I went to Hazard High School. I was born in Jenkins. So I'm not exactly one of these strange outsiders coming in. I'm one of these strange locals coming in. And I heard Bill Gorman speaking and then I made the mad dash to the Lakeview Drive-In at Vicco to pick up the Vortex tape and then come back so that we could air it before the entourage – I kind of hated using that word, but I used it many times. I didn't know how many vintage cars were in the entourage...it seemed like two or three is plenty. So when we got back and played the Vortex tape on the radio – this is the only radio station in the world that's gonna do stuff like this. And it is the greatest radio station in the world and, you know, Cheryl Marshall and Pam Shingler, and Rich Kirby and Suzanne Savell have just worked – 'cause stuff like this is not in the normal media. And don't get me started on that... But, when I listened to what happened at Pippa Passes, I was just transformed. Jack just did a wonderful job. So I, all of a sudden – I was actually working on an account for the Appalachian Regional Hospitals when Bobby Kennedy came, but my aunt, my second mother, worked in the courthouse with Charlie Wright, who's one of the longest, longevity-type politicians that's ever lived on the face of the earth. He had about fifty years as a court clerk here in Letcher County. My aunt worked there and she just, was just effusive about how wonderful Bobby Kennedy was when he was here on the courthouse steps. And so I heard all about it and read about it at that particular point in time. It's one of those amazing moments when people, you know, people – at least from this part of the country – can say, can remember where they were when Bobby Kennedy came. And so, to come up with this concept of doing this recreation of such a moment that people hadn't even thought about for a long time, you know, in an election year, when we're two months away from the election, it's just pretty dog gone brave. Well, I was a little worried being on the radio saying these things yesterday. We tried to spread the work around and stuff and so I got to go to the gymnasium for the city hearing. And that was another transforming moment. You know, you got all these problems... We're not a highly sophisticated radio station. And we're operating in 2004 with, basically, 1968 equipment, so, we're, sort of, right on the mark. When you go out to the car to see how it sounds on the radio... But, hearing Harry Caudill speak – Harry Caudill's one of my great heroes. I had a transformational moment in my life once when I went to Harry Caudill's office to arrange to do an interview for

young Appalachian periodical that was started with a shoestring by some folks in Mingo County. It was called 'Mountain Call' – they did a 'Mountaineer of the Month' – it was a monthly issue. And the first big name they did – they usually did, like, an eighty year-old grandmother and stuff – those were the 'mountaineers of the month'. And then they did Harry Caudill and I walked in and he said, "I was just reading about your ancestors." And it was amazing. My mother graduated from high school with Harry Caudill. So to hear Harry Caudill's words, while I'm presently reading "Watches of the Night", which is chilling, as is all of this and stuff like that, but to hear Harry Caudill and then John Tiller and those people... It was real. Jack was real – everybody – Frankie... I was just amazed. And I was so proud to be a part of a radio station who was broadcasting that live.

**Judi Jennings:** In America, in the U.S. we've turned our hearts to stone and we don't listen to the voices of poor people anymore. And we heard the voices of poor people. You know, it took Robert Kennedy to come in 1968 and make us listen to the voices of poor people again, but it took you all – we listened again. And we can't close our hearts to this – the voices that we have to hear in this country and you helped remind us of that, so thank you so much.

**Ginny Norris:** It was really great yesterday to talk to high school students – I know I've talked a lot – I'm sorry. We lose a lot of coal and we lose a lot of timber and we lose a lot of this and that, but the most important thing that we're losing are our young people – the people who could stay in this region and make a difference. And I was one of those people that ran away from eastern Kentucky as fast as my feet could take me as soon as I was eighteen years old. And, you know, I talked to a lot of young people yesterday, including a young man who was the guy who played the boy from Everts.

**Malpede:** John Childers.

**Norris:** And I talked to him afterwards and I was like, "What are you doin' when you're done?" And he's like, "I'm goin' to college, to Lexington, to college." And I said, "What're you gonna do when you get back, when you get done?" He's like, "Oh, I'm gonna come back." And I was like, that's right on. And so, I think any of us that know young people from the region, that we need to really talk with them about comin' home and that you can go out into the world and wander around, but it's real important, if you can do it, to come home. "Cause I look around and I think, "Who are gonna be our Harry Caudill's of tomorrow? Who're gonna be our Nell Fields of tomorrow?" And so I think that, you know, we really need to encourage our young people to get an education. It's what brought me out of poverty. It was the opportunity to have an education. But not just that, but to come back home and share what you've got with the people around you. So any of you that know students, you need to really be talking to them about that 'cause we're not gonna make it if we keep losing at the rate we are.

**Jack Faust:** The biggest difference for me is, on stage, there's the fourth wall and you're not supposed to interact with the audience. This was the just the opposite – to interact. And that made it more enjoyable for me. As I said before, I hate to practice when it's time to practice because there's no response. But the response that we received all along the way was just wonderful. And Frank and I were talkin' about this because at Vortex we didn't know what was going to happen. But the people were so responsive. That's when it all fell into place. Vortex set the tone for the rest of the performance.

**Frank Taylor:** There were some really special moments for me in doing this that I no way of predicting or forecasting, you know. I've worked a lot as an actor, and I've worked a lot as a film actor, you know, and a lot of times workin' in film, you prepare. But then right when it comes to the moment you just sort of throw all that away because what something spontaneous happens, a lot of times there's more truth and reality in that than what you'd prepared. But if nothing spontaneous happens, it's a good thing to prepare. But this was so different because, you know, these were people that I recognize – 'cause I grew up in this area too and I've done a lot of things around here – and so, it felt, at many times it felt more like a family reunion would feel where people would sit around and tell stories, you know, and – about something – a collective familiarity about things, you know, and that was very nice. I didn't get the feeling that anybody that participated in this felt trivial about any of it. None of it was trivial or there weren't any doubts about it or about "I wish I hadn't done this" or none of that. Everybody seemed pretty sincere and so I was, I was glad. For whatever reason, however, I felt very clam. I had a sense of calmness about this that is so whenever it got started, you know, and I just tried to make the words interesting and powerful and a lot of them were. And, you know, Carl Perkins was such a revered figure in this area that... And I had this big – as an actor, the thing that kind of – memorizing the words, which Jack did such an amazing feat in that, you know, some college is gonna want your brain, Jack. But then, at the same time, because Carl Perkins was so, such a famous person – the fact that, that the people who were listening, wasn't confusing it with me, like, being an actor so much, but in fact, that the words themselves were on a piece of paper in front of me and that they, at one time had been said out of his mouth in that same space and in some way were still hovering in the air all these many years later. And having the words there and knowing that I was looking at those instead of... I felt like that that would – that that does seem necessary somehow.

**Audience member:** Like you were channeling or something.

**Taylor:** I did feel that way, actually, when he was talkin' about... I mean, there's so much about, so much information about, you know, all the bills and things that you could, I got a sense that even Bobby Kennedy and Carl Perkins were gettin' tired of talkin' about it. But, you know, when he addressed his comments to Alice Lloyd College and the people there and how much that that meant to him, I did feel like I was channeling somebody there because he said, you know, how

much Alice Lloyd, the college, and Alice Lloyd had meant to him and the things that had, and all the things that he had done and just off the top of my head, and I didn't plan on doing this, I added words. I added words there and I said, "And things that have been given to me and I am so grateful." And so afterwards I started to mention to John, I said, "Well, you know, I added some stuff there." But it seems entirely fitting in some way and so I don't regret having said that. So that's just, you know, special and I was, I am really grateful that I had found a calmness because that's when those other kind of things can happen, you know. And so...

**Linda Burnham:** I wish that we had enough time for me to give you a lecture on the work of John Malpede because, you know, I've just been bathed in it, and I know so much more than you do. You think this was hard? When I first knew John, we were both in the performance art world and I was running a magazine about it that I started called High Performance. And about the middle of the '80's I got fed up with art and just quit because it seemed so venal and pointless to me – what people were doing. And when John came to Los Angeles and started working – started a theater company of homeless people on Skid Row – and these were the people that artists had to step over when they walked out of their studios every morning – 'cause we were all livin' downtown. And John refused to ignore those people. And he not only provided a venue in which they were able to express themselves as the poorest of the poor, but also he created a theatre company of homeless people and they began to tour the world. They went to Europe even. So, some of them spent as many as ten years in that company. I have seen his work save people's lives. I kid you not, I'd swear on a stack of bibles. And the reason I'm here right now in Neon Kentucky is because he is one of the most important artists in the world and I really never want to miss anything that he's doing. And a number of us are here for that reason. So, you're part of a much longer story. And I just wanted to tell you about another piece that he was involved with because I'm hoping that you guys will get to see the videotape of it. What's the name of the Artaud piece?

**Malpede:** An End to the Judgment of God.

**Burnham:** An End to the Judgment of God. And this is a, actually created by Peter Sellars who is a very important international theatre director. And this speech is also a re-creation. It's a speech that the French theatre artist Antonin Artaud gave in about 1945, right after the Second World War, on the radio. And it starts out as an angry speech against the militarism of America and it's imperialism and he becomes more and more insane, 'til he's just ranting and ranting against America. And you have the same experience listening to that as we had listening to Kennedy's words about Vietnam. And I also want to add – I hope Michael's still here, Michael Hunt – now, I may be getting this wrong, but I think that John is here because of Michael's work with the American Festival Project. And I want you all to know – those of you who don't know – that some of us are here participated in an American Festival

gathering that is overlapping today and that will happen tomorrow. And it's a group of artists who actually do this work, this kind of work, all over the country. And this morning we had the most remarkable opportunity, one that we rarely get, to actually talk about the theory behind this kind of work and specifically about this performance. And it was an event that was happening over at the Annex at Appalshop. And we got to talk about this work as a piece of art – and John can probably articulate it better than I can – but we got to talk about how all the different media worked in this piece: for instance, the installation in the one-room schoolhouse. How we didn't know, until we saw the performance inside, what was the meaning of all of the objects in the room. And after the room emptied out, that room came alive for us as an artwork because we knew now about the Valentine's on the walls and the curtains on the windows and went into that entire room. And then the mixture of actual present-time events provided an outlet, a flame around each moment that made you wonder if you were 1968 or you were in 2004. And that was a conceptual holding up of a mirror of the past to the present. It brought it to us in a visceral way. More than just speaking theoretically about the idea of doing something like that, we got to experience it in the pores of our skin. So, I just want you to know that there are people here who will be writing about this work as something that happened in the arts as a very important event, in addition to all the wonderful community aspects there were. And finally, if you want to read more about John, I've been writing about him since 1979 and the articles that I have written are on our website and if you go to the Community Arts Network and just put John's name into the search engine, you'll find all the stories that I've written about his work in the past and you can learn more about it. And the URL is [www.communityarts.net](http://www.communityarts.net)

**Jan Cohen-Cruz:** I wanted to ask John and Nell and Henriette and anyone about what Henriette said about you all are going to go into the school and there's a kind of a continuation?

**Malpede:** Henriette? Do you want to...? Were you listening? She was taking Barrett's picture. Do you want to...well, Jan was asking about what we would've liked to do if we'd had more time and what we intend to do in the future around the project. Um, you know, it's sort of, you know, it's obviously sort of infinite. And of course, many people have come up in the last couple days and say – in fact, you know, for those who were over in Prestonsburg yesterday, we had this beautiful audio tape that Ronnie D. Blair made of what happened in the room. Well, John Rosenberg's wife, Jean, who, other, you know, well, the other poverty workers over in Prestonsburg, Jean came up and said, "Oh, she was mentioning this at the college where she is now and someone in her office said, 'Well, I have an 8mm tape of it.'" So, actually, I'm glad we didn't – I mean that's one thing I'm glad we didn't find up until then because I thought it was so beautiful just to have the voice with no image, you know. But obviously, there's all that kind of stuff and more people's stories and etcetera, etcetera. But, um, we want to collect what we've got. We want to see about making book possibly. We want to see about making a film, obviously. And we want to keep working on doing stuff in

the community, you know. And earlier I was talking with Jill and Elise 'cause they're really concerned about the intact-ness of the community, obviously, and about the drug problem in the community. And there are other people that're also doing that, who've been working with Madeline Flannery-Kincer, whose students were – communications students – were at Hazard, but she's now head of Letcher County UNITE, and Tracy Frazier from the Letcher County Action Team, who played John Tiller. And you know, with the Los Angeles Poverty Department, our current project, Agents and Assets, is a national project about drug policy and about how drug policies are – the affects of drug policy in the communities around the United States – urban and rural. So we've been – and we've worked with people who are involved in, you know, policy issues like Treatment Verses Incarceration, people who're involved in, you know, Arts and Recovery, people who're just involved in recovery. And we want to find a way of working with Jill and Elise and the other people down here on that issue. And we've been doing a lot of stuff in the schools and we want to continue to do that, as Henriette said. What did you say? Continue. About working in the schools...

**Henriette Brouwers:** I'm so bad. I never want to speak because I'm very bad at remembering names. But Jenny Williams I think is her name is the teacher who works also at the community college in Hazard and she brought all her students down and they have a semester now that is about the War on Poverty, about the economics of it, and the jobs, and comparing it to now. So basically, what we have been doing with this performance, is what they made the subject of their semester. So, you know, already next week probably we'll go back and work with the class and there'll be more follow-up to do there as well. Yeah.

**Malpede:** Nell is behind you. I don't know if she heard your question Jan.

**Cohen-Cruz:** If you'd been given as much time as you had, if you had more time, what would you finish – what would you even do more – and now, at this point, what are the things you want to do, kind of now that the performance happened?

**Nell Fields:** I feel like it totally fit every aspect of my vision already, and exceeded it far beyond. But there's – the more that's happened with it, it's like it's taken on a life of its own. And I think the greatest desire I would have is to see more things happening in the classrooms at the community college and high school level. And the same kind of stuff that we was doin' before where students could actually have more opportunities to learn about this in the classrooms...besides many, many other things that if I wasn't so brain-dead, I could really, really elaborate on. But, you know, I can foresee so many wonderful opportunities to help build this into some kind of, if not permanent, at least... Um, I'm trying to think of some kind of annual, or...event that could really help continue to build on the aspects of citizen involvement in their communities and citizen involvement in art and that kind of stuff. So...

**Henriette Brouwers:** Oh, yeah, maybe you can say something about the Mountain Heritage meeting in two weeks from now where we'll also be...

**Nell Fields:** Well, we are planning on having some of our stuff at the booth. And part of the evaluation process, I think, is gonna be... Well, and you can see the number of people that's participated. And the vision was that maybe we could – we're gonna try to have ribbons that represent different kinds of involvement – from being actors to being technicians, to being community groups, to being high school students who we were in their classrooms – but different colored ribbons to represent that different kind of involvement. And to be able to pass these out at the Mountain Heritage Festival, which is, like, a culmination of all the Neon and Jenkins and Isom Day's Festivals together – when all the people in the county come together at the county seat in Whitesburg. And people could wear these and that that would give us a very good visual of looking out and seeing how many people had a ribbon on and how many people had three ribbons on because they did three different things and all that kind of stuff. And I think that would be a really good visual way to look and to evaluate the number of people that was connected to this on one level or another.

**Malpede:** You know, Mat Schwarzman has been working with us to keep track of the levels of involvement in the community with this. And earlier outside he asked me a question sort of like the one you asked me and then he supplied some really good answers of his own. So, we should all hear his good answers, or, the ideas you had I thought might be worth interjecting.

**Mat Schwarzman:** Well, I mean, I just thought that part of my job is to – what you asked me to do – is to try to look at this from a community organizing standpoint and to see, to try to tease out what the impact is from that standpoint. Certainly I think the Head Start session today brought that, made that a lot more tangible for me, as well as, I think, a lot of other people. But I also think that, if I were an organizer I would come in and say, "OK. NOW you've got something to work with." You know. And that is my feeling. And so, trying to encourage you to think about this in a longer term way and whether it's you or whether it's Appalshop or a combination, or... But something like having the people who have been involved in this, giving you all a chance to kind of let it sink in for a few weeks. And I imagine that what people will do is go back into their lives and just spontaneously have moments where they're realizing the impact that this has had on them, and to try to have a gathering where you all ask one another whether there's some purpose to staying in contact with each other. Whether there's some body of ideas that this project represents that deserve to be renewed on an ongoing basis. And whether it's an event, or it's a, just an ongoing, you know, 'The Kennedy Group', or, you know, whatever it is –

**Audience member:** The Kennedy Center.

**Schwarzman:** The Kennedy Center. Yeah, that's been done. That's been done. But you, I think what you did succeed in doing was, kind of, taking an iconic event that a lot of people had forgotten or lost track of and hold it up again so it had regained, for a lot of people, its iconic status. And so now what do you? And I think there's a lot of possibilities, but, you gotta – as they used to say in Vaudeville, you know – you gotta milk it, you know? You've gotta figure out a way to do that. And I also think, and I said this to John before, that, you know, the confluence of working with Head Start I think is absolutely perfect as far as, in a lot of ways. I mean, as it being a legacy of that time period, but also just – I mean, if I were an organizer, I would say... You know, you come into a community where a lot of issues are contentious. What is one issue that people can not really be contentious about? And it's about the need to support young people in their development. So I think you've – it's just a great beginning you have and I encourage you to keep it going. And to also, you know, whenever publications come out –

(end recording)