



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Michael Berman

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Interviewer: Martha Stracener Dantzie
Transcriber: Colleen Cruikshank

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

DANTZIC: Alright so we're going to start. So I'm Martha Stracener here with Michael Berman and to spell your name exactly right, it's B-E-R-M-A-N?

BERMAN: That's correct.

DANTZIC: OK. And today is May 5, 2009, and we are doing an interview on the history of Eastern Market and Berman's life on Capitol Hill as an artist and we are doing this for the Overbeck History project. OK, so I—one thing when we talked earlier I thought was kind of interesting and was probably covered in this book "When Culture Goes to Market," can you give me a little bit of the history of how Eastern Market survived the rest of the markets in Washington, DC?

BERMAN: Oh, OK. So the city of Washington, like many cities had when it was built and planned lots of market buildings scattered around the city. There were five market buildings, and Eastern Market is the only surviving market building that's still operating as a market. The only other market building still standing is the one in Georgetown which is now a Dean & DeLuca. So there was Eastern Market. The Georgetown market was considered the Western Market, I believe, and there was a Center Market which was downtown on Seventh Street and Pennsylvania Avenue where the Archives building now is. And both the Center Market and Eastern Market were built by Adolf Cluss. He was the architect and there was a pretty big celebration of him two years ago at Eastern Market and he built what we now call the South Hall and then the market expanded, built by another architect named Snowden Ashford—Ashford Snowden, I'm sorry—and he built what is now termed the North Hall.

DANTZIC: Oh, so they weren't built at the same time. I didn't know that.

BERMAN: Nope, no. And so when the new renovated market is finished, they're going to have the trim and the paint reflect its historic context and so you'll be able to see the differentiated colors and you'll notice that, you know, the windows are different and there's a couple of different things that they worked together but they're two different types of buildings.

DANTZIC: Oh that's really neat. I didn't realize that. Wow. OK, now let's talk a little about you. So when did you first hear about the Eastern Market?

BERMAN: Well, I—

DANTZIC: Or maybe we should say, when did you come to DC?

BERMAN: OK, well. So I went to University of Maryland. I'm from Cherry Hill, New Jersey, right outside of Philadelphia and when I graduated high school I went to University of Maryland and ended up in the art department and getting a degree in the art there. As soon as I graduated I took a studio downtown on F Street at 931 ½ F Street which had a bunch of artists in it and one of the artists there who became a great friend and mentor and colleague was named Stevens Carter and Stevens and I would sell on the street in front of our building and at festivals and around town. And sometime around 1992 he introduced me to Eastern Market where he said there was lots of artists selling and it was a great venue to show and sell your work. And I started coming out there in 1992, not regularly, but by 1993 I was out there pretty much every week—Saturdays and then Sundays as well.

DANTZIC: And how was it that the artists as vendors evolved outside of the original market building?

BERMAN: So Market 5 Gallery, a non-profit organization that was running the North Hall gallery, which they call Market 5, had lots of programs in there, had been doing that since the 70s and one of the things that grew out of their theater and arts and culture programming there was for people to set up outside, out front. And that evolved into their—a funding, a revenue stream for them to continue their program. So it was ad hoc in the beginning and it grew and by the time I got there in the 90s it was really cultivated by lots of artists and crafters and importers of handicrafts from around the world. So Saturday was called the market festival and it was juried to only accept artists and crafters and importers of hand goods.

DANTZIC: So they had importers at that time, too.

BERMAN: They had importers at that time but it was not resale stuff, it was not manufactured stuff. It was indigenous people making something and either somebody from that country or someone that knew a lot about that country would be bring it in to sell it there. And then on Sundays it was a flea market and John Harrod, who ran Market 5 Gallery, made a deal with Tom Rall to start a Sunday flea market. Tom was an auctioneer at the time and was having auctions inside the gallery and asked John if he could start a Sunday flea market. And Tom will tell you lots of stories about that, of how that began and all the people he had with him but so Sunday was more of a free-for-all, had lots of antiques and collectibles and accepted more types of products.

DANTZIC: And the flea market didn't take place in the schoolyard but in the place where the artists currently are.

BERMAN: That's right. So on Saturday, Market 5 Gallery had all of the North Hall plaza and just a bit of the Seventh Street, pretty much just the north section of Seventh Street across from the farmers' line

and on Saturday that farmers' shed was filled with farmers. On Sunday the market was closed and so when Tom started there was nothing happening there.

DANTZIC: Oh the indoor market was closed on Sundays?

BERMAN: Yes, and there was no farmers, there was no nothing. So Tom started his market under the shed and it just grew from there to encompass the plaza and everything up and down Seventh Street and then only later did he move to expand across the street to the schoolyard. So but Tom's market turned out to be so successful that eventually the market decided to open up on Sunday and then some farmers started coming and so that's why you see on Sunday this eclectic mix of farmers right next to, you know, antique sellers next to artists next to—because the flea market was there first.

DANTZIC: Oh interesting. I didn't ever realize that. And so when John Harrod was running the market, so he ran it on Saturdays and Tom Rall ran it on Sundays, more or less?

BERMAN: Right, uh huh.

DANTZIC: And so people would just go sign up with either or?

BERMAN: Well, John didn't really have a system. His system was eclectic. There was a jury which was three of the vendors and, you know, would be sitting at a table and so when John showed up in the morning, you'd sign up and then you'd get juried in for your first time and then you would wait. You'd be on this list in numerical order of whoever came in first and he would assign spaces to whoever didn't already have a permanent space. So the people that had been there for the 70s and 80s, they kind of had an assigned space and whoever didn't show up on a given day, he would look around and decide how many spaces were there and then would assign them. So because that was the basis of the system, what we would all do is, you got to get there really early in the morning to sit in line so you're, you know, number one or number five and you can get a decent space and you'd be able to sell that day. If you were number 20 you might not get in or you might be really squeezed into, you know, some corner. So the idea was to get there pretty early. And there was, you know, everybody kind of got hip to that so people would get there earlier and earlier and earlier to the point that you're camping out at three or four in the morning especially when it gets busy in the summertime. But we had a self-imposed system of you all got to be in line, that eroded to put a chair out and you know, go back to your car and go back to sleep and work off your hangover or something. [laughing]

DANTZIC: [laughing] Oh, that's funny. Being that you started to be a regular there in 1993, how long did it take you to go from having a regular spot to having, you know, to not have to wait in line?

BERMAN: I think by '95 or six, I can't recall but I think about two or three years later, somebody had died or gone away or was not coming regularly. And the way it worked then was you sort of either just sit and wait for a space to be assigned or what I would do is see, hey, Joe's not here, Joe didn't come last week, I talked to Joe, Joe's not coming, hey John can I take Joe's spot today, I know he's not coming. And you just sort of, you know, instead of waiting until 9:30 to get space assigned, you're done at 8:30 and you get set up and get out. So you sort of take it on yourself to find the spot and then, eventually, Joe or whoever stops coming altogether and you're just there and then eventually you're assigned that space and then if someone else dies, moves, leaves, you know—for me, being an artist and having to show paintings—I had a really difficult display where you have to have walls, unlike the jeweler that just throws out a table. So I need walls, this is all weather issues, I really wanted to be up against the building where I'm protected from wind, I can do a wall and not block the person behind me, so my goal was always to get up against the wall. And there's others like that, too so you're always jockeying for spaces and eventually you land where you need to be and then you have a home and customers can find you so after years and years they know where to find you every Saturday and then same on Sunday in a different location where you just generate your business and you kind of have your turf and you work it.

DANTZIC: Tell me about, you had mentioned last time we talked about how you guys as a group of artists have to go down to the vendors board and the arts commission, so you had a vendors board?

BERMAN: Well, that's a—yeah, so the success of John's vending world was that he just sort of ran it and it mostly ran itself and we took a lot of things on ourselves to build this into the best arts venue we could have. Tom didn't do a lot of advertising or marketing so we would kind of do that ourselves. Sometimes we would go around collect money to put an ad in the paper, you know, we would—so it becomes like family. And we're all invested in this, this has been incubating our businesses and so John unfortunately had, every now and then would have financial problems and we didn't understand or know anything about it but he couldn't pay rent. And so at the time the market was overseen by three different agencies of the government. So the South Hall merchants were under one department, the farmers were under what was called Weights and Measures at the time, and John's nonfood vending and the gallery he paid rent to the Arts Commission. So since I'm involved in the arts in the city and John was behind in rent at the arts commission, we would have some meetings among vendors to say, well, we're feeling like we're being, our welfare is being threatened, John, hey what can we do? And we would try to have meetings where we would, you know, volunteer to help him to either raise money or to help him with his operations or whatever it may be. He never really liked that or wanted us to be involved but, you know, appreciated the thought and sentiment but didn't really want us involved in his business. However, I knew the arts commissioner and people down there so I did organize a meeting to go down to see what could be

done to you know have them not charge him as much rent or be patient and wait for the rent or whatever deal he needed to make to keep this thing going. And that's when I started to find out oh, he's behind, there's issues, this is ongoing, this has got to change. OK, deferral this time but make him get straight soon. And that went on, off and on for about a year or so.

DANTZIC: And what year was that?

BERMAN: '97, '96—'97 somewhere around there. '97.

DANTZIC: And what was the outcome because he continued to—

BERMAN: He continued to operate and there was issues like this going on all the time, and parallel to this was a movement by some community members to change the whole structure of the market that they thought that what John Harrod was doing was illegal, that all the vending out there was either illegal or, you know, suspect, don't like it, don't want it. They're trampling the trees and the flowers and, you know, they had a long list of issues and was at war with John. Mayor Barry was our mayor at the time who supported John and they would try to go to the Mayor to force changes. They never really got too far on it but these had been longstanding battles which you'll read about in this book. I'm not the best person to lay out that history in this time but you can get some of that sense. So we all felt, you know, under pressure from these outside forces that wanted to either change or get rid of the market as we knew it and at the same time the South Hall merchants were under the Glasgows who were running it, who always hated the outdoor vending, wanted to get rid of it all, wanted to force us out, so there was a war going on between the merchants inside and the vending outside.

DANTZIC: And the neighborhood.

BERMAN: No, the neighborhood liked it all, probably didn't understand all that, but there was a small contingent that really wanted to grab control of this and change it into their view, which was never really clear but seemed to have a real, cold gentrification feel to it so we were all against it and eventually organized, really got organized.

DANTZIC: And how did that organization occur?

BERMAN: Me and Larry Gallo were taking the lead on these meetings of vendors, getting together to see what we can do to help John and to protect our world and to go to the art commission or what have you and then this whole thing grew to this, this community grew for community people—two or three people, really—going to the Council member, Sharon Ambrose at the time, to craft a law, a legislation to govern Eastern Market. And they were drafting legislation for her as it kind of turns out.

DANTZIC: Were you a part of that small coalition?

BERMAN: No, well, we organized to fight it. And we got very involved in this through the Eastern Market Preservation and Development Corporation. The EMPDC was an organization that had some oversight over the market but also had seats on their board for stakeholders at the market. So they had a South Hall rep, John Harrod was a member and was able to participate, we got very involved in that organization, had lots of good people on it that really cared about the market, were doing these kinds of things, oral histories of some of the oldest people there, would put on some events, was involved in the gallery and had a good picture in mind. But so this became a legislative and political fight which is when I really got my feet wet into some of the real history and things at stake with the market.

DANTZIC: Uh huh. And so that's when, about the same time that the Eastern Market Act of 1998 came in?

BERMAN: That was the end result of that. The Eastern Market Act was—

DANTZIC: Just from all the different strife that was going on.

BERMAN: Right, eventually they drafted legislation and Larry and I lobbied hard other Council members as well as Sharon Ambrose to change some of the language in there to reflect a better balance and get some representation, stakeholder representation onto what ended up being called the EMCAC [Eastern Market Community Advisory Committee], the advisory board, which is the same—

DANTZIC: Organization that exists now.

BERMAN: Yeah. And some of the people that were involved in those early fights, that was their body that they were going to oversee and govern Eastern Market by and none of it came out the way they wanted it or how we wanted it, the Eastern Market Act is nothing but a political compromise. And so it's a pretty terrible piece of legislation because it makes no sense and it doesn't help operate the market, it's got nothing really to do with how a market should be operated. But it's got representation from all these different people and it's got some oversight, it's got some organizational tree and it sort of codified everything that was happening there and said basically if you were there at the time that this law passed then you had some right to continue to be there and tried to define all the things that were there. But other than that it's a tangled mess that really makes not a lot of sense and hard to govern and ten years later still impossible for anybody to make Eastern Market run according to that law. It's not been done yet and now the city's doing it and they're not even following their own law. They can't do it either.

DANTZIC: And when did John Harrod quit running Market 5? Was it the fire?

BERMAN: No, he never quit running Market 5, the city pushed him out. They're not going to admit that, but the city's pushed him out. The city took over his business.

DANTZIC: At the fire?

BERMAN: No, he was there for the fire, after the fire, however, the fire damaged the building so he couldn't occupy the gallery space that he had a lease for. However, through the various lawsuits and settlements that have happened over the years, he still, in his view and probably could be right—I don't know, I've never seen all the paperwork—still had the rights to the nonfood vending outside, separate and apart from his lease for the gallery space inside. So he continued to run the vending, even though he didn't have a space inside anymore. Until 100 days ago, on January 1, when the city took it all over and just took his vendors. And took Tom's business, too. They just stepped in and took it, they said it's their property and these vendors are on our land and you've got no right to be here.

DANTZIC: And that was the timing at the same time that the other, the South Hall, the East Hall management team so maybe that's—

BERMAN: Right. Eastern Market Venture had a lease for the market and to run the food, never had control over the nonfood and in the end, John had his sublease for the gallery through them. So when the city said Eastern Market Venture, you're gone December 31, 2008—

DANTZIC: He lost that lease is what you're saying?

BERMAN: He lost that, we guess. And the city assumed control over the whole market.

DANTZIC: Wow. So where—is he still around?

BERMAN: He's still around, yeah.

DANTZIC: It's just a few months ago, really. Oh interesting, I didn't realize that. OK, let's see. So maybe let's talk a little bit about your business. Well, maybe first as a transition it would be good to say that when we talked before, you talked about the golden age of the market. Tell me about the golden age. What was golden about it? Tell me about the culture and what was great about it.

BERMAN: The golden age of the market. Well, for me the golden age of the market was a strong contingency of artists out there and crafters and, as I mentioned before, it was really like a family. And it still is because we all know each other and when you share this experience of being outside and in a selling environment through all sorts of weather and all sorts of turmoil and all sorts of craziness and illogic and tragedies and wonderful things, too, it very much becomes your family, you see them every

week. But the golden age sort of was this period, as screwed-up as it was, as mismanaged as it was, as no promotions, no marketing, wasn't run right but somehow we were all knitted together, we had some really talented people out there and had some great customers and it was just a great community. And it was a livelihood. You could show and sell your artwork—for me, it was artwork and my paintings—and not be in a box of having to paint something that seemed to appeal to a tourist. I mean, I could paint what I want and it sold. Good collectors, gallery directors, museum directors would come through there. I mean there was good clientele there, it had a great vibe but it also was known for its artists there.

DANTZIC: Its high standard of artist, yeah.

BERMAN: Yeah and you know that's all kind of slipped away. They've all moved on for various reasons and, you know, there's just a very small group left there.

DANTZIC: Of true artists.

BERMAN: Of true artists, yeah.

DANTZIC: And how's the clientele changed over the years?

BERMAN: Well, Capitol Hill has changed, for one. Tourism has grown, too. And I think just the way the market has grown and its vendor base has changed the type of people that come now. You know, I still have, I can still show and sell big and high-end paintings, I still can have good clientele there, they're still there and that's sort of the beauty of the market is on a weekend, everyone's dressed down in jeans, you don't know who anybody is. It's very egalitarian, so you don't know who anybody is and so it's always interesting and surprising to see whether some politician and or some museum director or some celebrity, you don't know—there's still some of that there. But it's changed, you know, the whole vibe has changed and the clientele base for the most part has changed. It seems to have gone lower-end and most touristy or more young folks that are just there—and great to have youth there—but they're just there, five, ten-dollar item, they're really there, it's more backdrop to them. So it's much harder to make a livelihood out of it now. And it's hard, just these days especially since the government's taken over especially it's just depressing really.

DANTZIC: Hold that thought.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

DANTZIC: So you say it's depressing, what's depressing? With the government taking over just the different way it's being managed?

BERMAN: Yeah, it's being totally mismanaged and this time where you're having a \$30 million rehabilitation of a landmark historic jewel of a building to not take the opportunities and potential there to really make this place special and the best it can be, the best managed it can be to really be a showcase nationwide, because it could. It really could. And all of that's slipping away and there's no appreciation of the community of people that have built this over the years. There's no appreciation for what the market is or what it could be. And there's no understanding of the management of marketing or even best practices on waste management, on parking, on a million different things. You go around to other markets in the country and you see how things should and could be. And they're still missing the mark and I don't see any light at the end of the tunnel.

DANTZIC: Where were you the night of the fire?

BERMAN: Well, I live a couple blocks away.

DANTZIC: So did you wake up?

BERMAN: Yeah, I woke up to the fire. I was called pretty early in the morning and then it was on the radio and my phone never stopped ringing from about seven a.m. on and so I walked over a couple blocks away and saw it burning.

DANTZIC: What was your first reaction then?

BERMAN: That it was all over, that this thing's burnt down and it's not coming back and not only there goes my livelihood but there goes a whole culture, there goes you know, the heart of Capitol Hill. You think yeah, something's going to come out of it, there will be something to salvage, there will be something left. But at the time there was no idea that government would step up to rebuild it or that community would rally in the way that they did for the people there. So it was really not only encouraging but, you know, heartwarming and an affirmation of how important the place and the people were there. So it was, you know, it turned out to be a bittersweet moment.

DANTZIC: And how was business affected in the beginning?

BERMAN: Well business was, of course, bad at the beginning just because of the machinations of trying to re-fit the market back together with it all being outside and how that works and how, you know—but

the beauty was from that, finally there was a coming together of all the elements at the market. That the inside merchants and the farmers and the nonfood vendors were all in the same boat. Everybody gave, everyone was giving, everyone, you know, stopped all fights, you know, it was really a coming together. And everyone made way and made room for each other and, you know, that's, you know, some of those bonds that were forged after the fire remain, which is great.

DANTZIC: With historically bad relationships, you're saying, improving significantly?

BERMAN: Uh huh. A lot of those fences got mended or forgiven or realized that they were petty and they didn't make any sense to begin with.

DANTZIC: And they're standing strong today, you think, still?

BERMAN: Uh, it's being torn apart because government's running it and there's no one piecing it back together. It's starting to circle back to itself of every man for himself, what's in it for me, what's best for us is not what's best for them. And, you know, it's not on the surface like that but I feel it, I sense it, you know this political issue of whether the street should be open or closed right now is indicative of that. And there's no leadership, there's no way for someone to come in and say there's an answer here if we all sat down and figured it out everyone could get what they need out of this and do what's best for the market and best for the community. There's a big void right now and that's breeding hostility and resentments right now. So that's part of the reason I say it's pretty depressing to be out there.

DANTZIC: Right. Oh, I'm sorry.

BERMAN: Yeah.

DANTZIC: When you think about your customers who come you mention that there's younger people, there's you know, all kinds of different folks but you said that you're still able to sell your high-end merchandise.

BERMAN: Uh huh. There's still a diversity of people coming there and that's great. That's the best of the market and that's what really needs to be retained. That's the beauty of Eastern Market on Capitol Hill is that it's not Georgetown, you know, it's not downtown, it's a residential community that's not as mixed as it used to be, but we still have black, white, we still have poor, we still have middle-income, we still have rich. And they all kind of blend together there at the market and it never did get gentrified as much as some people were trying to make it. So the market now is, you know, it takes management to try and keep that mix together and I think it's important. For instance, management should be coordinating food stamps to be taken by the farmers and by the merchants inside to keep food on people's plates. It should

be a social, civic priority and it's not happening. So, you know, if everyone goes towards this is going to be high-end market, you start removing a whole population of people that come to the market. Admittedly, they might not be buying my paintings but it's still important to have that mix there and it's what keeps it interesting, you know, you meet all sorts of different people. And you never know. You can't even pre-judge who is looking at your stuff ever. You just never know and that's been really interesting over the years.

DANTZIC: Yeah, I'll bet. So how did you go from being a vendor at the market to become the market man?

BERMAN: Not the market man, but, it's just the more I look at this place, the more interesting it is and the dynamics and the social fabric and the cultural activities there and all the different kind of people that come to sell there, incredible diversity of people that come to sell there from all different backgrounds all come together to make this thing work. And then all sorts of people that come to shop there or to just walk through there, it's so interesting and I just kept on—and then, as I was mentioning earlier, these early days when we thought we were threatened and, if you didn't do something, it would go away. So I, you know, you put one toe in the water and then, before you know it, you're swimming. And you're the only one around swimming and you just got to keep it going. So it's been an education over just wading through it and learning more and more and then the more you know, the more you feel you've got to do for it and then the more people you know and the more strings you pull on, you just end up knowing too much and then you've got to—I guess you end up becoming the market man because you know too much.

DANTZIC: Well, but just talking about to your market experience from Eastern Market but I know you do the holiday market and you do some other markets and so—

BERMAN: So what happened was going from fighting this stuff and, like I said, knowing too much, to then Tom Rall saying look, I'd like to expand and improve the business of the Sunday flea market, would you come work for me, so my relationship with Tom grew as I worked with him on website and communications and newsletters and promotions and marketing. The more that grew and expanded, the more we realized that—and his business was so strong that he has, you know, a huge backlog, waiting list of people who want to get into his market but can't—so we had realized that we could start another market elsewhere and provide more opportunities for more people. And that was our goal, we set up a new company, Diverse Markets Management, and our first opportunity was to do a holiday market downtown and that was five years ago and we did it in the parking lot of the old convention center site and it became a mix of Eastern Market people, people from his list that had never sold before, and through my being involved in the arts, bringing artists and advertising and recruiting out in the DC

general area. And we just started building and, you learn by starting something new what works, what doesn't work and how to keep it all together so it's been just experiences that you piece together.

DANTZIC: What do you think works in a market? You know, it makes me think about watching different vendors set up their booths and how they transport their stuff there and how they keep their walls up all day. What are some of the interesting things you've seen or done over the years in that regard?

BERMAN: Oh, well, displays are always interesting and different and something you learn as you go and everybody starts in a kind of hodgepodge fashion, you throw a table out and you're building some jerry-rigged contraption, you know, from whatever you find around your home, that's kind of how everyone seems to start. Although, I got to say, there are, you know, that's what's so interesting about the market, especially the flea market, is that there are businesses that say we're going to go out there, we're going to test market our product and we're going to try this for a while and grow it and then take on a store. So some people come out there professional on day one because they've spent money on building a display because they already think they're a store, they're just starting outside.

So there is some of that but people that make stuff on their own usually kind of start in a hodgepodge fashion and then eventually grow into a professional display. So, as an artist, my eyes are always on display composition and what it looks like and so I've always been cognizant of that. A lot of folks aren't, but displays are important and what you don't realize in the beginning is that you're also under weather. So either you don't come when it's either raining or windy or you might get caught in the rain or wind and you soon learn all about how to protect yourself and walls and tents when you can do it. You know, having a ten by ten space that you can put a tent in is a relatively new phenomenon that used to not exist, there used to not be these tents. So early days of the market was just, you know, broom handles holding up plastic tarps and it was, you know, it was jerry-rigged. A lot of crazy umbrellas and whatever detritus you could find was kind of how you'd protect yourself when it comes pouring rain. So those were funny days when everyone would band together with whatever you had to try and protect yourself. Now they're all pretty professional, everyone's got a tent, everyone's got a tablecloth. Most artists use grid walls that you buy, that you invest in your display and they take it seriously and the customers take it seriously.

DANTZIC: Well and so those vendors who didn't have assigned spaces, I've heard stories about how you have your set-up but then you end up in this space that your set-up doesn't work.

BERMAN: Doesn't work for, right. So you need flexibility, too. Exactly. And for me it'd be kind of difficult usually because I generally show a lot and some big artwork but having done it at Eastern Market, you know, I would go around and sell streets of New York and sell streets of Philadelphia and

streets of Miami so, you know, you learn how to: a) be real flexible in your display and your design and b) how to haul it, you know, from one place to another. You can't always pull up in front of your stand, unload a truck and set it up and drive away. Sometimes, you know, you've got to haul it for blocks or who knows? You've got to be mobile and as few pieces as necessary but make all your pieces very strong and durable.

DANTZIC: Do you use weights on your thing to keep your booth down from the wind?

BERMAN: Sure, when I have to, yeah, sometimes.

DANTZIC: That's amazing. So what are some of the other challenges of being a vendor at the Eastern Market?

BERMAN: Weather being number one, you know, your neighbors. You never know who your neighbors are sometimes and that might work for you, that might work against you. It's funny though because painters, artists are very happy to be next to each other, they don't care. That works well but, as being a market manager I've learned and know very well that you cannot put two jewelers next to each other. They will hate each other and they will bitch at you for doing that and have to be moved, have to move them and they fight over their customers. They all are clawing for the same customer there, they act like, you know, I don't think it's true, but they act like it. Painters are fine, I mean, if you don't like my work, hey Tom Bucci's next door here, I don't have a painting of the Washington Monument, but he does—go see him. No problem, we refer each other all day long, we love it. The more art, the better for us, we think it's great. So it's interesting who can get along as neighbors and who can't and there's some folks who just grind their teeth when they're next to certain people or certain folks that sell certain types of items. But, you deal with it. It's all part of the chaos out there.

DANTZIC: Yeah, well what are some of the joys of being at Eastern Market?

BERMAN: You meet all sorts of interesting people. And you can get lifelong friendships out of that. You can have incredible, for me, I mean, there are some people they might only have \$100 items, you know, their highest price might be \$150 on their stand. I could have and have had out there \$3,000 days selling art. Now, I can also have a zero day selling art, so life as an artist out there is a roller coaster, you never know. After years being out there my business is different than others. I don't have impulse sales. It's not that I get that tourist and I have a picture of the Capitol so I can count on a hundred photos I'm going to sell every day, you know, I can meet my benchmark, meet my requirements of x amount of money over there and go away, I could have a zero day. But I talk to a lot of people and the next week I'm out there the people I've been talking to over the past five months say hey, today's the day I'm ready to get that

painting and here's 2,000 bucks or whatever. So it's patience, you know, you're out there and you never know what's going to happen. You can try and line up some business to go out there but you can't control people's habits or whether the rain's going to keep them away or not, but it's interesting to see who reacts to your work and who buys it and then, you know, you keep these folks as, you don't treat them just as somebody who's going to walk in and leave. But as clients of yours, as supporters, they're going to come back over time and they're going to refer their friends over time and you end up with work spread out all over the world. I have clients and customers in Belgium and all over Europe and of course all across the States so it's really fascinating the web that is woven from being out there.

DANTZIC: Yeah, it's interesting. So when you think about being at the Eastern Market every weekend for so long it is almost like having a storefront.

BERMAN: It is kind of like having a storefront.

DANTZIC: Because people know where to find you and they always come back looking.

BERMAN: Well, when there's consistency then people can find you. There's no consistency now and we'll be—[interruption by background noise]

DANTZIC: Hang on two seconds. You were talking about consistency and being in the same place being like having a storefront.

BERMAN: Right and so now there isn't consistency, nobody knows where anybody is, and it's going to get changed again when the building opens. But and everyone gets really tied up to I've got to have my space so people can find me and I agree, it's important. However, if you move, you'll find out that new people will come and see you and, I mean, this still happens, they'll walk up and say wow, how long have you been here? I've never seen you here in my life, I've been coming here for five years. So, you know, sometimes moving puts everything in a new light and everyone's got their paths and their predictions of where the people are and where you want to be to be stationed to get the most eyes on your product but moving sometimes opens up whole new doors for you, so that's different than storefront.

DANTZIC: Yeah, right. I've heard from other artists who say the same thing, that people have never seen them before and they move so it's kind of a good thing. Well I know that you have obviously invested a lot in the market and its future and have a lot of dreams for it, so it's almost hate to even ask this question of you but what are your hopes for the market in the years to come?

BERMAN: Well, what my hopes for the market were was to knit this place together and really make it a jewel not just for Capitol Hill—definitely for Capitol Hill—but for the city and nationwide. It really could

be a model market, beautifully restored and renovated historic landmark structure tucked into a neighborhood that has so many elements which makes it so unique that it could successfully have indoor food and outdoor farmers' market and an arts and crafts movement, because it really was a movement for a while, and an antiques and collectibles flea market, all those elements together is really incredible. Complicated, but could be knitted together to be the most fantastic thing in the country.

DANTZIC: And there are no other markets that combine all of those elements? That you're aware of?

BERMAN: There are, here and there. To varying degrees of success and every market's different. They all have their own building and their own structure and they do things different ways. But I don't, I haven't seen a market, a traditional market which is usually a food focus have anything like Eastern Market, which has had a huge arts movement attached to it and such a strong cultural piece. To have a gallery on one end of the building and a butcher on the other and that could be put together and made into something, I don't, I haven't seen anything that really has that dynamic. There's other markets that have other dynamics that are equally impressive and, you know, socially integrated and really the heart of a neighborhood but this one's got some, you know, a unique take to it and has a gloriously, to-be-restored historic structure attached to it too and it's a shame because I just don't know if it's going to get there now. But my hopes were that it would all come together and that all of the businesses there, all of the 300 or so individual businesses there are not only working together for the better of the whole but their own businesses are interacting more. My goal was to really—

DANTZIC: Have them use each other.

BERMAN: Exactly.

DANTZIC: And buy from each other, support each other.

BERMAN: Exactly, exactly. And I don't know if that's in the realm now of anyone even thinking of doing that, let alone how do you do that.

DANTZIC: And your concern more is that they're just caught up in the day-to-day making it happen as opposed to having visions about the big picture. It's kind of like having a mission statement as opposed to not.

BERMAN: For themselves, exactly. Right, it's sorely lacking that.

DANTZIC: Well, hopefully once the building opens and things settle just with the chaos gone, the construction alone.

BERMAN: Right, on one hand getting rid of the chaos and so everything sort of falls back into its comfortable state. And that's also the problem—it falls back into its own norm, instead of this time where it's ramping up into something to be open is the time to be building that so when you open everyone's on this new plane going, here we are, here's where it is now. See, if you're not working on that vision now it all falls back and then it's so much harder to get that momentum going again and give people a reason why it needs the momentum again. So things are being put in place now, how to govern it, how to run it, and so, it's not headed towards any vision. It's mundane really. So something would have to change drastically to stop that from being the cycle and changing it to vision-based and moving in a collective good. And it really needs to start now, not wait till it opens then six months from there, that's all bad decisions.

DANTZIC: I have to agree with you but that's just me and I'm new on the Hill obviously. Does your friend Stevens Carter still come to the market?

BERMAN: No he doesn't. He's moved on. He's still somewhat in DC, he's mostly in Oakland now. He's still a painter, still doing his thing, still a very good friend but he moved on from the market.

DANTZIC: I've heard some painters say that they didn't want to sell their high-end items on the street, that they'd rather sell those in a gallery. How do you feel about that?

BERMAN: You know, that's interesting. There's, I've seen that cross-country where there's artists that will sell on the street and, you know, they don't sell their high-end work, they sell their most touristy, low-end work and they always say, oh you can't sell high-end work, why would you waste your time, you know, you just got for the ten dollar items, don't do that. But I've found just the opposite. I enjoy bringing out work and it's a surprise and a delight for the customers and it also makes art, takes it out of that elitist state of a gallery and makes it much more accessible to people. So even if I'm not selling it, just to show it, just to bring it out it's like a show-stopper. You can show and sell serious work at outside, outdoors, whether on the street or at the market and you'll be surprised. People who would never walk into a gallery now get to confront art and have a conversation about art and talk to the artist that made it and it's, you know, I talk to people who are educated about art and people who have no knowledge and don't understand any of it. But this gives them the opportunity to see it and talk about it and it's an education. I'm just out there educating people, if nothing else and that's fine with me. Spreading the art gospel.

DANTZIC: [laughing] The gospel-spreading Jew from Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

BERMAN: Right, that's me.

DANTZIC: Well, I think I've covered all my questions. Is there anything else that you want to share for posterity?

BERMAN: No, you got a lot out of me actually.

DANTZIC: I did.

BERMAN: You're pretty good.

DANTZIC: And I actually didn't talk very much, did I?

BERMAN: I'll do a follow up after that.

DANTZIC: Yeah, I'd really love to read the book. I feel bad that I didn't even know about it because I think it would have helped me do even better with the interview.

BERMAN: No, you did a lot of stuff and I'd be happy to talk more about things and there's all, you can keep on going down into rabbit holes on Eastern Market on any given issue.

DANTZIC: Well one thing that I really didn't even think of until we just started talking about it which I think is probably one of the most interesting things is as a vendor how do you deal with your—

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

END OF INTERVIEW