

Krystal Appiah
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Joan Ritchie Biography

Joan (Schaeffer) Ritchie was born and raised in Providence, in a neighborhood between Silver Lake and Olneyville. After high school, Ritchie moved to California to attend San Francisco State University where she earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology. Ritchie then spent the next several years living in several places around the United States with her husband, who was in graduate school. Following their divorce, she returned to Providence to raise her child closer to her parents. Ritchie began teaching English at a Roger Williams Middle School, and eventually enrolled in graduate school at Rhode Island College to earn an MA in secondary education. She went on to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) to adults, an occupation she loves and which she continues to do part-time. Since 1980, Joan Ritchie and her second husband have owned the Peaceable Kingdom. The store gave them a means of supporting and combining their love of world culture, travel, and textiles. Originally located at 436 Wickenden Street and then moved to 116 Ives Street in 1987, the store sells folk art, particularly textiles, from around the world.

In her interview, Ritchie discusses Wickenden Street as an ideal place to own a small business in the early and mid-1980s, despite some hints of crime in the neighborhood, primarily outside of business hours. Ritchie also fondly recalls the eclectic nature of the stores but acknowledges that most were not affordable or appealing to locals. Rising rents and several changes of ownership of their rented space eventually forced her and her husband to move the store to its current location on Ives Street. During her thirty years of business ownership, Ritchie has noticed signs of gentrification but feels the neighborhood has retained much of its diverse character.

Ritchie also discusses her relationships with local immigrant and international communities through Peaceable Kingdom's programs and her ESL teaching. Both activities further her desire to surround herself with diversity as well as to encourage others to understand and appreciate the diversity of cultures around them.