CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF MICHELLE ARENS

March 11, 2008

This interview is part of a series that will preserve the history of the Craft and Folk Art Museum and its predecessor, The Egg and The Eye gallery, through the recorded memories and observations of some of those who participated in that history. When the project is complete, the recordings and the transcriptions will be available at the UCLA Center for Oral History Research.

Michelle Arens
March 11, 2008

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Michelle Arens was born in Kansas City, Missouri. Six months later the family moved to Austin, Minnesota where she grew up and went to school. She attended Beloit College in Wisconsin, majoring in philosophy with a minor in elementary education. Moving to Los Angeles in 1976, she worked with her sister and brother-in-law at the Roxy Theater. In August 1978 she began a job in UCLA Publications Services and worked there until May 1986. She always had an interest in art and had taken art courses in high school, in college, and at the UCLA extension.

She decided to seek a volunteer position in a museum and began working at CAFAM in 1986, first as a volunteer, working for both the registration department and the museum library. In October 1987 she started her first CAFAM staff position in the museum shop as the book buyer, among other jobs. She continued as a volunteer in the museum library and meanwhile in 1988 she became the assistant shop manager. In January 1990 she was hired to fill a new full-time administrative assistant position in the museum library, where she performed many functions, including copy cataloging, creating databases, working reception, and interacting with staff, docents, volunteers, and the public. In the fall and winter of 1990 she helped plan and prepare for the first meeting of the national advisory board for the newly-created Center for the Study of Art and Culture, an adjunct library program. In September 1991 Arens resigned to accompany her husband to England.

While in England, Arens joined a printmaking studio. A year later she moved with her husband to Australia, where he had taken a position in the Sociology Department at the University of New England in Armidale, New South Wales. Between 1994 and 1999, she exhibited her artwork in numerous regional shows. In 1995 Arens obtained her Associate Diploma in Fine Art from the U. of New England in Armidale, majoring in painting and minoring in printmaking. She worked as a volunteer for the New England Regional Art Museum in Armidale and as coordinator and grant writer for their Library and Research Centre. She became a part-time staff member in 1998. Between 1999 and 2010 she curated 13 exhibitions that dealt with a collection of printing presses at the museum; she became the collection manager for the Museum of Printing in 2001. Arens started a museum consulting business with two former colleagues in 2004. When the University of New England advertised the position of Art Collection Manager, Arens applied and was hired in November 2006. She retired in 2017.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer: Joan M. Benedetti. B.A., Theater; M.A., Library Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. **Related Experience:** Milwaukee Public Library Decorative Arts Librarian, 1967 – 1968; CAFAM Museum Librarian 1976 – 1997. From 1998 – 2012, Benedetti worked to process the CAFAM Records, 1965 – 1997, now part of Special Collections at the UCLA Young Research Library. From 2008 – 2010 she conducted oral history interviews with seventeen former CAFAM staff and trustees; almost 60 hours were recorded and transcribed. She is the author of several articles on folk art terminology and small art museum libraries and the editor of *Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship*, Lanham, MD: ARLIS/NA and Scarecrow Press, 2007.

Time and Setting of Interview

Place: Benedetti's home in Santa Monica

Date, time of day, length of sessions, and total number of hours recorded: March 11, 2008. Interview took place in the afternoon and was 1 hour, 52 minutes in length. Arens was visiting from where she now lives in Australia and could participate in only one interview session.

Persons present during interview: Benedetti and Arens.

Conduct and Content of Interview: To prepare for the Arens interview, Benedetti reviewed the timeline she had prepared and also the relevant documents in the CAFAM Records at UCLA. Benedetti has also remained in touch with Arens since she moved to Australia in 1992. The interview is roughly chronological.

Editing: Arens was given the opportunity to review the transcript to supply missing or mis-spelled names and to verify the accuracy of the contents. Benedetti also reviewed the transcript for misspellings and accuracy and added relevant CAFAM information in brackets. Time stamps have been added to both the table of contents and the transcript at five-minute intervals; the time stamps make it easier to locate the topics in the transcript that are mentioned in the table of contents.

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INTERVIEW OF MICHELLE ARENS

Tuesday, March 11, 2008. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti (1 hour, 52 minutes, 23 seconds).

JB: Today is Tuesday, March 11, 2008, and I'm here in Santa Monica with Michelle Arens, who's visiting from her home in Australia. We're going to be talking about her involvement with the Craft and Folk Art Museum as well as some of her personal background. And my name is Joan Benedetti. So, Michelle--

MA: Yes? [Laughing]

JB: Start at the beginning. Can you tell us where and when you were born?

MA: OK. I was born on April 20, 1951 in Kansas City, Missouri, but [my family] only lived there for six months and moved to Austin, Minnesota. And I lived in Austin, Minnesota for my entire adult life [until 1976]. I went to Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin. When I graduated from there I went back briefly to my same hometown, worked [at the] Gerard Center, which was a halfway house for mentally disturbed children. And we had a snowstorm that snowed us in for a week and I decided [both laughing] that I no longer wanted to live in Minnesota. And my sister had married and was living in Los Angeles, so I came out to Los Angeles in 1976 and lived in Los Angeles from that time until we moved to England for one year and then on to Australia in 1992.

JB: Mmm, wow. Tell me, you said you went to work at a home for the mentally ill--

MA: Yes.

JB: Did you—what was your major in college? Was it psychology or something [like that]?

MA: No, actually, I majored in philosophy and minored in elementary education and—when I did my student teaching in elementary education--I discovered that teaching young kids was not what I wanted to do. And I just sort of happened [into] this job.

JB: Oh I see.

MA: You know, after you get out of college you have to have your first job and this was my first job so it really didn't have anything to do with anything!

JB: Except the snow! [i.e., her leaving Minnesota]

MA: Except the snow, yes.

JB: And when you were in school—or any other time—in the early years—did you take any art classes--studio art or art history or--

MA: I always took art. When you were going to school back in those days they divided everybody into the college-bound and the people who were never going to go to college and so should learn a trade, like for women it was secretarial school. And I was in the college-bound category. But I insisted that I always take art and when they—you always had to take all of the [college-preparatory] subjects—you know, you had to take math and science and history and everything all year. So squeezing in my art was a real challenge at times.

JB: So they didn't consider art to be part of the college-bound curriculum?

MA: No, this was just an extra activity that I had to really work at, trying to schedule in an art class every time.

JB: And you really wanted to do that.

MA: And I really wanted to do it, yeah.

JB: And that was making art.

MA: Yeah, it was mostly just anything, really, [that had to do with] making art. When I came to Los Angeles, I worked for the first two years at the Roxy nightclub on Sunset Strip because my sister worked there. My brother-in-law was the lighting designer there, and I worked in the box office.

JB: Was that a comedy club?

MA: No, no, rock and roll bands!

JB: Oh! OK. I guess I never—[both laughing]

MA: Bette Midler, Bob Marley—all of those people!

JB: I'm showing my age!

MA: And that was back in the—well, it was in the late seventies. And then in 1978 I got a job at UCLA in Publications Services. And while at UCLA, because I was an employee there, I always got to take their extension courses at a reduced rate. So I took basket making from natural fibers, I took printmaking. I did lots of philosophy and Indian art and archaeology. And, you know—just anything I was interested in. So I always did those courses when I was employed there because I got a good discount on the courses.

JB: And I know that you have a special interest in printmaking.

MA: Yeah.

JB: When did that start? **[05:00]**

MA: Probably in high school. I had--one of my art teachers was a printmaker and taught

printmaking and etching as part of it and I just loved it and took further courses and when I went to England for the year, there was a group of printmakers that did etchings and they had a studio and you could come in and make etching plates and make prints and I did that and just sort of continued on. And then when I went to Australia I decided to get an Associate Diploma in fine art and did printmaking there too. That was my minor--printmaking.

JB: Well, I want to get back to what you've been doing in Australia, but first I just want to ask a little bit more about what may have led you to your involvement with the Craft and Folk Art Museum. Had you ever, before you came to CAFAM, had you ever worked in a gallery or a museum?

MA: No, never. It was completely new. I had left my job at UCLA and I was just sort of looking around, trying to figure out what would be interesting to do and I've gone to museums all my life and have always enjoyed going to museums. [When I was in L.A.] I lived near—I lived in the Fairfax area on Curson--

JB: You actually—I was just going to say—you actually lived on Curson--

MA: I was very close.

JB: --which is where the museum—well, it was the nearest cross street to the museum.

MA: Yeah.

[Interruption in recording]

MA: So when I was looking around for work I was—I really thought that museums would be a great place to work—I mean, who wouldn't think that? [Laughing] And I, at first, went to the L.A. County Museum [of Art] and sort looked around to see what their kinds of volunteers were doing.

JB: So you were thinking about a volunteer job at this time.

MA: Well, I figured that that's the way you did it. I didn't have any qualifications--

JB: That was smart, yeah.

MA: --and so I figured the best way to do it would be to be a volunteer and then you start—you know, people find out you're capable of doing things—and if something opens up, you're there. But I didn't like the L.A. County—I didn't like the atmosphere—I thought the museum volunteers were—I don't know—they just looked like older wealthy women and I didn't think I would fit in at all and I thought, no, this isn't really a place for me, so I went to the Craft and Folk Art Museum. And I thought, well, this looks like a really good place to volunteer. So I asked them about volunteering and that's when Aileen had just

recently started—this was in ’86.

JB: Oh, I remember—Aileen Colton--I think her name was.

MA: And so she had recently started recruiting—I mean actively recruiting—and starting up a volunteer program.

JB: Yes, we had volunteers, but [until Aileen came along] we didn’t really have--

MA: --have a program

JB: --have a structured program.

MA: So I got the information and I thought—I thought it was very interesting because I had to fill out an application and I had to have an interview to be a volunteer and it was a bit intimidating, you know, at first. But I actually think it’s a good idea and when I was living in Australia, I tried to get our museum to actually do something like that, but they never would, but I think it’s a really good program, cause it makes you feel like you’ve actually almost got a job when you--

JB: When you have responsibility--

MA: --volunteer.

JB: And the museum has some responsibility to you.

MA: Oh, yeah. And she [Aileen] did. She had a great program and gave everybody lots of information. So that when you started you knew a lot about the museum and she gave you, you know, old programs and booklets and just sort of tried to fill you in on everything about the museum and introduced you to staff and took you around and gave you a lot of options about different kinds of volunteer programs. And I knew I didn’t want to do tour groups. I wasn’t really into the education program. And—but they had a library and I thought, well, my other thing I always do is go to libraries, so I figured a library would be a really good volunteer job and then I was also interested in [the] installation of the shows and so they thought they would try me out. **[10:00]** They talked Marcie [Page], probably, into [laughing] trying me out. Cause Marcie didn’t really like volunteers.

JB: Oh-h-h.

MA: She was not really--

JB: I know that she liked you--

MA: --enthusiastic about volunteers.

JB: Yeah, I guess I’d forgotten that she had that general feeling.

MA: Yeah, and--

JB: Before she had met you! [Both laughing]

MA: Yeah, and I guess people were a little surprised because she had sort of been, sort of reluctant to take on a volunteer. And so I basically took two volunteer jobs working with Marcie and working with you.

JB: So you took them at the same time.

MA: Yeah, I was doing both. I'd work—I was trying to remember if I worked—when I started out as a volunteer—I know I had worked one day a week with Marcie and I worked one day with you in the library, but I think I might have had two days at some point in the library. And then I'd work extra time when there was an exhibition coming or going. I'd come in for doing condition reports and taking things out of the crates and stuff. And also for packing up, so—because I wasn't [otherwise] employed, you know, I was pretty flexible and could work extra hours when I needed to. So I started doing those two volunteer jobs.

JB: Yes, I remember that in addition to working in the library that, you know, my remembrance was that you were doing registrarial kinds of things. But you were actually working with installations also.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

JB: Of course, the museum didn't have a very big collection—permanent collection—but it did have some—did you work on that at all?

MA: I worked a little bit, but not a lot. I did a lot of the—the marking [of permanent collection objects]. Once I passed the pen-writing test [both laughing] [and] it was found that I could write small and legible, Marcie let me put the marks on, you know, put the registration numbers on objects. So we would spend a bit of time doing that, but most of what I did was helping out during installation and de-installation. And some taking care of objects and putting them on shelves and things like that, but it was mostly just working with exhibitions.

JB: So what are some of the--I don't know--specific experiences that you remember as far as working with Marcie or putting up shows?

MA: Oh-h yes. I remember—there probably are three or four really specific ones I remember, and the first one was the first exhibition that I helped—take out of the crates and put on the plinths--was the Alvar Aalto ["Alvar Aalto: Furniture and Glass," organized by the Museum of Modern Art]. And it was all this gorgeous, beautiful—and very heavy—glass. And I was terrified 'cause I knew how much each of those pieces were worth [laughing]. **[Accidental interruption in recording. Some content repeated.]**

JB: OK. You were talking about how you got started at the Craft and Folk Art Museum and I think you were actually living quite close by.

MA: Yeah. I was living on Curson Street, just off Beverly Boulevard, which is just blocks away from the Craft and Folk Art Museum. And I was looking for a place to volunteer in.

JB: So you were a volunteer, then, first.

MA: Definitely I was a volunteer--

JB: And that's what you were looking for--

MA: I was looking for volunteer work. I wasn't looking for paid work at the time. I was looking for a job switch and was looking into museums and I sort of knew that volunteering would be the way to go to get a foot in the door because I had no [museum] degrees, no experience in a museum. So I was actually looking to volunteer for a museum, to work in a museum. And because I didn't need to work at the time, luckily--

JB: And was CAFAM the first museum that you went to?

MA: No, it wasn't. [Laughing] I went to the County Museum because I love art and thought it would be fun to volunteer in the County Museum—the Los Angeles County Museum [of Art] and just didn't like the atmosphere—I didn't like the volunteers there--they all looked like older women, dressed very richly with pearls, the whole bit, and I thought it would--

JB: I think there was actually a dress code [at LACMA]--for the docents at any rate--

MA: There probably was.

JB: Not any more, but I think there was at the beginning. **[15:00]**

MA: It just seemed a bit staid, and I didn't like that. So I went up to the Craft and Folk Art Museum and it was much more relaxed and it was a great museum besides that. I really enjoyed it. And at the time they were starting a big recruitment for volunteers and a big volunteer program that was very structured. So I got an application form.

JB: Was that Aileen's--

MA: Yeah, Aileen Colton. And it was—she was fantastic and she really did, I think, a lot. In fact I remember I probably had started to go to the Craft and Folk Art Museum because there might have even been an advertisement or they were actually looking actively for volunteers. That I can't remember for sure.

JB: I think that's very possible. I know she was really pro-active.

MA: Yeah. And I thought it was—at first I thought it was a bit intimidating, going for a job interview to be a volunteer, but I think it was a really good thing to do it that way because

you really did feel like you had a job, that this was a volunteer *job*. You had responsibility, you know, and the museum thought of you as something more than just someone who just sort of showed up, you know. And she gave us—all the volunteers—she had this whole information packet about the museum—who everybody was, all the exhibitions. And it was just really nice. It was a really nice program. And when she was talking about all the different areas that you could volunteer in, I knew I didn't want to do tours or work with kids or—so the education department was a "no." And I liked libraries, so I thought, well the library would be really good. And then I was really interested in working with the objects themselves, and especially in taking—putting up exhibitions and when she told me I could volunteer [to] do something like that, I was--I thought that was really exciting. And I heard afterward that Marcie Page, the registrar, wasn't exactly enthusiastic about volunteers, but she was willing to give me a try, and we got along great. So it wasn't a problem [laughing].

JB: Well, she was a very careful person about her responsibilities, but I'm sure that once she got to know you--

MA: Well, she was careful, and she certainly taught me a lot. But she didn't want just anybody working with the objects, so, you know, you really had to pass Marcie's tests, in order to stay. [Laughing]

JB: I'm not surprised! So—did you work—go to work at the same time as a volunteer [with Marcie] at the same time [as] in the library--?

MA: In both, yeah. I did one day with Marcie, once a week, and I did one and sometimes two days, I think, in the library. And when we had exhibitions come in, I worked extra days to install the exhibitions, and we had to pack up things, I would come in and work extra days for that. So it was at least two days a week that I was there on a weekly basis and then extra days as needed.

JB: I know I should remember more about your early days in the library, but I couldn't remember exactly when you started. Do you remember approximately when that was?

MA: Well, I think it--I had always thought it was around August of '86

JB: '86. OK.

MA: Yeah. 1986 and I see by this that it's probably right because my first--

JB: Michelle is looking at the list of exhibitions--

MA: My first exhibition was "Alvar Aalto: Furniture and Glass." [Opened September 10, 1986]

JB: I always tend to think in terms of the shows.

MA: Yeah, it helps remind you, you know, where you started and what you [were] doing and that was the very first time I had actually worked with Marcie—and we were unpacking for the installation of that exhibition—and it was a really terrifying job because the pieces of glass—his glass work--

JB: Oh that's right--

MA: --was large.

JB: I always think of the [Aalto] furniture, but actually there was--

MA: No, I was doing the glass work and it was large and it was heavy and you had to take it out of the crate and hold it next to your body and then walk to wherever you were going to put it and it was a real, sort of terrifying experience--

JB: Sure.

MA: As a first exhibition installation.

JB: Yeah.

MA: And because I'd had all the paperwork and we were doing condition reports and stuff I also knew how much each one of those glass things was worth--

JB: Oh my God, yeah!! **[20:00]**

MA: Which didn't help either because, oh goll, if I break it, it's thousands of dollars, but I do remember that as my very first job in installing an exhibition was that glassware.

JB: Now the museum did have a small permanent collection.

MA: Yeah.

JB: Did you get to work with that also?

MA: Yes, in bits and pieces. I got to work with putting the registration numbers on objects in which the writing had to be very, very small in permanent ink [and] that we actually used an ink pen and ink, rather than like a ball point or a rolling writer or anything like we have now, and so you had to be able to write the number very smally and you had to use an ink pen and ink to put the numbers on--

JB: Without smearing it!

MA: Yeah, without smearing it—and it also had to be legible, so someone could actually read the number. And that was pretty tricky on some things, but once Marcie was assured that I could actually write small and legibly then she let me put numbers on objects.

JB: Just to continue with the Alvar Aalto show for a minute—I think that show took up both

galleries--

MA: Yeah, it was a big one. Yeah, it was both galleries. [The galleries at 5814 Wilshire before the renovation were on the first and third floors.]

JB: It came from the Museum of Modern Art [in New York City]. It was a very prestigious show, I think. It really got the attention of other museums in the area.

MA: Oh it did. It was a fantastic exhibition.

JB: Do you have any memories of being there at that opening or other openings?

MA: I was there for just about every opening, and a lot of times also assisted in handing out, you know, the drinks and stuff like that—or just sort of being at the opening and welcoming people, the sort of things that you do at openings. I was pretty much at every exhibition opening. The one opening that I remember—and I'm going to look at the list again here—because this was a pretty funny one. This was a Saudi Arabian costume--

JB: Oh, costumes, yes.

MA: --costume exhibition.

JB: Yes, Janet Marcus was very involved with that, I remember.

MA: Which was a really—I can't even find it—I know it's here--

JB: We can pause for a moment. **[Pause in the recording]**

MA: "Palms and Pomegranates."

JB: "Palms and Pomegranates," yes.

MA: "Palms and Pomegranates: Traditional Dress of Saudi Arabia," [Opened August 16, 1988] and this was in 1988 and it was a huge exhibition with lots of dresses and costumes. And I helped—I was helping dress all of the mannequins into these incredibly complicated costumes, you know, with head scarves and veils and, you know, just wonderful clothing. And it was big and Marcie and I were up on the very top floor and we were still dressing mannequins at—when the opening started—[laughing]

JB: Oh, yes [laughing]. I don't think that was the only exhibition at which that happened.

MA: Probably not—but this one I remember because we had, probably, at least two [mannequins] to go and they had opened the doors and we were just all—you know, hoping that they [the opening guests] were going to just stop in the middle [on the mezzanine] where the food was--

JB: Yeah and have a drink--

MA: And give us enough time to finish putting the costumes on—and they did. Nobody really knew that we had actually been that close to not having it ready for the opening! [Laughing] Because it was a mammoth task having to do all that work. It was a lot of work to do.

JB: Well, I can remember—there was one show where the materials actually didn't—it was again a traveling show—and the crates didn't come and for some reason—I guess because the invitations had already gone out and it just would have been impossible to--

MA: --stop the opening--

JB: --to let everybody know. They went ahead with the opening—and I think the crates—I wish I could remember—we can fill this in later—but I think the truck actually arrived in the middle of the opening. [Guardians of Happiness: A Shamanistic Approach to Korean Folk Art; opened May 5 – July 18, 1982.] That was unusual to say the least!

MA: Yes, usually things were very orderly. **[25:00]**

JB: But it certainly happened! So do you have any memories of, oh, just the kind of, you know--I was thinking about openings, because you'd see so many members at that time, and—but do you have any thoughts about the kinds of people you would meet at the Craft and Folk Art Museum? MA: Well, they were always very enthusiastic, I think, the people that came to the openings, and there was such a wide variety in the types of exhibitions that went on there. It was always amazing because there were a lot of people, you know, who came to every single opening—whether or not it was contemporary craft or traditional craft or costume or furniture or—just the many multiple examples of craft and folk art and architecture and design that happened at the Craft and Folk Art Museum. But there was a real strong core of people who just came all the time, you know, that group that were always members and went to every opening and shopped in the shop and they just always loved whatever they saw—and it was really good—they were really good people, really supportive and enthusiastic about the museum and what it was doing.

JB: Yes, and I remember there were some of them, at least in the early days, that almost always wore what we used to call "ethnic" costume. [Laughing]

MA: Oh, yes, yes they did. Lots of the ethnic jewelry and, you know, paisley, and you know, shawls and flowery dresses and all sorts of things.

JB: They were definitely gala events.

MA: They were the "ethnic" crowd, yes.

JB: Speaking of the variety of shows—and there was a variety of types of objects in the permanent collection--what did you think about that? I remember that there was a—

something of a controversy from time to time about just what the museums should be collecting—or if they should be collecting at all--

MA: Oh yeah.

JB: And then a related issue was whether or not there should be more focus to the exhibitions—What are your thoughts—or were your thoughts at the time--about that?

MA: I don't know what my thoughts about it at the time were. A lot of it was really new to me because I'd—most of the art fields that I [had experience with] were painting, printmaking, and so it was all of the fine art type of thing. And the folk arts I didn't really know a lot about or get involved in that much and textile design which was just sort of—so everything was just really new for me. It was a whole new art world, basically, that I was getting involved in. And didn't know a lot about. And so—I mean—for me it was fine because I was learning about all of this stuff. It was great. And mural painting and, you know, all the wonderful traditions that are in Los Angeles—the Mexican [and] South American folk art and the Japanese folk art. I mean everything was just great and even through you, I mean, outsider art, I mean that was just—that is still one of my loves to this day, you know--

JB: That's right.

MA: And being introduced to all of this kind of stuff. For me, it was wonderful because it certainly expanded my own interests in art and different kinds of art and different kinds of collecting. Now I collect just about anything. It's just what I like—and not necessarily, you know, I don't collect paintings or—a lot of people will just go only with traditional fine arts: paintings, sculpture, maybe a little into photography, but being able to blend everything together and just collect everything—art from all sorts of traditions is really a great thing, I think, to learn about.

JB: Yes, I think, sometimes it was easier to say what the museum *didn't* exhibit or collect than to say what it did, but I think for—let's see what you think about this—for many of us that had worked at the museum for a number of years—a pattern did emerge and there was a relevance *to each other* of the kinds of things that were shown. **[30:00]**

MA: Uh-huh.

JB: At any rate there were those who didn't necessarily agree with that.

MA: Yeah.

JB: But I guess it was Edith Wyle's vision that really dictated—in a very flexible way—what was shown.

MA: One of the interesting things about it too was--about the Craft and Folk Art Museum and its

collection or the art work that it exhibited--was its emphasis on the people who made the art.

JB: Yes.

MA: And all the craftspeople who did the art--traditional, nontraditional, sculptural, you know, whatever it was, there was a real emphasis on the people who were actually doing art work and a respect that they [the museum] gave them [the artists] for the kinds of art work that they did, you know, whether it was tatting, or, you know, embroidery, or things that people would think of as just sort of, you know, householdy type of things.

JB: I think that they were sometimes called *minor* arts. That used to drive me crazy.

MA: Yeah. And I think the Craft and Folk Art Museum generally respected these people and saw them as creating art in what they did, no matter what form it was.

JB: Yes, and that was the case whether they were so-called contemporary craft artists or--

MA: Yeah.

JB: Or so-called traditional artists.

MA: Yeah.

JB: But when they were working in traditional forms, there was also an emphasis on the culture--

MA: Yes, where they came from, why they were doing it, or how it shows up in the culture. I actually went to the Mingei Museum [recently] when we were in San Diego.

JB: Yes, it's now in Balboa Park. [Originally, it was located in a storefront in La Jolla.]

MA: Yeah, and I had really never been there.

JB: It's a wonderful museum.

MA: It is a beautiful museum. But what they had on display—it was also sort of thematic, like, spoons from all of these different countries and [utilizing] all of these different kinds of [materials] like metal, wooden, or whatever. But all of the cultures were all together, just displayed together. And it was a really interesting exhibition, and I think that—that was sort of the opposite, I guess, taking all cultures and saying all cultures have spoons. But it also imbued in each culture—because each spoon was different—it was a different interpretation, and you had to really surround yourself with the culture in order to get the interpretation of their spoon and what metal—what type of material they used and things like that.

JB: Yeah, well, of course, making the context at least as important as the object or the art itself was something that I remember specifically Edith Wyle--

MA: Oh, yeah.

JB: --saying, and I'm not even sure that I knew exactly what she meant when I first heard her say it, which was back in the late seventies--

MA: Yeah.

JB: But it certainly was before its time.

MA: Definitely before its time.

JB: Later—I think you were still in Los Angeles—when did you—do you remember when you left?

MA: I left in 1991, September '91.

JB: So it was while we were still at the May Company building—

MA: Oh, OK.

JB: But there had [already] begun to be a lot of talk for a whole lot of both specific and general reasons, about the importance of culture in contemporary life.

MA: Um-hm.

JB: And I remember going to some Western Museum Association meetings--

MA: Uh-huh.

JB: I don't know—I don't think you actually went to those meetings--

MA: No.

JB: But I'm sure that—I hope that we talked about them. And about how important it was beginning to be to a lot of museums to change the way they looked at objects. **[35:00]**

MA: Yes. And now it's traditional, I mean this is the way that you do view the object is you pull on all of these things. But one of the other things I remember is, well, as part of the library work, pulling together all of the texts and information for the curators. And all of the information they put into the wall panels and texts and label copy to explain it. And how much study they did and how much research they did, even if it was an exhibition that was coming from somewhere else, with, you know, ready-made things available to them. The curators and the education people--

JB: And the docents--

MA: And the docents always took the time to really, you know, study what was going to be on exhibition—and Janet Marcus [former Museum Educator], when she would take all of her education people through—you know, the walk-through at the beginning of each exhibition--to tell the docents or explain to the docents what everything was, why it was

there, and give, you know, the little stories so that they could actually tell people that came into the museum these things. And there was a lot of intellectual thought going into all of these exhibitions that I haven't really found in the other museums—well, I've only ever worked in one other museum—well, no, I actually have worked in a couple of others—but that kind of thing doesn't happen everywhere. It's--maybe a curator, you know, when they want to do something really special will do it, but [at CAFAM] this was an ongoing process. This was continuing. You know, "What is our next exhibition going to be about?" Then you would look up and try to get information on it. We'd do interlibrary loans, pull things out of the text. We had the whole shelf, you know, of books on reserve so that people could come in and look at it, try to pull together as much information as you can. And everybody was really involved in each exhibition. And on an intellectual level as well as on a design level and on a display level. And I thought it was quite amazing.

JB: Why do you think that was? Why do you think it was different there?

MA: Well, it must have been because someone had to have started that kind of thing going and I would assume it was Edith, you know, I mean, I didn't start working there until '86 and the museum had already been up for about ten years when I was there and so I think, you know, obviously, this became the pattern of how you did things at the Craft and Folk Art Museum. Who started it I don't know, but that's the way everything—I think you probably had a good deal to do with it in the library.

JB: Well, I just had a great interest in it.

MA: Yeah.

JB: Edith definitely, as far as the staff and the board was concerned—she was the leader—in pretty much everything—but I think she did tell—I don't know if it was me or just [that] she was talking about it at a staff meeting or something—I think she did say that Pat Altman, who was I think one of the founders of the museum at UCLA, which is now the Fowler Museum—I think Edith credited Pat Altman with pointing out the importance of context to her.

MA: Really.

JB: That's my recollection. If Edith was alive, she might very well [both laughing] disagree with me—but that's what I remember. And I also think that because of the kinds of material that we were showing and collecting, we *had* to explain ourselves, it seemed like, you know--

MA: Yeah, that could be.

JB: Other art museums, it was taken for granted, if you were an art museum, you collected, as you were saying, paintings, sculpture, etc., etc. The Craft and Folk Art Museum considered itself an art museum. That was always important. I don't know who—I don't know if it was just something that I assumed or if someone actually told me that when I first started working there, but there was never any question in my mind—I think in most people's minds—that this was an *art* museum. **[40:00]**

MA: Yes.

JB: Even though it showed a lot of material that other museums that called themselves ethnographic or anthropology showed. But there was a difference in the way CAFAM showed those materials.

MA: Oh, there was a definite difference--

JB: Do you want to talk about that?

MA: Yeah, I mean, there—it's hard to—I guess it's hard to explain it because today it seems so normal--

JB: Yes.

MA: Because that is now the normal way that objects—folk art, you know--is exhibited, with all the background about who made it, where, what time, how—its importance to the culture. We all take it for granted now because that's what everybody does. And even natural history museums and traditional ethnography museums are all re-interpreting their collections. You know, they're all getting busy re-interpreting it.

JB: Good point, yeah.

MA: The Craft and Folk Art Museum always considered the object and the culture as something, yeah, you put it on a pedestal--

JB: Yes, you literally did.

MA: Yes you do. And, you know, you put spotlights on it and you talk about what skill it takes to make it. And you do have to explain it because you can't just say, well, that's a Sam Francis, and so—you know, therefore it's important. Or, you know, it's a Rothko, or you know, a Cezanne or something like that. Which is supposed to be self-explanatory. These are great artists so, of course, this is why you have this hanging on the wall. So [at a place like CAFAM] you do have to explain why these objects are so unique and so beautiful and you have to—and you look at them as you would an art piece. You know, what is this object telling me in its very many—how it's made, what its colors are, what does this tell me about it. So, yeah.

JB: Yeah, I think there's no question that the Craft and Folk Art Museum—it probably wasn't the only place that was doing it in the United States or even on the West coast, but it was one of the leading institutions in terms of changing the way people looked at what we used to call the "minor arts," the "applied arts" --

MA: But it involved everything. I mean, the way that it was displayed. The thought that went into wall colors—I mean--the walls were always repainted for every exhibition. You know, things were moved around. And everything was designed in order to show this in a very professional way. And it was designed—the exhibition was designed—and it just, you know, had that importance, and it had that attention to detail that went into each of the exhibition designs.

JB: I think that Edith did design some of the exhibitions herself. But also Bernard Kester is someone who designed quite a few.

MA: Yeah, they would bring in different people. I'm not really quite sure who was doing what. But yeah, they would bring in people that would take a look at it and decide how things should be moved, and I remember Timoteo had a lot of work to do.

JB: Yes, you know that [now] the museum finally has an elevator! But all of those years--

MA: Oh yes, gol, yes!

JB: --that you were there--.

MA: Yeah, walking up to the third floor--

JB: It was terrible. People that used to come in—just as visitors—would complain. And I would think to myself—oh-h-h, if you only worked here!

MA: Oh yes!

JB: Then you'd really be complaining!

MA: Yes, and having to drag things up there, you know, some quite heavy.

JB: Yes.

MA: Yeah, it could be quite a task. Or even mounting—I remember the ship's head for one of the exhibitions. [It] was this gigantic woman—you know, a ship's prow—and it was huge—I mean it was gigantic! And it took all of us, holding this—I didn't—I really can't remember how we hung it up on the wall, but we did. But it was incredible and we were—there were a whole bunch of us lifting this thing up, you know, to hang on the wall!

JB: It's just amazing to think about what—some of the things that went on just because of the physical limitations that we had. **[45:00]**

MA: Yeah, and there wasn't anything fancy—no fancy little people movers or anything--

JB: Cranes--

MA: No, oh no. It was just all muscle and people, putting the exhibitions up.

JB: And a lot of heart, you know.

MA: Oh, yeah, yeah. And that was the other thing about installing and exhibitions was [that] all of the staff would participate.

JB: And certainly at the last minute, they did!

MA: Especially at the last minute, yeah, I mean, if things weren't quite going smoothly, I mean everybody would just drop their regular jobs and everybody would be on the floor trying to get an exhibition together.

JB: I remember, yeah, I remember sweeping the floor—and speaking of painting—I think the floors would actually get repainted sometimes.

MA: Yeah.

JB: And sometimes they weren't completely dry by the time of the opening [both laughing]!

MA: I believe that! It was quite amazing!

JB: Yeah, yeah. Well, maybe we should talk a little bit about what you were doing in the library [laughing].

MA: [both laughing] Oh! Oh dear. Well, most of what I was doing, at least in the early days, was the exhibition slide cataloging.

JB: Oh yes. That was such a huge project!

MA: Oh yeah. And it's still—I mean—we still have unlabeled slides. [Since she moved to Australia, Michelle has worked with Joan in the CAFAM archives a few times when visiting L.A.]

JB: Yes, although I think that, thanks to you, every exhibition has a set—if slides were taken—
MA: Yeah, if slides were taken.

JB: There were a few that somehow we missed, but at the time that you started, which—if it was '86—then, yeah, we had at least ten years worth!

MA: Hm-hm.

JB: Of exhibitions—most of which had been photographed.

MA: Yes.

JB: And there were—I don't even remember if there were labels at all. They were identified in a very rudimentary way.

MA: Yes—and a lot of it was going back when I was doing the backlog—the identification of all of the old, old exhibitions—a lot of it was using catalogs—hopefully there was a catalog.

JB: Oh, the exhibition catalogs, right.

MA: Yes, the exhibition catalogs to identify objects. And then there were always the ones where sometimes you would remember something so that we could put a name to it or try and find it. Exhibition lists—you know, just lists of objects so that we could maybe somehow identify some of these. And then there were always those shots where we couldn't figure out what anything was, so it was [labeled] an "installation shot."

JB: Yes, yes, I remember.

MA: And it was a lot of fun because—I mean it was basically, it was research work, you know, investigative work. You had to figure this out--

JB: Detective work.

MA: It was detective work, you know: where the slides came from--the order—trying to visualize—the downstairs and the upstairs--

JB: After the fact!

MA: Yeah, having never seen the exhibition—and trying to visualize downstairs and upstairs. And trying to fit the order together from when you get one end—you get an object at the left-hand side of the slide that matches the same object that's the right-hand of the previous slide--

JB: And you hope that you've got the slide turned the right way!

MA: Yes. And getting everything in order, you know, trying to make it in order of exhibition and trying to figure out where the walls were and where the cases were. Yeah, it was a lot of fun. I would sit there at the desk with all of these slides and just sort of—at the light table--

JB: That big light table that we had!

MA: Yeah, and just try to figure out where everything was—and shuffle them around and rearrange them and try and get them into an order. And I think I did pretty good.

JB: You did great! I was *so* grateful. I just—it was just wonderful! Now, of course when you first started, we had a card catalog. **[50:00]**

MA: Yes.

JB: But I think it was just a year or two later [1987] that we finally got the first computer! It wasn't the first computer in the museum, but it was the first PC. It was the first one—of course it was a DOS operating system at the time--but I remember how excited I was that finally there had begun to be some stabilization of [computer] formats. You know there was a big [competition]—was Apple going to be the one that was the standard or was it going to be the--what at the beginning was the IBM PC—Microsoft? So I was reminded of that because, talking about the exhibitions, one of the first things that we did was to develop a database of exhibitions. I think you worked on that a little bit.

MA: I worked on that a little bit, but what I worked on more was the artists bio files.

JB: On the computer.

MA: Yes, on the computer. And then putting the information into the artists biographical files. And that was—it was interesting working on the computers, mainly because—you know, I tell people these stories—you know, when I first worked on a computer we were in DOS--

JB: Yeah, and they don't even know what that is—or was!

MA: And this was scary stuff because when you crashed your computer in DOS, you'd had it, you know, your information was gone forever. I remember—I was working on—there was a time when you were—when you could compress all of the data and then you—for one reason I was working in the library—this was over in the May Company--

JB: Oh.

MA: And I thought I had lost everything in the artists bio files

JB: Oh God! [Laughing] I don't know if I knew about this!

MA: No you didn't. I think I was working on a weekend or something and I was all by myself and I was sitting there—oh, no, I've just lost the entire thing. But what I had done was inadvertently I'd compressed it, so I uncompressed it and it was still all there! [Laughing] But those were early days of the computer and I remember Marcie being thrilled to death because she [also] had a computer—for the registration thing.

JB: Yes, she got hers pretty soon after the library.

MA: But being able to put all of this information on a computer where you could manipulate it a bit more than you could with the typewriter--

JB: And where you didn't have to repeat the information once you'd entered it. I don't think people who romanticize what the card catalog was—and there are people that do that--

MA: Yeah.

JB: --both librarians and nonlibrarians--realize or remember that we had to have cards duplicated

in order to have the different subject headings and the different access points—whereas with a computer database, of course, you enter it once and then you can sort it a lot of different ways.

MA: Yes, and you can do all sorts of things with it.

JB: And you can sort it so many different ways—it was such a miracle at the time!

MA: Yeah, and we were getting exhibition information in there cause we were trying to figure out dates and we were trying to figure out the actual dates—and searching for information as to what the dates were. And then we could use it and we could have [it sorted by] dates or, you know, by title and that was much easier to figure out on a computer than it ever was any way else.

JB: And still—it was before the Internet!

MA: Oh yes.

JB: So, you know, there were still challenges. Let's talk a bit about the May Company, about what led up to moving to the May Company Department Store and what that was like—the move and being there.

MA: Well, I remember it in two parts. I mean it was a real—I remember losing the library in the little house [at 731 S. Curson] was just a real tragedy.

JB: Oh, you know that it was torn down, finally, a few years ago?

MA: Yes. And it was really sad because the library was just—it was just a perfect house for the library. The library was great--

JB: "The cottage." We called it "the cottage."

MA: Yeah, the little cottage. It was really good. And it was a real shame to have to leave that and put it on the mezzanine of the May Company [laughing].

JB: Yes—the former luggage department I think it was.

MA: Yes. And there was also—because I—before I started working full-time in the library—which was in '90-- [**55:00]**

JB: That's right. You—by now you were being paid by the library—were you also working part-time in another department?

MA: No—I was working full-time in the shop until you got money for the library job and then I left the shop and I think that was in—it was just before I left. I think it was in 1989.

JB: Well 1989 is when we moved—in June of '89 is when we moved to the May Company.

MA: And I was working still in the shop--

JB: For pay--

MA: Yeah, for pay for part of that time.

JB: That was—now John Browse was--

MA: John left—oh John left before—a long time—well he must have left in ’88—I think—’88, possibly ’89. [April 30, 1989 was John Browse’s last day.]

JB: But you got to know him when you were working in the shop.

MA: Yeah, I worked in the shop. I got a full-time job working in the shop in ‘8—let’s see, it was ’86 I was a volunteer—’88 [actually 1987] I started working full-time in the shop. And then one day [a week I] volunteered still in the library.

JB: I guess that’s why I had it confused in my mind cause I know you continued to work in the library at least one day a week.

MA: Yep. So I was working five days in the shop and then I did one volunteer day still in the library.

JB: Oh, my goodness!

MA: And that was when—and when everybody left to go to the May Company, the shop was still on the corner of Wilshire—it was in the place next door [at 5800 Wilshire].

JB: Yes, I’m very confused in my mind about just when that happened because the shop did continue at the—in the original building at 5814 Wilshire until everyone moved, didn’t it?

MA: We [the shop staff] were the last ones out. Everybody had moved [June 30, 1989] and the shop was still there but we were moving into the 5800--

JB: The building on the corner. OK.

MA: The building on the corner. And they designed a new shop and then we—Carol and I—moved-- [The new shop at 5800 Wilshire was designed by Gere Kavanaugh.]

JB: What was Carol’s last name?

MA: I can’t remember. I really can’t—John would know.

JB: I can’t either. Yeah. [Carol De Runtz Day was John Browse’s assistant until he resigned in April 1989; then she became shop manager and Michelle was her assistant.]

MA: He would know. But we [Carol and I] moved all of the shop merchandise and we were really not supposed to be there because it was [at least theoretically in terms of earthquakes] unsafe and we were on the very last days and we had a shopping cart and we moved all

of the merchandise from the back of the shop [at 5814 Wilshire] into the new back of the shop area [at 5800 Wilshire]. It took us about two days to do that and we were the last ones out of that place.

JB: But John Browse had left before that.

MA: He was gone before that. I think he had left about—he had left maybe six months before that or maybe even longer. And Carol was in charge of the shop [the manager]. She was pregnant.

JB: I remember that.

MA: Very pregnant—and her daughter spent her first few months in the back of the shop [at 5800 Wilshire]. Carol would bring her into work and Sarah would sit in the back in her little chair. It was quite amazing.

JB: The museum was always very family-oriented. You could always get time off if you had family emergencies, I remember.

Well, I guess I shouldn't have jumped ahead to the May Company. But I think—let's talk about that and then we'll try to come back to talk about what you did in the shop. Let's talk—since we were talking about the library--

MA: Putting the library into the mezzanine--

JB: You were working full-time in the library [starting in January 1990]—and this was due to the grants that we got from the Irvine Foundation. Not that I didn't want—I would love to have had you working full-time, but—so we had to move to this department store [the May Company], which was still operating as a department store.

MA: Yes, it was, when we first worked in there, we would go into the May Company through the department store, you know, with all the clothing and everything else and go up to the mezzanine level and—oh gol—I remember the shelving—moving the shelving. [A moving company moved everything from CAFAM to the May Company, and then the library shelving units were put in place by Timoteo Torrico and Michelle.] And everything was in boxes [and they] were numbered and we got it all together and Timoteo and I [were] trying to fit the shelves back together. We did it, you know, but it was just--sometimes you couldn't—you just couldn't get your mind to work. **[1:00:00]**

JB: Well, it was all modular, and so it was a huge puzzle.

MA: Yeah, it was. And we just--I can just see him looking at the shelving on the floor and just telling me, "It's not going to work." You know, "We can't do this."

JB: He was such a sweet guy.

MA: Oh, he really was. Really, he would try and do anything he could for you. He was just a wonderful, wonderful person to work for [i.e., to work with].

JB: Timoteo Torrico, I think his last name was.

MA: Yeah, yeah. And his name wasn't Timoteo. It was Joaquin.

JB: Yes, that was a little bit strange. I still think of him as Timoteo.

MA: I do too.

JB: But his name was—I think his father was Timoteo and somehow there was some confusion when he was hired--

MA: Well, there wasn't confusion. He was illegal. He was using his cousin's social security number.

JB: Oh-h-h. I guess I never got that! Oh that should have been obvious to me.

MA: Yeah, he told me that. And then Patrick Ela helped him when they had the amnesty [in 1986]. Patrick helped him get his papers together so that he could become legal during the early amnesty.

JB: Oh, I'm so glad you remembered that.

MA: Yeah. One day I remember Timoteo coming up to me and I don't remember what we were doing because I was working in the shop full-time and Timoteo was always around in the shop area so we got to be, you know, really friendly, and he said something—I think he brought his little son in, and his son is named Joaquin and he [Timoteo] told me, he said that, his name—Timoteo's name—was Joaquin too. And I looked at him and I said, "It's not Timoteo?" He said, "Oh no." His name was Joaquin. But that's what it was. He was illegal.

JB: He [Timoteo] probably wasn't supposed to tell you that.

MA: Oh, no, no. I'm sure he wasn't.

JB: Oh my. Yeah, I guess we should interject that Timoteo was the maintenance person for the museum, although he did all kinds of things.

MA: He did anything that you wanted him to do.

JB: And he was there all hours—I think seven days a week a lot of the time.

MA: I think he was, yeah. I mean, he was always there when I saw him. He would be a guard. He would be a cleaner, fix-it, paint, build things. I mean he just did everything.

JB: If there was a party, he was there, he was the last one to leave.

MA: To lock up, yeah.

JB: So--

MA: So now Timoteo and I are in the mezzanine trying to fit the modular shelving together--

JB: I don't know where I was—I think I must have been out of town or something because--

MA: You could have been when we had to do the actual—you had everything set up—and we had everything numbered and we'd done the floor plan and we'd done the whole space—you know, figuring out where we wanted everything and everything was numbered, taken apart, put over into the mezzanine level and we were putting it all back together again. But for a part of that you were gone for something--

JB: I think I must have been because I can't imagine that [I would have abandoned you]—at any rate—go ahead.

MA: We were trying to put the shelves up and we finally got all the shelves up. And then we were redecorating.

JB: That was fun.

MA: That was fun. We had a lot of fun redecorating. And it actually worked out—it was very comfortable. We finally got it to a very comfortable state.

JB: I thought so.

MA: It was really nice and enjoyable.

JB: It was surprising because there were no windows and you would have thought that it would have been kind of dark, but I don't remember it that way.

MA: No, I don't either, and it seemed we had plenty of space. We had the whole back workroom area and I was doing some of the MARC [copy] cataloging, the—you know, the OPAC--

JB: Yeah, we had gotten on OCLC [the Online Computer Library Center, an online cooperative cataloging utility] by that time.

MA: OCLC, yep. We were doing that and so we had a large work space. It actually seemed like we had more work space than over in the cottage—it just seemed—everything was just designed better-- [Michelle had designed the workroom space in the May Co. and Joan's son, Ben, did the workroom space construction.]

JB: Well, we had more—I'm pretty sure we did have more than in the cottage.

MA: Then your office—and then I had my desk—and I was at the reception and [I had] my computer. And it was really pleasant. It was actually a really pleasant place to work.

JB: Well, I'm glad you remember it that way.

MA: No, I do. **[1:05:00]**

JB: We were busy, not only because of the move but also because of the Center for the Study of Art and Culture (CSAC), which was—had been started—that was, of course, the main reason we got the grant from the Irvine Foundation and the first meeting—oh, I hope I'm remembering right—I think the first meeting of the National Advisory Board was that fall, right after we--

MA: Yes, I think so because we had just really moved in. [The library moved to the May Company July 11, 1990; the first CSAC meeting was December 6-8, 1990.] And we were preparing—getting all of these people together in the rooms, and setting up the conference tables, and the hotel rooms and catering and--

JB: You were really in the thick of that!

MA: Yes, I was! [Laughing] I remember bringing things in, bringing things out, you know, making sure the catering and tape recording--and making sure everything got turned over so we could record everything.

JB: That's right, we were using cassette tapes.

MA: Yes, we were using cassette tapes, and taking phone calls and making sure people arrived and, yeah, I was—and we were both there—very busy for the few days that it was on.

JB: Yes, and you actually attended those meetings.

MA: Yes, I sat in on all the meetings, yep. [Michelle acted as CSAC Secretary.] And listened to them and listened to everybody talk. It was a real big thing. It was the first time I had ever been involved in that kind of—organizing a conference, which is never an easy thing to do. It's a lot of work.

JB: A lot of details that you try to anticipate—but you can't really imagine how hard it can be until you get in the middle of it. And Patrick and Edith attended most of those meetings.

MA: Yeah, yeah. And there were agendas, what we were going to talk about—the whole thing. Then you got to do the transcribing of the tape.

JB: Yes, I got to know what transcribing is like.

MA: Yeah, that was the first meeting.

JB: So I think you—I'm trying to remember how long after that—I hope that wasn't the cause of it—no, I'm just kidding! [Laughing] that you left.

MA: It wasn't that long afterwards. [Michelle left in September 1991.]

JB: You left for England, I guess, to begin with. And you thought you were going to come back.

MA: Yes, we had anticipated coming back. We were going to England for a year—September to September—and then Eric got the full-time position in Australia. So we came back in August [1992] just to tell you that we weren't coming back.

JB: To say good-bye.

MA: To say good-bye, yeah.

JB: Well, let's go back a little bit now. I kind of skipped ahead to get to the May Company. I'd like to talk a little bit more about, you know, about what you were doing [before the move to the May Co.]. We talked about your working for Marcie, in terms of the registrar, and we talked about the library. But there were other things that you did, I think.

MA: Well, I was in—I worked in the shop.

JB: Yeah, let's talk a little bit more about the shop, about your experiences there.

MA: Yeah, it was basically, I took—I wanted a full-time job in the library, but as we know [at the time in October 1987], the funding wasn't actually forthcoming, but they had a shop position going and--

JB: Who was working in the shop at that time?

MA: John was the manager. Carol was the Assistant Manager. Mary—and then they just had, you know, a couple of people--

JB: But Ann Robbins and Susan Skinner had gone by then. [Robbins resigned at the end of August 1982. John Browse was then rehired—he had worked for The Egg and The Eye Gallery as Edith Wyle's Assistant Director in the seventies. Susan Skinner was his Associate Manager and then she resigned in March 1984 to start New Stone Age.]

MA: They had gone. Yep, they weren't there anymore. And I had been working with Marcie on the "Puzzles Old and New" traveling exhibition.

JB: Oh yes, that was a *huge* exhibition. [It was an exhibition of mechanical puzzles primarily from the collection of Jerry Slocum; opened November 26, 1986.]

MA: That was a huge one, yes. And we were—and she had purchased a bunch of hard plastic suitcases, and inside the suitcases she put foam and then we had to cut--

JB: Oh—to prepare it for traveling!

MA: To prepare it for traveling--

JB: To Japan, I believe.

MA: Yeah, to Japan. And we had to figure out what puzzles were going into what suitcases and then cut foam out so that they would pack into the thing--

JB: Talk about puzzles! [Laughing]

MA: And the other job I had for that [traveling show] was to—some of the puzzles, when they were on display were displayed with pieces out of them or parts out of them—and not all of them had solutions to the puzzles. And so, whenever there was something that was taken apart or taken out I made diagrams on graph paper--

JB: Oh, my goodness! **[1:10:00]**

MA: --about how to return them into the put-together state and how to remove them--

JB: And I imagine you had to really figure out how to work the puzzle in order to--

MA: I did. I sat there with the puzzle and tried to figure it out. And I used graph paper and we used colored pens and pencils for--you know, it was a really–it was very crude in a way, but it worked, and Marcie told me later, she said when she took the exhibition down—she was in Japan in the middle of the night—and she was really glad that I had made those diagrams because she could put it back together to put it in the case. And so because, [when I was volunteering for] Marcie, [she] was doing all of this in the shop area, I got to know John and Carol pretty well and—I think it was Beryl—Beryl was the woman who used to work in the shop—a younger woman—and she left. She got engaged and she left to get married and so they needed a second shop assistant, full-time. And John and Carol asked me if I'd be interested because they knew me.

JB: Because they'd gotten to know you.

MA: Yeah, they knew me and they figured they'd rather have a--

JB: Excuse me, but I just wanted to kind of set the scene. The area that you're talking about where you were working on the puzzles--that was that area in back of the shop.

MA: Yes, in back of the shop—"the cage."

JB: Oh—"the cage." That's right. That was a secure area.

MA: And Marcie had a little room and then there was a cage with a lock in it and everything—you know, but she had room to work in it. Anyway, we were back in the back of the shop.

JB: And also the shop used that area for packing things or unpacking things.

MA: Yeah, so it was a big wide area. That's probably why we used it because it had space. And so they [the shop staff] decided that, rather than advertise for the position, [they] might as well have me come and do it. And it was also the first time the electronic cash register was going in. And I was trained solely on the electronic cash register before I actually

started at the front of the shop. So that when they took out the old cash register, I could train all the volunteers on how to work the electronic cash register. And this was a major job. You know, for them—because this was just, you know, the new electronics as everything changes, you know, your older volunteers—they get less and less able to cope.

JB: Oh that's right. A lot of the volunteers in the shop were older.

MA: A lot of the volunteers were older women. And we lost a few of them because of that, but then we had some 80 and 90 year olds who were still there, so it was fine. [Laughing]

JB: Because it was complicated--

MA: Yes, it wasn't that easy.

JB: I guess, you know, electronics do get simpler as time goes on, so the first ones were not easy.

MA: Yeah, yeah. And they had things to do. You know, we had to do the tape run, and putting the money in, and checking out at night became more and more complicated, because there were more things that they were required to do for bookkeeping in the shop than they'd ever had to do before. So it did get a bit more complicated.

So I started working in the shop and also became their book buyer because--

JB: Oh yes, I remember that.

MA: Because John was tired of—I think John was tired of buying books and he said, "Do you read?" You know, and just sort of gave me the book lists and I started buying books for the shop and that was quite fun too. I did that.

JB: Yes, I remember you were excited about that.

MA: Oh yeah, I got to buy all the books.

JB: And it was a very attractive display.

MA: Yes, that was great. We had a great book shop. It was really fun.

JB: So then the museum was—well, first of all, let's just talk a little bit more about the experience of being in the shop. There were obviously times when you had to wait on customers.

MA: Oh yes.

JB: And also, did you work with some of the artists whose work—well, first of all [laughing]—tell a little bit about what made the CAFAM shop really different--special? **[1:15:00]**

MA: Special. Yeah, well, most of the work was all original. A lot of it was on consignment where

local artists would bring the goods in and when we sold them, they would get paid. We had beautiful jewelry work. And then we also had purchases of ethnic art. The mask collection was fantastic—and baskets--and John Browse, who was the shop manager, just had an incredible eye and talent for bringing in really interesting crafts. And so it was all—we weren't a gift shop. We didn't have anything that wasn't made by somebody, you know, handmade. We had contemporary craft. We had traditional craft. John went to all of the fairs and he would buy things from Guatemala, from Africa, from Japan. We always had displays of traditional crafts from across the country—countries--and overseas, and then we always supported local [contemporary craft] artists who were actually making ceramics and glass and jewelry and just anything.

JB: So it really functioned—that was a good way of [describing it]—you said it wasn't a gift shop. It really was more of a gallery.

MA: Oh, definitely it was a gallery, and John did themed shows for every exhibition. So anytime there was an opening, there was this special shop show, which complemented whatever was being exhibited in the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

JB: I wish that the archives [i.e., the CAFAM Records, which are at UCLA Special Collections] had more records from the shop.

MA: The shop shows?

JB: Unfortunately, for some reason, I don't yet have them. Maybe John has them.

MA: I don't know. I don't think so.

JB: But I know that the shop always did have this tradition of having its own exhibitions.

MA: Yeah. There was a show that had a lot of fiber work, basketry work. I remember—one I really remember was John got together a collection of miniature baskets.

JB: Oh.

MA: And everything—just baskets made of all sorts of different materials, but the only criteria was that they were small. They were all small and they were just lovely, just wonderful. But he—and we--had artists coming in all the time. I mean, people would come in and they would bring whatever they had to show. They would show--Carol bought the jewelry and John bought everything else. And so they would show the jewelry to Carol and she would say yes or no or, "I like this. I don't like this." And the other artists would make appointments with John and a lot of times he would—if he wasn't sure--or even if he really liked it and just wanted to show us—he'd bring Carol and I into the back and say, you know, "What do you think? Will this sell?" You know, "How do you like it?" And we just had some incredible things in that shop.

JB: It must have been nice to be included in that process of--

MA: Oh yes, yeah. Got to meet all the artists, got to know them. And, yeah, it was really, really, good. It was fun.

JB: And then sometimes didn't the shop have objects that were related in some way to whatever the exhibition in the museum was?

MA: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. If you'd had an exhibition on, well, for example, the Guatemalan masks. I think John practically filled the shop up with masks—and other objects from Guatemala, you know, textiles and baskets and stuff like that. So he really worked, you know. He always needed to know what the next exhibition was because he would go out and try and find something to go with the exhibition. So yes.

JB: Speaking of masks. Let's talk a little bit about the Festival of Masks. What do you remember? What are your earliest remembrances of the Festival?

MA: Well, I never got that involved in the Festival of Masks. My earliest remembrances were all of these strange people just sort of showed up. [Laughing]

JB: You mean in the shop?

MA: No, no. When the Festival was on—they were working in—they worked [in] a part of the cottage.

JB: Yes, that's true. There were sort of pre-Festival workshops, is that what you mean?

MA: No, the staff that were putting together—you know, sort of the itinerant staff who would come in to organize all of the Festival.

JB: Yes, sometimes the library would kind of get taken over for non-library purposes. That's right. I almost forgot. **[1:20:00]**

MA: Yeah, so it was a whole group of people who really came in [only] when the Festival was on—to organize it and to run it and to get it done. There were new people that I hadn't seen before.

JB: In fact, I just remembered that they [the Festival staff] had an office in the back [of the cottage]—of course.

MA: Yeah, in the back. So that was sort of my—I guess—my involvement with the Festival of Masks was all of these people kind of scurrying around--

JB: That's kind of annoying, huh? [Both laughing]

MA: I mean it was an enormous undertaking. I went to a few of them and I think I probably—I think I did some face painting and stuff, you know, did a couple of—helped out in a

couple of the education workshops and things like that. But I just remembered this big crowd of people just sort of like showing up [probably 2-3 months before the Festival] and then they would disappear again until the next year!

JB: This was in the cottage on Curson.

MA: Yeah, it was quite funny.

JB: Do you—can you talk a little bit about just what the Festival itself was like—when you would go into the Festival?

MA: Oh, it was just enormous. It was a carnival, I don't know, a carnival, a circus—it was just really, really lively. There were so many things to do. And I really, I have to say, I couldn't believe that it was all organized by what is a small organization. I mean the Craft and Folk Art Museum was a very small organization. And this event was huge. You know, it was just huge.

JB: Well, as you said, they did hire some people especially--

MA: But I mean it wasn't like they had a horde of extra people ever.

JB: No. A lot of volunteers.

MA: Yeah, they had a lot of volunteers and of course a lot of things, you know, would never get done without the volunteers—

JB: Yeah, absolutely.

MA: But still, the organizing and putting it together and doing what was done for the Festival was just amazing.

JB: It was. It really was. And for a while they were having—it was a two-day affair [at the end of October]: all day Saturday, all day Sunday. But there was also—I don't know if you were there then, but they had for a while a masquerade ball on the Friday [or Saturday] night.

MA: Oh no, I wasn't--

JB: That was before—well, they stopped doing that [the masquerade], I think, mainly because they just didn't have the help to do it.

MA: Well, I can imagine they wouldn't.

JB: Well, let's see. We've talked about the people you worked with. Can you talk a little bit about some of the other people? Like, well, I guess, Edith Wyle is the one—I don't know that you had a whole lot directly to do--

MA: No I didn't have a whole lot directly to do with Edith. [Edith Wyle had retired in 1984, but she continued to be active on the board, and came into CAFAM on Wednesdays especially to

have lunch with Patrick Ela.] I actually, really, only got to know her well, I guess, because of the shop, because she always shopped in the shop [laughing].

JB: Well, that's important to know! [Laughing]

MA: She was always shopping in the shop—and especially at Christmas time, you know, and Edith got her 40% discount in the shop too. That was one of the benefits of being the founder.

JB: Yeah, I think nobody else got that much of a discount.

MA: No, no one else did. She would come in to the shop. And generally, she would just gather up a bunch of stuff and we would send her a bill or something like that and she would just take them away. But—and so that was really—that was really my only contact with Edith.

JB: Well, she probably expressed her opinions about things in the shop.

MA: Oh, she always did. Yes, we always took--Edith was somewhat gruff.

JB: Yes, she could be.

MA: Yes, and she could be very demanding.

JB: Yes.

MA: And—I don't know if I should even say this—

JB: You can say whatever [laughs] you want.

MA: There was one Christmas [when] it was really, really busy. And the line was from the front of the shop to the back of the shop by the cash register.

JB: Oh, my goodness.

MA: It was very, very busy.

JB: It was a very popular place to shop, especially at the holidays.

MA: Yes, especially at the holidays and it was just packed. And we always had to bring in extra people at Christmas. But Edith was at the back of the line and she was waving, trying to get someone's attention to go to the front of the line. And I was at the cash register and basically I was ringing up the sales and I had two other people that were bagging them and that's all I was doing was ringing up sales and taking money. And I ignored her [both laughing]. I did not have the time to deal with it.

JB: [laughing] Well, that must have been very tense. **[1:25:00]**

MA: I'm sure she didn't appreciate it. But there wasn't-- I just could not—I just couldn't be bothered. But anyway-- Yeah, so I really didn't have a lot to do with her. Mainly

because I think—I don't know—cause I was always a behind-the-scenes person. And never really wanted to be out front and so, you know, it was fine with me. I didn't really care and I worked in the library and I worked with the registrar and everything was behind the scenes. And it was only in the shop when I was, you know, at the front desk that I was really out with the public. And my preference is not to be out with the public. So I did not have a lot to do with Edith. In fact, I probably saw Frank more than I saw Edith.

JB: Really! Well, what about Frank?

MA: I sort of liked him. I thought of him—he reminded me of a cowboy or something. I don't know. He just had this--

JB: He did wear a cowboy hat, I think, and boots.

MA: He had this gentlemanly—yeah, and boots, yeah.

JB: I think he still thinks of himself as a rancher—and he is! [Frank Wyle, Edith Wyle's husband, was the founder of Wyle Laboratories, an aeronautics testing and electronics company; he also owns a large ranch in the Sierra foothills.]

MA: Yeah, and he had that look about him. He really did, yeah.

JB: He has that—I think it's over 4,000 acres up in—

MA: Oh, gol.

JB: --near Mariposa. [The Wyle ranch raises prize-winning cattle.]

MA: Yeah. And I always liked him. I mean he always--he was always nice to me. I mean—I don't even know if he knew who [I] was, but he was always very polite. And when—I think it was John's—they had a going-away party for John in some—in Westwood—the upper story of some building—God, I can't remember--you'd have to ask John that. But Frank Wyle had it and it was in this really fancy place.

JB: Oh, I think I know [where you mean]. It was on the top floor of—the Regency Club.

MA: That sounds like it, yeah.

JB: They were members and—ah--go ahead.

MA: I was invited to that and I went with Carol and John and we went to that. And he always seemed to be very polite and he really seemed to—I don't know—notice people I guess. But it was probably his way. You don't get to be a successful businessman by not having that kind of a personality.

JB: Yes.

MA: Yeah. I think I have to get some more water. **[Pause in recording]** And the—well, there

was one thing I really remembered about Frank and Edith and that was the party they had at their house--

JB: Oh.

MA: The Christmas party they'd get together for all of the staff and the volunteers—and that was such a special thing for them to do. And I don't know if all the volunteers went to it. I hope they did because it was just really nice to go to their home and just be treated so graciously by the two of them. It was just a really wonderful memory—those Christmas parties.

JB: I'm glad that you mentioned that. Do you want to just talk a bit about what their home was like?

MA: Oh, I can't remember! [Laughing]

JB: [laughing] OK.

MA: A lot of folk art! [Laughing]

JB: Yes, a lot of folk art.

MA: A lot of beautiful furniture—I mean it was just an absolutely gorgeous place and it was just such a special thing to go to those parties. It was really, really nice.

JB: It seems to me in retrospect that there were always a lot of parties going on at the museum--

MA: Probably, yes.

JB: --or in association with the museum.

MA: Yeah, yeah.

JB: There was a lot of celebration.

MA: There was. Well, I think there were a lot of people who—I think all in all everybody really enjoyed being with each other—as a working place, it was a really great place. And people were always, you know, they were celebrating birthdays, you know, going out for lunch, bringing things in. I mean everybody was just—it was like a family atmosphere, I mean--

JB: That's kind of a good segué to talk about some of the other people that you got to know there.

MA: Well, the other volunteers of course: Judy and Lorraine in the library.

JB: Judy Clark and Lorraine Rudoff, yes.

MA: Yes—I was trying to remember her [Lorraine's last] name. I still have a pair of gloves—when I went to England (because I had been living in California for so long), I didn't really have

any gloves and we were going to England and it was going to be cold--

JB: You had thrown away your Minnesota gloves [laughing]--

MA: Well, I just, you know, I just didn't have any gloves, but Lorraine brought me in—it was a pair of Isotoner gloves—and they were grey and they were cotton knit on the inside and she had purchased them for when she went over to Europe on a trip. So she gave them to me as a going-away present [for] when I was in England and I still have those gloves. They're the only gloves I really wear--**[1:30:00]**

JB: So you think about her when you wear them.

MA: I really do. I really think about her. And then there was Judy [Clark] and what a special woman she was. I mean, you know, we've kept writing and in touch with each other, off and on, as you do when you go away through the years, but until she died, we were regular correspondents and I saw her every time I came back here. It was—she was just a special lady—so interesting—I mean so interested in everything--

JB: Yes, it was quite amazing.

MA: Yeah, she was really wonderful.

JB: She was, I believe, 96 when she passed away this past year, but until just the last few months, she maintained her interest in so many things. [Judy Clark volunteered in the library from 1975-1997.]

MA: Oh, yes, yes. And then in the shop there were a couple of—as a lot of museums are, your volunteer group is mainly older. I mean this is just the way a volunteer group is—and it's still the same.

JB: Sure, when they retire—they have time to volunteer.

MA: Exactly—and the same is true today—and there were two older women who worked in the shop—Thelma and Callie.

JB: Oh yes.

MA: Yeah, and Callie was a buyer for a department store in her youth and I think she—she must have been 80—she was in her eighties when I first met her and she actually volunteered until basically the day she died. I mean we really, literally, got a phone call in the shop from her niece because our names were in the phone book—in her phone book—to let us know that she had passed away. But she used to live in Park La Brea. [Park La Brea is a large apartment complex near CAFAM.]

JB: Oh, yes.

MA: And when they gated Park La Brea, I could no longer—that was my shortcut to work—

JB: That's right. I remember

MA: --and she gave me her key.

JB: Oh. Oh my goodness.

MA: She gave me a spare key so that I could open up the doors and cut--

JB: So that you could open the gate.

MA: --and cut through Park La Brea.

JB: How wonderful.

MA: Yes. And there were so many like that. Mary, who was a really young woman, who volunteered in the shop on the weekends. She was an artist and she was a sculptor and was going to school at Barns—oh, I can't remember where she was going to school, but she was a crazy woman: short, buzz-cut hair, always earrings—you know, glasses. She had about ten different pairs of colored glasses and she was really good. She was really hard on the floor, you know, she didn't stand for any nonsense. So we had our weekend volunteers, who mainly had—mostly had jobs during the week.

JB: Uh-huh.

MA: And then would come in and do a Saturday or Sunday. So we had a couple of young girls who were volunteers. Well, I say young. They were young. They were probably close to my age at the time, but they seem very young now. And there were just marvelous people that volunteered at that place.

JB: Yes. There certainly were. There were some people on the staff that I thought maybe you might have some special memories of. [What about] Lorraine Trippett?

MA: Oh, Lorraine, yes. Lorraine was—she—poor Lorraine--

JB: She was our, the bookkeeper--

MA: --well, more than the bookkeeper--

JB: Well she became the--

MA: —financial controller.

JB: Right, right.

MA: And Sheri [Rodius], her assistant, who was really sharp and on the ball. She was great. I really liked Sheri. Denise—Patrick Ela's--

JB: Oh yes, there were a whole series of administrative assistants who were really helpful to those of us that were [laughing] trying to get in to see the boss.

MA: Yeah. And I remember Denise the most. I don't know why I remember her--

JB: Denise Wakeman.

MA: Yeah, and she was great. She always knew—she had the answer to everything.

JB: Very organized.

MA: If you didn't know something, you would ask Denise and Denise would know it. And Janet Marcus in education and the other Janet—in publicity--

JB: Lubkin, yes. I think actually her name—she got married and—but Lubkin was her maiden name. **[1:35:00]**

MA: But then we also had the boys in The Egg and The Eye restaurant--

JB: Oh yes, I knew I wanted to ask you about [the restaurant]--

MA: Ian Barrington, yeah, and James--

JB: Tell about the restaurant.

MA: Oh the restaurant. The Egg and The Eye restaurant, run when I was there by Ian Barrington, who was an absolutely fantastic—oh, he could be cantankerous—but he was fantastic—and he just loved food and they had a wonderful crew. John and Carol and Ian and James and a bunch of guys from the restaurant about once a year, we'd go to a beach and have a clambake and cook food in the sun. John and Ian and Carol were particularly close and went out quite often with Ian and went over to Ian's house and to John's house and had parties--and then Ian got AIDS and Ian died and it was very, very sad.

JB: Very sad.

MA: Really sad.

JB: He had touched everyone's life.

MA: He could make you laugh. He could make you kick him—sometimes. Actually he loved getting drunk and playing bagpipes on the roof of the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

JB: Oh-h-h! Now that's something I didn't know about!

MA: You didn't know about that?

JB: How wonderful!

MA: Ah, yes, he would, he would be there after closing. You know, drinking a little wine and every once in a while he'd go up to the roof of the Craft and Folk Art Museum and he'd play bagpipes and he would play.

JB: Yes, in addition to there being a restaurant, there was a bar.

MA: Yes, yes, there was a bar and lots of fun people came into that bar and actually it was interesting because there was a really—there was a symbiotic relationship between the shop and the restaurant.

JB: Well, you were open to each other, physically open [architecturally, the shop on the first floor was open to the mezzanine, which held the main part of the restaurant].

MA: Yeah, yeah, and, you know, the offices were closed at times, and so--I worked on Sundays. I had the Sunday shift. Carol worked on Saturdays. We split the weekend shifts. And so we [the shop staff] knew everybody in the restaurant. On Sundays, we'd come in early and have breakfast before you went to work. You know, you'd watch out after each other if it was slow or something was going on, so, you know, the restaurant people and the shop people were always very close. And there were just—there were a lot of people who came to the restaurant and then they came down and shopped. And one of the reasons why we didn't want to take the shop to the May Company (other than it would be strange to have—since the May Company was still the May Company—it would be strange to have a shop in the middle of the department store—at least that was the feeling) was that people knew where the [CAFAM] shop was. It belonged on that corner and we were just sort of afraid that no one would find us in the May Company.

JB: Yes, in fact, I think there were a number of people who [regularly frequented the shop and the restaurant who] were not even that aware of the museum. They would come in just either to go to the restaurant or the shop or both--

MA: --or the shop, yeah--

JB: --and were kind of surprised if you mentioned something [about] the gallery. [Both laughing]

But since you brought it up about the shop not moving to the May Company—of course the restaurant *couldn't* move to the May Company.

MA: Yes, yes, and [for] the restaurant [it] was the end.

JB: There was never any question about that, so it did close forever when we moved to the May Company. And Ian was there—I don't know just when he got sick. But he did work through the end [through the closing of the restaurant].

MA: And that was really sad to have the restaurant close.

JB: Just talk a little bit about what made the restaurant so special—besides the people—of course the people were wonderful.

MA: Besides the people? The omelettes! And even in the—well, let's see, I was there [in the] late eighties into the nineties—when eggs weren't really getting a good--

JB: --a good rap?

MA: When no one was eating eggs—supposedly. Wonderful omelettes. I don't know how many different kinds of omelettes there were, a-a-h.

JB: I loved the African one, which was kind of a lamb curry.

MA: Oh, I loved all of them--

JB: Yeah—they were great! [Both laughing]

MA: The food was fantastic! And, actually, the receptions for all of the openings—because they were catered by The Egg and The Eye—were fantastic, except when Ian got angry about not having the bill paid and he put out crackers and cheese [both laughing]!

JB: Which happened occasionally. **[1:40:00]**

MA: Yes, it did happen occasionally. But the food was fantastic. It was just really—it was good food. People had been going there for years and were going there until it closed. I mean, it still could have continued. I mean, it made it through the "egg crisis." People still ate omelettes.

JB: Yes. I don't know if you had this feeling before you left L.A., but in experiencing—well, you left before we moved back into the [5814 Wilshire] building.

MA: Yeah, I did.

JB: And we were not able to have a restaurant [there]—well, it's a question as to whether it was a matter of not able or--

MA: Oh, OK.

JB: --or not wanting to—but for whatever reason, the new configuration of the museum did not include a restaurant.

MA: Yeah.

JB: And, in fact, there really is no—to this day, still—there is no good place inside--

MA: That's true, yes.

JB: --the building for a restaurant. And I—it took a while for me and I think for others that worked at the museum to realize what an integral part--

MA: Yes.

JB: --of the museum the restaurant was.

MA: And actually—I'm sure you see it here too—I mean I know we see it in Australia—any museum has a café and a restaurant. It is just a—it is so important because when you

get the people that go into the café, then, OK, they might just be walking past an exhibition, but they might see something that they like. The shop, the restaurant, the gallery, it all goes together and it all brings in people that would normally—could care less about going to a museum. They may be just going to a—you know, going to have something to eat, or they might be going to buy a gift at a special place because they know they have really interesting and unusual merchandise, but those three have to be together. And the Craft and Folk Art Museum—that's what they started out as—all those years ago.

JB: Well, it was, of course, The Egg and The Eye gallery [which opened in 1965] and the restaurant was part of the basic concept from the very beginning. But it was more than the average museum restaurant, especially at that time.

MA: Well, yeah, especially at that time. Well, I think it would be more than the average museum restaurant now.

JB: Yes.

MA: I mean, a lot of museums just want the cafeteria-type style, just to be able to give their customers a cup of coffee or a sandwich--

JB: This was a "sit-down" restaurant.

MA: It was a "sit-down" restaurant. It was fancy. It was up-scale. You know, I mean, you would, you could get dressed--people got—for Sunday brunch—I mean, this was a special place to go for Sunday brunch was The Egg and The Eye [restaurant].

JB: And yet it wasn't expensive. It wasn't cheap, but it wasn't high-end in that respect.

MA: Yeah, yeah. But, no, it was known. I mean it was one of the better places to go.

JB: Well, I'm really glad that you remembered to talk about that because that was a very essential part of the experience.

So tell us, now, what you've been doing since you went to Australia.

MA: Since I went to Australia--

JB: In the next—six or seven minutes!

MA: OK.

JB: Unfortunately—this is just an aside—Michelle won't be able to—we won't be able to have another session with her cause she's going back to Australia--

MA: Unless the project lasts for a bit longer and then we can have Part II.

JB: Oh, OK. [Both laughing]

MA: If you're still doing it the next time I come back, we can continue--

JB: Maybe I will [both laughing], but I think it would be good to know [now] what you've been doing [in Australia] because it's very relevant to what you were doing at The Craft and Folk Art Museum [before you left].

MA: Well, I sort of started doing the same thing in Australia that I started doing here. [It] was when we moved to a town—my husband [Eric Livingston] got a job at a university—in a really small town. I [had] enjoyed my museum work [at CAFAM] so well that the first thing I did was volunteer at the art museum in town. [The New England Regional Art Museum in Armidale, New South Wales.] And luckily we had a really, really good art museum with a fantastic director, exciting programs, and [I] volunteered for a number of years and then got project jobs, writing grants mostly.

JB: You wrote some of those grant proposals? **[1:45:00]**

MA: I wrote lots of those grants. That was one of my basic—one of my jobs. And I worked there for eight years. And during that time I wrote a number of grant proposals to start a museum of printing and I was the collection manager for the museum of printing.

JB: That came about because the museum had received a gift of a press—a printing press?

MA: No, it came [about] because the director saw a collection of printing presses and it was being offered. It was going to go to scrap metal because nobody wanted it and he couldn't—he was a history major in his background. And he just couldn't stand to see this go away. So he came back, talked to us at the museum, and said, "What do you think?" And we said, "Ah, we'll try it." And so we started writing grants and proposals and we got a quarter of a million dollars to build the museum of printing.

JB: Which was an annex to the--

MA: The [Art] Museum was built on top of a bunch of pylons and underneath was basically open, and so we enclosed the underneath area of the museum to make a museum of printing with printing presses and turn-of-the-century—from the turn of the twentieth century—so it's 1850 to about 1950—all equipment and stuff, set up the displays and everything like that. And then I left that job and was starting a little museum business with a couple of friends, where we would offer our services to anybody who wanted help cataloging or [with] registration or writing grants or anything. And the university, where my husband works--

JB: That's the univ--

MA: University of New England in Armidale, New South Wales, Australia. They have a new vice-chancellor—the equivalent of a chancellor in the states—who was interested in art, and

for the very first time in the university's history (they opened in 1939), [they] advertised for an art collection manager.

JB: They had an art collection, then?

MA: Oh, yeah, they had an art collection. But it was just sort of—no one really took care of it—they had a couple of times where the secretary to the registrar looked after it.

JB: Oh, so there was a registrar.

MA: Well, no, it's not a registrar—it's—the registrar is sort of the bookkeeper at the university--

JB: Oh you're talking about the university registrar!

MA: --a different registrar. Yeah, the university registrar.

JB: Right, right.

MA: So his secretary looked after it for a while. But mostly it just sort of was not looked after. And the vice-chancellor and his wife are art enthusiasts and collectors. So they decided they needed an art collection manager, advertised for a full-time position, and much to my surprise—because I still don't have those [art or museum] degrees and credentials [laughing]—they hired me!

JB: But all of your experience--

MA: Yeah, they hired experience over degrees. In a university situation, it's not really that usual. I mean usually they like their pieces of paper but I did get the job. So I'm very happily the—what is the equivalent of a registrar for the University of New England art collection.

JB: What is the collection like and how big is it?

MA: It's got about 1,300 pieces. There's probably about—a fourth of that are actual paintings, original artwork. About half of those are actually valuable. They're mostly Australian artists, dating from [the] late 1800s to 1930 and then there is sort of a brief period where they didn't get any art work and then we get into the 1960s and 70s, where they've got a lot of the big, abstract, you know, canvases. There's a few of those.

JB: Uh-huh, minimalists or--

MA: A lot of prints. And quite a few reproductions. But some of the reproductions, I think, are valuable because they've actually been there for 50-60 years.

JB: So, they have historic interest.

MA: They have historic value. And I've been sort of teaching the administration about their art collection and just saying [that] "it may not be valuable in [terms of] the names of the artists that you have or the types of work that you have, but the art collection is another

history of the university, because it's all given by students, alumni, people associated with the university, people in town." I mean, it's just—the whole history of the donors is the history of the university. So, they've—they're learning to look at it in a little bit different light [laughing]. **[1:50:00]**

JB: It sounds like you're also doing a little bit more "front-of-house," rather than behind the scenes too, than you used to do.

MA: I am a little bit more, yes, I've had to give a couple of lectures and, yeah. And the people up there [in the administration] know me, you know.

JB: Sure.

MA: Yeah, so it is a bit more front of the house, but basically my job is still getting that collection on the computer, describing it, finding the provenance, and taking care of it, making sure it's hung properly, getting the things out of those awful frames that some of it's in—and that's my job and I really enjoy it.

JB: Well, I'm really glad that you have found this wonderful place for yourself there, since it looks like you're not going to come back to L.A. anytime soon.

MA: Well, we would like to, but--

JB: I know you would.

MA: --but we don't have a choice about that.

JB: And I'm glad that the Craft and Folk Art Museum was able to play a part in--

MA: Oh, definitely!

JB: --giving you some of those experiences. It certainly was good for the Craft and Folk Art Museum to have you--

MA: Well, see now, I have my artists bio file now. And I've got my library that I'm starting [both laughing]. So I learned a lot. I mean I learned from Marcie, from you. I mean it's just all come together where I can do a whole variety of things and it's just because of, you know, what--the experience I got at the Craft and Folk Art Museum—and then followed by the New England Regional Art Museum.

JB: Well, I thank you very, very much for taking the time from your relatively short visit here--

MA: Yes, unfortunate, yeah--

JB: --to talk about all of these different aspects of the Craft and Folk Art Museum that you were involved with. It's a real contribution to this oral history.

MA: I hope so.

JB: Thank you.

MA: You're welcome.

End of Session [1:52:23]