CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF SUSAN SKINNER

by Joan M. Benedetti

January 11, 2010

Susan Skinner at Home
January 11, 2010

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Susan Skinner was born in Los Angeles on June 27, 1951. She has a younger brother. Her mother, Eva Natterson, was born in West Virginia to Russian Jewish parents. Eva became a nurse with the Veteran's Administration. Susan's father, John Perry Skinner, was born in Kansas to a "very Protestant" family. He became a psychotherapist and studied with Karl Menninger. Susan "was always making stuff."

In 1961, her family traveled for a year in Israel and Europe; Susan learned to speak Hebrew. She never forgot "the exposure to archaeology, anthropology, and museums." In 1969, she graduated from Los Angeles High School. Her parents had divorced.

She entered CSU Sonoma for its anthropology program. She volunteered at UCLA's Anthropology Museum (now the Fowler) with Pat Altman and did an independent study at UC Berkeley's Lowie Museum, but when she graduated from Sonoma in 1974, she returned to L.A.

In L.A. she got a job at The Arctic Circle, an Inuit art gallery. In March 1976, she was referred to the Craft and Folk Art Museum's Shop Manager, Ann Robbins, who was looking for an assistant. Ann was an artist—a painter and ceramist, who had been a student of Laura Andreson. Susan says Ann was "a fantastic person to work for."

Susan learned from Ann how to see quality and became the main buyer for jewelry. The shop had "mini-shows" and Ann and Susan also curated several museum exhibitions. One of the first, in 1977, was a collaboration with the White House: American Crafts in the White House. They also curated a couple of shows for CAFAM's Gallery 3 in Santa Monica Place.

In 1982, Ann Robbins retired abruptly and John Browse returned as Shop Manager. Susan became Associate Manager and the main contemporary craft buyer until 1984 when she left CAFAM to go into business with Fran Rissmiller, who had worked part-time in the CAFAM shop. They opened a contemporary craft shop, New Stone Age, in 1982. Susan also met her future husband, John Christopher DeNoon, in 1982 when he came to New Stone Age to see a friend's exhibition.

Susan had started to make jewelry and sold some of it in the CAFAM Shop and later at New Stone Age. She enjoyed having her own shop, but a rep was getting orders for her jewelry in other parts of the country. In 1985, she married DeNoon, a producer of multi-media shows and a writer and collector of WPA memorabilia.

In 1987, Susan and Chris formed a company called Fibula Studio. Visiting Albuquerque, they fell in love with the New Mexico landscape and its Hispanic and Native American cultures and found a house near the U. of New Mexico with room for a studio. Since then Susan has been a full-time jeweler, developing her style and a following across the U.S. and in Great Britain.

Susan is on the board of the Craft Emergency Relief Fund. She says the most rewarding of her CAFAM experiences was knowing Ann Robbins.

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, which are 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: Susan Skinner's home in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Dates, time, length of sessions, and total number of hours recorded: Two sessions were recorded on Monday, January 11, 2010. The first session took place in the morning and was one hour, thirteen minutes, and fifteen seconds; the second session took place in the afternoon and was one hour, thirty-one minutes, and forty-nine seconds. A total of two hours, forty-five minutes, and four seconds of conversation was recorded.

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 in the transcript the topics mentioned in the table of contents. However, in this interview only, there are no time stamps in Session 2.

Persons present during the interview: Susan Skinner and Joan Benedetti; Susan's husband, Chris DeNoon, was working in an adjacent room.

Conduct and Content of Interview: To prepare for the interview with Skinner, Benedetti reviewed the CAFAM timeline developed while working on the CAFAM Records at UCLA. Joan's work in processing the CAFAM Records, her experience with the other CAFAM oral history interviews, and her personal knowledge of CAFAM during her 21-year tenure as CAFAM Museum Librarian, assisted in her preparation for the Skinner interview. The interview is more or less chronological. Susan spent a good deal of time talking about Ann Robbins, who, as the CAFAM Shop Manager, was her boss and an important mentor to her.

Editing: Skinner was given the opportunity to review the transcript and to supply missing or mis-spelled names and to verify the accuracy of the contents. Benedetti added full names and opening dates of CAFAM exhibitions where appropriate, and she added information for clarification and deleted some back-and-forth comments that did not add to the reader’s understanding of the narrative. 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. However, in this interview only, there are no time stamps in Session 2.

Table of Contents:

Gallery 3--Santa Monica Place. Donated by Rouse Co. Well-designed—bad location. Macy's and Gallery 3—quality difference. Pottery Barn—Gallery 3 shop prices lowered to compete. Introductions: Twelve Artists, curated by Ann and Susan. All Gallery 3 shows contemporary craft or design.**]**

Maskerade Ball. CAFAM parties. Black Folk Art in America—dressing as Sister Gertrude Morgan. Fundraising galas. Joan Mondale, honorée. Divide between staff and "people who give money." Constant need to raise money. PIC (Programmatic Input Committee). Contemporary Craft Council. Board members. Bernard Kester “loved Edith dearly, but they did argue.” “Knock-down drag-outs," says Susan. Gere Kavanaugh. Frank Wyle--a presence--bowties and pipe.

Staff meetings. Exhibition-related things. Shop shows. Budgeting. Museum relies on shop for money. Separate mailing list, but shop coordinates with museum openings. Korean exhibition--objects arrive at opening.

No reproductions. CAFAM not supposed to have collection—reproductions moot. Legal issues. Museum's emphasis folk art; shop "more about contemporary crafts." “Strong craft movement" at time. G.I. Bill.

J.B. Blunk. Sam Maloof. Many craft artists in California. American Craft Council. Aileen Osborn Webb. 1956 Asilomar meeting--Sam Maloof, Bernard Kester attended. East coast/west coast divide.

CAFAM staff. Willow Young. Blaine Mallory. Judy Clark. Nancy Cook Smith. Jorje Casillas. Shan Emanuelli, Max King, Laurie Haycock, Davida Rochlin, Janet Marcus, Gail Goldberg, Mary Ann Cesar-Tigne (Mac), Lorraine Trippett, Marilyn Rudolph, Deirdre Evans-Pritchard, Karen Copeland, Marcie Page share office in "cage” behind shop. Sabra Petersman.

Ann's sudden retirement, 1982; John Browse re-hired. Shop Manager job not advertised. Fran Rissmiller, Susan’s business partner at New Stone Age. Susan leaves 1984. Fran and Susan do renovation. Carol Sauvion.

Susan makes, sells found-object jewelry at CAFAM; sells more at New Stone Age. Growing confidence as artist. Meeting Chris DeNoon. Trip to Albuquerque, amazed at low housing prices. Move to Albuquerque, 1992. John Garrett. Susan sells jewelry in museum shops, Santa Fe; Mariposa Gallery, Albuquerque. "Some things important in L.A. you question in New Mexico."

“Working at CAFAM is a huge part of who I am." Chris DeNoon partner in jewelry business: his book, *The Posters of the WPA*, published 1988. He does graphic design work, catalogs, bookkeeping for business. "He's our computer guy." Fibula Studio.

Susan took classes in casting, anodized aluminum, forming, but "pretty much self-taught." 20 years with found objects, especially buttons. Susan Einstein and David Pottinger give her boxes of Victorian pearl buttons--takes work "to another level." Anthropology in play--more aware of "ceremony that accompanies so many things."

Susan now on CERF (Craft Emergency Relief Fund) board.

Most rewarding knowing Ann Robbins: “We don't always have those opportunities to be mentored, and I really was by her.” Teresa Barnett, head, UCLA’s oral history program, knew importance of CAFAM.

End of Session 2--1:31:49

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW OF SUSAN SKINNER

Session 1 (1:13:15), Monday, January 11, 2010. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti.

JB: Today is Monday, January 11, 2010, and I'm at the home and studio of artist Susan Skinner in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We're going to talk about Susan's experiences working for eight years in the shop of the Craft and Folk Art Museum, and also some of her personal history. My name is Joan Benedetti. So, Susan, I'd like to start at the very beginning. Can you tell us when and where you were born?

SS: I was born in Los Angeles, California, at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, in 1951.

JB: Do you want to give us your birthday?

SS: June 27, 1951.

JB: . . . . So, tell us a little bit about your parents and your family and your early childhood.

SS: My parents met after World War II, in Los Angeles. My mother [Eva Natterson] was a nurse with the V.A. She had been an operating room supervisor in the war, in Europe. My mother was born in West Virginia, to Russian Jewish parents.

JB: Wow.

SS: But [my mother] knew that West Virginia was not the place for her. She got a nursing degree and moved to New York City, and that changed her life. Most of her friends from New York, after the war, moved to California, so she moved to California.

JB: And this was before she met your father.

SS: This was before she met my father. My father [John Perry Skinner] was born in Kansas. My grandmother on my father's side was a DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution], very strict, a teetotaler.

JB: So, they were not Jewish.

SS: They were not Jewish, they were very Protestant. On my father's side, someone, great, great, great, grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War. But my father, when he left Kansas, he left his family behind.

JB: Did you ever meet any of them?

SS: Once, I met my grandparents. My father was a psychotherapist and had studied with Karl Menninger, at the Menninger Clinic.

JB: In Kansas. [The Menninger Clinic was founded in 1919 in Topeka, Kansas.]

SS: In Kansas. . . . And then he--I think he was an ambulance driver during the war, and a number of his friends [from the Menniger Clinic moved to L.A.]--people that he knew. I'm not

exactly sure, but he ended up in Los Angeles. And my parents met through--sort of through--the psychiatric community; a lot of these New York people who came to California. They also had a number of friends who were screenwriters. My father was less political than my mother. My mother was involved quite a bit in left-leaning politics. A lot of their friends were blacklisted. So, they were part of a community of interesting people in California.

JB: Yes.

SS: They started coming to the Southwest, I don't really know why. My father had some interest. He seemed to be interested in very unusual things. So they started coming before I was born and then when I was born, we would come in the summers, to New Mexico and Arizona, go to the reservations. My parents would buy some pottery and rugs. But there was more--there was sort of a spirit of adventure of going places that people didn't go.

I started going to public school, but I was dyslexic. They didn't have a term for it, but I couldn't read, I couldn't learn how to read. I was reversing numbers and letters.

JB: Did your parents know what was going on?

SS: They knew something was wrong. My father worked primarily with children and families.

JB: So he had come across that before?

SS: Well, I mean I was too bright a kid to not be able to read.

JB: Right.

SS: And they were also going to earthquake-proof the elementary school, which meant they were putting the classes on half-day sessions, and so my parents thought, well if she can't read going to school all day, it's going to be even worse half-day**. [0:05:00]**

So, they found [the] Oakwood [School] in the early years, and I was one of--I wasn't part of the original class, but I was [in] one of the very early [classes]. I started, I think, in first grade [or] second grade, and I graduated from the lower school. There only was a lower school; there was no upper school. And I learned how to read because they taught "kinesthetic writing," and you learned how to read at your particular level.

JB: Tell just a little bit about that for those who don't know about Oakwood.

SS: Well, there were no real grades--you were in a grade, but you weren't graded.

JB: Was it--it was a private--

SS: It was a private school. And you know, I don't remember exactly what the teaching method was, but I believe it was British, and it was two women who started the school. They had money from people in the film industry and coincidentally, a lot of them were very left-leaning. It was a very liberal school. There was no dress code, and this was in the fifties, and you just--you learned at the level that you were competent at. And I--you know--I don't remember

having any problems learning how to read at Oakwood, and once I started reading I never stopped . . . . And then I went through the sixth grade and then that was it, there was nothing beyond that [at Oakwood], and I went to public school, and that was OK. Actually, I--well, I had problems at Oakwood. The kids were, they were--a lot of them were, I think having problems at public schools and ended up at Oakwood because of emotional issues and you know, a lot of them were from wealthy families. But also, my parents' marriage was a very complicated marriage, and so I had problems at home and problems at school. We also--when I was ten--I left school for a year and we went to Israel.

JB: Oh yes, I have a note.

SS: Because my father was writing a book. But really, my grandmother had died, my father inherited some money--not much--but he decided that he was writing a book on the "mother goddess" and he wanted to do research sort of in the cradle of civilization. So, he was not Jewish but he wanted to go to Jerusalem to work on this book.

JB: So that was [at] your father's instigation that you went to Israel.

SS: Yeah.

JB: Was your mother wanting to go?

SS: Well my father--I think--was on the verge of having a breakdown, an emotional breakdown, and she thought that this trip might--

JB: Would help.

SS: Would help. It just sort of prolonged the breakdown.

JB: Now this would have been about 1961.

SS: Sixty-one. Yeah. And we drove our Nash Rambler station wagon across the U.S., put it on a boat, went through the Mediterranean, took it off the boat, lived in Jerusalem.

JB: Do you remember very much of this?

SS: Oh, it was an incredible experience for me. I was taken out of school, where I was--I didn't have a lot of friends. But [in Jerusalem] I went to public school, I learned how to speak Hebrew. I had a tutor who actually ended up being a quite well-known Israeli ceramist and taught at Bezalel. I mean it was funny. She just happened to live in the neighborhood, but she ended up being someone that--many years later--someone I knew from the Craft and Folk Art Museum, studied with her in Israel . . . .

JB: And were you aware of what she did?

SS: I knew she did ceramics down in the basement of her mother's house. But anyway, we traveled all over the country. I was fluent in Hebrew. I went to public school. I had friends.

We lived outside of Jerusalem, in a little community. Martin Buber was our next-door neighbor.

JB: Wow. Oh my.

SS: I remember… My mother also reminded me of this when I was older, but Allen Ginsberg came to our front door, looking for Martin Buber. Now Allen Ginsberg just looked like any rabbinical student in Jerusalem at the time.

JB: I've seen pictures of him when he was younger, and he didn't have as much hair.

SS: No, but he had some you know. So, I mean, it was a very interesting--it was nine months of living there and traveling around the country, and having, you know, having very unusual experiences**. [0:10:00]**

And then we took our car and put it on another boat and went to Istanbul, and then we drove through Europe for three months.

JB: Now, your brother is younger?

SS: Yeah, he was three. He doesn't have as many memories of all of that. But anyway, all of this was a lot of exposure to archaeology, anthropology, museums, you know stuff that--I didn't realize it at the time, but it was all--

JB: Percolating.

SS: -- part of the--yeah, a bigger plan.

JB: Yeah.

SS: It was all affecting me. So I came back, I finished at Oakwood. The kids didn't really accept me. It was like, "What do you mean, you were gone for a year?"

JB: Oh, yeah. Kids can be so mean.

SS: But anyway, I finished there. It was hard. It was very hard. My parents got divorced. It was a very--or they separated. But anyway, I went on to public school and I did just fine at public school. I really did. And there was no upper Oakwood. When there was, we didn't have the money for me to go there, and so I eventually graduated in 1969, from Los Angeles High School, L.A. High. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. It was 1969, there was a lot of stuff going on in L.A., and I wasn't getting along very well with my mother, so I decided--I had a friend who was going to the University of Tel Aviv on a scholarship and I applied, got a scholarship, and thought, "This is great, I'll go really far away from my family." Well, Israel in 1969 was different than it was when I was--

JB: In 1960 or '61.

SS: Yeah, it was after the war.

JB: The Six-Day War.

SS: Yeah, yeah. . . . And I was pretty involved in the antiwar movement in L.A., and it just--you couldn't be a pacifist in Israel.

JB: No, yeah.

SS: And you couldn't have long, red hair without being teased incessantly. You know, and I didn't dress right, and my boyfriend had long hair. I mean it was--anyway, it was a very complicated year. It was a very unsupervised program, there was a lot of drug experimentation. I mean it was really--

JB: But that was true everywhere.

SS: But it was all part of just the whole thing.

JB: Of 1969.

SS: It was, it was.

JB: Did you have a declared major? Did you major at the time?

SS: It was an American Student Abroad program, so I did get credit for some of the classes. I ended up going to L.A. City College, to be able to make up enough credits to then transfer somewhere and get a BA.

JB: Well, you transferred to CSU Sonoma.

SS: [After my freshman year abroad], I was backpacking through Europe and my mother had a hysterectomy that went wrong, and I hadn't seen her in a year, and I got to Athens and there were like 800 telegrams saying I had to come home. I came home and I had to drop out of school. She almost died. I had to take care of her. My brother was in the hospital for a while, [as well, during the same time].

So, I went to City College for--I don't know--two or three semesters, just so that I could--when I was done at City College, I was a junior and I had enough credits to go to Sonoma, to transfer.

JB: Why Sonoma?

SS: Well again, I had a friend who was going there. I didn't want to be in Southern California. I also was thinking I was interested in anthropology, and they have a fantastic anthropology program, specializing in Native American studies and particularly in California Indian studies.

JB: That would make sense, in that area.

SS: Yeah. And one of my teachers had been Alfred Kroeber's protégé, and he [my teacher] was Bodega Miwok, he was Native American, and he brought all these different people from--

Native Americans who lived in the area--who were shamans and basket makers. They came to class and they would just--

JB: How wonderful.

SS: I mean they weren't trained, but they had so much knowledge. And then we went on these field trips up to some of the reservations and I became friends with a woman who was Native American and it was--I mean it was really fantastic**. [0:15:00]** It was really fantastic. And at some point--I don't know the exact chronology--but during that time, I came home for the summer and I did an--or what did I do? I volunteered at the Anthropology Museum at UCLA.

JB: Oh yes, yes.

SS: When Pat--oh, what was her name?

JB: Pat.

SS: You know, she and her husband.

JB: Was it Pat--there was Pat Anawalt and there was Pat…

SS: She and her husband had had that gallery.

JB: Altman.

SS: Altman, yes. And I volunteered there and I really enjoyed it. I did some cataloging and then I--you know, they had a permanent--

JB: So, it wasn't--I thought maybe it was a regular internship program.

SS: No. I don't know what I did. I don't know, I think I maybe just went and said I was interested in museum work.

JB: So, you had identified that museums might be a place you'd like to work.

SS: Yeah. And I think this was before--well anyway, so I did that one summer and then I eventually, while I was at Sonoma, did an independent study at the Anthropology Museum at Berkeley.

JB: Yes, the Lowie.

SS: Yeah, the Lowie. Because one of the women who worked there, her husband was the head of the Anthropology Department at Sonoma, and I was friends with both of them. That was a wonderful experience and I got credit for that, as an independent study, and then I got a very nice letter of recommendation.

JB: Do you remember what you were doing there at the Lowie?

SS: I do. They had the Kroeber collection of artifacts in the basement of what was--it was the gymnasium, the Hearst Gymnasium. I think it was the girls' gymnasium, and there was a swimming pool above the collection.

JB: Oh my God.

SS: And they were so concerned that there would be an earthquake and it would flood the entire basement. A lot of the things that were in the collection were stone artifacts that had been underground for thousands of years, but we were--

JB: But still, there were probably records down there too.

SS: Well, there were, and there were dance costumes and perishable items. But what we were doing--and Dave Fredrickson, who was my teacher, he was working on this as well, and there were a couple other students, I think from Berkeley. We were sealing all of these things in plastic bags. We had one of these heat machines.

JB: Yes, yes.

SS: With the foot pedal.

JB: Yes.

SS: So, I mean the work itself was a little tedious, but what we would do is after we'd done it for a couple of hours, we would just wander around down in the collection and start pulling drawers open and looking at things.

JB: Wow.

SS: And also, there were other projects going on in the museum and I was curious. I remember there was a student who was transcribing wax cylinders of recordings that Kroeber had done with a number of the California Indians, and he was transcribing them onto tape. You know, and there were exhibitions. So, it really, you know it was a very exciting, vibrant place to be.

JB: Did you move to Berkeley during this time?

SS: I had a friend from L.A. who was living in Berkeley, and he was Taj Mahal--the singer Taj Mahal's road manager.

JB: Oh yeah.

SS: And he was on the road a lot, so I would come down two days a week. I would drive down in the afternoon or the morning--I don't remember--work that day. I would stay overnight at John's, because he was usually on the road somewhere, and then I would work all day, I think on Fridays, and then I would go back. But I also would have dinner. Dave and Vera-Mae, they would invite me over and they had all these interesting friends. You know, so it was a real kind of--I was really exposed to a very interesting, stimulating environment. When

I graduated, I don't know exactly why I moved back to Los Angeles. Part of it was because my mother wanted me to.

JB: She was recovered.

SS: Yeah, but she also had certain ideas about how my life was going to go and you know, I was young. **[Break in audio]**

JB: All right. OK, we're back.

SS: So, I came back to L.A. and I got a job working for some people that have an Inuit art gallery, it was in their home. They needed someone.

JB: Oh, the Arctic Circle? **[0:20:00]**

SS: The Arctic Circle, yeah.

JB: I never was there, although Judy Clark used to talk about it. [Judith Clark was a library volunteer at CAFAM for 22 years (1975 - 1997.]

SS: That's how I met Judy, was at the Arctic Circle.

JB: I was wondering.

SS: Originally, that's where I met her.

JB: So, it was in their home.

SS: It was in their home.

JB: I didn't realize that.

SS: Which was a little strange, but it was fine for my first job. It gave me some experience of working in a gallery setting. They were--

JB: And now tell me how you got that job again. You just got to know them?

SS: No. I think they were part of my mother's larger circle. I think I may have gone to cooperative nursery school with their son, one of their sons. They were people that my mother knew. I think somehow it could have been--I don't know how, but they were looking for someone. I put stickers on things, I did their mailing lists.

JB: [laughing and joking] Oh, I can see that you would be perfect for the job.

SS: Well it was not--I think we both have things to offer. And it was through--they would have openings in their home and it was at an opening there that I met Judy Weinstein, who was the director of the museum shop at the Natural History Museum.

JB: Oh yes, yes.

SS: And I guess I made a good impression on her, because when Ann Robbins was looking for someone to be her assistant [in the CAFAM shop], she called Judy [Weinstein] and Judy recommended me.

JB: Oh.

SS: And you know that--

JB: The rest is history. Yeah, so Ann had been--

SS: She had taken over John's [position as Shop Manager].

JB: Yes.

SS: Or she had been John's assistant or they had worked together for some period of time.

JB: I think only maybe a couple of months. [Ann Robbins is listed as Ass't Shop Manager in February 1976 issue of CAFAM Newsletter, but she may have been hired earlier; in March 1976, John Browse resigns and Ann is appointed Shop Manager; Ann hires Susan as Ass't Shop Manager.]

SS: Yeah. And you know, I remember getting this phone call, and the thing was that I grew up very close to The Egg and Eye, and when I was in high school--

JB: I was wondering if you were aware of . . . [CAFAM during that time].

SS: I used to walk over there, because I think there used to be--I don't know if it was once a week or once a month, but on Fridays, the shop was open in the evenings.

JB: Yes.

SS: And I would walk over there and just--

JB: Hang out.

SS: I couldn't believe the things I was seeing.

JB: There were film programs too I think.

SS: There were film programs. When I went to City College, I met Dorothy Garwood's son and we [dated]. . . . Before [I went to work at] the museum. Before any kind of involvement with the museum or The Egg and Eye.

JB: Wow.

SS: We had had very similar childhoods, coming to the Southwest. Dorothy and her family, they came, and we--it was one of those sort of--another in a--you know, how your life starts--sort of--the puzzle pieces kind of start to fit together.

JB: Yes. But you, I think had more of that than a lot of people.

SS: Well, I don't know, I don't know. I mean it's just the way it is you know? So anyway--so I had this experience in high school, of just finding it a very magical place, to go to the--

JB: Talk about that a little bit. How do you remember it?

SS: I mean, I'd never been to any place like it. It didn't feel like it was L.A. It felt like it was [in] a city that I'd never been to maybe, but just--it was a very sophisticated, really special place--very, very special for me.

JB: What kinds of things did you see there?

SS: Well, you know, I don't really remember the specifics of any of it, but it was just stuff that--being exposed to things that I just had never seen before, and artist-made things, and that it was near my house--you know, that I could go there any time I wanted. And I felt like I was in a very rarified environment.

JB: Did you go to the restaurant sometimes?

SS: Never, never, no.

JB: Now you must have gotten to know John Browse during that time.

SS: Oh yeah. Well I knew John because he was in and out of the shop all the time and he--I mean there was a whole area where he was selling a lot of things from Africa.

JB: Oh sure, he had his own--

SS: And he was friends with Ann. So, I mean I knew John, and then, well many years [later]--you know, when Ann left, he and I worked together.

JB: Right. I was just trying to establish whether you had known him before you worked with him.

[0:25:00]

SS: No. I mean I don't think--you know, I was aware--

JB: Because [even during The Egg and The Eye Gallery days], he was the manager basically. [His title was Assistant Director of the Gallery.]

SS: Right.

JB: Of course, it was--I guess--and you should tell me, I guess. I wasn't there at the time, but when it was a gallery--

SS: Yeah.

JB: A commercial gallery--even though it apparently didn't make much money.

SS: No.

JB: But it was a commercial gallery. There wasn't really a big separation between [the gallery and] what was then later known as the shop.

SS: Right, right.

JB: It was a gallery. And I guess there maybe was a separate section where books and smaller items were sold.

SS: You know, it's hard for me, having worked there as long as I did.

JB: You don't remember which.

SS: I remember that it was more about beautiful objects. That was really the thing that stood out for me going there. Maybe I was aware of the restaurant, but you know, I was 19, 17. I don't think that the restaurant would have ever been the place that I would have gone to at that point, and I think I was just dipping in. It was also finding things out about L.A. just in general. In high school, I had a friend and I would ditch certain classes and we would go downtown and go to the Bradbury Building and to Grand Central Market and you know, just all these places. So, I mean in some ways it was part of the process of discovering L.A., but to have this place, it meant I could get out of the house, get away from my mother, and go see these beautiful things. It was incredible.

JB: Your memory of it was that it was a kind of landmark of L.A.

SS: Yes, it was. There was no place else like that--there wasn't at all--and so you know, when I ended up working there, it was really--

JB: It was a big deal.

SS: It was a big deal for me, yeah. It took me away from anthropology--but not really. I mean it was--in a way it was, you know we were--I felt like I had an interest in material possessions and here not only was there all the folk art, but it was so exciting to see what contemporary artists and craftspeople were doing.

JB: Now, I may ask you this a few times--

SS: That's OK.

JB: Had you started to make things or think of yourself as an artist at all at this point?

SS: My father did a lot of play therapy with the kids who were his patients and we had a kiln. He did some ceramics, papier mâché. So, I was always making stuff, from the time I was little. I loved doing that. My mother discouraged me from going into art in college. She said if I wanted to study art, I should study graphic design because I could get a job. I ended up in anthropology and it has been a wonderful, wonderful foundation. I still meet artists of all kinds who studied anthropology. I didn't really understand at the time, but it was the right choice for me. And then, being around all of this incredible stuff.

JB: Yeah.

SS: You know, when I worked at CAFAM, it encouraged me, but I didn't have confidence in what I was doing. I mean it wasn't until--for me it came with age. At a certain point, when we moved to New Mexico, I just knew that that's what I wanted to do, that I had had a wonderful experience selling other people's work and I'd seen a lot of wonderful work, and I'd started to sell some of my own work, but you know, you turn 40 and you realize--or at least I realized--I wanted to make some changes.

JB: You have some different priorities.

SS: Yeah.

JB: Well, we'll get to that. Let's go back to when you . . . . Judy Weinstein recommended you.

SS: Judy Weinstein, from the--she was the director of the museum shop at the Natural History Museum.

JB: At the Natural History Museum, OK.

SS: And I met her—I also met Judy Clark. **[0:30:00]** Judy [Weinstein] came to an opening [at the Arctic Circle]. I don't know how--from the mailing list? I don't really remember. I mean the main thing I remember is that I met her, I made a good impression on her, and when Ann was looking for someone--

JB: And that was when you were at the Arctic Circle.

SS: At the Arctic Circle, yes.

JB: And Ann knew Judy Weinstein.

SS: Well, [Judy was at] the [Natural History] museum. You know, there weren't that many [museum] shops.

JB: Shops, museum shops, yeah.

SS: And so I interviewed and I was hired.

JB: You interviewed. Now this is--I'd just like to know how that process went, because the museum was just getting started.

SS: It was.

JB: You started in March of '76 and what had been a commercial gallery--The Egg and The Eye Gallery--had transitioned over several years [to be the Craft and Folk Art Museum].

SS: Yeah.

JB: But really, the official start of exhibitions that were advertised as Craft and Folk Art Museum exhibitions, was in November of '75. That was just four months before you started. John was

there for the first part of that, and then Ann, I guess, was hired [as Assistant Manager]. [John Browse had been the Assistant Director of The Egg and The Eye gallery since November 1971; when the gallery became a museum, Edith Wyle appointed him the museum shop manager.]

SS: Yeah.

JB: To work with John, and then John retired.

SS: Right.

JB: But all that happened in a relatively short period of time and I guess I'm wondering--the protocol, the way things are done in a gallery generally are different. They're more spontaneous, less thought-out perhaps, than in a museum. So, I'm just wondering—well, to get back to your [job] interview, you were interviewed by Ann, is that right? Do you remember?

SS: That's my memory.

JB: Do you remember talking to anybody else? Patrick Ela was there. He was the Administrative Director to Edith Wyle, [who was the] Artistic Director, at the beginning.

[Initially (in June 1975) Wyle was named Program Director; when Patrick Ela was hired as Administrative Director in October 1975, Wyle's title was changed to Director and Curator of Folk Art. Dorothy Garwood was Contemporary Craft Curator. In 1977 Wyle again took on the title of Program Director and there was an agreement that she and Patrick Ela, Administrative Director, would be co-directors.]

SS: You know, I have absolutely no memory of my interview for the job.

JB: Did you meet Ann before the interview? Had you met her?

SS: No. I remember going in and meeting Ann, and I don't remember the substance of the interview. I don't remember--you know, I couldn't tell you anything. I don't remember how long I waited. I don't know if anyone else interviewed. Ann had just come back from--she had just had breast cancer.

JB: Oh yes.

SS: And was recuperating. My impression was that they needed to hire another person, that Ann couldn't do this on her own. I don't even know whether John was still working there. But I was hired and I think it was a pretty good fit. Ann really was a mentor for me, and I think we worked pretty well together.

JB: Do you remember what her background [was]--I know that she was a ceramicist.

SS: She was an artist. Well--and then she went on to paint. She had been a student of Laura Andreson at UCLA.

JB: Oh, OK. She had not had retail experience though before?

SS: I don't think so, no. She had been a housewife; she was raising her kids. Her youngest son Dow--her third son--he was quite young. I think part of it--I don't think that there was a need for her financially to work. I think there was a need for her to get out in the world.

JB: Express herself and learn some more.

SS: Yeah. And I don't know if she knew--I think she knew Dorothy Garwood somehow, from the Palisades or something, and she knew--you know, I don't know how it was that she ended up working there--but she was a fantastic person to work for.

JB: So, tell about your experience at the beginning. I guess I was hinting that maybe it was a little chaotic.

SS: Oh, it was.

JB: Not only because of Ann's inexperience, but because of this transition from it being a gallery to a museum, and having to deal with a board of trustees. **[0:35:00]**

SS: I don't know if I met Patrick before or after, or Edith, because there was a feeling--I think that the shop, because we made money, we were not purely an intellectual pursuit. There was always, I felt, a slightly pejorative opinion of the shop, which was really unfortunate because um--

JB: Because they were so dependent on the shop for one thing.

SS: Well, financially, they were very dependent, and the shop really had some fantastic people from all over the country selling their work there.

JB: The artists.

SS: The artists. Now, you saying this, reminds me, when I first started working in the shop, there were some financial problems. The Egg and Eye had had a history--and I don't know if this was just towards the end--of being very slow to pay people when their work sold. Everything, I think, was on consignment. There were very little purchases, and one of the things that Ann and I did was to clean all that up. And really, the majority of work that we sold was work we purchased. I'm not exactly sure where the funds came from to do that, but we had to win back a lot of people's confidence--and I hadn't thought about this until you mentioned that. So, I mean, we had a pretty big public relations job to do, to tell people, "No, we don't do it that way anymore; we'll buy your work, we'll pay you for it." And as far as stuff that was on consignment, we paid on time; we made it a policy.

JB: One of the things that John told me was that when he had announced his resignation--and he had told Ann that he wanted her to be the Manager--he said to her that before she accepted the position (because I guess he had talked to Edith and Patrick and they wanted her), and

he--his advice to her was, he said, "You must make it clear," he said, "You should have a separate account for the shop," because, apparently, this had been such an ongoing problem, with the museum basically raiding the shop's funds, and that was why the artists ended up not being paid.

SS: Right.

JB: So, he told her, "You should have a separate account, especially for the work that's on consignment, you must pay the artists."

SS: In a timely way.

JB: I know that he--there are many memos [to Patrick and Edith] from John, and I guess there were many in-person meetings as well, with Patrick and Edith, [with John] just almost crying because he was so embarrassed at not being able to [pay the artists]. So that's the history that you were talking about.

SS: Yeah, yeah. And I mean the shop became a very successful Shop. I think part of the problem was there still was money being taken out.

JB: I was wondering.

SS: And I think that that was--I think that that was an ongoing thing that Ann dealt with as long as she could, and you know, she had some personal issues that caused her to leave. But I think it's a classic thing with many museums.

JB: Yes.

SS: And I think that Ann just felt unacknowledged often, for really, the great contribution that she made to the museum and through the shop.

JB: I do think that Edith respected her a lot.

SS: I think she did.

JB: And Patrick also.

SS: Yeah, yeah.

JB: I know for one thing, besides really running a very professional operation--at least that was the impression--that she became involved with the American Craft Council and American Craft Enterprises, which was the--

SS: Carol Sedestrom.

JB: -- ACC marketing arm. **[0:40:00]** And I know from my own experience in working with the Art Libraries Society [ARLIS/NA], that, for whatever reason, if a staff member became very involved with a national, professional organization, that impressed Patrick and Edith a great deal, and I think they saw it as a kind of extension of the marketing program for the museum.

SS: Ann and I would go to the American Craft Council shows.

JB: How was that?

SS: Oh, it was incredible. In the seventies and the early eighties, it was just--

JB: Now these were--tell [us] what they were and how they were in different locations.

SS: The first show was the Rhinebeck show in upstate New York, and it really was the premiere. It was the premiere show. These were [both] wholesale and retail. I think they started out more as retail craft fairs, but because they were sponsored by the American Craft Council, they had a lot of cachet and they really did--I mean the artists who applied were the best of the best craftspeople working around the country. But then at some point--and I don't know the chronology--there were certain days that were wholesale days, so that people who had shops and galleries could come and order. Some of the artists really didn't understand what that was about, I mean there were issues often.

JB: Because [the shop and gallery managers] would expect a discount of course.

SS: Yeah. And some of the artists would come to the wholesale days and they would put up signs that said they were sold out. They really weren't sold out, they were just waiting for the retail days, and they couldn't deal with wholesale, so they would say that they had no inventory. All of that's changed. There were certain artists that you would see and you would place orders with them and then you would never get the work, because when it came to making the work, they really weren't set up for that. Ann and I tried to be as understanding of people like that because we wanted the work. And if it meant [that] with some people we had to send them some money in advance--so that they could buy the materials to make whatever it was--you know, we did that.

JB: How long would you usually stay?

SS: I don't think we ever stayed for the retail days. We were only there for the--maybe there would be two, maybe two and a half wholesale days. But for Rhinebeck--Rhinebeck was the main summer show. The main winter show was the Baltimore Craft Fair, which was also a very--it was a wonderful show. And so when we would go to those, Ann and I would go together. We also would do quite a bit in New York, because we would go to look for ethnic crafts.

JB: I was wondering who was ordering . . . since both of you had a primary interest in contemporary crafts, although of course your anthropology background gave you some--

SS: Well, I mean Ann was the--you know--she was my boss. Eventually, I was the buyer for jewelry, I specialized just in jewelry. The thing about working with Ann was that we would go places and she would see something really fantastic and I would think it was fantastic, or I would see something really fantastic and she would think it was fantastic. So, I mean it

wasn't like one person would pick up one thing and someone else would pick up something else and it wasn't compatible.

JB: So you were very compatible as far as your taste.

SS: But I also learned a great deal from Ann, I mean really, she had a fantastic eye. I would watch the way she looked at pieces and what she appreciated. And she also--it may have been because she was older, I don't know, but she was a risk-taker. She would see some fantastic thing from India and she would buy it and we would sell it because she also knew people.

JB: Collectors.

SS: Collectors. And there were a lot of people, interior design people, who came to the shop to buy things for homes and offices**. [0:45:00]**

Ann also established relationships with people in L.A., who would bring these incredible rugs from Persia or Turkey, and they would leave them on consignment, and then Ann would work with, say an interior designer or someone.

JB: So she wasn't just sitting in the shop waiting for customers.

SS: No, no, no. Ann did a lot of outreach. And there were so many people in Southern California who had traveled in the sixties. There was a family in--I want to say San Pedro--that had bought an entire toy store in Mexico City and brought all of the stuff back, and Ann would go to their warehouse. I would stay and keep the shop running, and she would go and come back with this truckload of incredible vintage toys that had been--I mean they were old toys to begin with. You know, she just--we made connections with people.

There was a wonderful--the Gift Show, when it was in Downtown L.A.--originally [it] was in the Biltmore Hotel, in the hotel rooms.

JB: Wow.

SS: We would go and the hotel rooms--one room would be full of stuff from India, the next one, it might be plastic bags or something, I mean it was all sort of related to the industry.

JB: Right.

SS: But there really wasn't a separate building, they didn't do anything at the convention center, and you would meet people there. And so then it would turn out, well yes, this is what I have in this little hotel room, but if you come to my warehouse wherever, I have all this other stuff. So that was going on in L.A., and then there were just some fantastic dealers in SoHo, these people [in New York] that had stuff from Africa and India. And then there were galleries. There were so many craft galleries, wonderful places in SoHo, and the American Craft Museum and the folk art museum.

JB: The Museum of--well let's see, was it the--

SS: It was the--

JB: It was the Museum of Contemporary Crafts until the seventies, sometime in the seventies.

SS: Now it's the [Museum of Art and] Design… whatever.

JB: Seventy-eight, I think is when everything changed. [In 1979, it re-opened as the American Craft Museum and then in 2008 it moved and changed its name again.]

SS: And so it was through going to the ACC shows, the American Craft Council shows, they weren't--there wasn't the distinction of American Craft Enterprises at that point. They were just ACC. That was the umbrella.

JB: I see, OK.

SS: And the craft fairs were part of that larger--

JB: Lois Moran, was she involved?

SS: Lois Moran. Well, Lois, yeah, but wasn't she the editor of the--

JB: Yes, she was. She gradually took over more responsibility.

SS: Yeah, yeah.

JB: I was trying to remember who really coordinated the shows.

SS: Carol Sedestrom Ross.

JB: Yeah, she must have been.

SS: She was married to Bob Sedestrom, who was a potter, and she was the one who was the director. I don't know exactly what the chronology was with Lois. Carol and Ann became very good friends and that was sort of Ann's entrée into that whole world, and then American Craft Enterprises, Carol did that. Well, I think that was--those were the main ways that Ann was involved in that larger circle. And her expertise. Ann was running this fantastic shop that meant something when you said you were involved.

JB: Yes. And that was partly because of The Egg and The Eye gallery history I guess. John said--I asked him about publicity for the Shop and he said that a lot of the time, it just seemed to come to them, that they didn't make a special effort, they didn't put out press releases and you know, that they would just expect that the *Sunday L.A. Times Magazine* [actually the *Home*] section would have some mention, and sometimes a very big mention, of the shop, with pictures. I thought to myself well, in order to get pictures, they would have had to have had--

SS: Had to set up an appointment.

JB: Yeah.

SS: You know, I don't remember. . . . There weren't that many places, so you know, I mean I think if you were going to do an article on some of the--on contemporary design or ceramics, I mean that was the place to go. **[0:50:00]** Where else would you go in L.A.? I remember Ann doing PR, I do remember her doing that.

JB: Well I know that PR was very important to Edith, for the museum as a whole, and I'm sure she encouraged Ann.

SS: I can't tell you.

JB: Of course, the shop shows that you had were part of--I mean they were the content of what you did, but also, they served to advertise the shop and the museum.

SS: Well--and the museum's focus was more heavily on folk art, so part of the reason that the shop did the shows [the “mini-shows”] was because people weren't being shown in the museum. It changed some, but that was--you know.

JB: That was the impression.

SS: Well, yeah. I think that was Edith's interest.

JB: Yes, yes it was. She admitted that.

SS: Yeah. And so you know, we tried to pick up the slack and use the Shop as a way to feature certain people's work and send out an invitation, an announcement, and really showcase work that--Ann and I could decide to do that, without having to go to Edith or Patrick or the board or you know, all of the things that were involved to make a presentation for an exhibition in the museum.

JB: OK. Well that really leads me to my next question, which is to what extent did Edith influence the shop?

SS: I think we were a separate entity. I remember when I first started working there, there was still stuff from when Edith went to China. The back room, our storage room, still had wind-up toys and pieces of jade and, I mean, just these weird teapots, because when Edith went on that trip she overbought, and we were trying to get rid of it. I think periodically, there were things that came into the shop that hadn't been planned for, that may have been something of Edith's or someone Edith knew, who had something. I don't really remember, but those things were always dealt with on consignment. If we had to show somebody's collection of whatever, or somebody that Edith may have known.

JB: I'm going to stop for just a moment**. [Break in audio]**

JB: OK, we're back, and Susan, you were about to say something.

SS: One of the things that I--you know, I think that there definitely was a separation between the museum and the shop.

JB: OK.

SS: I think there were many people that came to the shop as customers, that never went in the museum.

JB: Yes, yes.

SS: And I think that there were--I would say that the people who came to the museum specifically to see an exhibition, always came into the shop. But it wasn't necessarily--

JB: The other way around.

SS: -- the other way around, especially when they--was there an admission? Did they charge admission at some point?

JB: Well, yes. I think it may have been free at the very beginning.

SS: I think when that happened, that changed things.

JB: It was a very low admission. I think it was at first, only $1.50 or something like that.

SS: I don't remember. But I think that because of the type of things that we sold, I mean we got a lot of--Jim Henson was a regular customer of the shop, and he came in and he bought a lot of stuff. I remember Jim Henson because, you know.

JB: He was Jim Henson.

SS: It was Jim Henson. But you know, we had many, many people from the film industry and from the music industry. I remember I waited on Joni Mitchell when we had the New Mexico show. I think she came to the opening. I'm not sure, but I remember she bought a sweater from Susan Summa, who still lives in Santa Fe and makes sweaters. You know, you didn't say anything to these people, but I mean you never knew who was going to walk in the door. It was across from the County Art Museum, but it also was a place where--there was an interest in crafts in the seventies and the early eighties.

JB: Oh yes.

SS: And the stuff that the shop was showing and selling was the best craft in the city, in the county. **[0:55:00] I** mean you couldn't go really, anywhere else.

JB: And it was an interesting mix of things.

SS: It was a mix and it was beautifully displayed. I think the display was a very important part of it. The folk art that was there was also incredible. It certainly was a place that people came to--it was a destination.

JB: Yes. I was wondering… **[Break in audio]**

JB: . . . . So, you were going to talk about some of the people that came into the shop that may have been celebrities, and how special the Shop was. It really attracted a lot.

SS: Well, I think it attracted a certain group of people who had an interest in contemporary crafts, and a lot of the people who had money to buy contemporary crafts were people in the film industry and in the music industry. . . . I remember I was in the shop on--I think it was a Saturday--and Art Buchwald was in the book department. I recognized him from his tennis shoes.

JB: Oh, my goodness.

SS: But you know, that was because it was across the street from the County Art Museum. There were people, say people from other cities, who were used to walking; a New Yorker would walk across the street. But we just, you know we would--we had a show in the museum, of New Mexico artists, and I remember that Joni Mitchell came to the opening and I helped her to purchase a sweater by a contemporary New Mexico artist. And you know, you never said anything to anybody, but people would come in and it was fascinating, because they seemed to have very good tastes and always pick out interesting things. And they knew that if they came to the Craft and Folk Art Museum, that they were going to see things in the shop that they could buy and that you couldn't get anywhere else in the city. It was really the *crème de la crème*.

JB: Well, it was an unusual combination of things that were there, and even if they didn't go to the exhibitions--this is another thing that I know John talked about when I interviewed him, that the museum did not always—well--

SS: Cross over between the--

JB: Yeah, between the museum and the shop--that often people would come into the shop and not--or into the restaurant for that matter--and not really be that aware of the gallery.

SS: Yeah, of the exhibitions. I think it depended on what the exhibitions were. I think also, because the . . . . The Egg and Eye [gallery] had been in the same location [on the east side] as the Shop.

JB: Yes.

SS: That people had a tendency to--

JB: Were confused.

SS: -- come in the front door and go left.

JB: Ah, yes.

SS: You know, or up [the stairs to the restaurant]. But going right into the museum space was a new experience for some people. And then there were people who appreciated the whole package certainly.

JB: Yes. You were talking to me earlier about Jim Henson coming in.

SS: He was a regular customer in the Shop. He was a supporter of American crafts, in New York as well as in Los Angeles. He appreciated whimsical pieces. I can't remember any specific piece that he purchased, but I do remember that he was a regular. He would drop in every six weeks.

JB: And then later--and this may have been after you had left--we had that [Henson] show.

SS: Yeah, I was still working there when--

JB: Oh, you were, yes.

SS: Yeah, of the--

JB: I'm trying to remember the name of that [exhibition]. [The Art of the Dark Crystal; opened October 19, 1982.]

SS: . . . . It was Frank Oz, wasn't it? He was the--I think the contact person, or somehow more involved in curating that show. [Frank Oz co-directed the film, The Dark Crystal; the exhibition, which was of costumes, props, and scene design from the film, was curated by Leslee Asch and the Henson Organization.]

JB: And I think George Lucas was involved in some way too.

SS: Yeah, yeah.

JB: Well I guess because he was one of the producers of that show. **[1:00:00]**

SS: Edith certainly knew--you know--she knew celebrities. I think a lot of the people that impressed me and who [it] seemed in a way . . . appropriate that they would come into the shop, were of the same generation of the artists that were making the stuff and were sort of--maybe a few years older, but were of my generation. There was this young--there were people in their twenties and thirties who had money and were supporting American crafts.

JB: Well there certainly was a big [contemporary craft] movement.

SS: There was.

JB: I guess that's still going on to a certain [extent]--but it was the freshness of it [at the time].

SS: Well, and Joan Mondale [and Rosalynn Carter] were in the White House and that had a huge--

JB: Joan of Art.

SS: Joan of Art, yeah, and the [American] Crafts in the White House show [opened August 16, 1977.] Ann was very involved, Ann and I--but more Ann--and Carol Sedestrom.

JB: Tell about that.

SS: Well they were the ones that--there was going to be this dinner [actually a Senate Ladies Luncheon] at the White House.

JB: Yes.

SS: And Joan Mondale wanted all of the dinnerware to be artist-made.

JB: She was a potter I believe.

SS: She was a potter, yes. I think that Joan Mondale contacted Carol Sedestrom, and then Carol contacted Ann, and because I was Ann's assistant, I was peripherally involved, but you know, all the work was purchased. I think some artists donated some of the work. There was some sort of an arrangement. It may not have all been purchased--but it ended up in the White House collection.

JB: And there was a catalog [designed by Max King].

SS: And there was a catalog. I believe that then, through the shop, we sold--say you came to see the exhibition, and you liked a particular artist's flatware, you could order it through the shop.

JB: Some of that--I don't remember how much--but a good deal of it did become part of the [CAFAM] permanent collection.

SS: But I mean--not the actual pieces in the exhibition--but if you wanted similar . . . . Let's say you came as a museum-goer, and you yourself personally wanted the same set of flatware for your dinner table at home, we in the shop then could call the artist up and say, so and so wants to order a set of eight.

JB: And then the shop would get a cut of that.

SS: Yeah, but it was also that you know--that not only was it--we did this with other exhibitions.

JB: Yes.

SS: So that an artist's work could be shown either as part of the White House exhibition, or--I remember when we had the Noguchi lamps. [Akari Light Sculptures of Isamu Noguchi; opened April 30, 1979.]

JB: Oh yes, that was a wonderful show.

SS: And we were selling them through the shop. So, the shop, if there was a tie-in: we might not have the exact same things for sale in the shop, but through the shop there was a way then, for collectors to buy certain things similar to what was in the museum. And it was also a way to generate money, income for [the] artists.

JB: I remember there was a little bit of controversy about--according to the, I think, IRS rules—there had to be a separation. We couldn't sell things out of the museum exhibition directly.

SS: Right.

JB: So, the shop became a vehicle for the sale.

SS: A vehicle to do that--or to order something similar. It might not be the exact piece. Yeah, because the shop was a profit-making business, that was what we did. [Although the shop "makes money," the "profit" goes to support the nonprofit educational purposes of the museum. The IRS and the State of California, therefore, consider it to be a "related business" and do not require that they pay "unrelated business tax." They do pay California sales tax, which is paid by all retail businesses, both profit and nonprofit, and they pay County of Los Angeles property tax on the square footage occupied by the shop.]

JB: Right. I guess there are special rules, because the museum is nonprofit of course.

SS: Right, right. But we had to charge [California sales] tax and you know . . . .

JB: Tell us a little bit more about working with Ann. I think that you started to talk about the shows that you went to together and how she mentored you, especially during those trips, the American Craft Enterprises shows.

SS: Yeah, yeah. I think I had a certain taste or interest in certain things, but I felt as if a whole new world sort of opened up to me by going to the shows, and even going to the New York gift show, I would see things. **[1:05:00]** And the folk art and crafts that were from other countries. But I just learned--Ann had a certain eye and she just had a way of looking at things that had a big influence on me. You know, you didn't just look at the front of a piece, you looked at the back, and you know, you paid attention to detail. And I think it's things that are extremely important, that you have to sort of be around someone who points that out to you.

JB: Now, you were learning a lot.

SS: I was, I really was. And Ann was very adventuresome. She wanted to go to galleries when we were in New York and go to--she was sort of fearless, and so we would go to people's studios and really--I mean a whole world. I had been to New York when I was much younger, but I did not go to New York again until I went with Ann. She opened up a whole world to me, by being there with her, and it was really fantastic.

JB: And she had gotten involved with the American Craft Council by this time.

SS: Yes, through her meeting Carol Sedestrom, who ran the [American] Craft Council shows, the wholesale and the retail shows? They became friends.

JB: This was before the American Craft Enterprises arm [came into being].

SS: Yes, [it] became a separate entity.

JB: I see.

SS: Yeah. And then Ann was on the board. I think she was on the board of the American Craft Council.

JB: I think she was too.

SS: And the Enterprises. And she juried some shows and I juried a few shows. But you know, it was a very vibrant time for American crafts. There were many schools that had very strong ceramics and jewelry craft. You learned crafts. It has changed quite a bit, but at the time that I worked with Ann, there really were fantastically talented people making wonderful things.

JB: This may be an aside, but since you are a practicing artist now, I'm just wondering, how would you compare the way craft was considered at that time, as opposed to now?

SS: Well, I think it was celebrated at that time. I think the Arts and Crafts movement from the early 1900s carried on. There was the whole--there were wonderful people working in the fifties and the sixties.

JB: Well, the whole post World War II revival, because of the GI Bill I guess.

SS: And I think artists came--you know, the Natzlers for instance, I mean Otto Natzler.

JB: From Europe.

SS: There were people that came from Europe and there were schools that were established across the country. And I think in some ways, because of it being the sixties, it was more experimental in some ways and then in the seventies there was a real refinement, and it was really fine crafts.

JB: And the American Craft Council and the magazine, its magazine.

SS: *Craft Horizons*.

JB: Which was edited by Rose Slivka [until mid-1979, when it became *American Craft*].

SS: Right.

JB: Were very influential.

SS: Oh yes, very. And there were craft fairs, I mean there were wonderful shows. Not just the ones that the American Craft Council sponsored.

JB: Yes.

SS: But I think that the craft community has aged and the next generation, you know there's certainly an interest in craft, but it's more crafting. You know, computers and the Internet, there's an interest in re-purposed crafts and recycling**. [1:10:00]** I mean, there still is an

interest, but you know, just the fact that the American Craft Museum is not called that any more.

JB: Yes. It's the Museum of Art and Design, MAD.

SS: Art and design, yes, and boy are we [mad, that is]. Craft fairs are not--there aren't as many. It's much harder now. There's more competition, there are more people out there making things. There aren't as many schools. You know, some schools have closed their craft departments, programs. It's just a different time. There still are people out there making things and there always will be, but it's not what it was.

JB: It seems more diffuse, doesn't it?

SS: Yeah, and I think it's a cycle. It's a different time. And there's--I don't know--consumerism is such a complicated, confusing issue these days.

JB: Yes.

SS: And collecting is viewed differently I think, among young people. I think there's a, "No, I don't want," you know, there's an attempt to--

JB: De-clutter sort of.

SS: Yes, in a way.

JB: And at the same time, there's the so-called do-it-yourself movement, which has positive aspects.

SS: It does.

JB: But it does I think, to a certain extent--I don't want this to sound elitist, but it does tend to water down the quality.

SS: It does, it does. And craft has this--right now, craft is crafty and it's DIY and it's Etsy online and you know, it's people crocheting at night.

JB: It's kind of odd. It's almost the opposite of what we expected it to [become].

SS: It's like we had a bell curve and we're down at the bottom [of the curve], and hopefully there will be a new sort of renaissance. And I do think that the work that people are doing with re-purposing materials is very--

JB: That you are doing.

SS: Well, it's very exciting. Crafts will always be around and I think there will be a new appreciation for things made by hand, because industrialization has taken us not to the best place, and people are examining, reexamining that.

JB: Yes, which is good.

SS: Which is good.

JB: Which is very good.

SS: But right now, it's not the way it was 25, 30 years ago.

JB: And it couldn't be.

SS: And it couldn't be--life goes on.

JB: But it's interesting to compare. Well, we're going to have lunch and we're going to take a break and when we come back, I want you to talk some more about some other parts of the museum, which I know you were involved with, and some of the people in the restaurant as well as in the museum.

SS: OK.

JB: So, we'll do that in a little while.

SS: Great.

[Susan and Joan break for lunch.]

[End Session 1--1:13:15.]

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW OF SUSAN SKINNER

Session 2 (1:31:49), Monday, January 11, 2010. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti.

JB: All right, we're back from a delicious lunch [prepared by Chris] and we're going to continue to talk about Susan's time in the shop--well, Susan's time at the museum, I really should say, because although your full-time job was in the shop, you were actually quite involved with other activities at the museum over eight years. One of the things that we haven't talked about much is the restaurant, which was right there, over your head, over the shop, on the mezzanine level. . . . Maybe you should tell us, first of all, about the restaurant--as if I had never been to The Egg and The Eye restaurant. [When the Egg and The Eye gallery became the Craft and Folk Art Museum, the restaurant took on the name of the former gallery.] What was it like?

SS: Well, it was a unique restaurant, because they did specialize in omelets. When I would get to work in the morning, the [restaurant] staff would be there, at least part of the staff, getting ready. Sometimes I could go up and get a cup of coffee. There were issues about getting coffee in the restaurant.

JB: Oh, yes.

SS: Eventually, we just got our own coffeemaker. I would see people going up and down the stairs**. I** felt like I had a friendly relationship with everyone in the restaurant. It doesn't seem to me that there was any reason not to. Ian Barrington, who eventually purchased the restaurant, is that how it…?

JB: Yes. He had a partner, a business partner.

SS: But I think in the beginning--

JB: But at the beginning, I think he was a waiter.

SS: Right. He was just the waiter, and then he became, I think, the *maître d'*. Ian was just a fascinating character. He was gay and he was very, you know, "out." He wasn't Scottish, but he could put on airs.

JB: Didn't he play bagpipes?

SS: Yeah, he had a kilt and his uncle, I think, was Scottish. His uncle was gay and older, but they would--I remember Ann and I went to a party at their house once and Ian was very well-read, and I don't know, either he had a PhD or was working on a PhD in linguistics.

JB: I think he had a PhD.

SS: He would always recommend books to me. In fact, I remember, in 1978, whenever it first came out, he recommended *Interview with a Vampire*, before all of the--

JB: Hysteria.

SS: --recent hysteria. And many other books, and I thought Ian was a really interesting person.

JB: And he was a serious chef also.

SS: He was a very serious chef; he was a scholar. He also--I don't know, he had this *alter ego* and that was sort of fascinating to me also.

JB: Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

SS: He had a thing for Hispanic boys, young men, and Ian would work in the restaurant in a white shirt, and I think a bowtie. I think they had to wear--he wore a black bowtie and was very neat and well-groomed, and then occasionally, if I stayed later to work, I would see him leave in his flannels and khakis, with a bandana around his head, in sort of full *cholo* regalia. And he was proud of that, I mean it wasn't something he was trying to hide.

JB: Oh, no.

SS: You know--and it was sort of "only in Southern California," you know?

JB: Yeah, yeah.

SS: So, the restaurant was a special place. I didn't eat there very often, but sometimes Ann and I would have a meeting there, or there would be someone that we needed to [impress].

JB: People were always glad to be invited to have lunch or whatever.

SS: Yeah. I think it was a very special thing when you could have lunch in the restaurant.

JB: And of course, then they were open for a while for dinner and there was the bar.

SS: In the evenings--and if you wanted to meet someone in the bar after work. It was very cosmopolitan. It was not like other places in L.A., and I appreciated that.

JB: I may have said this before, but . . . LACMA, the L.A. County Museum of Art--although they had a restaurant--it wasn't highly thought of.

SS: No.

JB: And at that time, there really were no other--there was no Marie Callender's, there were no other--

SS: No, there was no place, really, to eat.

JB: In that area.

SS: There was the Flying Saucer on Wilshire, in the Miracle Mile, but that had been there since 1945. [Laughs]

JB: There were a few other restaurants [not too far away], but not in that particular area.

SS: No, no, nothing in that area.

JB: And it was well-known, even--

SS: It was, it was, yeah.

JB: --beyond that area of L.A.

SS: And I think the whole combination of the museum and the restaurant and the shop, made it a destination that people could really--you know, you could have an afternoon of it.

JB: Oh yes. Well, Bernard Kester, when I interviewed him, he said you know, you could always, if you had to wait for a table--

SS: That's true, then you could wander.

JB: --then you could go to the gallery or the shop and so on. Yeah, it was a unique kind of--

SS: It was. It was ahead of its time. It was very visionary when you think about it now.

JB: Yes. It was really a shame that they did not--were not able to reopen the restaurant.

I guess you had left--by 1984, you had left—[when] we had to move out of that building at 5814 Wilshire, where the restaurant was, because of earthquake [retrofitting]. The City made us leave, and we were lucky to be able to go to the May Company. But what I don't think any of us really thought about enough at the time--and it's doubly sad, considering that Ian, I guess, was already sick by then, and died not too long after--[was that] the restaurant was not going to be able to make the transition. The May Company had a tearoom--they weren't going to, you know, be able to open a restaurant there--and although there were some [tentative] plans to have a restaurant in the new building, that never came to pass--for a whole lot of reasons I guess. That's always been somewhat of a mystery to me. But I do know that [at the time] none of us really appreciated the [critical] impact of the restaurant.

SS: Yeah.

JB: It wasn't just a restaurant.

SS: No, it wasn't.

JB: It was really part of what made the culture of that place.

SS: Of that place. I think so, definitely.

JB: And in retrospect, you remember, Edith was always saying she wanted to feed [all of] the senses.

SS: Yeah, and she did.

JB: And she did, literally.

SS: She did.

JB: So, the restaurant was certainly a really basic part [of it] and in the shop, you were right there in the thick of it.

SS: Yeah, we saw people come and go. You would hear that someone was eating in the restaurant, and then you'd wait to see whether they came down to the shop or not. Sometimes they did, sometimes they didn't.

JB: Star sightings.

SS: Yes, like, oh my God, so and so is in the restaurant. I think most of the time, people didn't--unless it was a business meeting, maybe from one of the office buildings, which people would eat there from--what was that Mutual of Omaha, or whatever that--

JB: Yeah. Prudential?

SS: Prudential. But I think anybody that came there for lunch planned on seeing what else was going on in the building.

JB: . . . . So you were able to do a lot of things in the museum. You did curate some shop shows.

SS: Yeah, Ann and I did. And then when the space opened in Santa Monica [Place].

JB: Yes. I'd like you to tell about how that came about, because I think Ann was involved.

SS: Yeah, I think she was, because of the Rouse [Company]. What was the involvement with the Rouse Corporation? You know, I don't remember.

JB: Well, they were the developers [of the mall, Santa Monica Place, where Gallery 3 was located]..

SS: Yeah, but I think Ann had some other involvement, maybe through ACE, you know, maybe they were on the ACE board. I don't really remember. But, you know, malls, they were trying to sort of change, I think some of the--well, they had built this mall and there was a space that was a dead zone, that nobody wanted to have a retail space in, and so I guess the Rouse Corporation was open to donating the space. Didn't they donate that space? The museum didn't pay rent I think.

JB: That's right. They donated the space for a year.

SS: A year, yeah.

JB: Frank Gehry was the architect [of the mall].

SS: Right.

JB: In fact, it was one of his first major commissions. In fact, it's being torn down now, as we speak.

SS: Oh, it is? Oh really, oh.

JB: Well, it's being transformed. They've basically gutted the whole thing. . . . You know, the trend now is going [toward]--for a long time it was enclosed malls. Now, the trend is for outdoor [malls].

SS: Right. More like Century City really.

JB: Yeah, really, Century City was kind of ahead of its time.

SS: Yeah, it was. And you know, I think part of the interest in that [Santa Monica Place] space, on a personal level for Ann, was that it was near her house, living in the Palisades.

JB: Oh, I hadn't thought of that.

SS: So, if she was going to be involved in that space, it would mean she [didn't] have to come into town. I just remember Ann having to schlep all this crap back and forth. She'd take stuff down for the shop [in Santa Monica Place] and then something would be there for a while and it wasn't selling, so then she'd . . . have to bring it back. As far as the shop area--

JB: That's the kind of thing, unless you work there, you just don't think about. We never had a truck really.

SS: No. The museum never had any kind of a truck, and Ann, fortunately, would have some sort of a--she always had some sort of four-wheel drive vehicle, so she could get stuff into--but you know, it was a hassle.

JB: Of course.

SS: It was a nice museum space and I think that space was well-utilized. I think the location was the problem.

JB: That was the downfall.

SS: Yeah. And I just don't know how many people that were going to that mall had much interest at all in what the museum was trying to do in that space.

JB: Well it really--somebody said it really "confronted merchandise in a store." It made you think, what's the difference between this vase that may be $500 in the craft museum shop, and a similar vase that was maybe half as expensive at Macy's.

SS: Pottery Barn. My memory was that the merchandise got less expensive. I think that was the direction that the shop went, in order to try and [compete]--you know.

JB: But that meant you didn't have as much profit.

SS: No, no.

JB: But tell about the shows that were planned--and you curated one of them.

SS: I was just reading about this. This must have been something that Ann and I--yeah, Ann and I did this together. [Introductions: Twelve Artists, an Invitational; opened November 21, 1980.] It was an invitational exhibition. It was inaugurating the new gallery space and it was the work of 12 not-well-known Southern California artists.

JB: Oh, they were all from Southern California?

SS: Yeah, I think we wanted to focus on that.

JB: There was a very handsome poster, I think designed by Max King?

SS: Yeah, probably. Anyway, I guess we got some publicity on it. I'm not sure. . . . It was a nice, big, open space, which was very appealing for an exhibition space. I just don't think the attendance for the exhibition was much at all, I mean I don't even remember. I'm sure we had an opening.

JB: Oh yes, I think I went to all of the openings. There were . . . [six] exhibitions during the year that it was open, and they were all contemporary craft. I think [Shan] curated the first show, which was the contemporary mask [show]. [The Mask as Metaphor: A Contemporary Artists' Invitational; opened October 16, 1980.]

SS: Oh yeah, I saw that on the--yeah, yeah.

JB: And that included masks by some pretty famous artists--Claes Oldenburg--

SS: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, oh yeah.

JB: That Mickey Mouse--

SS: Oh my God, I forgot about that.

JB: I don't remember all of them. But then you did that really, very attractive show of these younger artists.

SS: Yeah, less well-known.

JB: And then the third show was that Japanese artist, Shuji Asada. I always wondered how--I mean, his work, it was graphic. Well I think it may have been printed on cloth, but they were graphic, big, almost mural-like abstract graphic pieces.

SS: And they fit well in that space.

JB: I was always wondering how [that came about]. You don't remember what the connection was.

SS: No, I don't.

JB: Because the museum didn't mount very many one-person shows ever.

SS: No.

JB: So this was unusual.

SS: And I don't know if it was someone that Ann knew.

JB: That's what I was wondering.

SS: Yeah, I don't know. I don't remember.

JB: I guess it could have been someone Edith had met. And then the last show was just delightful: Two Schools of Fish. [Two Schools of Fish was the next-to-the-last show. The last show in Gallery 3 was actually the second part of Finland Designs; opened August 5, 1981; closed September 27, 1981.]

SS: Yeah, with Buster Simpson, who I knew.

JB: From Seattle. There were two artists from Seattle.

SS: Right, right, and Richard Posner.

JB: And they really used the space outside of the gallery, also; there was an atrium.

SS: Oh, that's right, there was that big piece of Buster's, yeah.

JB: It was hung in the atrium.

SS: Yeah, his fish, yeah.

JB: And the light would catch it in the daytime.

SS: He was--Buster still is, he's an incredible artist, really visionary.

JB: I would love to have some of his work.

SS: Yeah.

JB: I was going to ask you if you remember, because this was about the same time that Gallery 3, which is what it was called (because we had gallery one and two in the museum [on Wilshire] and so this was "gallery three"). About the time that it opened was the time of the Mask Festival, and that year for the first time, they had a Maskerade Ball as part of the Mask Festival festivities. They had a contest for costume and masks, and it was held in Santa Monica Place.

SS: Oh God, that's like ancient history.

JB: And the three judges that they got were David Hockney, Rudi Gernreich, the designer--.

SS: Oh, yeah, yeah, the topless bathing [suit]--

JB: --and Rose Slivka.

SS: I'm sort of remembering this.

JB: Beny and I went and we went as--Beny had just done the show at LACMA, of the Russian avant-garde opera, *Victory Over the Sun*, which was [designed in 1907 by] Malevich . . . .

SS: It was part of the show that was there, the constructivist show [The Avant-Garde in Russia: 1910-1930; opened at the L.A. County Museum of Art, July 30, 1980.]

JB: Yes.

SS: Which was incredible.

JB: So we came up with these costumes that were Malevich masks, sort of.

SS: I'm sort of remembering this, yeah.

JB: And I thought you were there too. We have wonderful pictures in the archives.

SS: I think I was, but I have no idea.

JB: You know, you may have had to stay in the shop.

SS: I sort of remember that going on, you know now that you mention it, somewhere in the back of my mind I remember that.

JB: They had taken over the whole shopping mall for that evening.

SS: I think they had closed it down, yeah.

JB: It was fun.

SS: Yeah, like you said, the museum in some ways knew how to put on a party.

JB: How to party.

SS: And how to do something really different and creative. One of the shows I really, really remember, was the Black Folk Art show. [Black Folk Art in America, 1930 – 1980; opened December 7, 1982.] That was unbelievable.

JB: Oh yes. You and Janet Marcus came as--

SS: And Blaine Mallory.

JB: And Blaine.

SS: We all came as Sister [Gertrude Morgan, an artist whose work was included in that show].

JB: As that nurse.

SS: Yes, we did. [They are speaking here of the exhibition opening.]

JB: She was an artist who was a nurse I guess. [Although Sister Morgan wore a nurse's uniform, she was not a nurse; she was a street missionary in New Orleans. When in 1957 she

"received divine word that she was to become the bride of Christ, she began to wear all white garments."]

SS: You know, there was--I think because it was craft and folk art, there was a lot of latitude for people who worked at the museum, to sort of play with all of that, and the openings were certainly a time when you could, and that was encouraged and that was a great thing.

JB: Yes, it was. I can remember some openings--well actually not openings so much as, do you remember the Primavera Balls?

SS: Oh God, I do, yes.

JB: This was the annual fundraising dinner and they were always elaborate, usually in a major hotel. It was, I think at that time, $100 a plate, and most of the museum staff could not afford to buy the full price, so there was always this discussion, should the staff be allowed to come for free as sort of--

SS: Acknowledgement.

JB: -- acknowledgement of their work during the year, or should they have to pay cost, and so on and so forth. And I can remember a few times, feeling like the people that were putting that on were not very appreciative of the staff. But we did have fun when we went.

SS: Yeah, or were allowed to go. I think that Ann and I went in the year that it was the Joan Mondale thing.

JB: Oh yeah, that was the first one.

SS: I think we were allowed to go to that one, maybe because we had worked on getting artists for the White House or something. I remember going to that one. And then I don't know, I don't really remember. That fundraising stuff was always something I kind of, you know, if I could, stayed away from.

JB: It was strange, I had to admit Susan, that I always had very mixed feelings about the people that put those on, most of whom were on the board or were part of that Associates group. They didn't make much of an attempt--I'm generalizing of course, there were exceptions. But it seemed like there was a great divide between the staff and those people.

SS: Yeah. Well, the people who gave money.

JB: Or perhaps we thought they should have given more.

SS: Give more, yeah, or treated us a little better.

JB: But I suppose that's true at most museums.

SS: Well, I think unfortunately, there's this constant need to raise money. It puts a great deal of pressure on everybody and it does create a hierarchy, you know, no matter what people might want to think otherwise, but it's unavoidable.

JB: Now you were involved, for at least a short time, with that committee that helped to choose or at least come up with ideas for exhibitions. . . . For a while it was called [the] PIC Committee, the Programmatic Input Committee.

SS: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

JB: Edith always loved these cute names for things.

SS: Oh my God, I forgot about that. . . . Was Willow part of that too?

JB: It's possible. You were also involved with a support group called the Contemporary Craft Council, that [Shan] and Bernard were definitely part of.

SS: I may have gone to some meetings. I have no memory of doing anything in those regards.

JB: Well, the reason I kind of transitioned to that is because we were talking about the other people who we might not see on an everyday basis.

SS: Right, right.

JB: But there were some board members.

SS: Bernard [Kester], I mean he was a fixture.

JB: Yes. Tell us about Bernard. You must have seen a good deal of him.

SS: Well, I had friends that were students of his.

JB: Oh yes, of course. He was on the faculty at UCLA.

SS: Yeah, at UCLA. I had a friend who always called him puce Bernard. . . . Which I don't really know why she called him that. I don't know if it was his fascination with the color puce or his personal skin tone? I'm really not sure.

JB: I'm not even sure what color that is, but it doesn't sound good.

SS: He and Ann, I think they knew each other maybe from UCLA, when Ann was a student there. I don't know if Bernard went to school there or not.

JB: Yes, he did.

SS: Yeah, I think they knew each other as fellow--

JB: He was there forever.

SS: Forever, forever.

JB: From the time that he graduated from high school, he basically was associated with UCLA.

SS: And so, he and Ann had that connection, and that may have had something to do with her being hired as well, because he was early on, involved with The Egg and Eye. I was looking on the timeline and right from the start--

JB: Oh yes, definitely.

SS: He would always, sort of, float into the gallery. . . . I don't think he ever called me by my name, but he always [called her], you know, "Dear Ann." And if he appreciated what you were doing or made some sort of positive comment on the shop, that went a long way, because everyone really respected Bernard.

JB: Yes, yes.

SS: I think we all sort of tittered a little bit behind his back, but it was never--you know, it wasn't hostile.

JB: No.

SS: He was just such--he was just Bernard.

JB: Yes, yes. Now when I interviewed him, he told me that he and Edith, although he "loved her dearly," and that's quote, unquote, they had some--

SS: Knock-down, drag outs.

JB: Knock down, yeah. I was wondering if you were witness to any of them, because he said that one of the things they argued about the most--and maybe this was during The Egg and The Eye gallery days--but he said Edith did not appreciate enough, the importance of good signage. He didn't think that there was enough of a separation between the show, the mini-exhibition that featured an artist, and the shop. He thought there ought to be more of--so that visitors would appreciate that this was an art exhibition over here, and this was a Shop. He thought there should be a difference. So, I was just wondering if you ever…?

SS: I don't know--between Bernard and Gere Kavanaugh.

JB: Oh, talk about Gere Kavanaugh.

SS: Well, she was another one who--

JB: Also, a designer.

SS: Also, a designer and very flamboyant, very opinionated, and Ann got along great with Gere. Gere loved coming in the shop. I liked Gere a lot. I actually had some contact with her after I moved here. She asked me to make a necklace for her. She was going to some event and she wanted a piece of my jewelry, which was fantastic. But you know, she was another very strong personality.

JB: And she was on the board for a very long time.

SS: And she was on the board. She spoke louder than Bernard, and when she had an opinion, she always made it known.

JB: Everyone knew.

SS: Everyone knew. But you know, those were the--

JB: But she and Ann didn't argue.

SS: Oh, they got along great, they got along great, because I think that was partly Ann's personality. She wanted to get along and try and find some sort of common ground. Gere, I can still hear her now. You know, you just knew the minute she walked in the front door that she had arrived.

JB: Now, someone we haven't talked about is Frank Wyle.

SS: Frank.

JB: He did show up for openings.

SS: Yeah.

JB: But he wasn't a regular shop visitor I guess.

SS: I don't remember him ever buying anything in the shop. He was always very nice to Ann. I think he was nice to me. A lot of times, I just sort of felt like I was on the sidelines. Ann was much more--

JB: The point person.

SS: Yeah. I never felt that Frank, you know, I mean he certainly never sought me out for my opinion on anything, but I wouldn't have expected that. And he seemed--I mean I knew that Frank had given a lot of money. Edith and Frank gave money, but it seemed like when Frank and Edith were around, Edith was the one who was front and center, and Frank was much more a presence, but certainly not the mouthpiece.

JB: No. Well, he describes himself as being the supporter.

SS: And I think that--

JB: The financial [supporter].

SS: Yeah.

JB: The deep pockets.

SS: Yeah, and that was always--

JB: Although, I think he enjoyed meeting artists and curators.

SS: Well, I mean how could you not? There were fascinating people that came through that place. Did he smoke a pipe?

JB: Yes. Now that you mention it, I had forgotten that.

SS: I just remember his bowties and his pipe. He probably doesn't anymore.

JB: I don't think he smokes a pipe anymore, but yes, he did.

SS: He was very proper appearing.

JB: Let me segué again now. I guess just talking about these sort of--oh, not divisions exactly--but different worlds that people in the shop occupied--from people, the other staff, from maybe the board--I'm just wondering, in terms of communication, either you or Ann, with--I mean you had to know, in order to do your planning in the shop, you had to know at least the general outlines of what was going to go on in the museum. Did you go to staff meetings?

SS: I think Ann--well, I probably went to staff meetings.

JB: There were pretty regular weekly meetings.

SS: But I think Ann went more to like the planning meetings. I mean I don't really remember, but she must have, because there was an attempt, when it was possible, to have things for sale in the shop that were appropriate to an exhibition. But that was really more--Ann would come back from whatever that meeting might have been--and then I would be involved with contacting people or doing what had to be done to sort of plan for whenever a particular exhibition was going to be.

JB: So, she would communicate with you.

SS: I think that was more communicated to me, and then I could help her to get that part done.

JB: And you said that when you were planning the shop shows, you were pretty much on your own. You had a budget I suppose, a certain budget.

SS: Yeah. I think there were a lot more requirements for budgeting. I remember that sort of towards the end. I think that as the museum evolved, there were more and more requests for budgeting. And I think unfortunately, a lot of that had to do with the museum relying on the shop for money. And so, you know, we did have--a fair amount of money from the shop did go to running the museum. I can't tell you what any of the figures were, because I wasn't really privy to that, but I know you know, that we weren't always as--we had certain restrictions, and I think things got a little more restrictive as time went on.

JB: You of course had access to the museum membership list.

SS: Yes. And we had a mailing list and we would use that. Well, I think the shop may have had a separate mailing list. I don't really remember, but I know that if--

JB: You probably did.

SS: Yeah.

JB: Because there were probably customers who were not members.

SS: Who weren't necessarily [museum] members. But you know, we would send out invitations for exhibitions in the shop. But also, again, if there was a way to coordinate something in the shop with an opening in the museum, then that was a way to do that as well, to have the two events sort of coincide.

JB: Yes. There of course were times when the best laid plans went awry.

SS: Well, yeah.

JB: When a show had to be canceled or dropped. I remember one memorable opening, where the objects had not yet arrived.

SS: When was that? Was that when I was there?

JB: I think it was a Korean show.

SS: Oh, the Korean show.

JB: Yes.

SS: We had a show of Kae Jung Kwak, who was a Korean basket maker. I think she was in that show and then we had an exhibition of her baskets . . . . in the shop, and they were for sale.

JB: There was a separate catalog. Yes, I remember that.

SS: Yeah. That was quite an experience. But they didn't show up for the opening?

JB: No. What happened was the trucks came. The way it had been scheduled, it had been scheduled so tightly, that by the time Edith and whoever the--Shan probably--realized that the objects were not going to appear, the invitations had already gone out. So, what they decided was they would go ahead and have the party, and then at the last minute they found out that the trucks were going to arrive on the day of the opening. So, I guess it was kind of funny and kind of horrible at the same time, and I guess everybody had a good time anyway.

SS: Well see, I remember what went on in the shop, but I don't remember what went on in the museum.

JB: You had plenty to occupy yourself in the [shop]. Well, I'm--I think we're getting to the point where we talked about most of the aspects of the museum and the shop that I wanted to. It's been great to hear you just naturally talk about some of these things that I thought I was going to have to bring up. One of the things that made the Craft and Folk Art Museum Shop different, at least initially--I think from most museum shops--this is not so true now--but I remember that back in the sixties, fifties, sixties, whenever . . . you could pretty much count

on [museum] shops having reproductions of objects from the museum. You know--of course, prints of paintings and so on.

SS: Right, right.

JB: But also, actual copies of objects.

SS: Pre-Columbian. My mother had jewelry from the Metropolitan Museum.

JB: Exactly, the little hippo and all that.

SS: Yes, the little hippo, exactly.

JB: But CAFAM never did that.

SS: No.

JB: Of course, when you think about it, that may have been because they weren't really supposed to have a collection, even though they did. So, the possibility of making a reproduction was sort of moot. But I think that there was some legal issue there too at the beginning. They had to prove that they were not competing with department stores or other gift shops.

SS: Oh really? Huh.

JB: Yeah, as far as the IRS was concerned, I think it had to do with that.

SS: And you know it's interesting, because now I think the policy at most museums is that the things you sell in the Shop have to relate to the collection and be reproductions.

JB: Oh yes.

SS: I sort of walked in blind, without really know about any kind of regulations or anything, but it always seemed to me that you know, why would--there would be no need to reproduce anything, because there was so much wonderful stuff being made in the world of crafts and folk art.

JB: Well, I think the subject matter--

SS: That could be sold.

JB: -- certainly had something to do with it. We were not exhibiting fine masters, renaissance master paintings.

SS: Yeah. And then I think because of possibly--I don't know this for a fact, but because of Ann's personal involvement with ceramics and because of the museum showing--which is what we talked about--showing more in terms of folk art, that the emphasis of the shop became more about contemporary crafts.

JB: Yes, that's a good point.

SS: And I think that it served a purpose, and I think it was very representative of what was going on at the time. I mean there was such a strong craft movement and there were so many people around the country who were making their livings as craftspeople.

JB: Well there was a real push I think, because of the university's involvement.

SS: That's true.

JB: Because of the GI Bill.

SS: Right, right, after the war.

JB: There was a real push for professionalism.

SS: Yeah, yeah. And there was this--I just was thinking about J.B. Blunk, remember J.B.?

JB: Oh yes, yes.

SS: He was so iconic.

JB: He died a few years ago. I think he must have been in his eighties. [J.B. Blunk was 75 years old when he died on June 15, 2002.]

SS: He must have been very old. But he was sort of iconic of one of those people who bridged that post-war, sort of hippie, kind of—[world].

JB: Yes.

SS: But what an incredible craftsman.

JB: Oh, absolutely.

SS: I mean even Sam Maloof, you know?

JB: Yes.

SS: I mean there were just so many people in California. I mean that's another thing, California was such a mecca for alternative lifestyles, and craftspeople were living that and choosing that.

JB: Yes. Even though the American Craft Council was probably the most influential--

SS: Yeah, but they had a lot of money back there.

JB: --they were in New York. But, when they chose to open themselves up to the rest of the country and have a meeting--Did you ever meet Aileen [Osborn] Webb?

SS: Well you know, I was looking at something [about her] somewhere.

JB: There was a party.

SS: Yeah. And I may have been there.

JB: I think you probably were.

SS: Her name is so--you know.

JB: She was the founder of the American Craft Council.

SS: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

JB: She organized a meeting. Now, this was before either you or I were involved, but you've probably heard of the meeting at Asilomar, which was I think in 1956.

SS: Oh, uh-huh.

JB: Well you know . . . [Asilomar, a conference site in Pacific Grove on the Monterey Peninsula] is where she chose to have the meeting, to which craft artists from all over the country came, but there were so many important California artists, including Sam Maloof, who were already exhibiting at . . . museums and so on, [who came to the meeting].

SS: Right, right.

JB: Bernard went to that.

SS: That must have been incredible.

JB: Yeah.

SS: Oh God, what an amazing thing.

JB: I found a transcript of that meeting.

SS: Oh really?

JB: And it is quite amazing.

SS: There's always been the east coast/west coast divide.

JB: Yes. But California was beginning to get respect.

SS: Oh, it was, yeah definitely.

JB: Because of the craft output.

Let's talk about some of the other staff. [They begin to look at a list of CAFAM staff.] I know you got to be friends with--

SS: Willow [Young]. Willow and I. I would say--yeah, Willow and I were--we're still friends, which is nice. I haven't seen Blaine Mallory, but I have other friends in L.A. who still know her.

JB: She actually went to work for a while, for the new Craft and Folk Art Museum.

SS: She did.

JB: When it reopened. I don't think she's involved now.

SS: And I know she married an architect, older. I think he was ten or fifteen years older.

JB: Someone who was also a long-time member. I don't remember his name.

SS: I've heard from friends that she was quite happy.

JB: Good, good.

SS: Judy Clark, who wasn't a staff member, but certainly a longstanding part of my life, really, and a role model for growing older and staying active.

JB: Absolutely.

SS: She sent me the most incredible letters and lists of museum shows all over Los Angeles.

JB: You know, when I started work in the library at the Craft and Folk Art Museum in 1976, she was there. She had evidently started when--she had, I think just retired as a social worker. I guess I had it in my head that your mother was a social worker.

SS: No, no, I--

JB: You said your mother was a nurse.

SS: No but still.

JB: But they were friends.

SS: Well, I mean, through me.

JB: Oh, I see.

SS: I mean, I met Judy when I worked at the--

JB: At the Arctic Circle.

SS: She came to the Arctic Circle, and then suddenly she was there at the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

JB: This was an incredible woman. In a way, she was typical and at the same time atypical, of people associated with the museum, because she had a tremendous amount of energy just like everyone--but she [had] like on-steroids energy. She was in her late sixties, volunteering for the library. I don't know that she ever volunteered for the Shop.

SS: No, no.

JB: She was very hard of hearing, but that didn't stop her. She communicated just fine with everybody. She would go to shows. Of course, she went to all the CAFAM openings.

SS: But everything else in town.

JB: Everything else. And her first job in the library was to develop this clipping file, which is still part of--it now encompasses something like ten filing cabinets, and at least half of that was

clipped by Judy Clark. And after she stopped working at the museum, she would still send me clippings, and I'm sure she did the same with you.

SS: Well--and she came by New Stone Age, because it was in the neighborhood.

JB: Sure.

SS: She just lived a few blocks away from the Arctic Circle when I worked there. It may have even been the same block. She would always try and come by. I had another friend, someone that I met through the Craft and Folk Art Museum, a weaver, Nancy Cook Smith.

JB: Oh yes, beautiful weavings.

SS: Nancy was profoundly deaf.

JB: That's right, I had forgotten.

SS: And I felt comfortable being able to converse with Nancy and with Judy, you know?

JB: Because they were both so comfortable in themselves.

SS: Yeah. And they had so much to say, and I felt like anyone--you know, I remember sometimes when I would be talking with Judy, people would look, because Judy--

JB: Talked a little loud.

SS: She talked a little loud. But that was their loss, for not speaking with her.

JB: Oh, absolutely. And I think everybody involved with the museum quickly got to know her and adored her.

SS: Adored her, you just had to. Well, Jorge was my friend.

JB: Oh, yes.

SS: Because I always--I spoke Spanish to him because I did take Spanish in school, and it was one of the few opportunities I had. He was a doll.

JB: He was a lovely man. A very good carpenter.

SS: Yeah, yeah. And a fantastic mariachi.

JB: Oh yes, yes. Well, he certainly played for every Mexican-related show.

But for others too.

SS: Yeah. Oh my God, Shan [Emanuelli]. I don't know [what happened to her]. I saw that she moved to New York.

JB: Oh, she moved back. She and Mike Kaiser had a baby, who is now going to Occidental College, which is where she went to school. Max King.

SS: Max King. And you know there's one person, she was there for a short period of time, but I did get to know her. Max had this assistant, Laurie Haycock.

JB: Oh yes.

SS: And Laurie had gone to college with my brother, at Berkeley, and Laurie and I became friends for a while.

JB: She designed a wonderful poster for the Masquerade Ball.

SS: She was an incredible designer. And then she ended up going to Minneapolis, not to work at the Walker, that's in Minneapolis, isn't it?

JB: Yeah.

SS: I think she was teaching, and she got married and had a baby, and then I heard via the grapevine that her husband died young of an aneurysm or something. I really haven't had any contact with her.

JB: I haven't either.

SS: But she really--she had a vision. I think she did some work for The Front Porch, the show with which Blaine was involved. [Blaine was the coordinator of a citywide series of exhibitions and events called Home Sweet Home and The Front Porch were CAFAM's contribution to that.]

JB: [Davida Rochlin] was the curator of The Front Porch.

SS: The Front Porch, yeah.

JB: Janet Marcus.

SS: I saw Janet's name and I was like oh my God, Janet Marcus, I haven't thought about her.

JB: She kind of disappeared. Now, maybe, among museum educators she's still known, but after she got married--she did come back and work [for CAFAM] for a little while.

SS: Yeah, I saw that.

JB: [Before] the museum reopened [in 1995]. But then she got very involved with just raising her family.

SS: Well, that's fine. And what about Gail Goldberg?

JB: Oh Gail, yes.

SS: She was a fixture.

JB: Yes, for quite a few years.

SS: And Barry you know--her husband, was quite--you know, he's quite a well-known person in the world of rock and roll.

JB: Yeah. Is he a promoter?

SS: He was a producer I think.

JB: Of musicians.

SS: Chris knew who he was. And I just thought of somebody else, someone else that was involved with--

JB: There was a series of secretary/administrative assistants.

SS: Mac, remember Mac?

JB: She was the first.

SS: She was a Mac. She was a little Mack truck.

JB: Did you know that "Mac" was her initials? Mac is “Mary Ann,” and then it's a . . . last name that I can't remember—[Cesar-Tighe].

SS: She was quite something, she really was.

JB: And she showed up for--did you come to Edith's memorial service?

SS: No, I didn't.

JB: You were here by that time.

SS: Yeah, I was here.

JB: She showed up for that.

SS: That's incredible. And Lorraine, and I remember going to Lorraine's house. Lorraine was really incredible.

JB: Yes. Lorraine was our accountant and then controller, but she was a wonderful craftsperson, a quilter.

SS: What an apartment, she had an incredible apartment on Melrose.

JB: And doll maker. She got into making dolls.

SS: That doesn't surprise me at all.

JB: Really fine, French [dolls], you know, that she could sell for thousands of dollars.

SS: Yeah, that makes perfect sense.

JB: It was amazing. . . . She and John got to be very good friends.

SS: Yeah, yeah. There was a woman, Marilyn Rudolph, who worked [in the Shop] on the weekends. Marilyn and I had our ups and downs. And [Kristy]. What was Kristy's last name?

JB: Oh yes.

SS: Who worked in the Shop for a while?

JB: Yes, I remember Kristy.

SS: And then she ended up marrying an old friend of mine, which was--I mean they met through me, at the Shop. And then I met Deirdre Evans-Pritchard, in the Shop.

JB: You did?

SS: Because she had moved to California and was selling scarves. I can never remember if they were Lebanese or Syrian or Jordanian, but they were these refugee women, and she was trying to make money for them, and she came in with these beautiful, beautiful scarves. We sold the scarves very well, but then I became friends with Deirdre and her ex-husband, Vikram.

JB: Vikram, yeah.

SS: And I mean, I've stayed friends with them for 35 years.

JB: I haven't seen her in such a long time, but I really admired her as a thinker and as a writer, as well as a person. She was involved with a project [of Marcie's] called The Language of Objects.**]**

SS: Yeah, I remember that.

JB: --that was a fascinating project.

SS: Well she--their daughter--graduated from St. John's, so the last time I saw her was a couple years ago, in Santa Fe.

JB: Oh, really?

SS: So I saw her at the graduation.

JB: Oh my goodness.

SS: With the twins.

JB: Oh, I would love to see them if they ever--

SS: Well, you probably will, you probably will, because they come to New Mexico.

JB: Do you remember Karen Copeland, who was the first educator?

SS: Yeah, yeah, and Marcie.

JB: I'm still in touch with her, as well as Marcie. I actually recorded four sessions with Marcie.

SS: Oh, I can imagine.

JB: She had so much to say.

SS: I can imagine.

JB: Well, she worked there for 21 years.

SS: Too long.

JB: Luckily, she got a wonderful job at the Pacific Asia Museum.

SS: Oh, well that's great, that's great.

JB: She made money for them in terms of grants.

SS: Good.

JB: And ended up being their Collection Manager really.

SS: That's fantastic.

JB: She retired just last year. Yeah, and Karen, I don't think Karen ever worked--I just don't know if she ever worked in museums again, but she was a wonderfully creative educator when she was at CAFAM.

SS: And Amanda, that was her daughter.

JB: Amanda Lynn. I remember Amanda Lynn, just because of the name, but Amanda Lynn was part of--I mean she came to staff meetings.

SS: Well--and you know--their office, we sort of shared that horrible space in the back.

JB: That's right, in the back. Yes, that space got used for everything didn't it?

SS: Yeah.

JB: Marcie and Karen were in the cage, and then you had your place where you had to receive all the objects, and then sort them out.

SS: It was horrible.

JB: And pack everything.

SS: It was horrible back there.

JB: I don't think it improved a great deal when the museum was renovated.

SS: No, no. And Sabra [Petersmann] and her book-buying. She did an incredible job being in charge of that.

JB: She was a terrific book buyer.

SS: She really was.

JB: Absolutely. Let's see. Boy, we have talked about a lot.

SS: Yeah, good.

JB: And what I would really like to do now is transition to finding out what you've been up to for the last--

SS: Eighteen.

JB: -- eighteen years, is it eighteen years?

SS: Well--more. I've been in New Mexico for 18 but then--

JB: That's right.

SS: -- there was you know--after I left CAFAM. [Susan left CAFAM in March 1984; she and Chris moved to New Mexico in 1992.]

JB: Well let's do it this way. Do you want to tell us--?

SS: I can summarize very quickly.

JB: Huh?

SS: I can summarize very quickly, or you just ask me questions.

JB: Well no, I don't have to ask you questions, but I just was thinking--we didn't say that Ann did retire.

SS: Ann retired.

JB: Or she resigned, at the end of '82.

SS: She resigned and they hired John back, and I had mixed feelings about that. I mean maybe I wasn't the right person to become the Shop Manager. I might have been too young, I don't know.

JB: You had applied for that job?

SS: No. I was never asked to. I mean, I was just--you know--one minute Ann was there and then I was being told that John was [coming back], you know? I think. I don't remember. I felt that hiring John back was a step backwards. It was not a forward-thinking choice.

JB: Well, he was not that knowledgeable about contemporary crafts.

SS: And he didn't care. I probably shouldn't say that, but I don't think he cared. That's why he very easily gave me that job, which I think I was well-suited for.

JB: Oh, certainly.

SS: You know, and that, but--

JB: But I suppose you kind of felt like you had been--and you were--prepared by Ann, to take over the shop.

SS: I thought so. I thought so, but you know, I think these things happen for a reason and at some point, during all of that, I had met, through Sylvie Fitzpatrick, Fran Rissmiller, who became my partner at New Stone Age. I think it was time for me to leave and go on to the next phase of my life.

JB: In retrospect, it seems clear.

SS: In retrospect, yeah.

JB: But so, what led up to your deciding to leave? Because you stayed on for two years.

SS: I think two years. I think part of it--I mean I don't remember exactly when I met Fran [Rissmiller] Ayers, but I think that part of it [i.e., contemporary craft] was not being promoted. **I** think it was also just realizing that maybe there was an opportunity with Fran, to do something where I wouldn't be working for somebody else. And you know, it was a gradual thing, because Fran was getting a divorce, and Sylvie thought that if she volunteered in the Shop, it might be a good experience for Fran, because Fran had been raising her daughters and she didn't really know what--she had been an accountant or a bookkeeper. So, she didn't really know what she was doing. She was looking for something and she really liked working in the shop, and she and I became friends.

JB: How did the subject of opening a gallery come up?

SS: Well, I mean, she couldn't volunteer forever, and I think I was chomping a little bit at the bit.

JB: Yeah.

SS: I knew a lot of artists. I mean I knew people all across the country, and I had a good relationship with them because Ann and I had really worked for that.

JB: Yes.

SS: And Fran had some money.

JB: I was wondering.

SS: Fran had some money. I mean we started the shop [New Stone Age] with nothing.

JB: But you did start out in that Third Street location.

SS: Well, because her uncle owned that part of the block. We would not have chosen to be as close as we were to Freehand.

JB: I was wondering, although maybe--

SS: No, we wouldn't have chosen that.

JB: --that turned out to be kind of--

SS: Well, it was fine. It wasn't fine for Carol Sauvion--and I knew Carol because we sold her pottery for years at the shop.

JB: Did Freehand…?

SS: Freehand was there before.

JB: Oh, it was, OK. That's what I couldn't remember.

SS: But Carol, I mean I knew Carol, because we sold her pots at the Craft and Folk Art Museum for years, but she couldn't--there were a lot of--there were problems between [us]. She had a really hard time when we opened up the shop. She was not, let's say very welcoming, to the neighborhood.

JB: Oh.

SS: But here we were given--it was an old barber shop. We pulled out the barbers' chairs and the floor. We did all of the work ourselves. And Fran was a trooper. She had no problems getting dirty. And so, I was still working at the museum I think. I mean there was very little time during the transition for me, because I needed a job. I think I somehow got a copy of the mailing list from the museum when I left, and I remember there was a big brouhaha about that. I didn't care. And it was a great thing for me. I think Fran and I--for many years it was a good combination. I had sold some of my stuff at the Craft and Folk Art Museum, some of my own jewelry. It was mostly found-object stuff and buttons.

JB: Well I was wondering when you started to sell.

SS: Well, you know, I was starting to put a few things into the museum shop. I even think I had some pieces that were photographed--I think I have it somewhere--that ended up in *Home Magazine*, you know in the *L.A. Times*.

JB: Yes, yes.

SS: But you know, I was so used to selling other people's work and I didn't have a lot of confidence, but gradually, I was starting to make more and because it was my--I mean, I was part owner in the shop. It was a place where I could see what kind of response I would get. And that evolved, and I enjoyed having the shop for many years, but I think that Fran and I were going sort of in different directions. Fran had not really been on her own, and she'd never--she hadn't really had a business like this or anything, and I was starting to have a little bit of retail burnout. I mean even though it was a museum shop at the Craft and Folk Art Museum, there were--you know, we had difficult customers.

JB: Oh, sure.

SS: And it sort of continued at New Stone Age. And at a certain point, after I got married [in 1985] --

JB: When did Chris come on the scene?

SS: [In 1982] he came into the shop to see a show. We had little shows.

JB: In the Craft and Folk Art Museum?

SS: No, no.

JB: Oh, at New Stone Age.

SS: He came into New Stone Age and it turned out that we were having a show for a friend of his in New York--because Chris lived in New York for four years, and his friend, [David Kirk], was also a friend of mine, and he made these incredible toys. You know, it was one of these little sort of--once again--a sort of overlapping thing.

JB: Yes, yes. Serendipity.

SS: Serendipity. So, after we got married, we started talking about buying a house and da da da da da, and we couldn't do it in L.A. We could not buy--we could have, but not really in a neighborhood we wanted to live in. And I could see that Fran and I were sort of--I was selling my jewelry and not just at New Stone Age. I had some--I met someone through New Stone Age, who--he sort of became my rep, and he was getting me some orders from places in other parts of the country, and so just as [those] things happened, we decided it was time for us to leave L.A. It was a gradual transition. At first, we thought maybe we could move to Ventura or Oxnard or San Luis Obispo, but we couldn't afford to buy a house there either.

JB: This sounds very familiar.

SS: And we had some friends here in Albuquerque, just one set of friends. We came to visit. Chris had never seen the Southwest, so we took a driving trip. This was very familiar territory for me, because I had spent so much of my childhood in the summers in the Southwest. And I remember we were staying in a part of town down by the river, by the Rio Grande, and we took a walk and it was this incredible walk through the bosque.

JB: The bosque, yes.

SS: The bosque, and I was, like--this is in the middle of the city--wow. And then we came up here, we came up to Nob Hill, sort of the university area, and there weren't really any--there was maybe one restaurant, but you could sort of see that it was maybe an area that was a little bit in transition. But we picked up a free real estate paper and it was like $40,000, not $400,000? It was, like--where are all the extra zeroes?

JB: Right, right.

SS: And so, we just you know, we made a big choice to leave L.A. and come here 18 years ago, and I've been doing my jewelry full-time and it's been really--it was a fantastic change for us. [Susan sold her share of New Stone Age to her former partner, Fran Rissmiller Ayers; it is still thriving in the same location in Los Angeles.]

JB: Well, it seems to me that when someone moves from a city like New York or L.A., or probably from Chicago, to another large city but a city very--

SS: Manageable.

JB: -- manageable.

SS: With a university.

JB: With a university, yeah that probably is key.

SS: It is.

JB: But what I was going to say is there's much less pressure, don't you think?

SS: Yeah.

JB: I mean there certainly is a community of artists here, very much so.

SS: Yes, yes.

JB: And, of course, if you include the Native American artists.

SS: Well, I was going to say--and the Hispanic [artists] and their traditions. I mean the tradition of craft in New Mexico--and you know that's something that [CAFAM] was aware of. There were, you know, Susan Peterson and the exhibitions of Hopi. I mean that show, the New Mexico Creates, or whatever it was. [New Mexico: Space and Images; opened November 26, 1979.]

JB: Oh yes, yes.

SS: That was an incredible show. I know some of those people now, they're still here making stuff.

JB: But the competition, I have a feeling it's not as intense.

SS: No.

JB: It's not as mean-spirited.

SS: Yeah. I mean, I don't feel like I have this broad community of artist friends here. I certainly am part of a community. I mean one of my closest friends is someone who was a student of Bernard Kester's, John Garrett.

JB: Oh yes.

SS: And he lives--he did the cover, you know his piece is on the cover [of the Made in L.A.: Contemporary Crafts '81 exhibition; opened January 27, 1981.]

JB: Yes, I know his work.

SS: John is from New Mexico originally, from Las Cruces, and he and I, we are very good friends and we talk a lot about Bernard and UCLA and the Craft and Folk Art Museum. We have that common history. I mean, I think that regardless of where you come from, if you make something interesting, hopefully there is appeal that goes beyond where you live.

JB: Oh, sure.

SS: I've been very fortunate to--since I've been here--I now sell through the Museum [of New Mexico] Foundation in Santa Fe.

JB: Yes, I saw your piece on the website there.

SS: They've been very supportive. I sell through a gallery here in town—Mariposa--and I sell in places around the country.

JB: Well, I counted the number of places that you are showing, somewhere. I'm sure it varies.

SS: Yeah it does.

JB: But I came up with 37 galleries in 21 states, plus England.

SS: And Japan. We sell in Japan.

JB: And Japan. You're doing very well.

SS: Yeah, I mean I've--

JB: This is a slightly depressed market for art.

SS: It is, but you know what? In New Mexico it's slightly depressed all the time, so we don't have so far to fall when we fall. I mean it's true, it's really true. That is one thing that has been to our advantage. And I mean there weren't really--there is a lot less pressure. Some of the things that you think are important living in L.A.--or maybe you're starting to question about whether they're important or not, when you live in L.A.

JB: Yes.

SS: And I'm not dumping on L.A. They're just not as important when you move to a place like New Mexico.

JB: They can stand it.

SS: Your car can be ten or eleven years old and you can live in the same house. You know it just--the priorities are different.

JB: It must be--I don't know if "easier" is the right word, but the quality of your work experience must be a great deal more positive.

SS: It is, it is, and it's different—and I'm sure there's--you know, our friends that were living here, that we visited 20 years ago, moved back to Los Angeles. But they were involved in the film industry. You know, but I have friends that have moved here and have left and gone other places--but it was the right fit for us.

JB: Well it certainly seems that way.

SS: I mean working at the Craft and Folk Art Museum is a huge part of who I am. I mean, I know how important that experience was. It certainly was a complicated relationship for everyone, I think, who worked there, but I think like any family--however you define it--you try and come away with what was really positive from that experience, because to focus on all of the negative, especially in retrospect, accomplishes nothing.

JB: Nothing, no. And so much was accomplished there.

SS: What an amazing thing.

JB: So now, I'm wondering--Chris has been a part of your work.

SS: Yes, Chris DeNoon, John Christopher DeNoon, my husband.

JB: Tell us a little bit about what his role has been, besides being your husband.

SS: Chris is a historian, and his interest from college was the WPA, particularly the posters. And 22 years ago, he published a book called *The Posters of the WPA*.

JB: I do want to see that.

SS: Which is a fantastic book. Many people in the design world look to it, because it has page after page of these fantastic posters that still have so much resonance as far as design and the content.

JB: Everyone who was anyone as an artist, worked for the WPA.

SS: Depended [on it] yes, in one way or another. And Chris has done a collection of all of the ways in which the posters have sort of been used, because [of] public domain.

JB: Oh yes, yes.

SS: I can show you. But anyway--and so when we got together, Chris was working in the audiovisual world in Los Angeles, which really no longer exists as far as slides. They did these multimedia slideshows for companies.

JB: Oh yeah, yeah.

SS: But everything is PowerPoint now, on a computer.

JB: Yes.

SS: And so when we were in L.A., Chris continued to do that kind of work, but he sort of--we transitioned out of--he transitioned out of it when we moved here, and he's really the person that does all of our graphic design work, does the catalogs, takes care of all the bookkeeping. He's our computer guy.

JB: Well, your website is beautiful.

SS: Well, you know, I think it works for us. We probably could have had one done by a designer, but I think doing it ourselves, it really, it's just--

JB: And you have more control.

SS: We have more control. And we travel together and, you know, Chris--we had different functions in the studio but I know personally, I learned a lot about business working at the Craft and Folk Art Museum, but my strength is being the maker, and Chris' strength is being the "keeping things moving forward." We could not do this in L.A. We could not run a studio. I mean our cost of living would just be out of this world.

JB: Well, I was going to say, just the expense would be tremendous.

SS: And so, you know, that's kind of what we do, and I hope that we can continue to do it for many, many years, because we both get a great deal of satisfaction [out of it].

JB: Well, I hope so too. Now your company is Fibula.

SS: Fibula Studio.

JB: What's a *fibula*?

SS: A *fibula* is a type of safety pin. It was designed by the Romans to hold clothing together. It has a spring in it, when it has that one spring--and in many of the museums in Europe, that is the term that they used for a f*ibula*--or a *fibulae* if it's plural--and you see it in a lot of archaeology books. But interestingly, I just came back from London and [I] went to the Victoria and Albert, and all of the fibulae at the British Museum--they've all been renamed as brooches.

JB: Oh.

SS: So, I think that *fibulae* is a thing of the past.

JB: That's ["brooches"] not nearly as graceful.

SS: Well, I think it has to do with trying to upgrade.

JB: Yeah, I suppose.

SS: I mean I really want to write to the Victoria and Albert, and ask them: when did this happen? and explain that it's the name of my studio. It made me feel sort of old and out of date.

JB: Oh no, I think it's--I think most educated people know.

SS: I hope they know what it is. And I have a safety--some of the first jewelry I did was I put *milagros* and charms on safety pins. And it's my hallmark. I stamp it on the back of all my pieces.

JB: Yes, it's beautiful.

SS: It's a conversation piece. But now there's an added element, because I didn't see it on one tag in the British Museum. I was like--I said, "Chris, where are all the fibulae?"

JB: Oh my. Well, it seems to me that you're doing very, very well, that you have done well. And your work, talk a little bit about your work. I know it's on your website and so on.

SS: Well, I'm untrained. I don't have a degree from a university. I have taken some classes in casting. I took an anodized aluminum class at Long Beach, when I was at the museum, and I think a forming class, but I'm pretty much self-taught. I have always, for 20 years at least, tried to incorporate found objects--re-purposed, recycled.

JB: Buttons were special.

SS: Buttons were--yeah. I was interested in how Native American groups--they used to drill their own [*heishi]* and use [them] for ornamentation--jewelry--but also sewing it onto blank [fabric].

JB: In the Northwest.

SS: In the Northwest Coast. But when the traders came and they had the mother of pearl buttons that were made on the east coast and in England, the native people just switched. It was like, well we're going to use these because we don't have to do as much work. So, they incorporated this trade item, this functional trade item, and turned it into something that had a higher purpose. I became very interested in that. And then some friends of mine, my friend Susie Einstein.

JB: Yes, oh yes, the photographer.

SS: I met her at UCLA, when I was volunteering in the museum [there]. She was the photographer at the--

JB: At the Fowler?

SS: No, the--

JB: Museum of Cultural History.

SS: Yeah. Is that the Fowler now?

JB: It's called the Fowler [Museum of Cultural History] now.

SS: Well she was the [photographer]--and then when I moved back [here?], we were roommates. Anyway, she married this guy who was living in an Amish community.

JB: Oh yes. We had the show of the--

SS: Dave Pottinger, his quilt show. I saw that.

JB: The Craft and Folk Art Museum had that show. [Quilts from the Indiana Amish; opened November 15, 1984.]

SS: Well after they got married, I went and visited, and they had bought this Amish farm and in one of the outbuildings, Dave said, "You know I think there's some old buttons out there and you can have them." They were old Victorian, hand-carved, mother-of-pearl buttons. There were like two or three cardboard boxes of them.

JB: Oh my.

SS: And I got all of them. And I had been doing some sewing and doing some soft sculpture pieces with buttons, but when I got that collection from them, that really sort of took it to another level. I think personal adornment is an important part of--can be an important part of one's life, but I try and make jewelry that--I don't know. I mean, I'm not looking for any spiritual or talismanic quality, but people do say to me that they have pieces of mine that mean something to them.

JB: Oh, sure.

SS: And whatever that is, that means a lot to me, that it goes beyond just being a thing. And I think that's my interest in anthropology. It's not jewelry just for jewelry's sake. I hope that it has some other quality or purpose beyond a fashion magazine.

JB: Well, you are an artist, and so I think that's inevitable. But yes, I understand where, as an anthropologist, you would also be very aware of community values, traditions, as well as individual expression, aesthetics.

SS: And living in New Mexico, you're so--

JB: It's impossible to not--

SS: I mean the ceremony that accompanies so many things, and still--the culture that--the native peoples in the Southwest, they carry on thousands and thousands of years' worth of culture. And you know, the Hispanic community has been here for a very long time too, and I try and be aware of that and honor that in my own way. I don't want to make fake Native American jewelry.

JB: No, thank God.

SS: There's enough of that around. But you know, I certainly am happy to be in a place where there is that longevity.

JB: Yeah. I think longevity is a very important part of being in New Mexico. There's one more thing--certainly related to--but different from what we've been talking about, that you've been very involved with--and that's the organization CERF.

SS: Oh yeah, yeah.

JB: The Craft Emergency Relief Fund. Tell us about that and how you got involved and how it started, because you were kind of there at the beginning.

SS: No, no, no. Carol Sedestrom was one of the original founders of CERF, with Josh Simpson, who is a glass artist. Interesting how one's life--

JB: Intersects.

SS: One of the first families that they helped, who were in a terrible train accident in Mexico, in Copper Canyon, was a family from Santa Fe. The father and son, I believe were killed, and the mother and daughter survived. The daughter ended up being in a relationship with one of the people that worked in our studio a number of years ago, because I said something about being on the board of CERF, and Ann said, "I think I know that organization. I think my girlfriend's family"--and you know. And then I talked to her girlfriend and it was just like--you have got to be kidding--because I hadn't been on the board very long when that happened, and I just thought that was a pretty amazing coincidence.

But it is an organization that--originally it was just to help artists who have some kind of emergency, whatever it may be. I mean something as horrible as an accident and death, but more and more there are artists who don't have health insurance and who are aging and have serious medical problems. Katrina certainly was something that CERF was very involved in, helping those artists. Through the Southwest School of Art and Craft--the director recommended me as a [CERF] board member.

JB: Where is that?

SS: In San Antonio. And the organization has really grown to include artists without health insurance. I mean health insurance is a big issue for a lot of artists.

JB: Sure.

SS: Unfortunately, I think some of the--the consistency of the board membership has changed quite a bit because of the need for people who can raise money. There are, I think less--are not as many artists--on the board.

JB: Artists, yeah. That happens.

SS: Which happens.

JB: Yeah, definitely.

SS: But it's a wonderful organization.

JB: Are they able to offer group health insurance as an organization?

SS: Not yet, no, not yet. Maybe with some of the changes, they will be able to. It's complicated because people don't live in the same state.

JB: Sure.

SS: You know?

JB: The laws would be different.

SS: Yeah, the laws would be different. But you know, it is an organization that I really believe in and have stayed involved with as a member, and contribute to when there are different fundraising things, and if I can contribute to that, I try to.

JB: Well it seems to be a very good organization.

SS: It is, it is.

JB: I think Carol Sauvion is involved.

SS: Yeah, she's on the board right now, yeah. And you know, there's many people from many different aspects of the world of craft, and that whole definition has changed over the years too. CERF is trying to figure out how to be all encompassing, and how do you define craft. So it's an ever-evolving organization, but to provide aid for artists in need is certainly its primary goal and I think always will be.

JB: And very worthwhile. Well, I'm wondering if you have any final thoughts about your time at CAFAM. You've said this really already, in a couple of different ways, but I'm just wondering if you could kind of encapsulate what was the most rewarding thing about your experiences at CAFAM.

SS: I think one thing was knowing Ann Robbins. Having her be a part of my life and my being a part of her life. You know, we don't always have those opportunities to know--to be mentored, and I really was by her. I feel very fortunate to have had those--I mean she continued to be my friend after I left the museum, but what I learned working under her was invaluable. And I think to have been--I always sort of felt like the way to describe sort of what I did at the museum and what Ann and I did together: you know, we were in this craft boat. This big boat that encompassed Edith Wyle and the people on the board and the curators and the makers and Ann and me, in different ways. But because Ann and I were--I think partly because we did buy it—[the art]. It wasn't on consignment--most of the work in the shop. To make that commitment, to purchase someone's work, and then to turn around and sell it, and then be able to call them and say, "You know, I need five more or two more," it

was so satisfying, because you felt as if--or I felt as if--I was part of what was allowing these people--who I then became when I switched roles, but, you know, people who had made certain choices, . . . [to live] the kind of life that they wanted to live.

JB: Yeah.

SS: And to be able to support them in that choice was a very satisfying experience. I don't think working in a department store, selling you know, whatever, is--there's no comparison. It was retail, but it was very specialized. We were dealing with--we knew the people that made the work.

JB: Yes.

SS: We appreciated the quality of the work, and you hoped that whoever was buying it appreciated it as well. You know, that's wonderful, to be part of all of that. I feel good, that that's what I did and I was an apprentice, and then at a certain point it was kind of like OK, well maybe it's time.

JB: You flew the nest.

SS: I flew the nest. I jumped over the table, you know. Instead of being on an aisle, looking at an artist's work--I'm the one in the booth. But I think that I was very lucky to have the experience from both sides.

JB: Yes.

SS: And there are artists who have gone on to open shops, and they had the experience of being on the maker's side, and I think that's been valuable for them. I mean Carol Sauvion is an example of that. Whatever the transition is that you make, I think having that experience from both aspects, is a more complete sort of experience. I couldn't have had that without working at CAFAM.

JB: And Ann Robbins.

SS: And Ann Robbins, and I mean many of the other people I met, but you know, I worked with Ann every day and we traveled together. We spent a lot of time together, and it was a very, very rewarding experience.

JB: Well, I am so glad that you've been willing to devote now, almost a whole day to--

SS: It's only one day.

JB: -- telling us about all of this.

SS: Well, I'm really pleased that you wanted to talk to me.

JB: Well, you were a very important part of my experience at the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

SS: Well, likewise.

JB: I always remembered--I suppose the red hair had something to do with it--but I remember you [because of], you know, your enthusiasm for the work that you were selling.

SS: It wasn't hard.

JB: And I think it helped to infect me about it too.

SS: Oh, I'm really glad. Well, and you were the librarian, I mean that's such--

JB: Which was a little bit odd, but it seemed to be something that people appreciated.

SS: Oh my God.

JB: At least after the fact. LACMA was very glad to get that collection.

SS: Yeah, I bet, I bet.

JB: And putting together the papers of the Craft and Folk Art Museum, and being able to include the reminiscences of people like yourself has really enhanced what I guess is a history of the Craft and Folk Art Museum. I don't really think of myself as a historian, but at least I'm putting together the pieces of what somebody else will write someday . . . . Because this is for UCLA and they are very glad to have [it]. You know, it was so wonderful-- when I first approached Teresa Barnett, who is the head of the oral history program there. (I took a class that she was offering for free, on oral history, because I was only just beginning to think that maybe nobody else was going to do this, so maybe I had to do it.) And she knew immediately. You know how sometimes when you mention the Craft and Folk Art Museum, you have to then explain what that was?

SS: Oh, absolutely, yeah.

JB: But she knew [what it was] immediately and she said, "Oh, I certainly hope that you're going to deposit all of it with us."

SS: That's fantastic.

JB: And it just you know, it kind of really motivated me from then on. But that to me--that just shows the power of the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

SS: Oh yeah, yeah. I think among a certain group of people, it means a great deal.

JB: Absolutely. Well, thank you very, very much.

SS: Well, thank you Joan.

[End of Session 2: 1:31:49]