

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF STELLA KRIEGER
by Joan M. Benedetti

October 19, 2009



Stella Krieger at Home
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BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Stella Nadelman Krieger was born March 5, 1938 in Los Angeles. She had an older brother, Seymour Nadelman. The family lived in East L.A. until 1953, when they moved to the Fairfax neighborhood. Stella went to UC Berkeley for her first two years of college. She came back to L.A. to finish her B.A. in Sociology at UCLA and graduated in 1960.

When Stella met Fred Krieger, he was a medical student. He went into family practice in San Pedro. Stella always either worked or went to school. After renting in San Pedro, they renovated an old house in Rolling Hills, where they raised four children and lived until 1989, when they moved to West L.A.

Fred and Stella were collectors of paintings, glass, old Mexican silver jewelry, beaded bags, and rugs. Fred (along with Stella and Gloria Gonick) started the Textile Museum Associates of Southern California. They also joined the Bead Society and the Ethnic Arts Council.

About 1970, Stella began to work as a volunteer at the Natural History Museum shop. She became a buyer of ethnic clothing for the shop. She also started a small independent business selling ethnic clothing and rugs. John Browse, Assistant Director at the Egg and the Eye gallery and then Shop Manager at the CAFAM Shop, had a wholesale import business on the side and Stella bought from him for the Natural History Museum. In 1994, Gloria Gonick called to see if she would be interested in being the manager for the new CAFAM shop being constructed in the renovated original CAFAM building.

When first hired, Stella had to quickly make decisions about the design of the shop. She hired Rosie Getz, the Wyles' granddaughter, as her assistant, and they became good friends. Stella talks about the difficulties of running a small museum shop that is supposed to help support the museum. She gradually became aware that the museum was in trouble financially. At the end of 1997, CAFAM closed and was not expected to re-open. Stella had to deal with the disposal of the files and the furniture—and the sale at Butterfield's Auction House of the permanent collection. She worked closing things up through the end of February 1998.

CAFAM's former Executive Director, Patrick Ela, began talking with Al Nodal, General Manager of L.A. Cultural Affairs, about the city taking over the museum. The city became partners with CAFAM, which reopened in February 1999 with Stella again the shop manager. Joan de Bruin, head of the L.A. Folk Art Program, became the director, but resigned for health reasons in April 2001. Patrick Ela was appointed Interim Director. Stella went on the board as the staff liaison. Despite administrative upheavals, some excellent exhibitions were mounted during this time. Fred curated several shows.

After resigning from CAFAM in August 2005, Stella re-started her part-time business. In 2007, she was approached by the Fowler Museum of Cultural History at UCLA to run their museum shop. She died on November 21, 2013.

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: Stella and Fred Krieger's home in Los Angeles.

Time of day, length of session, and total number of hours recorded: Two sessions were recorded on the same day, October 19, 2009. The first session took place in the morning and was one hour, twenty-five minutes, and nine seconds. The second session took place after lunch and was one hour, forty-five minutes, and two seconds, for a total of three hours, ten minutes, and 11 seconds.

Persons present during the interview: Benedetti and Stella Krieger. Fred Krieger, Stella's husband, was available in the apartment, but he spent most of the time in his office. He left to get a "take-out" lunch and joined Stella and Joan for lunch at their kitchen table. They had just moved into a new apartment and several workmen came and went during the interview, so there were several interruptions.

Conduct and Content of Interview: To prepare for the Krieger interview, Benedetti consulted some of the CAFAM Records files, now in Special Collections, UCLA Young Research Library, and also an extensive CAFAM historical timeline she had compiled as she was processing those records. Krieger passed away November 21, 2013, so in 2015, when Benedetti was finishing the editing of the transcript, she retrieved several online obituaries. Krieger's memory during the 2009 interview was quite sharp and the interview moved along quickly with most of the questions answered very fully.

Editing: Krieger 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.

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Session 1 (morning): Birth in Los Angeles March 5, 1938—Parents—Early years in East L.A. **5:00** Problems fitting in with Mexicans and WASPs--Move to Fairfax neighborhood--First two years to UC Berkeley **10:00** Meeting Fred, who is in medical school--Living at home in L.A.--BA in Sociology in February 1960--Fred sets up with partner in family practice in San Pedro. **15:00**

Stella always works or goes to school even after kids come--San Pedro/Miraleste/Rolling Hills, where they live until 1989--Interests in collecting groups develop--Fred is "real" collector and artist. **20:00** Bought paintings, oriental rugs, textiles, beaded bags with rug designs--Textile Museum Advisory Council--Fred starts The Textile Museum Associates of Southern California; joined Ethnic Arts Council and The Bead Society. **25:00**

Not sure when met Edith Wyle--Rodessa Moore, Egg and The Eye chef, catered some of their parties'--1970 started volunteering at L.A. Natural History Museum shop--Manager, Judith Weinstein--Judy had falling-out with Natural History Museum--Stella starts working as travel agent in San Pedro--Fred and Stella aware of Egg and Eye gallery changing into museum. **35:00** Judy Weinstein and Edith Wyle similar--Members of CAFAM off and on; didn't belong to Associates.**40:00** Got to know John Browse--He was wholesale vendor of imports from Africa; Stella bought from him for Natural History Museum--In 1989 Kriegers moved to West L.A.--Stella works for another travel agency part-time.

In 1994 Gloria Gonick calls to ask if she would consider working for renovated CAFAM. **45:00** They knew Patrick Ela, belonged to same collecting organizations--Stella was aware CAFAM in May Company. **50:00** May Company--Library in May Company; riots in 1992. **55:00** Leaving the May Company--Problems with renovation; architects Hodgetts + Fung; not owning 5800 Wilshire building. **1:00:00** Stella knows Frank tried to buy building--Stella invited to Regency Club to talk to Wyles and few others about being new Shop Manager—Stella's impression of Wyles. **1:05:00** Patrick Ela; Wyle children and grandchildren. Bernard Kester's influence on Edith. **1:10:00**

CAFAM shop unique: no t-shirts, everything handmade--Museum Store Association; books on organizing museum shops--Influencing design of shop; what she couldn't change. **1:15:00** Problems with Hodgetts + Fung--designed shop furniture; footprint of building; no loading dock; no storage space--Leftover merchandise from previous store; Gerri Freer helps. Wyles and Patrick trusted her; Joaquin Torrico did not at first. **1:20:00** Getting "point-of-sale" computer system; Frank Wyle's help to buy; LACMA point-of-sale person helps her--Problems with merchandise; couldn't unpack so couldn't tag ahead of time--Hiring Rosie Getz, Wyle's granddaughter, as her assistant.

End Session 1--01:25:09

Session 2 (afternoon): Grand re-opening ("Homecoming") May 1995. **5:00** Very successful shop opening--Restaurant on mezzanine? **10:00** Restaurant's importance to original concept--Rosie's artistry--Mezzanine shop show space. **15:00** Bud Knapp, Lloyd Cotsen promise money for museum--Problems of small museum shops expected to make money for museum.

April 1996: Patrick Ela announces resignation (after 21 years). **20:00** Bud Knapp wants to close museum; goes off board--Nancy Fister Acting Director--Staff layoffs begin; shop not affected--Final effort to buy 5800 Wilshire fails. **25:00** \$17,000 monthly rental impossible--Frank Wyle board chair again--Paul Kusserow hired as director--Kusserow hires Martha Drexler Lynn. **30:00** LACMA merger talk; Wyles renege on verbal agreement—Kusserow and Lynn resign. **35:00** Lorraine Trippett resigns (after 20 years); Sheri Rhodius appointed CFO--Kusserow attempt to revive restaurant; Bombay Café; CAFAM about to close. **40:00** Sonny & Gloria Kamm teapot collection show curated by Lynn opens September 1997--Museum closes end of year; shop remains open to end of January—Stella works through end February--Disposal of files and furniture--Patrick works on a way to re-open museum--Coping with many things Martha and Paul throwing out. **45:00**

CAFAM library to LACMA; staff files (the Egg and The Eye and CAFAM records) to UCLA--Auction of permanent collection at Butterfield's; Maloof rocking chair and Beatrice Wood sculpture did well. **50:00** Auction very sad; Patrick works with Al Nodal--Edith very ill--Edith as person--Edith regrets not knowing more about her Jewish heritage. **55:00** Stella always interested in her own Jewish culture--Edith let Frank run museum's finances; never involved herself and wished she could turn it all over to Patrick--Edith dies October 1999. **1:00:00** The following year plaque, "Edith Wyle Square," raised at Stanley and Wilshire.

Board chairmanship to Ela for one year; Patrick also serves as Interim Director April 2001 to December 2002--Joan de Bruin resigns April 2002; Frank Wyle leads national search for new director. **1:05:00** Joan Marshall accepts, then turns it down--Runner-up Peter Tokovsky starts January 2003--Tokovsky resigns at end of 2003. **1:10:00** Tokovsky's resignation causes serious split on board. **1:15:00**

Ela recommends James Goodwin as director; Goodwin's wife, Sushila, helps; atmosphere more positive; problems remain; he resigns after one year in January 2005. **1:20:00** Maryna Hrushetka recommended as director; Frank Wyle likes her; she is hired March 2005--She is young and energetic--She lays everyone off, hires new people--Stella resigns August 2005. **1:25:00**

Mexican silver show not wanted by Tokovsky, but is very popular; Stella sells a lot of related shop merchandise; Carol Fulton designs installation. **1:30:00**

Stella starts independent business again; 18 months later Fowler director calls to ask if she would like to run the Fowler Museum shop. **1:35:00** She works part-time, but enough hours to be paid benefits; very happy to be working there. **1:40:00** During 1992 tour of new Fowler building (before CAFAM closed temporarily), Edith remarks to Stella, "Why didn't this happen to us?"

End Session 2--01:45:02

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF STELLA KRIEGER

Session 1 (1:25:09), Monday, October 19, 2009. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti

JB: Today is Monday, October 19th, 2009, and I'm in Los Angeles, in the home of Stella Krieger, who was the CAFAM [Craft and Folk Art Museum] Shop Manager for--I think it was--[more than eleven] years. We're going to talk about her experiences, and memories of CAFAM, and also a bit of her personal history. And my name is Joan Benedetti. So, Stella, let's start at the beginning. Can you tell us where and when you were born?

SK: I was born in Los Angeles, March 5th, 1938.

JB: And were you born in this--I know you lived in the Fairfax area for a long time.

SK: I actually was born at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, which at the time was on Fountain in Hollywood. But I lived in . . . City Terrace, which was in East Los Angeles, until I was 15 years old. And it--at the start of high school I ended up going to Fairfax High School.

JB: Was that the Cedars that became Cedar-Sinai?

SK: Yeah.

JB: Yeah? Wow. So you're a native.

SK: I am.

JB: That's a rare commodity here. (laughs)

SK: Yes.

JB: Well, so what was it like growing up in Los Angeles at that time?

SK: Well, it was a very kind of--sort of--sleepy city. I mean, it was always geographically very large, but really the population was slim, in comparison to the way it is now. And my parents both came from the Ukraine. Ended up in New York and, on their honeymoon, they hitchhiked across the country, and ended up in Los Angeles.

JB: Oh, my God!

SK: Right. And they lived here for two years, went back to New York, [and] my brother was born [in 1928] in New York. And they decided it was better to be poor in Los Angeles than in New York. So they actually took a ship from New York to New Orleans, and then a train from New Orleans to Los Angeles. And my mother was a dressmaker; my father was a machine embroiderer. And they lived--in the wintertime they lived in Boyle Heights, in a rented place. And in the summertime they would move--I don't think they had any furniture, or anything. They would move to the beach in Ocean Park, or Venice. . . . and my brother is ten years older than I am. So that all happened prior to my being born. And when I was--my mother conceived me--I wasn't an accident, even though she was in her early forties. But I wasn't an accident. My brother cried because he was an only child, so, anyway. . . .

JB: He liked it that way?

- SK: No. He wanted a sibling, so that's what happened. And they built a house in City Terrace. [City Terrace is an unincorporated community in Los Angeles County, considered part of the East Los Angeles region.] They bought--I think the whole thing cost them like \$4,000 or \$5,000 for the lot. And then they built a house, very small, 1,200 square feet. Two tiny bedrooms. (laughs) I don't know what they were thinking, because--
- JB: Houses were small at that time.
- SK: They were. One bathroom. And my father was in the candy and tobacco business, and he had a truck. So the garage they built was like a two story garage, so the truck could fit inside the garage. So that's where I lived until I was 15. And at the time that I was growing up, City Terrace was predominantly a Jewish neighborhood.
- JB: Now is this within Boyle Heights, or . . .
- SK: It's between--you know what it's near? It's near Cal State East L.A., which is in Monterey Park. But that--Monterey Park is the adjacent neighborhood. And that--that Cal State University, I think it wasn't built when we moved from there. But at about the age of 12 or 13 I started telling my parents there were no Jewish boys for me to go out with. And we were being bused --
- JB: And you knew about the Fairfax area, I guess.
- SK: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We were--at the time I was in junior high school, we were actually being bused--and this, you know, was **[05:00]** a long time ago [early fifties] --to Wilson Junior High and High School in El Sereno, which was 90 percent WASP, white Anglo-Saxons. And City Terrace had become sort of half-Mexican, and half Jewish. And the--the WASP population didn't want to have anything to do with either the Jewish kids or the Mexican kids, so it kind of got difficult. And my parents--my father didn't want to move--but my mother understood, so we went and looked for houses in the Fairfax area, and we moved.
- JB: And you were already in high school when that happened?
- SK: I was just starting high school.
- JB: Just starting. Now I've heard you say, some time ago, that you met Fred Krieger in high school. Is that right? . . .
- SK: No. I didn't meet him until I was actually in my last--starting my last year of college.
- JB: Oh, OK. . . . Now, Stella, I've always known you--as a person--and Fred also, your husband, as collectors. And I'm just wondering, in light of that, and the places that you've worked since then, if--when you were growing up--you had collections, or if your parents had collections, of any kind.
- SK: My parents were definitely not collectors. They were the most unmaterialistic people you've ever met. So. But I've always been interested in beautiful things, and art. So, I--my parents were both involved. My father was a [machine] embroiderer, and he could draw, but they really were not collectors at all But my mother was a dressmaker. She made me all my clothes, and I used to draw the clothes, and pick the fabrics, and tell her, or we would copy something. And I always--I was always interested in art too.

- JB: And I can see where your interest in textiles started too.
- SK: Right. Right, that's true. But my parents were not at all collectors. Fred's mother was kind of a collector, though, and Fred definitely had that collector's instinct. So he actually kind of brought it to me. So that's--but I had never collected anything before, except for clothes. (laughs)
- JB: So . . . you said you always were interested in art. In--let's say in high school--did you major in art, or take courses in anything related to that?
- SK: You know, I didn't. I don't know why I didn't, but I didn't. I mean, I was, you know, I was in an academic--
- JB: Well, that was my next question. You were in a college preparatory course.
- SK: Oh, yeah, definitely. And I ended up going to Berkeley--UC Berkeley--and I lived in a dorm. Actually, it was the second dorm I had lived in. And the dorm had a Diego Rivera mural in it.
- JB: Oh, my gosh.
- SK: And it's interesting, because a lot of people didn't know who Diego Rivera was at the time, but I did. I mean, I was like really impressed. So.
- JB: And so when you were in college, what kind of courses did you take?
- SK: I was a sociology major. And, again, I mean, I always, you know, was always interested in going to museums, and I was interested in art. And I did draw, but I really didn't take any art classes to speak of.
- JB: Well, let's see. So, you did meet Fred, then, in your last year of--I'm going to pause for a second. **[Pause]** OK, we're back. So you had mentioned that you met Fred in your last year of college. So what was he like then? How did you meet? (laughs)
- SK: OK. Well, he was just starting his last year--no. That's not true. He was finishing his last year of medical school. And I was fixed up with a friend of his, and we doubled. And somehow or other--
- JB: So it was a blind date.
- SK: Well, I wasn't out with him, I was out with --
- JB: Oh! **[10:00]** The other guy.
- SK: Right. Well, he's still our friend. And Fred and I just had a lot more in common than I did with my date, or he did with his date. And I was about to, you know, it was the olden days. The women didn't normally call the men. But so I was going to tell the person who fixed me up with his friend to have him call, but he called. I mean, he called because it was obvious that we were connected. So. So that was--
- JB: That was the beginning.
- SK: That was the beginning, yes.
- JB: So how long before you were married?
- SK: About a year, actually. About a year.
- JB: And where was he from?

- SK: His parents actually--by this time, we lived in the Fairfax area. And his family's house was two blocks away from my family's house. So.
- JB: But you didn't meet before you were out there [at U.C. Berkeley]?
- SK: No. Well, he's six years older than I am. So, you know, we wouldn't--our paths wouldn't have crossed in school.
- JB: Yeah. Well, is there anything else you'd like to say about college, and Berkeley? When you were there.
- SK: Yeah. Actually, I was sent there, almost, by my brother, who felt like I was too--too closely connected to my mother's apron strings. So, actually, it was really a good thing. And I was there for two years, and I had just--I dated a lot. I always dated a lot, so--I liked boys. So at Berkeley I had just broken up with this guy, and my parents said, "We miss you. Please come back." So I transferred [to UCLA] for my junior year. And the thing is that I lived at home after that, because my house was close to UCLA. And at that time there wasn't much dorm space, and I was very anti-sorority, so I never joined a sorority. And I was--you know--by the time I came to UCLA I was really too--too old already to even think about it. But my high school had clubs, and the high school clubs were like mini-sororities, where they sat there and decided who they'd let in, and who they wouldn't. And I thought that was a terrible thing to do. I mean, even in high school I felt that was an extremely undemocratic thing to do, and have a snotty kid, you know, pass judgment.
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: So I was never interested in a sorority. Which, you know, in the long run, maybe that was a bad choice, because I see some people have friends from
- JB: I'm sure you had lots of friends, both in Berkeley, and at UCLA.
- SK: Yeah, I did. I did. And I still have my friends from high school. Even from my high school club I have my--we're still really--my closest friend is still from that time. So.
- JB: So you came back to L.A., and I suppose graduated from UCLA.
- SK: I did. I graduated from UCLA.
- JB: But before you graduated, you met Fred.
- SK: Right. He was definitely at my graduation.
- JB: Was he practicing?
- SK: Oh, no.
- JB: Or was he doing an internship, or what was he doing?
- SK: Well, he started his internship the whole year that we were dating, before we got married. I actually graduated UCLA in February, because I was a mid-- at the time, there were mid-term classes, even in high school. So I was always on that sort of [fast track academically]. . . . So, I finished college in February, and his internship ended in June. I mean, we got married--actually, he was still in his internship when we actually got married.

JB: So, you had a good idea of what it was going to be like to be married to a doctor before you got married, I guess. (laughs)

SK: Well, sort of.

JB: What was it like to be married to a doctor?

SK: Well, it was good. We--Fred practiced in San Pedro, and he--

JB: Now did he have a . . . specialization?

SK: Well, he became a family practitioner, but his was a general practice. And he went into practice with a partner. And they started from scratch, and it was, you know, it was very difficult. San Pedro is a very kind of cliquey ethnic area, where there are a lot of Italians, a lot of Yugoslavian people. And they kind of --

JB: People associated with the [15:00] port [of San Pedro], I guess, or with the --

SK: Right.

JB: -- boating [and fishing business].

SK: So, it was kind of a struggle to start a new practice, but it was also interesting. And I went to work for the Department of Employment. Which is now the --

JB: With your newly minted sociology degree?

SK: Yeah, that's right. So. Well, actually, I was on a waiting list to get that job. In the meantime, I went to work for the Broadway department store, in their personnel department. And . . . I got \$1.15 an hour. Which really --

JB: At that time was . . . pretty good.

SK: Well, it wasn't so good. But, anyway, as soon as I got my appointment, I went to work for the Department of Employment. And I think it's DPSS [Department of Public Social Services] now. I can't remember what it's called. But, anyway, I worked there until my oldest son was born. And we were married like three years before he was born. And I was going to go back to work part-time, but they changed their rules, and they didn't--they weren't using part-time people. But I always either worked, or went to school. I was always very busy, even after I started having kids.

JB: Fred was working in San Pedro, but you didn't move down--

SK: Oh, yes, we did.

JB: Oh, you did.

SK: Yeah, we did. Well, we actually rented--our first place, we rented a house with a gorgeous view of the harbor. And our landlord and his wife lived next door, and they were the most fabulous people. And they just took us under their wing, and here we were--

JB: Oh, you were lucky.

SK: Yeah, we were these green newlyweds . . . [with] a wonderful house. They wanted \$175 a month rent, and we told them we couldn't afford it. So we paid \$150 a month rent for this fabulous Cape Cod three-story house. And we stayed there until we decided we could afford a house. And then

- we ended up buying a lot, and building a house in the Miraleste area, which, was in [Rancho Palos Verdes in] the hills above San Pedro. . . .
- JB: So you were there quite a long time.
- SK: Oh, yes. Yeah. We moved there in 1960, and we moved to West L.A. in 1989.
- JB: Oh, boy. I guess I didn't realize that you were not in the L.A.--well, I mean, I guess that's considered [the] L.A. area, but--
- SK: Well, it was--
- JB: But you were in San Pedro until 1989
- SK: Well, we were . . . in Rolling Hills. That was--we built the first house in the Miraleste [development], and then we bought an old house in Rolling Hills, [which was nearby] and gutted it and remodeled it. And we lived there until we moved [in 1989].
- JB: So--I want to segue now into the other interests that you developed. And I'm just wondering, I know you told me that you were aware of The Egg and The Eye, which started in 1965--The Egg and The Eye gallery. Had you or Fred involved yourself by that time with any other collecting groups, or--I'm thinking of, besides CAFAM, the Ethnic Arts Council, the Textile Society. . . And some of those others.
- SK: OK. So, we --
- JB: Tell us how your interest in those areas developed.
- SK: Well, OK, so we started--[phone rings, pause]
- JB: Folk art, textiles
- SK: Well, OK. So, I can't exactly remember when we started collecting specific things, but we started looking at, well--even on our honeymoon--we were in the Caribbean, and we started looking at different [kinds of] art. In fact, we still have paintings we bought on our honeymoon 49 years ago. But we bought glass, I mean, we were very interested in art. And Fred also is very interested. He's a really--he's a good artist too. He's actually a better artist than I am. But we started buying **[20:00]** different things. And in our first house we started collecting paintings, and we kind of associated ourselves with a man who sold different artists' work, and we bought a lot of paintings.
- JB: Were these local artists?
- SK: They weren't local artists. They were--one painting is behind you. It's a French artist.
- JB: Oh, that's beautiful.
- SK: And, you know, I can't exactly remember, because we stopped doing that. But we did collect quite a bit. Oh, and then we made friends with . . . a Spanish artist, but he moved to San Francisco, and we collected his things. And we collected his work, and so did some of our friends. He actually was being represented by a gallery on La Cienega [Blvd., a center for galleries at that time], but we looked him up, and we became very good friends with him too. So. And actually now our children have his art in their houses as well.
- JB: Pieces that you had collected.

- SK: Yes. Yes. And then . . . when we moved to Rolling Hills, we bought this very beat-up old house, and remodeled it. And somehow or other, we got very interested in both oriental rugs and textiles.
- JB: Now, when was that, approximately?
- SK: Approximately 1971. And, in the meantime, we started going to the flea markets, way before anybody else went to the flea markets. Our friends thought we were nuts. And we would buy all kinds of . . . things there. Furniture, a lot of textiles, rugs. And also, we noticed that beaded bags from the 19th and early 20th century had rug designs on them. So, we started collecting those beaded bags. And at the time they were like \$10 or \$15 or \$20. So, we started collecting different things, and we went back east, and we got involved with The Textile Museum, which we were involved with for, you know, many, many years.
- JB: Yes. That just happened from a visit to Washington?
- SK: It did, yeah. But we were, of course, interested in rugs, and we both ended up being on the Advisory Council to the museum.
- JB: To The Textile Museum.
- SK: To The Textile Museum. And we were very good friends with Ursula McCracken, who was the director there for--
- JB: A long time.
- SK: --for 20 years, yeah. So we just kind of--and then Fred (Fred more than me) started The Textile Museum Associates of Southern California. . . .
- JB: He was one of the founders of that group?
- SK: Yes, we both were. Yes. Along with--Gloria Gonick was one of the original founders. And there were several people who were very involved, and it's turned into being a, you know, pretty active organization. . . . We also joined the Bead Society. Now all these organizations kind of had their meetings in Los Angeles. So we lived in Rolling Hills. It was a long way to go to everything. The Bead Society--we were active in the Bead Society. We also joined the Ethnic Arts Council, which mainly supported African art and Pre-Columbian art, which were not the areas that we were predominantly interested in. But we were interested in learning anyway, so we enjoyed their lectures.
- JB: And there were probably interesting people in that group--
- SK: Right.
- JB: --that had overlapping interests with some of the other [groups].
- SK: Right. Although I will say, in general, the Ethnic Arts Council people weren't so friendly. And it was funny, because I had--we had a good friend who took us to that meeting, and our friend lived near us in Rolling Hills. And she told us they were not friendly people, and we thought it was her, but it really wasn't her. (laughs)
- JB: Was Jim Pieper involved at that time?

SK: Well, I don't know if [he was] at the beginning, but--

JB: Later.

SK: Later. And he was the president of the [Ethnic Arts Council].

JB: Yeah, I knew he was very active with that group.

SK: Right. I was secretary when he was president.

JB: So, in the meantime, The Egg and The Eye gallery opened in 1965. . . . They opened in November of that year, and the previous **[25:00]** summer, of '65, LACMA [had] opened on Wilshire. I mean, the new building. Of course, they had existed as a museum down in Exposition Park. So--you were in San Pedro, but you were beginning to get to know people involved in these [L.A. groups]. Do you remember when you first went to The Egg and The Eye [gallery], or how you--did you meet the Wyles first?

SK: I can't remember when I met the Wyles, but I definitely knew--particularly--Edith from an early time.

JB: Maybe she was in one of these other organizations that you --

SK: She might have been in one of the organizations. And, of course, she was, you know, a famous person for having started The Egg and The Eye. And we did go there, and we made friends with Rodessa, who was the chef at [the gallery's restaurant].

JB: Rodessa Moore, yes.

SK: Right. And she catered a few things for us.

JB: I guess she started out as a caterer. That's --

SK: Yes.

JB: -- what I was told.

SK: But I remember her catering things for us in our first rented house. So that would have been between '60 and '63.

JB: Well, I don't remember now who told me, but [maybe] somebody named Judd Marmor? Do you remember? He was involved with [the start of] The Egg and The Eye. And his wife, apparently, recommended Rodessa when they were looking for a--somebody to run the restaurant. And I guess Edith had had the idea, by that time, before they opened, that focusing on omelettes would be a good idea. And Rodessa did--she was well known for her omelette parties, or something like that.

SK: Right. So that's what she did; she catered. She catered something for us.

JB: And she catered for you in your house.

SK: Right. Right.

JB: Tell about her a little bit. Talk about her.

SK: I can't remember too much. (laughs) I'm sorry.

JB: (laughs) OK.

SK: I remember the contact. I can't even remember exactly what she catered.

- JB: OK. Well, it was a long time ago.
- SK: We'll have to ask Fred. He might remember. So. But, you know . . . I'm thinking about, you know, my relationship to The Egg and The Eye. And I know we went there. I was--I mean--I think my kids were small, and we were geographically challenged, since we lived so far away. So, I really wasn't involved with The Egg and The Eye, or the Craft and Folk Art Museum in those early years.
- JB: On a regular basis.
- SK: Right. I mean, we did go to things, you know, but--and we were really interested. I mean, we loved what they were doing, because we loved both the crafts and folk art. But it wasn't like --
- JB: It wasn't that easy to --
- SK: It wasn't that easy. Now--about 1970, I became a volunteer at the store at The Natural History Museum.
- JB: Oh, yes. That was a wonderful store. It [still] is.
- SK: It was a wonderful store. And we originally went there because they had--they were selling a collection of Chinese robes that they had gotten from Neiman-Marcus. And so we were interested in those robes. So, you know, you can kind of figure how things went. And I went in there, and we met the then-manager, Judith Weinstein. Do you know Judy?
- JB: I may have met her. I've heard people talk about her.
- SK: OK. She was sort of like a friendly--she was very friendly with Edith, but it was sort of [like] they were . . . in--I don't want to say conflict.
- JB: Well, they were competing, in a way.
- SK: They were competing, yes. They were sort of competing for a certain kind of attention. Judy had started the UN store in Westwood. And then she was hired by The Natural History Museum to run the store there. And it was really a great shop. And at the time I was just--maybe [it was] just before my daughter was born. So, I started volunteering **[30:00]** there, and Judy and I became very good friends. And so, as a volunteer, she had me starting to buy stuff for the store, and I ended up buying all of the clothes. They had a lot of clothes, and I bought all the clothes. And they had really wonderful stuff; Navajo blankets, I mean, really good old stuff. And also at the time I met Lois Rose. Do you know Lois?
- JB: No.
- SK: OK. So, Lois--I'll get to her much later, but Lois was a fashion coordinator from [the modeling agency], Mary Webb Davis. And Lois did these ethnic fashion shows for The Natural History Museum. They were unbelievable. I mean, they were just fabulous clothing. And she would just put together these shows, and they were just fabulous.
- JB: Can you date that, approximately?
- SK: It was between 1970 and 1975.
- JB: OK.

- SK: And about [that time]--you know--these things happen. Judy Weinstein had a falling out with The Natural History Museum, and she left. And I still was there, but I felt bad for her. I really felt very bad for her. It never quite was the same. And so eventually I started working as a travel agent part-time in San Pedro.
- JB: But your experience there at that museum--at The Natural History Museum--was a kind of apprenticeship, in a way, [like an] internship --
- SK: Oh, it was.
- JB: -- for running that kind of shop.
- SK: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. In fact, there were vendors there that I still know now, which is a long time ago. So, yeah. I mean, I definitely--in fact, she took me to Santa Fe with her, on a buying trip. I actually missed the plane. And I think we went a couple of times, but one of the times we --
- JB: But that was your first time in Santa Fe?
- SK: Yeah. . . . But, anyway, one of the times we went to Santa Fe we picked [up] Elaine Horwitz, who was a famous gallery owner in both Scottsdale and Santa Fe, and I became very good friends with her too. And we went to Santa Fe, and Elaine had a lot of money, so she bought these fabulous Navajo blankets. But she didn't know anything about them and I did. So we kind of became partners. And it was a wonderful experience. I really learned a lot. And Elaine knew all these artists: Fritz Scholder, Allan Houser. I mean, we were like hobnobbing with all these people.
- JB: The Native American artists.
- SK: Yes, they were Native American artists in the Santa Fe area.
- JB: Very, very . . . well known even then.
- SK: Oh, they were.
- JB: But now they're really [world-famous].
- SK: Right. We actually have small Fritz Scholder paintings, because we were so interested in him.
- JB: He died recently.
- SK: He did. He did. He also had an affair with another friend of mine. (laughs) . . .
- JB: You know the connections here.
- SK: It's like--you've been around too long, so you know a lot of bones buried under the ground, right? (laughs)
- JB: Yeah. . . . Were you aware of the change that was going to happen with the [Egg and The Eye] gallery turning into a museum? That happened--well--starting in the early seventies, there were people at The Egg and The Eye gallery [who talked about forming a museum], including, of course, Edith [Wyle]. They never did make a profit, even though they were a commercial gallery. (laughs)
- SK: Right.

JB: So early on, they were talking about turning the gallery into a museum. And in 1973 they got their nonprofit status from the IRS. It wasn't until 1975 that they began to mount [museum] exhibitions . . . [under the name of] The Craft and Folk Art Museum. At first it was "The Craft and Folk Art Museum Incorporating The Egg and The Eye."

SK: Right.

JB: So, I'm just, you know, trying to **[35:00]** merge that information with what you told me about getting involved with some of these groups. And I'm just wondering: did you start to get involved more with the museum then, what became the museum?

SK: . . . I was very involved. I knew--I knew that was happening--and partly I knew some of that through Judy [Weinstein], who was friends with Edith. And maybe that's how I originally met Edith, although they were kind of--

JB: What did Judy go on to do? Do you remember?

SK: Well, she kind of was involved with the movie industry. I mean, I think that her falling out of favor [at the Natural History Museum] and losing that whole job, I don't think she ever quite got over it. I'm not kidding. It was like a really traumatic thing for her, because she had really created a fabulous store.

JB: Yes.

SK: And I think that a couple of the people who were working with her at the store really sabotaged her. I mean, she was a--she was a difficult person--she wasn't, like, easy. And she was what we now refer to as [a] high-maintenance kind of person. But she had lots of connections. I mean, we had fabulous spreads in the newspaper--I mean, all the time--because she just knew all the right people.

JB: Well, it sounds like she had a lot in common with Edith Wyle.

SK: Yes.

JB: And she was a friend of Edith's, you said?

SK: Yes. And, I mean, they--during the years I was at CAFAM--I don't think they had anything connecting [them] They weren't connected at all, so I--I don't think they stayed friends. But certainly in those early years they were kind of doing parallel things. And so--I can't tell you--I mean, first of all--we were just so--we lived so far away. But, you know, we went to events [at] CAFAM, you know, over the years, and certainly we were interested, and I visited the [CAFAM] store many times. And we visited it when it was in the May Company as well.

JB: Yeah. Well, I was going to get to that.

SK: OK.

JB: You said you weren't that involved because you were still living down in San Pedro, but I'm just wondering if you had any sense of the change. I don't just mean the fact, but the qualitative change. Was there, from the time that it was a gallery to the time that it became a museum that had a shop, do you remember much about that?

SK: I don't. I don't.

JB: OK. Did you become a member of the museum, at some point?

SK: I think, periodically, we were members, but we've always belonged to a lot of museums, and sometimes we would rejoin, and sometimes it would drop, then we'd rejoin, you know, depending on what brought us there. So, I mean, yeah, I know we were members, but I don't--we weren't consistent members.

JB: So, I was going to ask you if you had gone on any of the museum trips.

SK: No.

JB: But I guess you--you were not that involved.

SK: No. I'm sorry. They all sounded wonderful.

JB: Yeah. Apparently, the Associates group trips, especially.

SK: Right.

JB: But you were--starting in the early seventies, you were a member of several different collecting groups.

SK: Right.

JB: The Textile Museum Associates you actually helped to found.

SK: Well, that was later. That was, I think, in the eighties. [The Textile Museum Associates of Southern California was founded in 1985.]

JB: Oh, was it?

SK: Late eighties, yes. Yes.

JB: OK. You were a member of the Bead Society.

SK: Bead Society, the Ethnic Arts Council. I mean, and we were always big museumgoers, so we definitely...

JB: Do you--you must have gotten to know John Browse, at some point. He was--well, I interviewed him, and he said that when he was working in the gallery--he had arrived at the gallery to do a show. He and his partner, Alan [40:00]—Alan Donovan--were doing a tour with objects from East Africa, mostly from Kenya. And they arrived at The Egg and The Eye gallery. And from that he was hired to--he said he never really had a title, but there was an article in The Egg and The Eye newsletter that referred to him as the assistant director. So--whether he knew it or not (laughs)--he was Edith's [Assistant Director] during the latter part of the gallery days. And that was, I think, starting in '72, something like that.

SK: Right. He actually was the manager of the store later on as well. He left, and then came back.

JB: Yes. Yes, he was there a couple of times.

SK: I did know John, and actually I also knew him because he became a wholesale vendor.

JB: Yes. He had his own business.

SK: Right . . . and he sold mostly soapstone objects from Africa. And I bought from him for The Natural History Museum. So it must have been right, you know --

JB: Well, and he was actually involved with a big show that they [the Natural History Museum shop] did. I can't remember now just when, but maybe you were there. Oh, dear. I'm not remembering. It must have been an African show. And I think it was Judith who had asked him to help her, because she knew that he had this business.

SK: Right.

JB: As a wholesaler.

SK: Right.

JB: So that might have been when you first met him.

SK: Right, right, right. So it was also a long time ago.

JB: Yeah.

SK: He's amazing, in that he's--I can't remember how old he is, but he's definitely old, and he looks great.

JB: Yes.

SK: He really never changes.

JB: I think he's just about 80. He's older than us. (laughs)

SK: Oh, definitely. Oh, he's in his 80s, definitely.

JB: Yeah. I think he's in his early 80s. And what about Ann Robbins then?

SK: I only knew her from the store. I didn't really know her too well. I knew her a little bit, but I didn't know her too well.

JB: Now you said that you had--after you left The Natural History Museum shop--you went to work for a travel agency.

SK: Right.

JB: So did you stay there for quite awhile?

SK: I did. I was actually there for--because it overlapped my last year or two at The Natural History Museum. And I just worked on my own clients so, you know. I could work at my own pace because I, like, I have four children, and they kept me busy too. So, but I--I did stay there for 14 years. I stayed in the same agency.

JB: That's a long time.

SK: Yes. And then, when we moved to West Los Angeles, in 1989, I actually went to work at an agency that belonged to a woman who had been a volunteer at The Natural History Museum store.

JB: At a travel agency.

SK: Yeah. She and her cousin had opened a travel agency. But I met her originally at The Natural History Museum, so things kind of connect.

JB: Yes. Yes.

- SK: That actually turned out to be not a very good experience for me. She's a very nice woman, but somehow or other, once I became an employee, she started treating me very differently. And I'd never had that experience. (laughs)
- JB: Yeah, that can happen.
- SK: And the travel business started changing, with the Internet, and I could see it was not going to be a good thing to stay in, and also aggravating. And at that point, I started thinking, "I'd better find something else to do." And Gloria Gonick called me, and told me that Patrick was interested in interviewing me for the job of running the store at the Craft and Folk Art Museum.
- JB: So that was some time in 1994.
- SK: Yes, it was early 1994, when that first started.
- JB: But you--and you moved to--did you move to Santa Monica in 1989?
- SK: Yes.
- JB: So--did you become more **[45:00]** involved with the Craft and Folk Art Museum then? Or not really?
- SK: Not specifically. Of course, I was aware of it.
- JB: And Gloria Gonick had been working at the Craft and Folk Art Museum--
- SK: Right.
- JB: -- for at least a couple of years before you [were hired. Gloria Gonick was hired as a curator at CAFAM in 1993.]
- SK: I think that she was chosen to call me, because they knew we were friends from our textile interests, you know, our common--our commonality in textile interests. And she was also involved with The Textile Museum Associates at that point. And so I think that was--and also I knew Patrick too. I mean, I can't remember exactly when I first knew him, but we were very friendly from a long time before that.
- JB: Well, he made it his business from the time that he started at the Craft and Folk Art Museum-- which was '75--he made it his business to be involved with as many of the local organizations that were related to folk art or contemporary craft as possible.
- SK: Right.
- JB: And I imagine he was invited to speak, or he probably let people [know about the Craft and Folk Art Museum]--and I think he also all along had some side businesses in dealing with art, and--
- SK: I don't remember exactly that, although --
- JB: But there were a number of ways that he was connected to people. **[phone rings, pause]** OK. I'd like to back up just a little bit. You told me earlier that you had visited CAFAM in the May Company. Were you aware of what was going on about--you know--it was a little complicated, actually. There was more than one reason that we ended up moving into the May Company. We were in the middle of what was going to be a major development called the Museum Tower. Had you heard about that?

SK: Yes.

JB: Wayne Ratkovich, the developer, and Frank [Wyle], and the board had gone into partnership to develop this 22-story building. It would have been, I believe, if not *the* first, one of the very first mixed-use developments [in Los Angeles]. And it really was ahead of its time. It would have been mainly condos with the museum as the major owner occupying the first two floors, as well as retail space.

So, we needed to find another location during the construction, but at the same time, the city of L.A. suddenly, apparently--apparently for some time--hey had been warning the museum that the original building, at 5814 Wilshire, was not up to par for earthquake [stability] . . . And some work had been done. But finally, in 1989, they said, "You have to vacate, and come up with a plan." And at that point, they [the Wyles and the CAFAM board] were looking at the possibility of tearing that building down, and building this [Museum] Tower. So, they looked--went out and looked for temporary space. And the May Company offered free space, not only for galleries, but for the offices and the library, and [they] ended up giving us over 10,000 square feet of free space [as well as a generous donation for operating costs].

And I know there was some controversy among board members--and others-- about our being in the May Company, and I'm just wondering how you felt about it, and what, you know, what you had heard other people say too.

SK: I really don't remember any controversy.

JB: Oh.

SK: I wasn't that involved to really have known that. Truthfully, in some ways, I can't separate what I discovered later, when I was working at CAFAM, from what I knew from before.

JB: Sure.

SK: I did know that the museum was closed, and that they were in the May Company, and --

JB: The original museum was closed.

SK: The original museum **[50:00]** was closed. And that there was--I remember going to an exhibit at the May Company. I knew the May Company well, because when I was in high school my friends all worked there. So, I mean, I was very familiar with it. It was definitely the neighborhood department store.

JB: And the tea room.

SK: And the tea room. A sad moment [when it was] gone.

JB: It was.

SK: Yes . . . So, yeah, but I don't remember exactly--I don't think I knew exactly what was--what had gone on [up to] that point.

JB: But what was your impression of it as a gallery space?

SK: I think it was sort of mixed. I mean, it was nice to see an exhibit, but, on the other hand, it was kind of in a funny place. I mean, it was a department store. It wasn't what you expected to find

there. But, you know, I certainly think that it was great to have an exhibit—[for] it [to] still be alive and have exhibits, rather than not to have anything.

JB: Yeah. And it was really an offer that we couldn't refuse, because it was free.

SK: Well, great--great offer.

JB: Although, in retrospect, I have to say I guess we should have seen the handwriting on the wall, because they probably wouldn't have offered us that space if they were doing very well as a business.

SK: Right. That's probably right.

JB: But, you know, I don't think anybody at the start of a recession realizes what's going on. And that was the start of a recession, which ultimately torpedoed the Museum Tower project.

SK: Right.

JB: But . . . [the museum gallery was] in the May Company for three years. The [museum and library] staff actually didn't move over there for a year, so they [the staff] were there for two years. And it was--for the staff, it was really a great space. I mean, it was very practical. We had almost all the space that we needed. And we were, of course, anticipating moving into this wonderful new building. But that --

SK: Where was the library?

JB: The library was on the mezzanine. It was where the luggage department used to be. (laughs)

SK: I see. I see.

JB: And it was kind of a neat place to be because it overlooked the perfume department. And it was--the mezzanine was where all the administrative offices for the May Company were. And so, all the staff would have to walk back and forth, along that mezzanine area, to get to and from their offices. And my office was right--right there. So, I--it was actually very sad when the May Company was closing. And I overheard a number of conversations that were very poignant, you know. Some of those clerks had worked there for many, many years.

But the . . . gallery space was on the fourth floor. It was in the furniture--what had been the furniture department. So, it had a beautiful wood floor. It was perfectly appropriate for a gallery space. And the offices were on the fifth floor, and we were able to use the roof for parties sometimes, and so that was fun. And there were some good exhibitions there.

That was a time--the early nineties--I'm sure you remember--and please jump in and comment. But that was a--for museums it was a real tumultuous time. It was a tumultuous time in terms of Los Angeles ethnic history. You know, in [October] 1992 the trial of the police officers who had beaten up Rodney King happened, and that was what led to the civil unrest . . . and the May Company was one of many targets. That was the only time that I've ever had to decide if there were some things in the collection that I wanted to take out for safekeeping.

SK: Interesting.

- JB: But it helped--as terrible as that all was--it helped to make museums look at how they were presenting their material to the public in a different way, and to be more inclusive. And to actually involve some of the community members in the planning, [55:00] and so on.
- SK: Where were the collections kept, at that point?
- JB: I believe they were actually [in the May Company]. I know some of them were offsite. There was--I don't remember the name of the company [Cooke's Crating?], but it was an art storage company that they used; they had been using, off and on. But some of the collection was at the May Company also, in back of the gallery space.
- SK: I was just wondering, because by the time I got to CAFAM, [it] also owned the house behind it, and the duplex. And so I think a lot of the collection was there.
- JB: Yes. Well, the house--the cottage--as we referred to it, that had been the library for quite a long time, but there were other offices there too. And it actually had been owned by the Wyles. [They] bought that early on. I think maybe in the early--[or] late seventies or early eighties. And they did give it to the museum. The duplex was bought later. So, is there anything you'd like to say about that period?
- SK: No, I --
- JB: About the May Company, or --
- SK: I think I really, you know, wasn't, you know, involved with CAFAM at that time. And my children were kind of in their teenage years. And so I think I was otherwise occupied.
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: And--but, you know, we did move to town. And, of course, I [had been] far away. So, we didn't move to town until '89.
- JB: '89.
- SK: Right. And that was the year my daughter graduated high school, so it kind of--and went off to college--so it kind of freed us from our children.
- JB: That was your youngest?
- SK: She was my youngest, yes.
- JB: So at the time that we had to leave the May Company, which was at the end of 1992, I believe. (I'm just checking the timeline.) It gets a little confusing for me too sometimes. (laughs) Yeah. The May Company announced it was closing its Miracle Mile store November of 1992. And at that time, the building on the corner--which we moved into--the building on the corner of Wilshire and Curson, at 5800, was owned by someone else: Joseph Ventress and Lena Longo. It was leased by the museum, with, quote unquote, "an option to buy." Unfortunately, that never happened. But everyone assumed that it would be purchased, because it was going to be part of the new museum. When the Ratkovich development was abandoned, due to the recession--they couldn't get financing--we still went ahead with . . . [plans] for more space. And so Hodgetts and

Fung--the architects Hodgetts and Fung--were hired, some time in 1994. I think just not too long before you --

SK: Went to work there.

JB: Went to work. It was a relatively short time between the time they were hired, and we finally reopened. And part of that plan, from the very beginning, was to occupy that--to merge . . . that building on the corner with the original building.

SK: Right.

JB: And yet we didn't own it.

SK: Right.

JB: But the assumption was that we would. So I'm just wondering when **[01:00:00]** they started talking to you? You said Gloria called you.

SK: Right.

JB: What were you told, at the time, about the plan?

SK: I don't think I was told too much about the plan. I was told that they were redoing the 5814 building, and that they were going to tie it in with the 5800 building. I'm not sure I knew that they didn't own the building, at the time. I do, in retrospect, remember that they almost bought the building. Frank Wyle almost bought the building, but he thought it was--they wanted too much money, which, of course, really--

JB: Relative to today.

SK: Right, when you think about it, it was, you know, corner property on Wilshire Boulevard.

JB: Well, Edith Wyle wanted to buy that building back in the seventies. It was available for \$350,000. She wanted to buy it, and I guess Frank nixed it.

SK: I see.

JB: But it was--the purchase price was a lot higher in the nineties than [it had been in the seventies].

SK: It was like a \$1.4 million, but that was--

JB: Something like that, yeah.

SK: But that was really still not much money. It wasn't a great building. I mean, if a big truck rolled by, the building shook.

JB: Yeah, and there was the tar [from the La Brea Tar Pits], of course. (laughs)

SK: And there was tar, right. Well, I think that whole area is just sitting on a pool of tar.

JB: Yeah.

SK: So, yeah, the elevator shaft [in the 5800 Wilshire building] would fill full of tar. But --

JB: Yeah. It smelled. (laughs)

SK: Right. So when I was--well, I think originally Gloria talked to me in about March of 1994, and then, sort of, like nothing happened, and then I had a meeting with Patrick, and he told me I was hired. Maybe that was in April, or May, or something. And then somewhere--maybe not until the fall--and I'm thinking, "I've got to get out of this travel business thing," and nothing had happened

[with the CAFAM offer]. And so I think somewhere in the fall I was invited to a lunch. And it was at the club that--

JB: The Regency.

SK: The Regency Club, right. And Frank Wyle and Edith Wyle were there, and Patrick Ela, and I think there were another few board members, maybe Wally Marks was there. And they kind of interviewed me over lunch. Which was--I think they did that. That was, you know, kind of a thing that they did. And I was, you know, really very excited about doing--being the manager. The other thing, which I had failed to mentioned, is for the last, for the previous sort of 20 years I had had a small business in which I sold antique textiles, and--and jewelry, but I just did shows. So, I already knew about business, but I didn't know about running a store. [To Fred Krieger:] Are you ready?

Fred Krieger: I'm always ready. **[Fred, Stella's husband, has brought back lunch for us.]**

SK: OK. (laughs) OK. Turn this off? **[Pause recording for lunch.]**

JB: Before we go on, Stella, to when you actually started working at the Craft and Folk Art Museum, I'd just like to take some time to get your impressions of some of the main players. They [are], of course, Edith and Frank [Wyle] and Patrick [Ela]. You had known them before.

SK: Right.

JB: Do you want to just tell us what your impressions were?

SK: Well, I thought, you know, I liked the Wyles. I thought they were--Edith was a very sort of sophisticated, somewhat standoffish, kind of person. I mean, she wasn't warm and fuzzy. But she was, you know, very bright, and--and I also kind of knew that Frank wasn't particularly interested in the--he was interested in the business part of the museum, but he really wasn't interested in the arts--I mean, that was Edith's baby. And, you know, **[01:05:00]** they weren't exactly my kind of--type of--people to be, you know, intimate friends with--but we had a nice relationship, both my husband and I, with Frank and Edith.

And I was friendly with Patrick Ela also. I didn't . . . we weren't intimate friends, and I didn't really know his family before I started working at the museum, but I did know him. And he kind of made himself known, I think, to the people who were interested in--particularly folk art--and other kinds of ethnic arts. And I always found him very, you know, warm and friendly. I mean warmer and friendlier, in a way, than Edith and Frank were. But in my mind I--you know--I got so involved [with all of them] after I worked there, that it's hard to remember what I knew before I got to the museum. (laughs) It's sort of like there's this [time warp].

JB: Yes, I understand.

SK: Yeah. And I think I actually knew some of the Wyle children before. I did. I knew Nancy before. And I knew Frank Romero, [a well-known L.A. Chicano painter and muralist], who was their son-in-law, before. [Romero was married to Nancy Wyle, the Wyles' oldest daughter.]

JB: And you had seen Noah on television, probably.

- SK: No. Noah didn't start [on TV] until I was at the museum. [The actor, Noah Wyle, who was Frank and Edith Wyle's grandson, had a recurring part on the TV series, "E.R." for its entire run (eleven seasons), 1994 – 2005.]
- JB: Oh, I had forgotten when he started. . . .
- SK: We were--in fact, several times I was at the Wyle's house, and they would, like, run to the television to see their grandson. I mean, he was just a young whippersnapper at the time. So that didn't start until I was already working at the museum.
- JB: Well, of course, Edith had retired in 1984 from being the [Program] Director of the museum, but she stayed on the board. [Edith Wyle took on the title of Founder/Director Emeritus.] And Frank [Wyle] was still not only on the board, but chairman of the board. So, they were, of course, still very involved. And I guess you must have realized--pretty quickly--that Edith was someone that you were going to have to deal with. Did they talk to you much about what they expected in the shop, in the new shop, when you first had that lunch with them?
- SK: Well, I think that they kind of gave me an outline of what they wanted. I, truthfully, must say nobody ever sat on my head and said, "Do this, do that." I think that Edith wanted me to have more one-of-a-kind, expensive items. But I really felt it was a museum store, and you couldn't just do that. So maybe I made it a little more populist kind of store.
- JB: Well, you had to have a range of prices.
- SK: Right. Right. And, yeah, I mean, I--that was the only thing that--maybe once she said--you know, "Could we have, like, more expensive one-of-a-kind things?" Which I really did have, but--but maybe it was sort of more gallery-like, at one time.
- JB: Well, of course, during the gallery days, it was, even though not everyone "got it." Not everyone understood that she meant for it to be an art gallery.
- SK: Right.
- JB: And I guess Bernard Kester, in particular, had discussions with her about how to make it more distinct--the featured show more distinctive from the shop. There really wasn't something that they called a "shop" when it was the gallery, but there certainly was an area where things--less expensive things--were for sale. I had the impression--I did not . . . know The Egg and The Eye gallery personally. **[01:10:00]** I didn't show up until '76. But from what everyone has told me, I really didn't have the impression that there was that much difference in what was displayed, or sold after it became a museum. It certainly was more obviously a gallery, with a shop that was distinctive. But one of the things that I did notice right away about the CAFAM shop, in the [late] seventies, was that, unlike other museum shops at the time, it didn't sell reproductions.
- SK: Right.
- JB: Even though a lot of the things that were for sale were inexpensive, they were, you know, like most folk art is--
- SK: Handmade.

- JB: Handmade. And so, it had a certain quality of uniqueness.
- SK: Well, I definitely learned that, and I was--I think I was told not to sell things like t-shirts.
- JB: Oh. (laughs)
- SK: OK.
- JB: Unless they were Festival of Masks t-shirts, or--(laughs)
- SK: Oh, well, that was a different story.
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: OK. But, basically, I learned that, and I'm still--I'm still doing that at the Fowler Museum, where I work now. We do not sell museum-- **[phone rings, pause]**
- JB: So you were just saying that you did not have reproductions, ever, [at CAFAM—or at the Fowler]. And I was wondering--that must have been true at The Natural History Museum too. You probably --
- SK: That was actually true there too. And the thing that it makes you do is to look for handmade, authentic crafts, as well as folk art, in all kinds of price ranges. And I love doing that. I love--I mean that, certainly, the buying is the most fun part of the job, because the other parts aren't exactly fun. But, actually, when I was hired, I started doing [some research]--and I knew I was going to start at a certain point. I called the Museum Store Association. I got books. I started--
- JB: I thought you belonged to that group.
- SK: Right. Right. So, I started reading a lot of material to see what I had to do, what they suggest you do with a new store. And so that was good, because they do have books on how to organize. Interestingly, one of the things they tell you is: don't let your regular architect design the store, because it is really a completely different thing. It's sort of like a kitchen. You really need a kitchen designer to do a kitchen, and it's the same thing with a store. But, of course, Hodgetts and Fung were the designers for the museum, and they were going to design the retail space, no matter what.
- JB: Well, I was going to ask you--you were hired, though, before--had construction [started]? I guess construction had begun.
- SK: It had begun, but, actually, I was involved somewhat with the design of the store.
- JB: What kind of an impact were you able to make, do you think?
- SK: Well, I actually made some--I think--significant changes, although I don't --
- JB: From the design.
- SK: In the design. Although I think that there were certainly errors made, some of the design elements were interesting from a design point of view, and not really great for a store, per se. And some of it, we were able to correct later on, and some of it, you know, I'm sure that they're still living with it today. But they were going to put the main cash register in a completely different place, where you, you know, where the person at the cash register really couldn't see the rest of the store. So, I mean, that was a big change. And also I had seen in new stores the way they

arranged the jewelry cases was to make them like drawers, where you could pull them all the way out, rather than reaching in. And so they definitely did that design, [that was my idea], which was very nice. **[01:15:00]** And so I did have influence, but they were still--they had these kind of little islands that were on wheels, but the way they did it, they put big wheels in the middle of each side, rather than in the corners. And so in order to move them--they were big and heavy. In order to move them, you had to rotate these things

JB: It sounds like it could be kind of dangerous.

SK: Right. And also they made too many of them. So eventually I think we got rid of one or two of them, because they just were--and you couldn't even store them. They were just [in the way]. . . .

JB: Yeah. Well . . . space--storage space--was always at a premium then.

SK: Well, and I think that was another thing. I think they had forgotten that you needed office and storage space. So we actually ended up stealing storage space from the [education] studio in the back, because we really practically had none. We had closets in the office, but it was an office as well.

JB: Well, and that was--we didn't really have a loading dock.

SK: No.

JB: But [in the back where the education studio was located] was where all the merchandise had to come in and go out.

SK: Correct.

JB: In the back. So, you had to go through there anyway. What did you have--you started to tell me about buying. Was there any stock in storage from the previous shop?

SK: Oh. That's a very good question. So, OK. I think I looked at your [timeline] history, and Sally Shishmanian had been --

JB: Yeah.

SK: -- the manager of the store. And then there was this man, Diego, who followed her. He had been her assistant. And I don't think you have it on there.

JB: No.

SK: Right. So, he --

JB: There was another young man, [Martin Venzal].

SK: Right. He was her assistant, and then when she left, he took it over. Anyway, there was quite a bit of merchandise left over, but it had been several years already between the time the store closed, and I came. [The CAFAM shop had closed at the end of 1992 when the May Company closed and CAFAM had to move out; Stella was hired in December 1994.] The stuff was either broken, or really ugly. I mean, really bad. So, ultimately, I think we had garage sales, we gave stuff away, we returned things. There was even stuff that was still--was on consignment that was still around. And so I returned that. And, ultimately, I really started from scratch, because it was

just not acceptable. I can think in my mind's eye of some of that stuff. And Gerri Freer came and helped me.

JB: Oh, yeah.

SK: And we definitely disposed of a lot of stuff, or, you know, made arrangements for it, one way or the other.

JB: And you said you had an office up--in the 5800 building--

SK: I did.

JB: --you had an office up on that second level.

SK: Right. And so really, I started with nobody telling me what to do, or how to do it, and I kind of--sort of--was inventing it.

JB: But they trusted you, I think, from what--

SK: Yes.

JB: --they knew of your--

SK: Well, it was interesting. The people who hired me--Patrick Ela, Edith, and Frank--they trusted me. Joaquin [Torrico] , who was the--

JB: Everything. (laughs) [Joaquin Torrico, whose title in the last ten years or so of his tenure was Preparator, actually functioned to also do maintenance and security and any number of other jobs; he worked at the museum from approximately 1985 – 2006.]

SK: Everything, right.

JB: Maintenance, and--

SK: He was very suspicious of me, because he--

JB: Really?

SK: Yes. He thought, you know, he thought--well, I'm a friend of the Wyles, so I must not be worthwhile.

JB: Oh.

SK: I think he had had experience with other friends of the Wyles, maybe my predecessor, as a matter of fact. So, he was very suspicious. And I really needed his help, because I started going to shows, and buying merchandise almost right away, because there basically was nothing, and I wanted to start with very nice things.

JB: Did they give you a separate shop account?

SK: Not exactly. So--

JB: Because I know that was an issue for John [Browse], and **[01:20:00]** for Ann [Robbins]. And I-- (laughs) I just was wondering what--how it started--at least started out--for you. (laughs)

SK: So, OK. So, one of the things I decided right away [was] that it was really important to get a point-of-sale computer system.

JB: Yeah.

SK: And--

- JB: That I remember--you talking about that.
- SK: Right. Fortunately, I think it was--The Natural History Museum had done--had spent \$10,000 surveying point-of-sale systems. And so I just followed--
- JB: You were able to benefit from that.
- SK: I benefited, and I got the same--well, I wanted the same system, but it was a lot of money. It was more than \$30,000.
- JB: Oh, my gosh.
- SK: And so, I made a plea to Frank Wyle, because I knew that was the only way we were going to get it. And then I--the salesman was very good. I mean, he was really nice. And it was the same system that The Natural History Museum, and the Page Museum across the street, had. And also LACMA had it.
- JB: I was going to say--I knew there was someone in the LACMA store [that helped you]. Was it the manager that you became friends with?
- SK: It was--oh, yeah. The manager, and then they had a--LACMA had a full-time person just working on the store's computer point-of-sale system. He's still there, as a matter of fact. And so, he would come and fix things for me for free.
- JB: Wonderful.
- SK: And periodically I would take him out, and give him a present, or something.
- JB: Sure. But all of these museums had the same--
- SK: They did. The only thing is that they kept updating, [but] because it was expensive . . . I fell behind. But it was OK. I mean, it was OK. It was enough, you know. But it's actually better to keep up, if you can.
- JB: But also computers were so much more expensive then than they have become. Software and hardware was hugely expensive.
- SK: Yes, that's true.
- JB: In comparison to today.
- SK: Right. But that was a lot of money to put out. But I just felt since we were starting afresh, this was the time to do it.
- JB: Yeah. Good for you.
- SK: So, I did win that battle. And Frank paid for the computer system, which was really good. In fact, I have a different system at the Fowler, and the one at CAFAM was much better. And there are other systems now, so. But so, anyway, I went to work in December of . . . [1994]. . . . and the store opened, like, in April of . . . [1995]. April or May.
- JB: Well, the grand reopening was May--the weekend of May 15th.
- SK: OK. So that's actually when I opened.
- JB: But you probably had to be ready a little bit before that.

- SK: Oh, right. And not only did I have to be ready, but all the merchandise originally came to the 5800 building, [which was next door to the original 5814 Wilshire building, which was where the new shop would be], and it [all the merchandise] had to be moved, and it had to be tagged, and I couldn't even tag it. And, I mean, I didn't really exactly know how to run the system, although we started inputting the inventory while we were at 5800. But normally what happens that you input the inventory--sometimes it's better to open the box, and make sure it's all there. We didn't have the--all I had was an invoice. I didn't have the ability to look at the stuff I was inputting. So, if stuff was broken, I mean--
- JB: It was--was it stored down on the first level of that-- ?
- SK: No.
- JB: Oh, it was off-site?
- SK: It was all--it was on the second level [of the 5800 Wilshire building], sitting in the entry.
- JB: Oh!
- SK: Boxes, and boxes, and boxes.
- JB: Oh, my gosh, I don't remember that for some reason. Wow.
- SK: Yeah. It was really funny. So--right sort of like--where Patrick's office was. It was sitting right out there in the corridor. So, anyway, that was interesting. At the time, I was--I guess--told to hire an assistant, and I ended up hiring Rosie, who was Edith Wyle's--
- JB: Rosie Getz, yeah.
- SK: Rosie Getz, who was Edith Wyle's granddaughter. [Rosie Getz' mother is Nancy Romero, the Wyles' oldest daughter.] And everybody said, "Oh, she's a difficult person. You're going to have a hard time with her." And I never had a hard time with her. We became very good friends, even though there was this huge age gap. But we really became very good friends--and I still see her. And I didn't have [01:25:00] a problem with her, and then I was given credit for mellowing--causing her to mellow.
- JB: Oh.
- SK: So, it was--anyway, it was a good arrangement. She had certain talents and abilities that I didn't, and we were a good match with each other.
- JB: Now was she the only paid assistant that you had at the beginning?
- SK: I think we had part-time people on the floor.
- JB: She was full-time, though.
- SK: She was full-time.

[End of Session 1: 1:25:09]

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF STELLA KRIEGER

Session 2 (1:45:02), Monday, October 19, 2009. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti

JB: . . . So, you did have more [staff] than just Rosie [Getz], who were paid.

SK: Yes.

JB: But you also had volunteers, I think, didn't you?

SK: I never completely relied on the volunteers to run the store, because I felt like they would come and go and maybe, when we needed them, they weren't going to be there.

JB: Yeah. Well that's always a problem with volunteers. Yeah.

SK: It is. Yes. So yeah . . . I definitely had volunteers. But, we . . . also had paid people working.

JB: And I--I guess I sort of asked you this before. But I was just wondering, when you were actually in the process of buying, . . . before the reopening, were Patrick and Edith involved at all? . . . They really were hands-off?

SK: They really were hands-off. I really did my own thing. I went to the craft show in Baltimore, which is definitely the best contemporary craft show for wholesale.

JB: That's the one run by the American Craft Council?

SK: Right. And I went to the gift show and I really knew the gift show pretty well anyway because I had definitely--

JB: You had been an exhibitor there?

SK: I had been . . . an exhibitor there. But I had also bought for the Natural History Museum there. So I definitely--yeah, I actually sold wholesale there as well. So I had a lot of experience with that and I knew a lot of people.

And also--while I was getting ready, I also discovered a [stack] of checks like this [makes a gesture of thickness with her fingers] that had been made out to vendors that had never been paid. [phone ringing; pause] So--do you want me to go into the unpaid checks? . . .

JB: Sure.

SK: So, I discovered . . . there was like this thick group of checks that were made out to vendors from the store that had obviously never been sent out . . . from some years before. And I asked Lorraine Trippett, who was the bookkeeper, about it and she got really nervous about my having discovered this. And she says, "Oh, they had been paid in other ways." So I was--I already knew that there was a problem. But I just proceeded to do my thing. And I think that, . . . certainly until through 1997 or the beginning of '98, when the museum was still operating by itself, I didn't really handle the payment of the bills. I just gave the bills to Lorraine and she took care of that. Or I hoped she took care of it.

- JB: Yeah. I was going to say, you probably heard from vendors when they didn't get paid.
- SK: Yes. But I think that, . . . at first, I think that they tried to keep it going straight. So I didn't have a problem. And you know these vendors--they need to sell, so they wanted to sell to me too. So I never had a problem.
- JB: Well the reopening of the museum [in May 1995] was a--I know for the rest of the staff--it was a very big deal. We called it the "Homecoming." And I think we really--[for] those of us that had been, to some extent, exiled in the May Company--it felt like a homecoming. [After leaving the May Company], we had been closed to the public. We didn't have any public presence, really, at least not in the original museum, for two years before it reopened. [No public presence from the closing of 5814 Wilshire, June 30, 1989--to the opening of the gallery in the May Co., November 21, 1989; then again after the close of the May Co., December 30, 1992--to the re-opening of 5814 Wilshire, May 12, 1995.]
- SK: Right.
- JB: So, we really looked forward to that weekend. Now, of course, you were very busy in the shop, but were you able to participate? Like--were you able to go to that--on Friday night there was a big gala dinner--
- SK: In our tent.
- JB: -- in the tent.
- SK: I think I did. **[05:00]** I'm pretty sure I did. I mean, the shop was extremely [busy].
- JB: Probably Fred came too.
- SK: Right. The store was very busy. I think--I just looked at my notes, I think we took in like \$16,000 or \$17,000 worth that weekend, which was enormous.
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: So, we were very busy and very successful. So I was looking forward to continued [success and] that kind of business, which of course is unrealistic, but anyway . . . it was--I was excited too.
- JB: They had the--I hadn't mentioned this before but during The Egg and the Eye [gallery] days and certainly during the museum days, they always had a publicist and had--well, actually, during The Egg and the Eye days they *didn't* have a publicist. But they always managed to get a lot of publicity regardless. And then when the museum started, they did [always] have a publicist [at least part-time]. And the promotion of the museum was quite incredible. Since I've been working on the archives, I can tell you, it's amazing the coverage throughout. Not only in southern California, but in national publications and so on. And of course, for this Homecoming, for this reopening, it was tremendous. So, a lot of people came that--well, of course they hadn't been able to come for a couple of years [because we didn't have any public programming to speak of]. But people who were old friends of the museum showed up for that weekend.

- SK: Yeah. It was very exciting. And I was--I loved it. You know, I was really happy to be there. And of course, that wasn't normal business either, but it was a lot of fun. And . . . I really enjoyed what I was doing too, so that was great.
- JB: So, we had this big weekend . . . Saturday was a special members-only kind of [day]. I think they called it a "Sneak Peek." And then on Sunday it was open to everyone.
- SK: I do remember that it was really hard getting that exhibit together, that it was sort of disorganized.
- JB: . . . Well, there were several exhibits.
- SK: Yes.
- JB: There--the Warmbold Mexican Folk Art collection was in the new gallery.
- SK: Right. That was in the 5800 building.
- JB: No . . . well, there was a new gallery in the 5800 building--
- SK: OK.
- JB: -- but I mean the new gallery in--
- SK: Upstairs.
- JB: --upstairs in the 5814 building.
- SK: I think that was OK. That was--I think that was not the problem. I think that the other exhibit that was at the 5800 building, they couldn't quite get it together.
- JB: It was kind of a history of the museum.
- SK: Correct.
- JB: "Museum for a New Century" [was what it was called]. And it was really interesting to people who had--you know, been--lived--through part of that.
- SK: Right.
- JB: But it was large, and it was complicated. . . .
- SK: Well, . . . at that time they were still thinking of bringing a restaurant back on the mezzanine.
- JB: Oh, yes . . . whatever you know about that, I'd really like you to talk about that.
- SK: Yeah. I know quite a bit. But I mean that was just a big, empty space.
- JB: On the mezzanine [of the renovated 5814 Wilshire building].
- SK: On the mezzanine, which of course--and I think that . . . at that time Patrick [Ela] was still the director. He didn't want it to be a restaurant. He had . . . I'm trying to remember what [were the] reasons. He didn't want it to be a restaurant yet. He wanted certain things in place before it turned into a restaurant. And so, they held back. And I think there was a little bit of a controversy about whether it should be a restaurant or not. And I think in the long run they felt maybe that was a mistake not putting a restaurant in. Because people really like that concept of coming and having, you know, lunch and then looking at art work.
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: And I think that [having a restaurant] was really part of the museum's vision to the public.
- JB: Yeah. [Part of its] personality.

- SK: Yeah. And I think it was a mistake not to [include it in the initial design]. But they hadn't really thought out the space they [had] left. And so it might have been hard in the long run to turn it into a restaurant. But of course, that never happened. **[10:00]**
- JB: Yeah. And I don't think most of us on the staff really gave it as much thought as maybe we should have at the time. I do remember hearing comments--you know, it was clear that all along during the earlier museum days that people would often go to LACMA [the L.A. County Museum of Art, which was just a few blocks to the west] and then come to The Egg and the Eye Restaurant for lunch, and maybe would overlook our galleries completely. And that may have been part of what Patrick, and maybe even Edith, were thinking--that they wanted to, you know, get respect for the museum as a museum.
- SK: Right.
- JB: . . . So, you were very, very busy, both before you opened and in the first few months. Did you have--we used to have what they call "shop shows." Did you have those--where you had a featured artist or--
- SK: Oh, a lot. That's why I just gave you --
- JB: Oh, right, right.
- SK: -- I just gave you all those --
- JB: The announcements, of course. [These shop exhibition announcements were deposited in the CAFAM archives at UCLA.]
- SK: Right. We had lots of stuff where we featured a culture or an artist. Yeah. Definitely, we had lots of those.
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: And when Rosie [Getz] was there--she was there for actually all the time you're covering--because she was there for three years with me. And she was very artistic too, being part of the Wyle family. And we know they're all artistic. Although her style wasn't exactly my style, but we still--we worked together and she knew, like, a lot of [important] people, because of her relationship with Edith. And I really think she was Edith's favorite grandchild because she was a lot like Edith.
- JB: I've heard that, too. . . .
- SK: So, . . . we . . . definitely did a lot of shows together in the store. And we tried to connect [thematically] with what was going on with the museum. But we had the whole mezzanine space--that was another thing.
- JB: Oh.
- SK: The mezzanine wasn't a restaurant anymore. And it wasn't --
- JB: It wasn't used by the museum as it [had been]--
- SK: -- and it was--sometimes it was used, but it really wasn't finished. So the store [used it]--actually, we had a rug show there--we had a rug show there, an oriental rug show with things for sale. We

had a pottery show. And it was really the store show. So, we [the shop] had the use of that mezzanine, too.

JB: That's interesting. I hadn't remembered that. Now when was it that you started to go to board meetings, was that later?

SK: It was after the museum reorganized and the city was a partner. And I really was the only person on . . . the board that was in the museum full-time --

JB: OK.

SK: -- other than Joaquin, so --

JB: OK.

SK: -- so I did attend all the board meetings.

JB: All right. Well, we'll get to that. What I'd like to do now is to start to kind of count down to the-- through this 1996 - 1997 period--the last--well, year and a half anyway.

SK: Right.

JB: And the first time that I was really aware that there were problems, was when Patrick Ela announced that he was going to resign. And that was in April of 1996. It was 11 months after the museum had reopened. Were you aware before then that that might happen, or--

SK: I think I was actually aware of it. And I think that the reason he resigned was because he--there were board members that wanted him to resign. And some of these board members had very deep pockets and they [had] promised to give a lot of money to the museum if he was gone, although they didn't do it.

JB: No. I didn't remember that . . . [any money came through from the board during that time].

SK: Yes.

JB: -- In fact just the opposite happened, **[15:00]** really.

SK: Correct.

JB: So what is your recollection of the time leading up to Patrick's resignation? Just from the shop perspective, I suppose.

SK: I don't think there was a big thing going on. I don't think anybody said anything to me specifically. But I was aware that it was going to happen. And I can't remember the name of the guy who became the interim director. He was a board member. [Knapp became Board Chairman--not director--when Frank Wyle stepped down as Board Chair on July 20, 1995, a few months after CAFAM had re-opened.]

JB: Oh, Bud Knapp. Bud Knapp.

SK: Bud Knapp. And I think he was one of the deep pocket people who promised--

JB: Oh. . . he was on the board before he became chairman?

SK: Yeah. And I think it was he and it was also Lloyd Cotsen who was another person who promised to dig deep and help the museum. But it didn't happen. Yeah. It didn't happen. [Lloyd Cotsen had given a substantial amount of money to CAFAM earlier during the capital campaign period.]

- JB: But the shop was going along pretty well.
- SK: Yeah.
- JB: I know it wasn't as good as right at the very beginning.
- SK: Oh, no. I think that in the long run the shop didn't make as much money as they wanted it to make. And I think sometimes that we were just--you know, keeping our head above water. And I think that--there was an article, actually, I just read [that said]: small museum shops do not necessarily make money, because the cost of running them almost [always] takes away from any profit that they're making. So, it is actually a problem [for all museum shops] . . . and probably the store never made a lot of money.
- JB: I don't think it did.
- SK: In fact, I think it lost a lot of money.
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: So, I wasn't--it wasn't like it had changed except that there was no other place for the money to come from, so they really wanted it to come from the store, and it just wasn't [doing] what they wanted it to do. [Formerly, the restaurant was a source of some revenue.]
- JB: It's really a dilemma, isn't it? Because there's the expectation that there will be a museum shop.
- SK: Right.
- JB: And you, I think, really need it as an attraction in addition to the museum, especially for a small museum.
- SK: Well I think from the time that the museum reopened [in 1995], it was suffering. And for all the years I was there--even though [the museum] did have some very good shows--but almost all of the years I was there--I was told that the store was better than the rest of the museum, which is not really good.
- JB: No.
- SK: I mean, you really don't want to hear that. But I do think that--you know--museum stores are important. Not just as money-makers, but they're really the public's view of the museum.
- JB: Yes.
- SK: I mean, even at the Fowler [Museum] I feel that way, although the store is not as significant [relatively] as it was at CAFAM, it still [is important]. [For example], I had problems with my employees on Saturdays, and I said, "you know, the public [is] coming in--you're the only people they're really talking to. . . . The guards aren't going to talk to them."
- JB: Right.
- SK: So, you have to present a really good face to the public. So, I really felt it was important for the store to do that.
- JB: Oh, I think for everyone that regularly visited the museum, the [CAFAM] shop was always very important. They--you know, you'd always stop in and at least look around.

- SK: Well, it was even put in a prominent position. [In the renovated design of the museum, which reopened in 1995, the shop takes up the entire front of the first floor of the museum.]
- JB: Well, yeah.
- SK: But, you know, you'd go--you could linger in the store and look at stuff for a long time, where you might not even do that in an exhibit.
- JB: Right. Of course, the original concept and the way it worked until the reopening [except for when it was closed from 1989 – 1995] was that there was also a restaurant.
- SK: Right.
- JB: So they--the restaurant and the shop worked hand and glove until the restaurant was not there.
- So Patrick announced his resignation in April [1996], the following year. And he did, in fact, resign a couple of months later. And suddenly--for me it was sudden--I don't know how it was for you--Nancy Fister, who had been the development person --
- SK: She was the assistant development [20:00] person. . . . She--but, Kim Litsey was the development person.
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: And [Nancy] was her assistant.
- JB: Right.
- SK: . . . So, we--I think what happened is Bud Knapp didn't want to--he wanted to close the museum.
- JB: From the beginning, you mean?
- SK: Bud Knapp wanted to close the museum. And so, he, I guess, went off the board. I'm pretty sure he went off the board And so the--actually the staff voted to make Nancy Fister the acting director [after Patrick resigned]. And we all liked her a lot until she became the acting director. . . .
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: And she really became very difficult. You know, people [would] . . . come in late. I mean, she, like, laid the law down on [that] you had to come in exactly on time. I mean, it was like she became this, you know, kind of aggressive person. And the first thing she did, by the way, was to fire Kim Litsey.
- JB: Yes. That I remember very well.
- SK: Yeah. And that was like--I was, like, a little shocked, too. It was
- JB: Yeah. It was done very abruptly.
- SK: Yes, it was. It was. Yes.
- JB: I don't want to dwell on this too much, but my recollection was that Bud Knapp--that Nancy [Fister], you know, was ambitious. And that she went to Bud Knapp, who was still on--he was chairman of the board at that time.
- SK: Right.

JB: And he had made it known that he was going to look for a new director. Of course, we all knew that, because Patrick was resigning.

SK: Right.

JB: And Nancy volunteered--not volunteered in the sense of not being paid--

SK: Right.

JB: --but she, on her own initiative, went to Bud, I thought, and applied for the job.

SK: I don't think so.

JB: I don't remember ever having a discussion with anybody about it. It was kind of a shock to some of us that suddenly she was--

SK: Yeah.

JB: So, you think there was actually a meeting at which--

SK: Yes.

JB: --the staff [voted to make her the acting director]?

SK: Something like that.

JB: That's interesting.

SK: Yeah. I can't remember exactly. [I'm] thinking of who was involved that you--who else you could talk to. I don't know if you've talked Lorraine Trippett?

JB: No. I haven't. . . . In fact, I think she's now moved to Ojai. She was planning --

SK: Where--her mother was there.

JB: --was, yeah.

SK: Yeah. Has her mother died?

JB: I think so.

SK: OK.

JB: I think it's an aunt that's still there.

SK: OK.

JB: So--and then, when Nancy was named acting director, the staff layoffs began at that point. And I was wondering--I mean, was the shop affected? Weren't you [i.e., the shop] kind of bare bones to begin with? You couldn't really cut back anymore.

SK: Yeah. . . . I don't think we were affected, though.

JB: OK.

SK: Yeah.

JB: Because at that point, anybody [on the rest of the staff] that had an assistant--and I had two part-time assistants--and there were several other people who had part-time help, and they were all laid off.

SK: I don't--I truthfully don't remember having to do anything drastic.

JB: OK. And then I know that sometime either just before Patrick left, or just after, there was a kind of final effort to buy the 5800 building. [That may have happened later in 1997.]

SK: Yes.

JB: And Frank was not—[when I interviewed him] he said he didn't remember everything about that, but --

SK: He was definitely involved in it.

JB: Oh, yes, yes, I know he was.

SK: I can't remember if Lena Longo was still one of the [owners of the 5800 Wilshire building].

JB: I think she was.

SK: She was still. I think ultimately what's-his-name bought her out, though.

JB: Oh, Ventress. [Joseph Ventress and Lena Longo were partners in ownership of the 5800 Wilshire building.]

SK: Ventress, I think. And then Ventress ended up on the board or some--well, maybe not, but he ended up being involved with the museum, too. Because he was considered public enemy number one at that time. But I think that they--they wanted a \$1.3 or \$1.4 million or something like that. **[25:00]** And I think that Frank wanted it for a million and he felt [that what Ventress was asking] was too much money, although ...

JB: I know that was the bottom line--that Frank was just not willing to go as far as Ventress's asking price. And Ventress, for some reason, was not willing to come down.

SK: Right.

JB: And I always thought that that was a little strange. But --

SK: Well, [and] they had been paying something like \$17,000 a month rent. I mean, the rent was just ridiculous.

JB: It was ridiculous.

SK: It was ridiculous. So, I mean --

JB: I was shocked when I found out that none of that was going to count toward the [sales price or down payment].

SK: No.

JB: Because I--we [on the staff] were told definitely several times that [the deal] was "with an option to buy." And to me that meant--I think to everyone--that meant that whatever we paid in rent would go against whatever--

SK: That is not what it means.

JB: --but it's not what happened at any rate.

SK: No. Yes, that was--for a poor institution, that was a ridiculous rent for them to pay.

JB: Yes.

SK: And the building really wasn't that good. . . .

JB: No. [But] it worked OK.

SK: Yeah.

JB: But for what we needed at the time--but, yeah, that was ridiculous. So, then Bud Knapp, just a couple of months later, in August--this is still 1996.

SK: Yeah. Right.

JB: A lot happened in 1996--

SK: I'm glad you have the dates, because I--

JB: Well, I put [the history] together gradually [because of working on the archives]. He [Knapp] resigned at that point completely. I know--I think he was off the board; he definitely resigned as [board] chair.

SK: Right.

JB: And he had been chair for just slightly more than a year.

SK: Right.

JB: And Frank took on the chairmanship again. And at that point, they were actively looking for a new director.

SK: They did a big search. They did a huge search and they had--I was very involved with it--they had like 96 applicants.

JB: Now, wait—this [that I'm talking about] is the first one [in January 1996], when Paul [Kusserow] was hired. I think--I think the search you're talking about --

SK: Right, right. Was later.

JB: [Actually that extensive search took place several years later in 2002 after Joan de Bruin, who had been appointed to be the Director when the City took over in 1999, resigned.] But when--after Patrick resigned in 1996 and [while] Nancy Fister was acting director, I know that they were . . . looking for a new director, but I don't know how much of a [formal] search there was.

SK: No. I don't think--

JB: I was wondering if you --

SK: No, no. I *do* know how that happened. So Frank Wyle was friends with the director or president or whatever for--of the [Getty].

JB: Of the Getty Museum. . . . John Walsh, I think.

SK: Right. And he [Walsh] recommended--

JB: Paul.

SK: Paul Kusserow, who had some sort of museum position at Williamsburg.

JB: Yes. But it wasn't curatorial. It was --

SK: It wasn't curatorial, and he wasn't a director.

JB: No.

SK: But they did--they hired him. And it's my opinion that Paul was just looking for a way to the West Coast because soon after he started, they bought a house in Santa Barbara.

JB: Yeah.

SK: And so that was clearly not a friendly thing to do. And his wife was a landscape architect--I think I remember correctly.

JB: And I think she was some distant relation of John Walsh, or she had relatives in the [Santa Barbara] area--

SK: I see.

JB: --which I think is why they [bought a house in Santa Barbara].

SK: Right. But he was, you know, [he] obviously went to Santa Barbara on the weekends, too. So--

JB: Yeah.

SK: --that was not a match made in heaven.

JB: No.

SK: And then he hired --

JB: Martha.

SK: Martha [Drexler] Lynn, who had been a [decorative arts] curator at LACMA.

JB: Yes.

SK: And she--I think he just hired her to be his henchman, because he was--it was a--

JB: Well, he may have hired her, too, because he realized he didn't have any curatorial [experience].

SK: Correct. But it was like a "good cop/bad cop" situation. He never did anything really nasty.

JB: When--well, let's say--first of all--what was your impression of Paul when he was--when you met him?

SK: Well, at first, I thought he was, you know, he was extremely personable. Actually, when I think about it, he reminds me of Govan who's now the director of LACMA.

JB: Oh, Michael Govan.

SK: Michael Govan, who's--I mean--who's very nice looking, **[30:00]** very charming, very personable, and he was kind of that--from that cut.

JB: Yeah. I think you're right.

SK: But, you know, a small museum really needs somebody who has a lot of depth or is willing to develop it, you know . . . And my other--my experience with somebody who really wasn't a curator, but was successful as a director, was Ursula McCracken. [Ursula McCracken was the director of the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. from 1986? – 2004.]

JB: Yeah.

SK: Because she didn't know anything about textiles, but she just learned. I mean, she just found a way to learn and do what she had to do, or find the right person to do it. So--but he didn't--he wasn't that interested. . . .

JB: I remember one of the first things that he did was to interview each of us, each of the staff, to, you know, to ask us basically--I guess he asked everybody the same thing, what they thought was wrong and what, you know, what was right and so on. And after he had finished doing that, I remember him remarking that we all had a different idea about it. And I was kind of suspicious

about that because that wasn't my impression. I mean, I'm sure we had different opinions, but I don't think [our opinions about the museum were] that radically different [from each other's].

SK: Right.

JB: I think we were a pretty good team, actually.

SK: Right. I agree. I think he was--it was just the wrong position for him. And I think that when he realized that there were maybe too many problems for him to fix--or maybe for anybody to fix at that point--that he and Martha Lynn decided they were going to close the museum. And so that was at the--that was . . . toward the end of 1997

JB: They had been talking to somebody--well, to Andrea Rich, I think, at LACMA too, about a possible merger. [Andrea Rich was the CEO of the L.A. County Museum of Art; an agreement was reached for a merger with LACMA in September 1997, but it was cancelled by Frank Wyle.]

SK: Right. Oh, I remember. I forgot about that.

JB: Or actually, you know . . . there were several different ideas floated around.

SK: Right. They were going to--but I think, actually, people were interested in that [idea] except that they weren't--LACMA wasn't [actually] interested in [continuing to operate the museum or in] using the building other than maybe for education or storage or something. And I think that that's what soured that deal. So, I remember that too.

JB: But they did actually go through, I guess, this--I'm trying to remember if Paul and Martha were still there. They--I know they didn't, technically, didn't . . . resign until the end of November. [The talks about a merger with LACMA happened during the late summer of 1997; Paul and Martha resigned in November.]

SK: Oh, I think you're right.

JB: And I know that at one point, because I--in September--I had been laid off for a while, but I had been helping to, you know, pack up [the library at CAFAM]. And in September I went across [the street] . . . I had got a job at the LACMA Research Library.

SK: Right.

JB: And it happened that the very first week that I was there, was the week that [the merger] had been announced in the paper, in the *L.A. Times*. And after, apparently, a LACMA board meeting, at which it was announced that CAFAM was going to merge with LACMA. And I'll tell you, it was somewhat embarrassing for me, because everybody [at LACMA] thought that was going to happen. And then [at the last minute—but not until *after* the public announcements], Frank and Edith blew the whistle on it.

SK: Right.

JB: So, I mean, you must have been aware of that.

SK: Oh yeah. . . . I was definitely aware of it. And I think that . . . it could have probably been really good for . . . CAFAM, but it would have certainly changed it a whole lot.

- JB: Yeah. I don't think there was really any feeling that CAFAM was going to proceed anywhere [with LACMA] like what it had been.
- SK: Right.
- JB: I know that's what Edith was afraid of.
- SK: Right. Well I think she was right. I think at the time--maybe if there had been somebody like Michael Govan, who already is interested in a lot of different art forms, it would have been a different story. Was Andrea Rich the director at the time?
- JB: Yes.
- SK: Well, Andrea was not interested in art in general.
- JB: Well, she had that assistant director still. [Michael Shapiro, who had been Rich's Assistant Director, was, after Rich resigned, the Director of LACMA.]
- SK: Yes.
- JB: He was about to leave [to take the directorship of the Detroit Institute of Art]. But, yeah.
- SK: I think that--I mean, her interest was, you know, money. And she was a good fundraiser for LACMA. **[35:00]** But certainly the staff didn't like her at all because she didn't really support them. So I think that wouldn't have been good for CAFAM.
- JB: Yeah. . . well, I agree. [But] it was embarrassing . . . because [the Wyles] went--they let it go to the point where there were all these public announcements and *then* said no. [They] reneged on the deal [after the announcements].
- SK: Right. Yeah.
- JB: That was the embarrassing part. Because it made it pretty clear that CAFAM was in shambles. And we knew that. But it wasn't publicly known, at least not to that extent.
- SK: Right. Well, you know, . . . I mean, MOCA [the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles] was in shambles, and look, they cried for help, and they've been rescued. They were smart.
- JB: Yeah. That's true.
- SK: And the Long Beach Museum of Art is in shambles now. And I don't know what's happened to that.
- JB: I don't either.
- SK: I mean, I think that they're not in good shape. And the Claremont Museum of Art, which was practically a brand new museum, lasted two or three years. And I just talked to my friend who was a docent there and they closed, practically without letting anybody know they were in trouble. So it's hard to run a small museum.
- JB: It is. Well, just to back up a little bit. There were--while Paul and Martha were still there--they did start to lay other people off. [I was given a "leave of absence" by Paul and Martha in April.] And, in fact, I think by the time it became clear that there were major financial problems, there were only about maybe five people left on the staff. That must have been around September or October [1997].

- SK: Right.
- JB: Maybe I better stop this for a second. **[Recorder paused.]** Well, as I was saying, a lot of things happened in 1997--well 1996 and 1997. And one of the big things that happened in 1997 in June was that Lorraine Trippett retired
- SK: Right.
- JB: And she had been with the museum since 1977, so 20 years basically. And the woman who had been her--Lorraine was, actually--had the title of--Controller. She had been the Bookkeeper and then [when she took the title of Controller], her assistant, Sheri Rodius, became the Bookkeeper. But when Lorraine retired, Sherry took over as, I guess, not only Controller but also CFO, Chief Financial Officer.
- SK: Really.
- JB: I saw a reference to that.
- SK: Really?
- JB: At least for a time.
- SK: OK.
- JB: You know, one thing that we haven't talked about, is . . . the attempt to revive the restaurant during this time when Paul was the director. He did try to get something going. And do you remember about that? You want to talk about that?
- SK: Well, I'm trying to remember if it was he, but they actually signed an agreement with the--these--a man and a woman who owned an Indian restaurant and --
- JB: Yes. I think it was the Bombay Café.
- SK: -- right, it was the Bombay Café, which, at the time, was a very small [but popular] restaurant in West Los Angeles on the second floor of a shopping district. But now, of course, they have a big restaurant on Pico.
- JB: Right.
- SK: However, they've sold it.
- JB: Oh, they have?
- SK: It belongs to somebody else now.
- JB: I haven't been there for a long time.
- SK: Right. So yeah, the last time we were there, we asked and they're different owners. But anyway, I know that they were--they had signed a contract [with CAFAM] and they were going to sue [because the deal with them fell through]. But it was, like, just prior to the museum closing, so there was nothing for them to sue since the museum was going out of business itself.
- JB: They could have sued the board, but, you know, you can't get blood out of a turnip.
- SK: Right. They didn't sue, I mean, ultimately, they did not sue because . . . there was no--the turnip wasn't very good at the time . . . But they definitely looked into it. And in fact, even after **[40:00]** [CAFAM] reopened [in 1999], Fred Krieger, [who was on the CAFAM board at that time], found

this person who had a restaurant in a medical building and they were willing to--because the mezzanine was no longer available and the City [Cultural Affairs Department] had its offices upstairs and --

JB: Right. [The City] turned that into office space.

SK: Right. And the front of the mezzanine was really a gallery. So--but this--these people were willing to set up some sort of restaurant situation in the courtyard. And Frank [Wyle] was very interested in doing that.

JB: I think he still is interested in that but [it] . . . just hasn't worked out.

SK: Right.

JB: Yeah, the restaurant plan, as you said, went pretty far [before the museum closed]. They had named it Malibar and, I think, had even sent out some press releases about it.

SK: Right.

JB: So, I don't know--I think the actual public announcement about closing the museum didn't happen until the very end of the year. But can you--do you remember when you became aware that --

SK: That it was closing?

JB: Yeah. That it just . . .

SK: It probably wasn't until, you know, fairly late. And we had the [Sonny and Gloria] Kamm teapot exhibit [Tantalizing Teapots: The Felicitous Union of Form and Content--Selections from the Collection of Gloria and Sonny Kamm; opened in September 1997].

JB: Right. That was the one show that Martha designed --

SK: Right.

JB: -- and put together.

SK: And it was supposed to be on until, I think, the end of February, and it ended up--the museum ended up closing in December. And I know the Kamms were really upset, they were really upset.

JB: But didn't--I know the shop did end up staying open through the end of January.

SK: Yes.

JB: And I thought the decision was made --

SK: Maybe even longer.

JB: -- to hold--to keep the exhibition open.

SK: No. We only kept the [shop open]. I convinced them not [to keep the exhibit open] because I knew we'd have a good Christmas season anyway--people were going to come because they knew the museum was closing. [Keeping the exhibit open would have incurred more expense for security and maintenance.] So, I convinced them not to close the store at the end of December. And I think we were open past the end of January. But I really sold everything.

JB: Wow.

SK: In fact, I ran out of merchandise.

JB: Wow.

SK: So, we really had a good couple of months trying to--

JB: Clean out everything.

SK: --clean out everything. Yeah.

JB: Well I--my follow-up question was: if you had worked beyond that time to close up?

SK: Oh, I did. So it took me--to do paperwork and stuff--another month. It--[and] in the meantime, I have to tell you --

JB: Yeah.

SK: Joaquin and I tried to save as much as we could. I took all the paperwork from the store home.

JB: Yeah.

SK: You know--boxes and boxes of invoices, of information, of all kinds of stuff because --

JB: It would have been thrown out.

SK: Well, Patrick already had come to me and said he was the director for good or for bad. He was the director for 20 years and the museum never closed [during all that time: 1975 – 1996]. And he wasn't going to let it just die. So, he had already started going to the city. He was friends with Al Nodal, who was the head of the Cultural Affairs Department, and he already was working with him. So he said, "Give me a few months and we'll reopen." So I just packed up everything. In the meantime, Martha Lynn was just throwing out everything from, you know, all the archives that were--that, you know, Marcie [Page] had had in the little house.

JB: The "cottage." Yeah.

SK: Yes. They were just throwing all kinds of stuff out and Joaquin was going crazy. And they were throwing out furniture. If you'll notice, the chairs in my kitchen are from the museum store--the museum's chairs. I mean, they were throwing everything out.

JB: I thought they looked familiar.

SK: Right. They--I mean, everything was just like--it was horrible. And so Joaquin and I tried to save as much as we could. And I didn't take the computers home with me, but I did take all the other--

JB: I remember seeing--I went into the museum, I think, during that time. And I think you showed me--there was a huge pile of stuff back in the back that --

SK: Oh my God. It was really terrible. So, Joaquin tried to save things, but you know, we--you don't even know where to put it or what to save. It was just--by the time it got to us, most of it was just a mess. **[45:00]**

JB: Well, the archives, all the [staff] files did go to UCLA [before the end of 1997] . . . Although some of it was in my garage for a while. And then--you know.

SK: Well, I mean, it was a terrible thing. And I just had a garage full of stuff. I really did.

JB: I know.

SK: So as soon as it--well, Patrick let me--you know, kept me in touch, and I knew [he] was going to try to reopen. And he said, "As soon as it reopens, you'll come back and start the store." Which,

of course, I didn't know if that was going to happen for sure, but I figured it was worthwhile saving all this material in any case.

JB: Now in--I think it was April [March 26, 1998], the auction of the permanent collection happened.

SK: Yes. I must tell you, I have a catalog. Nobody else has a catalog.

JB: Oh, well I have a catalog.

SK: I'm--OK, you do.

JB: And I--and there's a catalog in the archive, too.

SK: OK, great. They used my catalog forever. Yeah. And I wrote the prices--I could--I was so upset, I never even bid on a single thing, I just sat there. And I was thinking in my mind's eye that there were things I would have liked to have. But I was just--it was a terrible thing.

JB: OK. So, you were at the auction --

SK: Yes.

JB: -- but you didn't bid on anything?

SK: No. I was--I sat through the whole thing.

JB: It was a very strange--Beny and I went to it and we did buy a few things. But it was very much a mixture of [sadness and also amazement at the range of things that we had never seen all together at one time].

SK: I think it was--actually the auction gallery [Butterfield's] had never handled that kind of stuff anyway. They didn't understand what was valuable and what wasn't. And I know that some people who had--particularly people who had donated contemporary crafts--were very upset, were very angry at the museum. And some things actually went back to their original owners.

JB: Yeah. Some things did. And some things were offered to their owners and--like the Warmbolds--she didn't--Mrs. Warmbold--didn't want it back. All right. One thing that struck me, did you go to the preview the day--a couple of days before when they had everything out?

SK: Yes.

JB: Well a couple of things struck me and I just--I'd like to know, you know, what you thought, too. One was--I didn't remember ever seeing all of the collection out at one time. And that was . . . well, I thought it was very impressive [though] it was not well-presented.

SK: Right.

JB: In fact, some of the things were quite dirty. I was embarrassed by how dusty and dirty things were. But it was amazing to see the breadth, and how wonderful some of the--some of it was.

SK: Right. Well, there were some really wonderful things in the collection . . . When you have a collection, you have to have a conservator all the time. You can't just stash things away. You have to take care of the stuff and they really hadn't.

JB: And they never did. I mean Marcie did the best she could --

SK: Right.

JB: -- but she had other things she had to do. [Page did have some things conserved at CAFAM during her tenure as Registrar.]

SK: Right. I mean, there just wasn't the personnel [or the space] to take care of it. And I think, as a result, they never since--they've never collected anything. That isn't exactly true.

JB: Oh yeah?

SK: They did take a few things into the collection, but they shouldn't have. I mean, after it reopened. After they--it reopened, they did take a few things --

JB: Oh, I didn't know that.

SK: -- yes. At Patrick's--because of course I asked. I mean it all went through me, because I was there. Nobody else was there.

JB: I wonder where that is now.

SK: Good question.

JB: Well it was a very sad, very poignant event.

SK: Oh, very sad.

JB: And it was more like a wake, kind of, in a way.

SK: Right. I mean there were--I mean, two significant things that come to my mind that I was interested in, was a Sam Maloof chair, which he was pre-- he was there and he was prepared to buy it. But it sold for like \$20,000--\$18,000 or \$20,000.

JB: Oh.

SK: So, he let it go. But he wasn't going to let it sell for less money. . . .

JB: It was a rocking chair.

SK: -- Yes. . . . And the other item that I really loved was a--what's-her-name, the potter from Ojai--Beatrice Wood.

JB: Beatrice Wood.

SK: Beatrice Wood. There was this sort of theatrical scene; it was **[50:00]** fabulous. And it also went for a lot of money.

JB: Well, that's good.

SK: Yeah. So, I mean, but there--they had grouped together all kinds of stuff that didn't . . . look like they belonged to each other.

JB: Yeah. And that tends to devalue these things when they're not presented well.

SK: Right.

JB: Well, that's what you meant when you said you were so upset. That you just were--it was such a kind of final event.

SK: Right. And you just--I mean, at that point, I thought that was just the end

JB: I think all of us did.

- SK: Yeah. Well, but--there was Patrick [Ela] still pounding away. I mean, as many mistakes as he made--and we know that he made many--he definitely was committed to keeping it alive. I'm not sure he is happy about it today, but
- JB: Well, I know he loved Edith Wyle.
- SK: Yes.
- JB: And that, I think, was his [motivation].
- SK: Well it was--I mean, he put a lot of his own life there.
- JB: Oh, absolutely. Twenty-one years.
- SK: Yeah. I mean, I think he's a very nice man. I think he's not a good manager. And he made mistakes. But he meant well.
- JB: Yes. I think he stretched himself a little thin.
- SK: Right.
- JB: He had several different other activities going on at the same time and
- SK: I think that he had pressure from his wife [Lisi Rona] to make a lot of money, and he clearly wasn't making it at the museum. So, he did other things.
- JB: Yeah. That's understandable
- SK: And, you know, that was--even when he was the interim director, he was, like, rushing in and rushing out.
- JB: He--yeah--he made brief appearances.
- SK: Yes.
- JB: So, when--in this time when the museum, after the auction, and you had finished packing everything up, I suppose--what were you doing then? You said that Patrick had talked to you about reopening.
- SK: Right. Well, I didn't go look for anything, [for another job]. Again, I was already not a young chicken, and I wasn't sure anybody would hire me. But I was waiting. And also I had my own little business which--
- JB: Right.
- SK: So, I was--I started doing shows [selling antiques, jewelry, and textiles] again. Textile shows, the antique shows, and stuff. So, I was--you know, I was busy. I mean, I--as you know, it doesn't take much to get busy with something else
- JB: Yes. I think we have that in common.
- SK: Yes. I mean, some people just don't know what to do.
- JB: On an even sadder note, Edith, by this time, had become very ill.
- SK: Yes.
- JB: And I was wondering, you know, how--well, of course, after it closed, I don't suppose she was around. Well--did she come in during the last days [of the shop]?
- SK: Yes. She did. What year--when did she die?

- JB: She did not die until October of 1999.
- SK: Oh yeah. She was--yeah, she definitely came in. And she was still around when the City was there.
- JB: At the beginning? [CAFAM reopened in partnership with the City of L.A. Cultural Affairs Department February 11, 1999.]
- SK: Yes She didn't get really sick until the last few months.
- JB: OK.
- SK: And I called her--by the time I called her--I wanted to go visit her, [but] she couldn't see me anymore. I mean, she sent messages, you know, but
- JB: Yeah. That was in the summer, I think, that--
- SK: Yeah. I don't remember exactly. But I was very fond of her and she definitely was supportive. Yeah.
- JB: Yeah. She--you know, you said she was standoffish when you first met her.
- SK: Right.
- JB: And I--and she certainly could be. But she had another side to her that--
- SK: She did.
- JB: -- if you got to know her, as you got to know her more, she--
- SK: Well, I think I--of course, I didn't know it at first, but—I'll tell you an interesting thing. What she told me, toward the end, was that her one big sorrow in life was that she didn't know more about her Jewish heritage.
- JB: Oh.
- SK: And that was a--that is a very interesting [55:00] thing all by itself. She was brought up in a very left-wing household. And as a result, she was really very interested in mankind and in cultures. I mean, I was brought up in the same kind of household, so I understand it. My parents weren't religious at all, but they were very interested in Jewish culture. So I had a completely different background than she did.

But she married Frank. Frank came from a very different kind of a family. He came from a very aristocratic, wealthy family from Chicago. They were--there were a lot of people like that who were Jewish. I'm not sure where his family came from originally, but they didn't want to be Jewish. So they really raised their family with practically no Jewish background. The kids—Diana [Munk, Edith and Frank's youngest daughter], told me that the kids were sent to Hebrew school for like six months or three months or something and they hated it because it was all strange to them and they dropped out and that was the end of it.

So, anyway, it was very interesting because I was--I, you know, I'm so interested in Jewish culture. My kids were raised with that. And here was Rosie [Getz, Edith and Frank's granddaughter and the daughter of their older daughter, Nancy Romero.], who had really been brought up--her mother was Jewish, but--and her father, [Nancy's first husband], was Jewish--so

she's actually all Jewish. And she told me her grandfather, Frank Wyle, was not Jewish. I said, "Rosie, your grandfa—"

JB: She didn't know?

SK: No.

JB: Oh.

SK: I said, "Rosie, your grandfather's Jewish." She says, "No. I'm positive he's not Jewish."

JB: Oh, my goodness.

SK: In two weeks, she came back to me. She says, "You're right." She says, "I never knew it." So here is--

JB: That is sad.

SK: Isn't that sad? So here--it was in the back of Edith's mind that maybe she had lost something. And actually, the only person--the only one of their kids who married somebody who was Jewish was Diana. Bernie [Munk, Diana's husband] was Jewish.

JB: Yeah.

SK: And I don't think, when they first married, they did anything [about their cultural heritage] either, but they got involved. They got interested in being Jewish, and so their daughter married a Jewish married man and that one side of the family [is somewhat religious]. Not that that's necessarily important . . . but it's kind of interesting that, you know, that it is part of what you're born into.

JB: It's important to know what your culture--your heritage--is.

SK: Right. So anyway, that was the one thing she said: "I," she [Edith] says, "I'm sorry that I didn't do that." But, of course, Edith did turn out to be a very different person. And also, Frank was very conservative politically and she was very liberal.

JB: I didn't realize he was conservative politically.

SK: Well he was. I mean, you know--but I think that--well, the other thing she said to me [was] that she--that he had taken good care of her, her whole life, and so it was something financial. She said, "I have to leave it up to him to make those decisions," which I thought was interesting, because she was certainly no weak lady.

JB: No.

SK: I mean--she was a strong lady.

JB: Yeah. But she never, I guess, needed to involve herself in that kind of detail, and I think that was evident in the running of the museum, too. She really wanted to be able to turn all of that over to Patrick. So, she was strong in some ways, and not in others.

SK: Right.

JB: Like all of us.

SK: Yeah. Yes. . . .

JB: So, Edith did finally pass away in October. [October 12, 1999.]

SK: Right.

JB: And a month later there was a really wonderful memorial celebration of her life.

SK: Oh, it was fabulous.

JB: And—well, why don't you tell about that, as much as you can remember.

SK: Well, it was in the park across the street.

JB: Which is where the Festival [of Masks] had always been held.

SK: Yes. And I can't remember if the park had been remodeled by then. I don't --

JB: Some of it had, yes. **[01:00:00]** That little amphitheater had been built [behind LACMA] and that was where the [memorial was held].

SK: Well, later on they built a fence, which made it very difficult to do anything. But it [the memorial] was in the amphitheater, and there were just a huge outpouring of people for her memorial service. I mean, it was really amazing.

JB: Yeah.

SK: And I think the museum had already reopened--is that true?

JB: Yes.

SK: OK. It had already reopened, so [then] there was like--I mean the City--I think the--I think it's Gardener or—Stanley [Avenue]

JB: Oh yes, where the [memorial plaque was mounted]. That happened later [the following year in November 2000]. They . . . [put up] a plaque.

SK: A plaque. Right. Making it [Edith Wyle Square].

JB: At Stanley, it was at Stanley [and Wilshire]. Yeah.

SK: But the memorial service itself was really very touching. And lots of speeches. And, of course, her whole family came and it--I thought it was a very moving experience. And I can't remember all the details, but --

JB: Well, I don't remember all the details. But it [was] just wonderful to see everyone again --

SK: Yes.

JB: So many people that had been on the staff in the past came together. And then we all marched over to the museum--

SK: Right.

JB: --where they had a lovely reception.

SK: Right.

JB: And it was just really good.

SK: Well I was--I think in a lot of ways once--I mean, and I think at that point we really didn't know how much involvement . . . Frank would continue to have, because, as I said before, he wasn't really interested in any of the artistic part of the museum; he was interested in the financial thing.

JB: That was kind of surprising [that he continued to be involved with CAFAM after Edith died], now that I think about it. But I think that--you know--he had retired. By that time he wasn't even--in

fact, I think maybe his business had been sold at that point. It was somewhere in there that Wyle Labs [which had been founded by Frank Wyle] was absorbed by another company.

SK: Right. And they kicked him off the [Wyle Laboratories] board.

JB: Yeah.

SK: Right.

JB: So, I think that he welcomed the chance to--well he --

SK: I think you're right.

JB: --during this time when Edith was ill, he did turn [the CAFAM board] over to Patrick to--Patrick was chairman of the board [from January 1999 to December 2002].

SK: Correct.

JB: In fact, for [21 months, from April 2001 to December 2002], he was both chairman and he was [interim] acting director --

SK: Correct.

JB: --which was--

SK: Probably a conflict of interest.

JB: --unusual.

SK: Right.

JB: Then at . . . Let's see, I want to get this straight: Joan DeBruin, [who had been head of the folk art program at the L.A. Cultural Affairs Department] was the [CAFAM] director at that point--when Edith died.

SK: Right.

JB: And when she [DeBruin] resigned in [April] 2002, that's when they started the big search that you began to talk about a little bit ago.

SK: Right. OK.

JB: So, do you want to talk about that a little bit?

SK: Right. So, they did a major search through--and I forgot the name of the organization, but --

JB: Oh, they had a . . . some head hunters?

SK: Right.

JB: Yeah.

SK: And . . . there is, like, an organization of nonprofits [The Center for Nonprofit Management], that-- [they] did the search through that too. And they had, like, 96 applicants for the job.

JB: Wow.

SK: And then, of course, there was a search committee and they narrowed it down [in late 2002] to six people at the end.

JB: You were not on the search committee.

- SK: I was not on the search committee. But when they got down to the six people, they brought each person to the museum to look through the museum, and they asked me to tour that person and then to give my opinion.
- JB: And just to [clarify]--you were on the board at this time?
- SK: Yes.
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: I was on the board as soon as the City came into the situation. [The City of L.A. came to an agreement with the CAFAM board at the end of 1998 to partner with them for ten years.] I attended all the board meetings. And so, I really know what was going on. And, I mean, they needed me to tell them what was going on at the museum. If not, they really didn't know. I mean it was sort of--it was a difficult kind of marriage between the City and the board.
- [01:05:00]** Nobody quite knew what the other person's responsibilities were. And they [the responsibilities] did continue to change. I mean, the City could not replace Joan DeBruin. They didn't have another person who was capable of being director of a museum. So, they turned it over to the board and they said they would pay the salary for that person--or they specified what they would pay. So, anyway, the board did a search. And the search ended up with these six people, and they--well, first of all, the people [candidates], came and they looked around and they [the board] asked me-- [recording paused]
- JB: OK, you were talking about touring around the different candidates for the director [position].
- SK: Oh, OK. Right--so they wanted my opinion of these six candidates, which I gave them. And they ended up hiring Joan Marshall. And Joan Marshall had been the development officer at the Autry Museum. And she accepted for about a week and then she turned them down.
- JB: Oh.
- SK: Now Joan Marshall is now the director of the Pacific Asia Museum. [Marshall was the Pacific Asia Museum director 2003 – 2010.]
- JB: Oh, I knew that name sounded familiar.
- SK: Right. So maybe--so I actually knew her. I've seen her many times since then. But maybe she already was talking to the Pacific Asia Museum and that's why she turned it down. But for whatever reason, she turned down the job. And it was interesting--they hired Peter Tokovsky. And I was--he was strange--when . . . I walked him through the museum. He just asked the weirdest questions and I thought, "This is a strange man." They did--the search committee actually did an in-depth study and testing of the six candidates. So, it wasn't like they didn't try, you know, and they had different people look at different things. So, they tried very hard to do the right thing. So anyway, Joan [Marshall] turned them down, so they hired Peter Tokovsky
- JB: What kind of testing did they do?
- SK: Like psychological testing --
- JB: Oh really? Oh.

- SK: Yeah. So--and they interviewed them in-depth. You know, they had two groups of three people interviewing the candidates --
- JB: This was the company that they were using that--
- SK: No, it wasn't. OK. So --
- JB: OK OK--so this was the board that was doing the more in-depth analysis?
- SK: Right--they were trying to be very careful. Right. So, anyway, they hired Peter Tokovsky, who had been an adjunct professor at the World Arts and Culture department at UCLA. [Tokovsky started in January 2003.]
- JB: He was a folklorist--he had a PhD in folklore, I think.
- SK: Right. To make a long story short, it was the wrong job for him. He wasn't psychologically equipped. He was a very smart man. But he wasn't psychologically equipped to have such a diverse kind of a job. I mean, when you're the director of a small museum, you have to be--you have to do a little of everything. And he was not very good with people, *not*. So that was--I'll tell you what happened the very last day. Well, there was actually a duel between he and Frank Wyle. And he [Tokovsky] thought he could win and stay at the museum. But of course, there was no way he could win.
- JB: Before--I want to hear that--about that. [But] when Tokovsky was first hired, were there any changes in the shop--[in the] policy about the shop? I mean, did you and he have conversations that indicated he wanted to change anything?
- SK: We actually--not at first. But later on, yes, he did. He [01:10:00] wanted--he wanted pieces to be signed. He didn't want--he wanted artists' pieces with names. He didn't want anonymous folk art.
- JB: Yeah. That's interesting.
- SK: It became, like, a big thing. It was sort of, like--anyway we did have a conflict because--going through my papers [I found that]--I wrote a letter to Frank Wyle, complaining about him, and complaining about what he [Tokovsky] was requesting from me. I mean, I'm not even sure that I--you know--I don't think . . . Frank--and Frank by the way--if you weren't at a meeting for the museum and you were someplace else--he did not want to talk about the museum. So, I may have met him 5 million other times and I [always] knew I couldn't mention the museum. So--I actually wrote him this letter [which was very unusual] and I had--I did have a meeting with him. But he wasn't--he wasn't impressed by my complaints. But that was before--it was before he and Peter had got into it. And Fred [Krieger, Stella's husband], of course, didn't like him either.
- JB: Fred was on the board by this time?
- SK: Yes OK, so the last day that Peter was going to be there [December 2003] . . . well, I was the only board member left in the museum. We had had some sort of opening, and it was his last day of work. And I got a call from Wally Marks, and he told me to ask Peter for his keys.
- JB: Oh.

- SK: Me! So, I told Fred. And Fred asked Joaquin to hang back there just in case. Because he [Tokovsky] had a--had a temper and he and I were already not in good--good shape with each other.
- JB: But if it was his last day, he must have expected to have to give his keys up.
- SK: I don't think he expected to give them to me. And he said some nasty things to me, but he did give me the keys and left. I mean, I saw him [leave]. And that actually caused a lot of dissension in the board, because there were a few board members who--important board members--like Marge Fasman, who really liked him--or like what's-her-name --
- JB: Tomi [Kuwayama]?
- SK: No. Tomi wasn't involved. She kind of went along with whatever. Clara [Huste?].
- JB: Oh.
- SK: They were very supportive of him. And they were very angry that he was gone. And we tried to talk to--Fred tried to talk to them--and explain why he wasn't good for the museum, and they were [implacable], so they both dropped out of the board. And that was--[those were] big losses for the board.
- JB: Yes. Frank [Wyle] did mention that [in my interview with him] as being an unfortunate byproduct.
- SK: Right. But that is always the case whenever somebody is gone. Somebody's always--I mean--when the Textile Museum fired Ursula McCracken, Lloyd Cotsen went off the board. That was a big loss for them too. So there's always somebody who likes whoever it is, even if that person isn't perfect. So that was too bad. But as far as I could see Peter--Peter was the wrong person. He would have been OK [someplace else]. He's now at the Getty doing education and I thought that was a good place for him to be. And I've actually seen him a couple of times at the Fowler. But we haven't really had a full hello . . . Well--OK, so Peter Tokovsky and Frank Wyle had, [as] I said, a duel--not really--but they--it was a power struggle.
- [. . .] And so, Peter, of course, as I said, had his allies. And so, he and Frank kind of vied for power. But there was no beating out Frank. Frank was the person with the money and the history and whatever. There was no getting rid of Frank. So, Peter lost, obviously.
- JB: Oh boy. What a--and you . . . were physically in the museum, you were [literally] right in the center of all of this. The offices at that point were just [on] the floor above you . . .
- SK: So, well, I was there . . . no matter [what]--everything sort of went through me. So anyway--so then Patrick [Ela] recommended --
- JB: Goodwin.
- SK: Goodwin.
- JB: James Goodwin.
- SK: James Goodwin, who was an old friend of his [Patrick's], who had actually sort of been hanging around. And even before Peter Tokovsky left, . . . James would come to the museum, and I

would see him. And he was like a more mature person, but he was very artistic and interested . . . And he—James—had . . . been like one of the managers of the Pacific Design Center.

JB: Right. Right. For quite a long time I think.

SK: Right. . . . OK. So, he came [in February 2004], and along with him came his wife Susheila. Susheila was fabulous, but James wasn't fabulous. Now I know Patrick still thinks James was . . . a wonderful person. . . . He just wasn't really with it. And he--he was very good artistically. He'd put sayings all over the place.

JB: I remember he repainted all the offices.

SK: He--he liked Joaquin--he was so nice to Joaquin. He hired--I forgot the guy's name--to be at the admissions desk. I would say, in a lot of ways, the atmosphere [was]--and he hired this old --

JB: More positive.

SK: Right. This old friend of his was doing publicity. And in a lot of ways it was definitely a more positive thing, but he was not the right person either. And so, he actually resigned in a huff over something. . . .

JB: I understand he went down to the Mingei [Museum in San Diego].

SK: Oh, well that's my next story. I'll tell you about that.

JB: Oh, OK, OK.

SK: So I'm a very good friend . . . I'm very friendly with Martha Longenecker, who's been the director of the Mingei for a hundred years. . . . [Longenecker founded the Mingei Museum in 1978 and served as its director until until she retired in 2005.]

JB: I was wondering why you hadn't mentioned the Mingei.

SK: Oh yes. I've had involvements with the Mingei too. So anyway--so Martha called me one day and she said that she was going to retire, which is hard to believe. But that she had other things she wants to do. I'm sure by this time she was 85 anyway. And she had just totally controlled everything at the Mingei.

JB: She's still alive, isn't she?

SK: Yeah. She almost died. But she is still alive. [Longenecker died October 29, 2013; she was 93.] So, she had--she called me and she said that they were looking--they were doing a search for a director because she was going to retire. And what did I think about . . . James Goodwin? . . .

[01:20:00] So, OK, so they hired him. . . . So, he was there for two weeks. And they--I don't know how they did it--but I think they let him quit. And he said it was just the wrong thing for him. He didn't want to live in San Diego, or whatever it was. His mother lived in San Diego.

JB: Oh.

SK: So, there was a reason for him to be going down there.

JB: I see.

SK: So, anyway, that's the whole story. So, he was the wrong person and I knew that they were desperate. So that--that was like one [director] after the other.

- JB: Right.
- SK: And . . . then Frank was—[he] was actually related to Frank Wyle--and he was on the board. And he's not anymore either.
- JB: Oh, I can't think who that would be.
- SK: OK, so--a young man, anyway--he had met Maryna [Hrushetska], who was like an assistant manager of an art gallery. [Hrushetska was a partner in Off Main, a small gallery in Bergamot Station.] And he wanted her [to be the new director]. And although they pretended like they were doing some sort of search--and we even suggested some people--they were going to hire her no matter what. And so Frank--I can't remember his name--
- JB: Oh, I think I do [know who you mean, but] I don't remember either. But I--I'll be able to look that up because I think Beny [Joan's husband, Robert Benedetti] was on the board, too, at this time and he knew this person, yeah. [Frank Strausser was the CAFAM board member who brought Maryna Hrushetska to the board's attention as a potential director candidate.]
- SK: OK. So, anyway, they hired Maryna [in March 2005]. And she was a very positive, young, energetic person, although she had absolutely no museum experience at all. She did not know a thing about museums, but she came in with sort of a "new age" kind of attitude. And . . . I think, probably, soon after she got there, she probably decided she was going to get rid of everybody who was there, and just start from scratch. She actually told me that. Actually, I have her telling me that on a note that she sent to me. She didn't say she was going to get rid of all of us, but she said that [when] . . . a new manager comes in, a new director comes in, that frequently it's better to start all over again.
- JB: You know, I think she mentioned something like that to me too. And for some reason it didn't strike me until later exactly what she meant.
- SK: Right. And she definitely told me that. And it didn't sink into my brain [either] because I couldn't imagine anybody [would] want to get rid of me, right? [laughing]
- JB: Well, I couldn't either.
- SK: Right . . . but I'm--I would--you know--in retrospect, I thought about it. Maybe I was the most important person for her to get rid of, because I had had so much control over the place for such a long time that I was--she was going to be in my space. And I wasn't used to really having somebody else [in authority there]--and she started criticizing. This is--was her way of--that's how she got rid of Joaquin. She just started criticizing every single thing I did. There was like nothing I could do [right]. I didn't know how to do an Excel spreadsheet, and she--you should see how she taught me how to do it . . . There was nobody teaching anybody. And besides--did I have to--was that the most significant thing for me to learn? Yes. She had to have all these reports and blah, blah. And . . . I should have realized sooner than later that she was out to get rid of me. So, close the machine for a sec. **[Recorder paused.]** . . .
- JB: OK. So, when did you actually leave, Stella? Do you remember when? **[01:25:00]**

- SK: Yes. I actually left in August of 2005, is that correct?
- JB: Yes, that must [be right]. Well, James Goodwin resigned at the end of 2004. So--and Maryna started--I think--a month or so later. And --
- SK: Right, right, around March. That's right.
- JB: So—so, you stayed on through to almost the end [of the year]?
- SK: No. . . . So, I left, like, in August.
- JB: August—[that's what] you said, OK. Well, I guess the only other thing that I thought about asking you was if there were some special--I know that you--especially in these last years--you were very involved with some of the exhibitions. And I just wondered if there were any that you would like to talk about specifically? I know the silver show was a special [one for you].
- SK: Oh, OK. Well, . . . Peter Tokovsky, he was the director then. And I was there--it was Mexican silver, and Fred and I [had] collected it for many years. And so we were very involved with the curator. And it was organized by the San Antonio Museum of Art, and really was a beautiful exhibit. And it went from San Antonio to the Mingei, and then came to CAFAM. Well Peter did not want it. So, he--
- JB: It was a gorgeous show.
- SK: Right. So, he was--he threatened to cancel it.
- JB: Did he say why? Did he have a reason?
- SK: Well, they hadn't raised enough money. And so Fred and I were watching, so when he started threatening [to cancel it], . . . I spent \$700 on my cell phone making phone calls to try to get money.
- JB: Oh boy.
- SK: And we actually got friends and other interested parties to donate, because he was just . . .
- JB: So he was not willing to make a fundraising effort to [get it]--he just didn't want it.
- SK: He just didn't want it. And I'll show you the invitation he did. He didn't want it so bad that he almost sabotaged it. So--but it was a--it turned out to be a beautiful exhibit.
- JB: Yes. I saw it at the Mingei. And it was lovely there. But I actually liked the CAFAM [installation better].
- SK: Actually, the Mingei did it [differently]. It came [from the San Antonio Museum of Art] with very specific ways of setting it up, so that there would--it would make sense. And Martha Longenecker just--she's her own designer. And she was--she wasn't interested in accuracy. She just wanted things to look nice. So, she really didn't follow the directions. And we did [follow the directions] at CAFAM, so it wasn't [the same as at the Mingei].
- JB: Now who designed the show at CAFAM? Was Carol involved at that point?
- SK: I think she was.
- JB: Carol Fulton.
- SK: I think she did it.

JB: Yeah, I was thinking --

SK: Carol's married now.

JB: Yes. That's right.

SK: That's an interesting story.

JB: Yes, yes.

SK: So yeah, I think she did it. So, that was actually a wonderful show, and I obviously was very involved, and of course, I did really well in the store too [during the run of that show].

JB: Yes. Well, that was important for everyone that the shop do well.

SK: Right. Actually, we just had a silver show at the Fowler. [But] I had nothing to do with the show. That was one person's collection. It was somebody I knew very well. But it was--it's very bad to do one person's collection. And I think it's bad for them too, because it--it's--museums are short of money [01:30:00] and sometimes you need to do stuff that you shouldn't do. . .but the Fowler just did it. And that exhibit, by the way, is traveling to the International Folk Art Museum; . . . next summer, it's going to be in Santa Fe. So I will definitely be there.

JB: Well, I'll look for it. Oh good. We'll have to arrange something. [JB moved to Santa Fe in November 2009.]

SK: I'll let you know.

JB: I'm trying to remember if I had--I think Beny and I went to that show. There was another show up at the same time that we had gone to the museum for. And then we--then we --

SK: It was up a long-- it actually was up a long time

JB: OK.

SK: Well another--another show--of course, Fred [Krieger did], after Joan DeBruin left: She had asked him to do an exhibit of collectors. So, we had an exhibit--we had eight collectors in that exhibit. And actually, I exhibited my beaded bags in that [show], which I think--at the Fowler they'd never let somebody running the store [exhibit in the gallery]--in fact I'm not allowed to sell anything to the store. So there's a much greater division of, of--so there's no conflict of interest.

JB: Yeah.

SK: So here Fred [Krieger] was the curator. And I had—I, the store manager, had--had stuff in the exhibit. But we had like seven other people who were collectors.

JB: Yeah, it wasn't just your collection.

SK: No, no.

JB: And that was an extraordinary time too. It was [a very abnormal situation].

SK: It was a . . . really beautiful exhibit. It actually was a beautiful exhibit. It included--Sam Maloof actually had some pieces of his, even though he's not a collector. But it had some of his pieces. It really was very nice. And then we also had--Fred actually curated another exhibit of five or six textile artists, contemporary textile artists. And that was a really nice exhibit too. So I was involved in a lot of the exhibits even things I didn't know anything about. And also the City

- arranged some of the exhibits too. So--they had a [curator, Carmen Ramirez], who worked for the city. And she was very nice. And she was very smart. And I enjoyed working with her too.
- JB: Well, just to wrap things up Stella, I wanted to ask you about what you've been doing since you left the museum. And I know that now you're working at the Fowler [Museum shop]. Can you tell us how that came about?
- SK: So--well I left CAFAM in August of 2005, and--which is about four years ago. I'm now 71. So, I was 67 at the time, and I thought nobody is going to really hire me at this point. So, I really didn't look for another job as a museum [shop] manager. Although I really liked being part of the [museum] world. First of all, I loved--I loved museums and I've always been interested in museums. And somehow or other, when we've been involved with museums, we've always been friends with the staff, rather than with the other members. So, I--I missed it and I also was involved with the Museum Store Association. I had made a lot of friends through that too. And—so, anyway, I--but I had this business [Threads?], which sold antique textiles and Mexican jewelry and other old jewelry. And so, I started doing shows--and there's always personal things that you have to do, that you've--you've neglected because you're working.
- JB: Sure.
- SK: So, I did that. And then about a year and a half later I got a call from the Fowler. Well, I kind of knew that . . . well, when they moved to their present building on the UCLA campus [01:35:00] in 1991, they had 35 women volunteers who ran the store. And they had one woman who acted . . . as the manager. And about four years before, I [had] got a call from them [when] she had retired. And they took what was their finance officer in the museum and turned her into a half-time manager. They'd really never paid for staff [in their store] at all. And all the years that I was at CAFAM, it was thrown up to me that the Fowler store made so much money. But they had no overhead. They had--they never paid for staff . . . they had all these volunteers. But, of course, over the years, the women--some women died, some women retired . . . They were getting like older and older.
- JB: Sure.
- SK: And by the time they called me, they realized that this half-time person, who was a very nice young woman, really didn't understand the--the museum store business. And . . . the women who were the volunteers, already there were only six or seven of them left. And they already were using students to work the store part time. So --
- JB: So they were paying the students that --
- SK: They were paying the students, but they're work/study students. So, they don't pay them very much.
- JB: Right.
- SK: And so . . . they had this other woman--I don't think she was on the store's books. She hadn't had a job in the museum. So they still looked like they were making a lot of money in the store

[because they weren't paying her]. So they called me . . . oh, I was called by, actually, my boss, who was the only person I didn't know that was working at the museum . . . I never had heard his name before. And he called me and asked me if I would come in and talk to them. And it was interesting because he has the same name. He has the same name as my plumber at the time. His name is David Blair. So, I thought it was my plumber calling me. I didn't know why he was calling. Anyway, they interviewed me and they hired me. And at not very much money, but I really wanted to get my foot in the door anyway, so that was fine. And they really hired me to be very part-time, so they wouldn't have to pay me benefits, which I accepted at the moment. And I started working at the Fowler.

And of course--first of all, things were a total mess. I was like--I was so surprised to see what the merchandise was, and that they had really been using--misusing--the point-of-sale system, which was entirely different than what I had used at CAFAM. But I knew what they were doing was wrong. So, anyway, I've made many changes and I still have--I think I lost one of my old volunteers, but the rest of them are still around. And I still have students, and it's a pain in the neck because they keep changing . . . but--I couldn't just work 20 hours a week. It didn't work out, sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. So, I'm still part time, but I've surpassed the--the 1,000 hours a year thing--so they now have to pay me benefits--that's another story.

But anyway, I really do like working there. It's a lot different than CAFAM. I'm not as involved in a lot of the [museum] stuff. But I'm very good friends with the director. So, we talk frequently about exhibits and other things that are happening. The Fowler's a really good museum. They produce a lot of books. I mainly sell [them] in the store--I barely buy other people's books, it's mainly books that the museum has produced. They've produced 200 books .

JB: Wow. And they're substantial?

SK: And they're substantial. And we have a full-time book designer. And we have a full-time book editor. It is a big thing for the museum . . .

JB: Wow. I didn't realize that.

SK: Yeah. They're really serious about the books. And it's a very serious museum in a lot of ways. Although it depends on who the director is. And I think they've changed the name. It was originally the Cultural History Museum. And then when they took over the Fowler name, it became the Fowler Museum of Cultural History. And now it is--and now **[01:40:00]** they've flip-flopped the name and it's--it's instead of being UCLA Fowler Museum, it's the Fowler Museum at UCLA. So, we're an F instead of a U. And they've actually broadened it so they're a lot more contemporary things there too. So--but the exhibits are generally very good. And there's a good staff of people. Although in these hard times, they've actually laid off people.

JB: But not in the shop?

- SK: No. We're bare bones. We're less than bare bones truthfully. Other than me, I have two students and six volunteers who are all—well, five are definitely in their 80's, and some of them are not what they used to be. But they're very nice ladies.
- JB: That doesn't even seem that old to me anymore.
- SK: No, it isn't, it isn't. Well they say—truthfully, they say--they wish they were my age because . . . they're a lot different in their 80's than they were in their 70's.
- JB: Yeah. We have something to look forward to. (laughs)
- SK: Right.
- JB: Well, Stella I cannot think of a better--I don't want to say ending, because I'm sure you're going to be at the Fowler for some time, but a better ending to [your] CAFAM saga than . . . your ending up at the Fowler, because they are and have always been, that I know of, a serious, interesting museum, that's quite close in concept to the Craft and Folk Art Museum, and yet very distinctive too. And I'm just so happy that you've been able to take time to talk with us about the Craft and Folk Art Museum. Is there anything else that you'd like to say?
- SK: Well I just--I'll say one thing because it just brought to mind [that] we—[Fred and I]--actually belonged to the Ethnic Arts Council, and so did Edith and Frank. And because of our membership, they gave us a backroom tour of the Fowler [after the new building had opened]. And this must have, honestly, been sometime, maybe '96, '97, and Edith looked at me, and she said, "Look at all this. And why didn't this happen to us?"
- JB: Yeah.
- SK: So, she--she realized that something went amiss with CAFAM. And--because the Fowler really was in the basement of Haynes Hall for many years.
- JB: Oh yes. Yes, I do remember going down there [back in the seventies]. Well, I've always felt that way about the Mingei also, that [how they have evolved so well] should have been [what happened to] the Craft and Folk Art Museum.
- SK: Right, well, you know, sometimes it's luck, and sometimes you just make a slight misstep. But it's--the museum business is very touchy.
- JB: It's very fragile.
- SK: It's very fragile, and even the big museums have their--their problems.
- JB: Oh yes. When I went to work at LACMA, I realized very quickly that although their budgets were much bigger, their expenses were much bigger too.
- SK: Right.
- JB: And--and--there were many commonalities between [them]. So . . . this is a tricky time that we're in right now.
- SK: Well, I'm really glad to talk to you, Joan. And it's sort of made me reminisce about all the [CAFAM] stuff.
- JB: I've enjoyed it.

SK: Yeah. And--because I--there are things you forget. Life rolls along and you just kind of go with the flow and forget all this--all this stuff.

JB: It was an adventure working at the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

SK: Yeah it was, definitely.

JB: I'm very glad to have known you there.

SK: Thank you. We were there too short [a time] together, but who knew at the time?

JB: Who knew indeed? None of us could have planned this. Well, thanks again.

SK: It's a pleasure.

[End of Session 2: 1:45:02]