

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF JOAN M. BENEDETTI

by Joyce Lovelace

January 17, 2012



Joan M. Benedetti
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BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Joan M. Benedetti was born in New York City December 28, 1937, after her parents, from Illinois, had completed their MLS (Library Science) degrees at Columbia University. She has a younger brother. Her father, who traveled the world with the Merchant Marines, became head of the Merchant Marine library. He died when Joan was eight. Her mother headed two NYC branch libraries; moving back to the Midwest, she was director of the Decatur Public Library and three Illinois regional library systems.

Joan majored in Theatre and minored in Art History at Indiana University. Intending to become an actor; she was a member of IU's Brown County Playhouse. Marriage and the birth of a daughter derailed her acting plans. Her mother encouraged her to think about librarianship. After obtaining her BA in 1958, she took library courses for an entry-level certificate, then was a children's librarian for three years at the Gary Public Library. Returning to IU, in 1966 she earned her MA in library science, re-married, and went with her husband and daughter to Milwaukee, where she was Decorative Arts Librarian at the main library.

After two more children, in 1976 she met Edith Wyle, founder of the Craft and Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) in Los Angeles. She developed the CAFAM library, raising money through grant-writing to pay herself and fund what became CAFAM's research library and an adjunct think tank, the Center for the Study of Art and Culture. Her 21 years on the CAFAM staff, the most inspirational and challenging of her life, ended when CAFAM, after suffering through a nineties recession, closed at the end of 1997.

In L.A., she joined the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA), chaired the 1984 national conference in L.A., edited the 2001 L.A. conference program, and served as Chapter Chair. She wrote articles on folk art terminology and small art museum libraries. After retiring in 2002, she edited *Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship*, still the only publication devoted to the subject; it was co-published in 2007 by ARLIS/NA and Scarecrow Press. In 2014, she received the ARLIS/NA Distinguished Service Award.

CAFAM re-opened in 1999 but the entire former staff had been laid off, the institutional archives were given to UCLA Special Collections, and the library was given to the L.A. County Museum of Art. Joan went to work part-time in LACMA's Research Library and began working a few hours a week at UCLA on CAFAM's archives. The finding aid, which she wrote, went online in 2012. In 2008, she began working on a CAFAM oral history. Over 15 months, she recorded interviews with 17 former CAFAM staff and board.

In 2009, she moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she finished editing the CAFAM Oral History Project, donating it to UCLA's Center for Oral History Research in 2017. In Santa Fe, she has been active with the Folk Art Committee, a support group of the Museum of International Folk Art, and the Mountain West chapter of ARLIS/NA.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer: Joyce Lovelace, Contributing Editor and writer for the American Craft Council's (A.C.C.) magazine, *American Craft*, started writing for *American Craft* magazine in 1983 as an Associate Editor when the A.C.C. was headquartered in New York City. When the A.C.C. organization moved to Minneapolis in 1995, she remained on the *American Craft* staff as Contributing Editor, reporting from her home in La Cañada in Southern California. Her articles appear in almost every issue.

Time and Setting of Interview

This interview was *not* part of the original Craft and Folk Art Museum Oral History Project. It was conducted by Joyce Lovelace for an article published in the April/May 2012 issue of the magazine, *American Craft*, on the completion by Joan Benedetti of the processing of the CAFAM Records: 1965 – 1997, located at UCLA Research Library's Special Collections. The institutional archives had been donated to UCLA when the museum closed (temporarily as it turned out) at the end of 1997. Benedetti had served as the CAFAM Museum Librarian for 21 years, 1976 – 1997, and she facilitated the transfer of the archives to UCLA and the library to the L.A. County Museum of Art. She moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2009 and Lovelace interviewed her for over two hours by telephone; the interview was recorded. Because the content of the Lovelace interview covered essentially the same time concerning CAFAM that was the focus of the oral history project, it was decided that Lovelace interview of Benedetti (with Lovelace's permission) would be included with the CAFAM oral history recordings and transcripts at the Center for Oral History Research at UCLA.

Place: Joan Benedetti was at her home in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Joyce Lovelace was at her home in La Cañada, California, when she called Joan, recording the interview on her cell phone.

Dates, time, length of session, and total number of hours recorded: One session was recorded on Tuesday, January 17, 2012, for a total of 1 hours, 58minutes, and 38 seconds.

Persons present during the telephone interview: Joyce Lovelace in California and Joan Benedetti in New Mexico; Robert Benedetti was present in the Benedetti home, but not participating in the telephone conversation.

Conduct and content of the interview: The focus of Lovelace's interview was the project that Benedetti took on as a volunteer, starting in 1998, after CAFAM closed temporarily—though at the time it was believed to be closing forever. Almost 300 transfer boxes of Egg and The Eye gallery and Craft and Folk Art Museum institutional records were discovered and would have been discarded but for the efforts of Benedetti and the remaining CAFAM staff just before the museum closed on December 31, 1997. They were taken by the UCLA Young Research Library's Special Collections department and Benedetti began working a few hours each week, to sort, appraise, and process the many types of documents that had been created by the staff of every department of the former gallery and the museum over 33 years. (She continued through June 2012 to complete the finding aid for the collection.) Benedetti describes what that work was like and reminisces about the many activities of the museum and some of the memorable personalities involved--staff, trustees, and others.

Editing: Both Lovelace and Benedetti reviewed the transcript and made minor changes, deleting some back and forth dialogue that served no purpose. Benedetti also added some information in brackets for clarification, as appropriate. 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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Tuesday, January 17, 2012. Interviewed by Joyce Lovelace, by telephone (01:58:38).

JL: So, Joan, when we got this press release from CAFAM about the project, the American Craft Council's . . . librarian [Jessica Shaykett] said, "Oh, well you know, Joan Benedetti wrote the book on art librarianship."

JB: Well, on art *museum* librarianship.

JL: Art museum librarianship, yeah, that's what I meant.

JB: Jessica [Shaykett, the A.C.C.'s librarian] --you are so lucky to have her.

JL: Oh, we know.

JB: By the way, are you in Minneapolis?

JL: No, I'm in L.A., as a matter of fact.

JB: Oh, you are? Oh, for heaven's sake.

JL: Yeah, I have--I was--I worked on the magazine [*American Craft*] in New York for years, and then I moved out here, and they've kept me on as Contributing Editor, and when they moved to [00:01:00] Minneapolis, you know, I continued to cling on. So--

JB: Well, luckily we don't--you know, with the Internet we can do all kinds of things [not formerly possible]...

JL: I know. It's great.

JB: Well, that's wonderful. I know Jessica through the Art Libraries Society of North America—ARLIS/NA, which I've been active with--well . . . since almost the beginning of the organization in the late '70s [ARLIS/NA was founded in 1972], and she--and I've just had been reading in the most recent *American Craft* [magazine] about her [Jessica's] digitization project, which I really envy. I wish that CAFAM's archives could be digitized in that way, and hopefully they will be at some point. Maybe it can be a library school internship project or something. [laughter]

JL: So, it's just a terribly painstaking, laborious, time-consuming process--

JB: It is.

JL: --that's the challenge, right?

JB: I think other people have no idea how laborious it is . . . but at the same time, you have to have some intelligence behind it, making the decisions about what is worth that trouble and what isn't, and Jessica is obviously doing that . . . I have always--Let me just mention that I have--I guess

since I was the librarian--the Decorative Arts librarian at the Milwaukee Public Library years ago [1967-68], I've been very aware of the American Craft Council and . . . *American Craft* and its previous incarnation [*Craft Horizons*], and I--I've been very aware that the Council really was the leader [in this country] in the field of contemporary crafts. And so when I started working on [developing] the Craft and Folk Art Museum library in 1976, one of the first things I did was to get in touch with the [person who was the] A.C.C. librarian at that time. I'm try--I've been trying to remember [her name] this morning. I made a few notes to myself and her [first] name was Joan, and I cannot remember her last name . . . [Joanne Polster].

JL: I remember her. I had come to the magazine in '83.

JB: Oh, you had? My goodness!

JL: I know--and I vaguely remember Joan, and I can't remember [her last name] either.

JB: She was a lovely person, and she--I got to know her personally because of ARLIS--the Art Libraries Society, and then [the next librarian], Linda Seckelson, and I became very good friends.

JL: Oh, Linda! Do you still hear from Linda at all?

JB: Oh, yes, primarily because of ARLIS.

JL: Oh my gosh!

JB: We get together once a year in this group of about--well, the membership is about 1,200 throughout North America, but . . . usually about 400 or 500 of us get together [annually] for the national conference-- that's coming up in Toronto in April this year--

JL: Oh, well, tell Linda I said hello, would you?

JB: Oh, absolutely, yes. . . .

JL: Yeah.

JB: She was doing some wonderful things there, and for a whole variety of reasons that I don't know, she . . . [left], and [for a while] I kind of lost track of the people that were there [at the A.C.C.]--partly because of the various crises that CAFAM [was having]. [Overlapping dialogue; inaudible] [Laughter]

JL: I know. It's all a blur. I don't even remember much of it, but it always seemed like there was upheaval [at both organizations].

JB: Yes, yes. And of course, there's upheaval now with other museums. That's not surprising given [the present] economic conditions.

JL: Right. But, we--as you say, Jessica seems just great, really on top of it and interested.

JB: She does, and I'm so glad that she's being allowed to write.

JL: Oh yeah.

JB: She's such a good writer, and having that regular column really brings the Research Center to, you know, the attention of the people.

JL: Oh, absolutely. And people are noticing, you know--I see tweets and posts about treasures in the library and things like that. . . .

JB: Well, I'm sure you probably make use of all of that, and so much of it is . . . you know--in libraries all over the world--is now available online. **[00:06:00]** It makes a big difference when you're doing research, doesn't it?

JL: Oh, it sure does. So now--tell me about the CAFAM project because this is sort of the focus of the news item--but 14 years--my gosh, that's a chunk of time that some people would find it hard to wrap their heads around.

JB: . . . [Laughter] The only way it's been possible for me to do it, really, has been just one transfer box at a time. [laughter]

JL: Well, what were you presented with? So--14 years, that's 19--what--'98?

JB: Well, the museum closed temporarily at the end of 1997, due to all kinds of economic problems, including a major recession in the [early] '90s—a building project that was more expensive than was anticipated, and so . . . forth. So it closed. The library--I was the Museum Librarian--the same position that Jessica has, and I had developed--

JL: Excuse me, Joan. What year had you come to CAFAM?

JB: I came to CAFAM in 1976, which was one year after it [had] completed the transformation from being The Egg and the Eye gallery, which [had] started in '65, [to being a museum]. And the museum, which--they got their IRS [nonprofit] status in '73, so they use that as . . . their official anniversary date--but they didn't start--it took a while to form a board of trustees, to hire staff, and so on, and it wasn't until the middle of '75 that they began to have exhibitions that they advertised as being Craft and Folk Art Museum--at first, just saying the "Craft and Folk Art Museum Incorporating The Egg and the Eye" because the Egg and the Eye had become famous.

JL: So well-known, yeah.

JB: And certainly, not just as a restaurant, although the restaurant was a major attraction. So, at any rate, I came on in '76. I had met Edith Wyle, the founder of [the Museum]—through [CalArts]--my husband was Dean at the Theatre School at California Institute of the Arts--CalArts.

JL: Oh wow, OK.

JB: And she [Edith Wyle] was on the [CalArts] board, and I just happened to--we had just moved to L.A. shortly before that--no more than a year before that, and--

JL: From Milwaukee, or...

JB: No, let's see. I think we actually moved from Riverside, California, but we were there for only a year. My husband was, at that point, moving up in his field, which was [the teaching of] theatre, and the grass was always greener somewhere else. So, at any rate, we had lived a lot of places, Milwaukee, Toronto, Pittsburgh, New Haven, so on and so forth.

JL: And as a librarian, had your focus always been art museums?

JB: No, it hadn't. I originally thought that I wanted to be a children's librarian, and I worked for three years as a children's librarian in Gary, Indiana. Well, I originally wanted to be an actress!
[laughter]

JL: Ah, is that how you met your husband?

JB: Yes, actually, because we were both [studying in the Theatre Department] at Indiana University. He was there on a graduate fellowship and [was with the original] . . . Indiana University Theatre Company. So we were introduced by mutual friends in the Theatre Department, but I had been married before and had an eight-year-old daughter at that time and had already figured out, by the time I met my present husband, that I could not--for a whole variety of reasons--go into the acting field. . . . **[00:11:00]** My mother and dad were both librarians. They met at Columbia University Library School--when they still had a library school. And even though I was virtually brought up in libraries--my dad was head of the Merchant Marine Library, and my mom worked for the New York Public Library system--which was the greatest library system in the world at that time, and it still is pretty great. Even so, I never, never thought about going into library work until I had to find some professional work to . . . you know, to earn some money because [my first husband and I, as students], we were desperately poor. And I went--after I got my Bachelor's degree in Theatre], I got my Master's in Library Science at I.U. And at that point, I thought I wanted to be a children's librarian. Well, that didn't work out. I love children's literature, but doing 20-some-odd story hours every week for preschoolers just wasn't my thing.

JL: It's more about the books, isn't it? . . . It's more about the literature?

JB: Oh, yes, yes, absolutely, and God bless the children's librarians of the world. They really do make a big difference in children's lives, but . . . well, at that point, when my daughter was eight or so and I'd met my second husband, I just decided to take a break. And for eight years I--well, first I got the job in Milwaukee. Sorry--this is a little disorganized.

JL: It's OK.

JB: After Beny and I were married, he worked at UWM [University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee] for two years and I got a job as the Decorative Arts Librarian at the Milwaukee Public Library, the Main Library. And that was a wonderful job. It was a subject area that I'd always been interested in--

had done some collecting--and Beny and I had traveled through the Southwest and started to collect Native American rugs and pots, and so on.

JL: So that was an easy transition?

JB: Yes, and the good thing about that job was that the head of the library required that all the professional librarians be given--they all had subject specialties, and not only that, but they had to do the whole process--that is, they had to buy books in that subject area, catalog them, do whatever weeding of the collection was necessary, be on the reference desk, available to answer questions in that subject area. Of course, this is all before computers. And my point is that that experience prepared me--although I didn't know it at the time it was happening--to be what I became at the Craft and Folk Art Museum, which is what's known as a "Solo Librarian." I did everything there. I had interns from the local library school at UCLA, and I had--from time to time as money became available, I'd have a half-time assistant--but all the professional work was done by me, including what really made it happen, which was writing the grant proposals.
[laughter]

JL: Yeah, so it was a small institution, and you did everything, right?

JB: For the library.

JL: Yeah, that's what I mean--as we all know, with small nonprofits, right?

JB: Right. Right. It was, in retrospect--and this is probably what partly, or in large part, really--kept me going [when I eventually was] working on the [CAFAM] archives--was the experience of 21 years (as it turned out)--of working there from 1976 through the end of 1997. **[00:16:00]** It was the highlight of my professional life. It was a wonderful adventure--[with] Edith Wyle, as anyone who--did you ever get a chance to meet her?

JL: No. No, I did not.

JB: Oh, she passed away in--I think it was '99, just after the museum was able to reopen--thank goodness, she was able to see that. [Edith Wyle, CAFAM's founder, died October 12, 1999.] But [the development of the museum]--it was just crazy. She hired a lot of young women who were very ambitious and very talented, and they were willing to, you know, just work their tails off. They did everything. We did have more staff then than they have now, but a lot of the staff-- even though there were, gosh, at least 15 to 20 people on the staff at any one time--I'm talking about the museum as a whole now.

JL: Yeah, yeah.

JB: Even though there were so many--a lot of us were working part-time. I did work full-time for about seven or eight years. We were funded by many different agencies, but the library was primarily funded by the James Irvine Foundation. They really believed in it.

JL: Joan, can I just ask for a second--what was Edith Wyle like? I've always been curious.

JB: Oh, she was an amazing, charismatic person. She had a big ego. [Laughter] She was definitely the boss. There was no doubt about that ever. She--let's see--she was a warm, generous person—she had incredible aesthetic judgment. She was not always able to articulate her vision as well as some of us would have liked, but she just did it. She had this idea to combine what was, in the mid-'60s, a burgeoning interest in both contemporary craft and international folk art. Later, when the fellow she hired, Patrick Ela--

JL: Oh yes, yeah.

JB: He was hired basically as her [Administrative Director] at first, or--I have to be careful what titles I use. I think she thought he was going to be more of her assistant, but he was hired, really, to handle the administrative and business end of things. And later that was formalized when she--her title changed to Program Director, and he was Administrative Director, and then later when she retired, he became Executive Director. But, in terms of programs, in terms of inventiveness, [she was definitely the leader]. She invented this annual event, which happened across the street in the park at Hancock Park. You know, where the [La Brea tar pits are, just east of the L.A. County Museum of Art]. Well, that area between the tar pits and L.A.C.M.A., a large park-like area [was where the Mask Festival was held]. And starting in 19--well, in 1976--she had the idea to do a parade, a mask parade. [See also the transcript of her daughter, Nancy Romero's, oral history interview.]

JL: Oh, the Festival of Masks.

JB: Yes. And the first year was so disorganized--I wasn't there. I have only read about it, but apparently, they hadn't bothered to get permission from the city to have anything happen on the street. I guess they had, [00:21:00] I think, gotten permission to have the parade. So, the parade came off all right, but they also had musicians--a gamelan player and some others on the street [actually the sidewalk], in front of the Museum, and the police came along and tried to arrest them. [laughter]

JL: [laughter] That's great.

JB: I think that was averted--according to legend--by Patrick Ela. But the next year, the . . . [parade] evolved into . . . this incredible Festival: performances, food booths, mask-making demonstrations, vendors selling all kinds of things related to masks. It began in association with Halloween, although later they decided that that was not a good idea. There were a lot of people . . . who didn't necessarily celebrate Halloween, and so they . . . disassociated the Festival from it. But it was always near the end of October, and it became--it grew every year, it grew and grew. In 1984, it was chosen as an [official] event of the Olympic Arts Festival. The [Summer] Olympics were in L.A. in 1984, and the Festival that year was done in July in connection with the

Olympics.

JL: So the museum really did so much to shine a light on this--on international folk arts and be kind of a nexus for it?

JB: Yes. Yes, and some of us--always in part for practical reasons--me, in the library--[were] having to sort all this out. I had some intellectual interest in how it all fit together. There were people who--on our board as well as others, who wondered why were we doing both of these things--contemporary craft and folk art, which seemed so different [from each other]. And then later, Patrick Ela added product design, and at first, I and many others felt, "Oh my God, it's hard enough to explain these two things. Now we're adding product design, which is industrial-related. Why that?" Well, in my mind--and I think in the minds of most of the staff and board eventually--the understanding came that we were dealing with materials of everyday life from all over the world.

JL: That's kind of a lovely way to put it, "materials of everyday life," yeah.

JB: And that doesn't exclude fine art, [or] fine craft at all because that, hopefully, is part of everybody's life also. So you have a very broad range and you could even say that painting, not easel painting or panel painting--but painting on clay, certainly--we had a whole exhibition of painting on clay--and even printmaking--folk art prints and so on--[is part of everyday life].

JL: Well, I think they're continuing that sort of broad view of things in just such an exciting way these days.

JB: Yes. Yes.

JL: Very fun museum. I always enjoy it.

JB: Well, I'm so glad to hear you're in L.A. Did you get--I see that you wrote the article for *American Craft* on the Pacific Standard Time series.

JL: Oh yeah. Well, that [my article] was just a little roundup.

JB: But did you get a chance to see the show at CAFAM?

JL: Oh, absolutely. I took my teenage son as a matter of fact, and going through it, I can't tell you how many times I said to him, "You have to understand, no one had ever done this before, and California was where it was happening, and Eudora Moore was there, and he got to meet her. Eudora's actually--

JB: Oh, you went to the opening?

JL: Oh yeah. Yeah.

JB: Good for you.

JL: Yeah. Actually--

JB: I wish I could've been there.

JL: Yeah, oh it was fun. And Eudora's actually my mother-in-law's next-door neighbor, so we see her at my mother-in-law's club. [00:26:00] . . .

JB: Well, I'm so glad to hear that. I was fortunate enough to get to know her when I started a project--which was funded very generously by the Irvine Foundation to start--what we called the Center for the Study of Art and Culture, in the late '80s, early '90s. And she was on the Advisory Board, and she was so supportive. I don't know if she'd remember me now, but I--we had quite a few exchanges, and the board, the Advisory Board--to be distinguished from the Craft and Folk Art Museum regular board--[laughter] was--we met several times, and she was just always really smart. She understood what we were trying to do right away and was very supportive--we had several projects that I am very proud of in retrospect in connection with what was basically intended to be a think tank [for the museum] . . . And it was a think tank for a while--it was hoped that we could also offer fellowships. That never happened, partly because the museum closed, but we did offer two series of workshops targeting museum professionals. Now this was--the workshops were given in '93, but they were conceived of in '92, which was a real watershed year for the whole topic--I'm sure you remember this--[the topics of] multiculturalism and issues related to diversity.

JL: . . . I'm trying to remember what happened in 1992 that made it a watershed for that.

JB: Well, there were several things that happened. In Los Angeles, there were some major riots.

JL: Oh, OK, right, of course.

JB: I'd have to look up the exact dates. But that was when the Rodney King trial resulted in the acquittal of the police that had beat him. [The riots started on April 29, 1992 and continued over six days, after a trial jury had acquitted four police officers from the L.A. police department of the use of excessive force in the videotaped arrest and beating of Rodney King.]

JL: Yes, of course.

JB: My husband and I happened to be living just very near the museum at that time, on Sycamore, off of La Brea. And it was quite amazing--[scary and exciting too--CAFAM was temporarily in the May Company department store near there at Fairfax and Wilshire and it was threatened and as the riot was starting I went into the library and took out a few rare things that I didn't want to be destroyed]. Anyway, so that happened, and after it happened, the Museum really re-dedicated itself to focusing on issues of diversity in every aspect of what we were doing.

JL: I see. OK, because being in New York in those years, I don't think we felt it as intensely.

JB: Yes, yes. Well the other thing that happened in '92 was--in October of '92--was the

Quincentenary of Columbus's "discovery" of America. And Native Americans--all over the world, really, as it turned out--but certainly in the U.S. at that time, decided to demonstrate their history and why they didn't need to be discovered since they had been here all along.

And that dovetailed--I was active at that time with an organization called the Western--let's see, it's now called the Western Museums Association--and the woman who was at the head of that, [Kate Sibley], [had been] very influential in getting some [00:31:00] Native Americans working in tribal museums and so on together to support legislation that resulted in what's called NAGPRA, the Native American Graves [and Repatriation Act; enacted in 1990]--and whatever the rest of that is--which meant that museums were going to have to give up some of what had been stolen from Native American graves. I was not active with [the organization of] any of those meetings, but I attended [some of] them, and I was very aware of it. And I was also, and had been for some time, aware that the Craft and Folk Art Museum, like many, many museums, had decided that since Native Americans were supported by natural history museums and other specialized Native American museums, that they did not have to deal with them. Now, that's not 100% true of CAFAM. CAFAM actually, in its earliest years, did have a few Native American shows. Maria Martinez was in one of the early CAFAM shows when she was still alive. She used to spend summers [doing workshops] in Idyllwild, so it was relatively easy to get her down there to do demonstrations. But that was an anomaly. Primarily, this was something that wasn't considered. It wasn't that it was rejected.

Well, another staff member [Marcia Page] at CAFAM and I decided that CAFAM really had to have an exhibition that would be part of this general movement to commemorate the Quincentenary. [Marcia] was Head of Exhibition Development at that time. And I must say we had to struggle a bit to get some of the staff and administration behind this idea. But we hired a wonderful curator named Sarah Bates from an organization in San Francisco [American Indian Contemporary Arts], who knew all of the contemporary Native American artists [from all over North America], to be the curator of our show, and she did a fabulous job, and the people in that show--I've become somewhat active with the Museum of Contemporary Native American Art here in Santa Fe, and all those same people are still very, very highly thought of--

JL: Right. So it had a very strong, sort of contemporary art thrust.

JB: Right, right.

JL: Yeah.

JB: So, let's see, I can't remember why I got off on that tangent, but it--

JL: Well, we were talking about Edith Wyle and yeah--

JB: Yeah, and I was talking about the Center for the Study of Art and Culture, which was a think tank, and as I said, an attempt to develop a fellowship program, which really never materialized. But

we did have these workshops for museums in Southern California. And the woman I was able to hire to be the Program Director--her name was Nancy Downs-LeGuin--developed an--we had another Advisory [Team] for those workshops, which was made up of curators from the local museums, and they were carefully chosen to be as diverse a group as possible. And they developed workshops, which attracted the attention of 19 museums in Southern California. We had teams of people, between three and five people [each], both staff and board members, from 19 different museums. We ended up having to do two separate series [00:36:00] because so many people were interested.

JL: Wow.

JB: And it had to do with this very broad topic of diversity [and inclusion]. We hired two professional [diversity] trainers to moderate the workshops, to lead them, and we insisted that each team come up with an idea that could be implemented in their own institution, and then they had to report what happened, and it was, really, a fascinating exercise. As you can imagine, a broad range of reactions, but most everybody thought it was worthwhile. And it was something that was very much needed at that time, because whether they liked it or not, they [museum staff] were being forced to look at themselves and realize how focused they were on Western values, and not including people that were representatives of Los Angeles at large or Southern California.

JL: And, you know, in that regard, CAFAM has always had a unique sort of niche, you know, and the ability to be a mirror of the culture that it lives in.

JB: That's right, and the Festival, I think, really did start that, although Edith's vision of the Egg and the Eye gallery before the [establishment of the] museum--always because of it's, at least, attempt at equal focus on international folk art, you know--included the [whole] world. I think [this dated to] when, in the '70s, she used to say she had heard from Mayor Bradley at that time, that there were people from more different countries living in Los Angeles . . . than any other city in the U.S. I suppose because there were so many more people from what was known as the Pacific Rim at that time in L.A. And that made her focus not just on the objects from those communities, but to more consciously include people from those communities--

JL: Which was so ahead of her time.

JB: Yeah. Yeah. So, it--she really was, in so many ways [ahead of her time]--and she could be maddening sometimes because, you know, she wanted her way, and often those of us that were around her could not really understand where we were going--but somehow or other, often after the fact, it became clear.

JL: And Joan, how do the CAFAM archives--what contribution do they make to our understanding of this--these crafts of the world?

JB: Well, like all archives, you have to be willing to sit down with them and do a lot of digging. But

those files, they basically are all of the staff's files, which miraculously had been saved since 1965. Now, not 100% of them. There are many fewer files from the Egg and the Eye gallery period, and unfortunately, there are [only a] few from the restaurant. [However], there are, I think, enough from the restaurant that was part of the Egg and the Eye gallery.

JL: So we're talking just thousands of [pieces of] correspondence, and photographs, and what kinds of things?

JB: There are every type of document that you could imagine. Official documents, of course, [00:41:00] including the minutes of the board, bylaws, and so on and so forth, but certainly correspondence. And correspondence--the way the archive is organized--it is pretty much by department. I did--because of just the sheer size of the photograph and slide collection--thousands of photographs and slides--and also videotapes, and audiotapes, and even a couple of wonderful films that were professionally produced. Just because of the sheer size of all of that, I do have separate, what are called record groups, for those types of materials.

But by and large, the archive is arranged by department. So for example, probably one of the largest and most interesting, at least superficially, is the exhibition record group, and in that record group, all of the exhibitions that were ever produced at the Craft and Folk Art Museum and, according to my calculations, there were 142 over a span of 22 years--1975 through the end of 1997--everything related to each of those exhibitions is there. Now that includes initial correspondence with whoever the curator was going to be--if it was an outside curator, collectors who had objects that might be borrowed, community groups related to the exhibition, correspondence. Although there is a separate section on [installation] design, you will probably also find in the exhibition section, memos, and even drawings related to the design of the exhibition. There also, in the exhibitions section, are photographs, and even some slides, although most of the slides are in a separate slide record group. Then--and we also--and I have to take credit for this--[laughter]. I thought, from the very beginning, that we had to have professional photography of every exhibition. And for the most part that happened--almost every exhibition at the Craft and Folk Art Museum [was photographed professionally] during that time period. We had--actually I started to try to do it [laughter] and I just--even though I took a course, you know, and knew what should be done, I was not a professional photographer.

JL: Well, and I mean, people don't appreciate today how far that's come, the photography of objects, from late '70s, early '80s to today.

JB: Exactly. Yes, yes. The course that I took was specifically on photography of art objects--LACMA was offering it, and I was able to take that. But Edith Wyle and Patrick Ela finally agreed with me that we had to spend the money to hire a professional photographer to come in some time before the exhibition closed.

JL: So I bet you were patting yourself on the back as you went through these archives.

JB: Well...

JL: Oh, I'm teasing, but just saying, "Oh, aren't we glad we documented these?"

JB: Yeah, you know. There were battles involved sometimes with all of these things. You know, there were always budget issues, always budget issues. And of course, I would remember some of those discussions.

JL: Sure, no, no, no. I mean--to have that lasting record is so important, you know, to anyone who's researching, anyone who's publishing a book, let's say. You know, it's invaluable, it truly is.

JB: Absolutely. Absolutely, and I'm not sure [00:46:00] what they're doing there [at CAFAM in terms of documentation] now. I haven't been as involved, of course, since I moved to Santa Fe. I really haven't been involved at all with the current CAFAM, except, you know, occasional emails and so on. But, yeah, I mean that period [1965 – 1997] is quite well-documented. And the other thing you'll find in those exhibition files--although again there is a separate record group for publicity--you will also find in the exhibition files publicity directly related to [each] exhibition. We subscribed to a clipping service and got all of the related clippings from newspapers and magazines from all over. So, all of that is in there as well--and then the administrative files. There's a whole separate . . . [record group] on the Festival of Masks, which is chronological. There--of course, there's a record group on the library and a separate one on the Center for the Study of Art and Culture . . .

We had--there were so many special projects that went on in that museum. I mean, looking back on it, we all knew we were exhausted all the time, [laughter] but sometimes, you know, when you are excited about something, enthusiastic, you get caught up in it. And you're relatively young and ambitious, you just go ahead and do it. Edith Wyle was responsible for initiating the idea of documenting contemporary--I use the word "contemporary" in terms of "current"--folk artists living [at that time] in the Los Angeles area, who were doing traditional crafts. And we were able to get volunteers from the Junior League to help with the actual documentation [interviews and photography], but they were run by [graduate] folklore students from UCLA, and that went on for four years.

JL: Oh, perfect.

JB: In the archive, you'll find the section--it was known as Edith's P.E.T. project [laughter], and the P.E.T. stood for the Preservation of Ethnic Traditions. [laughter]

JL: Oh, that's cute--

JB: It's a little embarrassing--

JL: That's cute!

- JB: But she thought it was great, and--but the documentation itself is terrific. There are--oh my gosh, I can't remember just how many.
- JL: Oh, I'm looking at it now, 40 artists representing folk art from 28 different ethnic traditions. [Lovelace is looking online at the archival Finding Aid.]
- JB: Yes.
- JL: Yeah. Oh, that's wonderful--
- JB: And again those are documented with slides. We didn't get--we were hoping for actual oral histories that would be transcribed. The recorded interviews happened, in most cases, but the transcribing didn't happen. [laughter]
- JL: Oh, we know how that goes. It's painstaking work. But now, Joan, let me understand--you began this project officially when you left CAFAM. Is that right, or...
- JB: The archive project?
- JL: Right.
- JB: Yes. Yes.
- JL: But you had been--had you been involved with organizing--I mean, obviously you must've had your own department somewhat organized.
- JB: I did, [yes, in the CAFAM library]. But I never--when I was going to library school, long, long ago, [laughter] I never--I did not take an archives course. Nowadays, most library school students--and library school is a graduate program--everywhere there's a library school at the master's or doctorate level. I have an M.A. in Library Science from Indiana University, but at the time--they might've been offering an archives course, but I wasn't aware of it. I wasn't interested at that time.
- JL: So you had to develop your own system?
- JB: I did, but luckily, organizations like ARLIS and the Society for American Archivists **[00:51:00]** have a lot of publications and have, you know, lots of local meetings as well as annual meetings.
- JL: So there is a real art to it, or science, or craft?
- JB: Yes, well it's different [from library training]. It's different. Yeah.
- JL: What are the main considerations? What are the key things that you have to think about when you're archiving this kind of material?
- JB: Well, archives are, in general, this is a generalization--and there are some exceptions in the CAFAM archives--but in general they are not organized by topic. They are organized by the originating source. So, you know, obviously, board of trustees material is in a section for board of

trustees. Festival of Masks material is under Festival of Masks. Exhibition material is under that department, and that is--and also there is a section--there are actually two sections for Edith Wyle. One that is materials that she produced while she was actually working at the Museum, and then another whole group of materials that I was given--or UCLA was given--that came from her home after she died, and those materials overlap with some of the others, but they're kept separate because they were originals. In other words [in American archival practice], there is an attempt for the archive itself to reflect the intention of the person [or institution] that originated the file.

JL: Give me an example--Joan, give me an example of something where it might not be obvious, where a decision would have to be made. You know, where I might say, "Well that's really--or, it would be filed under this." And you would say, "No, actually it is this."

JB: One of the most difficult--well, I should preface it by saying--because I was working on one box at a time--and at the very end, in the last few years, was not able to have access to the entire archive when I was working on it because they were rushing to get it all done. One of the most difficult areas was the area of publicity, because we always had a publicist and the publicist had many files. Everyone at the museum seems [to have] had a good sense of the importance of keeping files.

JL: Well, that helps, right? [laughter]

JB: It's critical. It's absolutely critical. So, there is a separate publicist's file. Most of which, I would say, all of which, came from whoever was the publicist at that time, and those are chronological. Well, so, the exhibition section [of the publicist's file] is by exhibitions because that's the way she had filed them, but then, as I was mentioning, the exhibition record group also has files, publicity files, the clippings, and even photographs, and slides. So, those things overlap, and there are--probably after I get off the phone with you, I'll think of something else. Maybe I can email you.

JL: Sure.

JB: There is a lot of overlap from one record group to another, and I have tried--in the scope notes [of the Finding Aid], you will find at the top of every record group--and at the top of every series within each record group--there is a scope note. And I have tried to indicate cross **[00:56:00]** references from one to the other. It's not perfect, but that should help researchers.

JL: And what is your aim in terms of--in thinking of researchers, is the idea just to keep it as easy as possible to find things?

JB: Well, yeah sure.

JL: Is that just the basic idea?

JB: You know, research scholars, people who actually do research for books and major academic

projects, are used to digging, but even they appreciate all the help they can get, and an index like this [Finding Aid], which is searchable by keyword [is invaluable]. By the way, when you search--you may know this--it's always a good idea to enclose whatever your search term is in quotes.

JL: Oh, really?

JB: Yeah. You'll find--try this sometime--like "Festival of Masks," for instance, just enter it like that [without quotes], and see what comes up. And then enter it within quotes, and you'll see that . . . [the results are] different because the quotes indicate to the data--to the search engine that the database is using--that you're looking only for items that have those words, in that order. Whereas, if you enter Festival of Masks without the quotes, you will find references to projects and exhibitions about masks, for example, or other types of festivals.

JL: Right. Well, I think that's something we can all relate to, you know, in doing our Google searches as well.

JB: Yeah, exactly. It works exactly the same there.

JL: Joan, can I backtrack, just one more . . .

JB: Sure.

JL: When the project began, physically, what were you confronted with your first day officially doing this? What are you--do you walk into a room? Is it full of boxes? What are you given?

JB: Well, of course, over the course of 1997, especially the last half of the year, [there began to be] the realization that we might close, that it was looking like we might close, and then of course, that we were definitely closing. That came on rather gradually.

JL: And was that all just--not to go deeply into it--but was that envisioned as a temporary thing, or just no one was sure?

JB: It was envisioned as a permanent thing.

JL: OK.

JB: We *never* thought that the museum was going to be able to reopen, and that is the reason why the library, which at that point was about 7,000 volumes and had over 100 subscriptions and--as well as this small, what I called the "Historic Archives" in the library, which was really just the printed materials, the catalogs, and clippings, and so on—

JL: And it was all—it was all there in a space on Wilshire?

JB: Well, just--what I had as far as CAFAM archives were concerned in the library—[the CAFAM archives] was really just one lateral file drawer. That's all it was in the library. When we realized that it was very likely that the museum was going to close, I got on the phone to my colleagues in Los Angeles that were members of the Art Libraries Society, and told them that we were going to

have to find another home for the library. Now, this is the *library*--not the archives--what became the archives.

JL: OK.

JB: I got involved--

JL: So your library--the library was small?

JB: Relatively small. I would say it was always . . . smaller than the American Craft Council library, but they were comparable in some ways. [I think the American Craft Council library now has at least 15,000 volumes.]

JL: Right, right. OK. That's a good size for us, right?

JB: Well, we started out back in 1976 with about 300 books, and it developed over 21 years to 7,000. So--plus many back issues of magazines and so on. So [when it looked like the museum might close] I formed a small committee in the Museum, made up of board members and staff, to locate **[01:01:00]** another home for the library, never thinking about anything else but the library. And we--it was very heartwarming in the middle of what was really a tragic situation. It was very heartwarming to me to get the responses that I got. I got eight--we had made up a formal "Request for Proposal" and sent it out to the people who I [had] talked to on the phone, who indicated they might have some interest, and that was basically all the major art libraries in Los Angeles. LACMA ended up taking it. I'll just cut to the chase there.

JL: Yeah, because when you Google it, you get, you know, LACMA CAFAM. They come up together.

JB: Yeah. They had a link to it from the CAFAM website. I think--I'm not sure that they still have that. Anyway, so, that's what happened with the library. Now, as we were getting closer to the actual closing, suddenly staff members came to me, one by one, and said, you know, "We've got all these files"--not only in their offices, but in--we were in an old building, and there were lots of storage spaces. You know, cupboards, and cabinets, and just "hidey hole" places where, low and behold, there were filing cabinets, cardboard transfer boxes, just everything you could think of [holding things going back to 1965]. "What are we going to do with all this?" they asked. And Patrick Ela had resigned. There was a new director. There was talk of just tossing it all out.

JL: Oh.

JB: Yeah. And even at that point, I didn't comprehend how much there was. But we had a staff meeting--when we still had staff, [laughter]--and I asked everybody to please try to--in as organized a way as possible-- to put everything into transfer boxes. I just started doing this because there wasn't anybody else to do it--

JL: And it must have been kind of a--

JB: --it needed to be done--

JL: --It was a sad time.

JB: It was a very sad time, and all I knew was that this couldn't be thrown away, not now. Later, when I was processing [it], a lot of duplicates were tossed out or given away to other people [or other libraries], but at that time, we could not--we did not have the time to do anything, except to put everything into transfer boxes, label them as best we could, and, of course, because they were coming from the individual staff who were still there, [they were] luckily, organized by department. Well, at the end--so, we actually ended up sort of adding onto the archives [that were already in the library] . . . "oh, by the way . . ." and at that point, I had counted, I think, about 100 transfer boxes-- that we added onto the Request for Proposals to the other libraries.

JL: OK--so that being the idea that they would become part of the library?

JB: Well, or that they [the adopting library] would find a place for it. Well, there were only two or three places that were interested in the archives. There were eight libraries that were interested in the library, but there were only two or three [of them] that were interested in the archives. . . . [This was primarily because most libraries did not have the space to take them.] And we, the committee, went around to all these places and looked at them [the libraries that said in the RFP that they would take them]: what they had, what their facilities were like, and [for the archives] UCLA just came out on top. LACMA, although they wanted the library--and they were [physically] close [to CAFAM], so it seemed--you know, they were right across the street **[01:06:00]**--so it seemed logical for the library to go there. But they could not take the archives; they barely can handle the archives of their own institution. So UCLA agreed to take them and I think neither they nor I realized at the time how many boxes there were going to be eventually. And as it turned out, after several deliveries--I was actually the last one out of the Craft and Folk Art Museum [corner] building, which was the building on the corner at [5800 Wilshire] at that time. That's where the library, [the staff offices], and the storage areas were.

JL: So, they're not using that building now, right? This is all pre-my arrival in L.A., so I'm trying to envision and understand where it all physically was.

JB: It's very confusing. The plan was for those two buildings to be--we were leasing that building [for an outrageous price], and there was a gallery, a very big gallery, in there, and all the staff offices, and the library, and storage areas. We lost the lease on that building *after* the two buildings had been renovated and merged. And it was a major tragedy, not only because--I mean, on top of a tragedy. It was because, also--that building included the parking lot in back.

JL: Oh, that would've been nice.

JB: If you go out into the alley behind the museum, and look to the [south], you will see a huge parking lot that we had access to in connection with the building on the corner.

- JL: Oh, that would've been just fantastic because we all know what it's like parking in that neighborhood.
- JB: Oh, yes, yes. Did you see what is now the courtyard in the [renovated] building [at 5814 Wilshire]? That used to be our parking lot!
- JL: Oh, gosh! Well, they made good use of it.
- JB: [Inaudible; overlapping dialogue] It was small, but it was better than what they have now.
- JL: So now what they have--the small little, funky little building--which is a great space, really, and the courtyard.
- JB: Yes. That's right, that's right. And they had, at the time that all this happened, as the museum closed, they were leasing the building on the corner. It had been renovated. It was a little funky, but it worked.
- JL: Now, they still have a library, don't they, today?
- JB: The library is at LACMA.
- JL: Oh, it is. OK, so it stayed at LACMA. All right, I'll put--I'll get it all together in my head, Joan, I promise.
- JB: Sorry it's so complicated.
- JL: No, you know what, so is the A.C.C and the [American] Craft Museum--as you know, right?
- JB: Yes.
- JL: It's all complicated. . . . Yes. So, anyway, you were going back to moving day, I think it was.
- JB: Yes, well, I arranged for UCLA--thank goodness, they agreed to come [with a truck] and take things up there, and they did. And they picked up about 120 boxes or so. In the meantime, we were still finding other materials hidden away. Well, just to cut to the chase, the final number of boxes that [were filled] before the corner building was vacated . . . was 250 transfer boxes.
- JL: Now transfer boxes--
- JB: --on the floor of the library.
- JL: How big is a transfer box, just like a--
- JB: It's sometimes called a "banker's box." It's also referred to by archivists as a "cubic foot box" because it takes up one cubic foot of space, or one linear [foot]--you know, you can put either letter-size, or legal-size documents in it.
- JL: So, your basic little carton?
- JB: Yeah.

- JL: OK.
- JB: In addition to those transfer boxes, there were flat files of posters.
- JL: Oh, right!
- JB: There were films. There were all these slides and photographs--well, most of those went into the transfer boxes.
- JL: And they were going sort of as-is?
- JB: Yes, yes. In the original file folders, which were a mess. So, one of the things that--well, [I don't want to] get ahead of myself. So that's what I was faced with physically in the last days **[01:11:00]** before we had to vacate that building—was this sea of transfer boxes--labeled as well as anyone could expect, by staff members who had either just been let go, or were about to be let go. Everyone was laid off by the end of the year. And so, little by little, all of that was transferred to UCLA, and they did find a [work/storage] space in the [UCLA] Research Library building, where I was able to have access to all of the transfer boxes [for the first few years]. They were put on a long row of stacks, empty stacks, in the--what was known as Arts Special Collections at that time, and I worked--
- JL: And this was not a public space, was it? This was a--
- JB: No, no, there were--
- JL: Because I've been in that reading room that they have there, looking at things, but [what you're talking about], this was an administrative [area]--
- JB: The Research Library [Reading Room] has been completely renovated since then. I haven't been there for a while. [But where Joan worked was in a nonpublic work area.]
- JL: OK, completely different then. So, here you are in this room.
- JB: I'm in this room [at UCLA] after I . . . well, actually, even before I stopped working at CAFAM. I was offered a job at LACMA--not to work on the CAFAM library material. I had always thought I wanted to be a cataloger. So I was given a part-time job working as a cataloger at the LACMA Research Library—[which was great]!
- JL: Were you doing both for a while, or--?
- JB: I was certainly working on some of the CAFAM materials at LACMA—but not entirely. I worked there [cataloging all types of art books] for five years before I retired.
- JL: So, I'm just trying [to figure out the timeline]. So, you were at CAFAM still? You still had your CAFAM job when [you started] doing some LACMA [work]?
- JB: Only for a few months—[the CAFAM job] was winding down.

JL: Winding down, OK.

JB: Yeah.

JL: Yeah, all right.

JB: So I started working [as a cataloger at LACMA in September 1997] and getting paid [laughter] [which I hadn't been at CAFAM for several months] for a part-time job at the LACMA Research Library. [And the building where the library—and all the CAFAM offices had been—had to be vacated in December 1997]. But at the same time [starting in 1998], I started going to UCLA [as a volunteer], at first just one day a week, when I was off from my [part-time] LACMA job, and then--

JL: And who--I'm sorry, Joan. This is--for whom that you're doing this? For CAFAM? For LACMA? Or for UCLA?

JB: (Laughter) Good question! [laughter] -

JL: For UCLA I guess, right?

JB: Mostly I was working [on the CAFAM archives] for UCLA. They allowed me, because--first of all because I knew a lot of the librarians there. They knew that I was a professional librarian, and they just let me do this. They let me volunteer.

JL: I was going to say, "Were you getting paid to do this?"

JB: No. No.

JL: Oh! So, it was really a labor of love?

JB: Yeah, I guess it was. I guess it was. But, it was gradual. I mean, I did say it took 14 years, and it did. But at first, I was really there [only] one day a week, and then after a couple of years, I managed to work two days a week. I retired from [my part-time cataloging job at] LACMA at the end of 2002, so starting in 2003, I was there about two and half days a week, still as a volunteer. But what I was doing was going through each of the transfer boxes. I had organized them with help from the people at UCLA, who helped with lifting the boxes. [laughter] I arranged them in roughly the order you see in the database there, and just one by one, going through, replacing almost all of the file folders with acid-free folders. And as I went, entering--just in a Word file at first--just entering the headings on the file folders in these different groupings. [Of course the items in the old file folders were not always what the headings on the folders said they were—and there was quite a bit of duplication that had to be dealt with. Sometimes there were folders from more than one department in a single transfer box—so then those had to be re-distributed.]

JL: Did it--were you able to figure out pretty early on in the process how you were going to organize this? I mean, just a general map?

- JB: Well, pretty early.
- JL: OK, so when--and how many years in--did you . . . feel [01:16:00] you were starting to really pick up steam, and kind of understand what you wanted to do?
- JB: Yeah. I think it was—let's see—it was about 2004, '03 or '04, something like that.
- JL: So, when you could retire and really kind of focus?
- JB: Oh, yes, yes, yes.
- JL: So, you would literally go in--you'd go, what--with your laptop?
- JB: Yes. [laughter]
- JL: And as you say, just enter these--
- JB: They would provide me with a table, you know, and a step stool to get up and down to pull off a box. And I would usually go through one box a week—about--depending. And you just do it. I mean, every archivist does this. You go file by file. It's a little more interesting than scan--well, a lot more interesting than scanning. [laughter] But it's just as tedious. The difference was that I had worked at that museum for 21 years, and so--and I still was in touch with ex-CAFAM staff members--so if I'd get stuck with something or didn't quite understand what was going on, or approximately when something happened, I could call on them. . . . And at the same time, I started to develop a timeline, and that helped, too, to keep my sense of when things happened, and so this went on, basically, until 2008. And it was due to a reorganization [and major renovation] that was going on in the UCLA Research Library that I had to give up working in the space that I was working in. And this was both a blessing and a curse. [laughter]
- JL: So, by this time, you'd been doing this for 10 years?
- JB: Yeah, from the start of '98--yeah, through the end of 2008—[11 years].
- JL: Wow, just--I'm still trying to absorb that--just every week, did you--
- JB: Pretty much every week. I did have a—[you know]--as a volunteer, I could occasionally go on vacation with my husband or whatever.
- JL: Sure, sure.
- JB: But I would say at least 40 to 45 weeks of every one of those years, I was there one to two to three days a week
- JL: And, [you worked] a full day? A morning or afternoon usually, or?
- JB: You know, I took it as my prerogative [since I was working as a volunteer by myself] to come in at 10:00 and I would usually leave around 4:00, but sometimes if I was in the middle of something, I would stay later. They trusted me so they [would let me stay longer and let myself out].

- JL: Right, oh, they got to know you. So, is what you did as unusual as it sounds, in terms of an archiving project?
- JB: I think it is pretty unusual. Archivists certainly do use volunteers and interns, but archives have to be highly cautious of--because things get, you know, stolen, or they disappear. Every once in a while, you see something in the paper about some [thing that's gone missing]--it's a big thing.
- JL: And then of course, as you're going along, you're making decisions? Surely, you don't keep everything--
- JB: Well, [yes, a lot of duplicates were thrown out, but] not only that, but I had access to a lot of other material in the same space where I was working, and I wasn't necessarily in sight of other people, you know? I was literally working by myself most of the time. Now, I did have one person, a person who was my best assistant that I ever, ever had [at the CAFAM library], and she had moved to Australia, but she came back about every three years, and she was my dear friend, and I convinced the people at UCLA, at the Research Library, that when she was in town, she could come and help me, and so she did. She worked on several of the record groups, you know, more or less separately but under my supervision.
- JL: So, every three years, there was a burst. [laughter]
- JB: [laughter] Yeah, she was--is--a dear person, Michelle Arens, who I think felt pretty much the same way I did about the museum. **[01:21:00]** She's one of the ones that I interviewed for the oral history.
- JL: Well, wait--I'm sorry to keep interrupting you.
- JB: Oh no, please.
- JL: I'm just trying to [picture it]--so, you're alone in this room, you're doing this. You know, we've used the phrase "labor of love." I mean, was this--in your mind--are you thinking, this is my--my tribute to the Museum, this is my way of ensuring that everything it has accomplished is preserved? I mean, you know--
- JB: You know, I don't want to sound self-effacing, but at the time, it was certainly something I enjoyed, especially after I retired--I really looked forward to those days. I did enjoy it. It was a pleasant environment, in terms of the other people working there--people that I got to know, people that I had known in the past, and I enjoyed working with the material. [You know, it also had to do with the fact that CAFAM had been so well-liked and well-known in L.A. and so I think that--even though they were concerned about the size of the collection and the amount of time it was taking to get it processed--the UCLA Library and Special Collections staff was also happy that the collection would be housed there--so I always felt welcome.]

There was probably [for me] also something of the mystery about the Craft and Folk Art

Museum. After all, I had been in charge of the library, and I certainly attended meetings, staff meetings, but I didn't know everything that had gone on at the museum, and it was--part of my motivation was probably to maybe discover [the reasons for] some of the problems that the Museum had had that I didn't understand fully, and I can't say that I discovered all that much, [laughter] but it was an ongoing motivation to me. But most of all--*most of all*--it was just something that had to be done, and I knew--because I had asked--I asked some of the other people that had been laid off if they could come and help. And they couldn't. They were available to me to consult, but they could not commit to this.

JL: And this took--

JB: Especially after I retired, I had the time. My husband didn't always agree with me [laughter] about it, but I [felt I] had the time, and it needed to be done.

JL: And as you were going along, what--can you name a few things that you discovered, surprises, treasures? What things sort of stick out in your mind?

JB: Oh, boy, I might need to think about that.

JL: Yeah, you can, and maybe you can shoot me an email if something--

JB: Sure, sure.

JL: I mean, were there any real jaw droppers? You know, like, I don't know, a letter from a President? You know, things like that?

JB: Oh, there were, there were. It was amazing. Of course, every museum has, on their board, people who have influential friends and so on. But, yeah, I can't say it was a surprise necessarily, but there was correspondence with Joan Mondale, and--well, I mean, the American Craft Council people, too. Aileen Webb was a visitor to CAFAM. I actually happened to be there that night they had a dinner in her honor at the Craft and Folk Art Museum. In terms of board meetings, that would--you know, it was interesting. The board meeting minutes were not as interesting as I thought they might be--you know, I don't know if its intentional or not, but there's a lot of equivocation that's written into the minutes. So, it varied. Toward the end, when the Museum was really tottering and about to close--at the time we thought forever--there was more detail in the minutes.

JL: Sure. Now, in terms of treasures relating to the craftsmen . . . because I've found--whenever I would poke through the A.C.C. library files, it's like--oh my gosh, you know, a hand drawing from this person, or a letter from that person with, you know, charming personal anecdotes, you know?

JB: Yes, there certainly was some of that. In fact, **[01:26:00]** there are one or two real art pieces that somehow got stuffed into filing cabinets, and we do have a whole section--I didn't mention this--of memorabilia, and some of those [kinds of] things are in there. These are not in transfer boxes.

They're in large or odd-shaped archival boxes. But yes, I mean, Jack [Lenor] Larson, [a very well-known textile designer], he was an honoree at the annual fundraiser one year, and he was a good friend of Edith Wyle. And so there's fairly extensive correspondence from him there, as well as from Beatrice Wood. Beatrice Wood was an old friend of both Edith and Frank Wyle's. Frank Wyle's parents lived in Ojai, which, of course, was where Beatrice was. I may think of some other things. I'm having trouble [remembering] [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]

JL: If you were to encourage not just a researcher--someone writing a book, let's say. But suppose it was, I don't know, a young maker? Are there things in those archives that, you know, "Gee, it would be worth taking an afternoon and going to UCLA and get the pass and spend some time with it?" What is there to be enjoyed, learned?

JB: Well, I think probably for a maker, the exhibition files. And I would urge--really, it's almost essential that anyone wanting to actually look at the archives at UCLA to look at the database [the Finding Aid], to discover more or less--you can't really tell exactly until you get there, but you should make a list, you know, search [online] for your topic, and make a list of the box numbers that you're going to need because they have to--the actual boxes, the document boxes themselves that the archives are in, are in a separate storage area. It's on campus, but it usually takes a day or two to get them.

JL: So, do you have to go in there and search their database and then put in your request?

JB: Yes, well you can do it--

JL: Or can you do it from home?

JB: --from home, [online] yeah. [And then make an appointment and have them call up the boxes that you will want to look at.]

JL: OK, all right.

JB: And so that's what I would suggest, that you should look at the [online] database and figure out which boxes you probably want to look at, then you call [Special Collections]. The press release, I think, has--yes, it does--it has the phone number for Special Collections.

JL: Right, and I do have that press release, and for some reason, I meant to pull it up before I phoned you today, and I couldn't find it or something, but I do have it . . . So, you could really have some fun. You could disappear into another time, really.

JB: Yes, exactly, yes. And if we had not had to move out of the original space at UCLA where the archives were [first] located, all of them together, more or less in order, up until the end of 2008--if we had not had to move out of that space, I probably would have continued working there, you know, just one folder at a time, by myself. And you know, you could argue that they should've thought of this before. [laughter] But--you know what happens when a crisis occurs? That's when

movement happens.

JL: When things get done.

JB: And there was a unit within the Special Collections Department that volunteered to take on this archive, to **[01:31:00]** help finish it. It's set up . . . [as] an [endowed] unit with a very long name, which is [the Center for Primary Research and Training (CFPRT)]--it's [mentioned] in the press release.

JL: So it was kind of like, "We're going to move things around here. We'd really like to help you finish this." Was it that kind of thing?

JB: Exactly.

JL: Right, OK.

JB: And what this unit [CFPRT] had that I hadn't had was graduate students, some from the library school, some from other departments, but they were graduate students who would apply to work in the archives on, what they called "collections that would otherwise languish." [laughter]

JL: [laughter] Literally?

JB: Well, if you look at the Special Collection's site on the UCLA Research Library's website, I think they use a slightly different language.

JL: OK!

JB: But that's how it was described to me to begin with. These are collections that have been given to the library that they don't have staff to work on right away.

JL: They need some TLC--

JB: --unless something comes up to force the issue. They would just sit there, unprocessed, and not necessarily available to the public. So, they were able to hire two graduate students to help me at that point. [The graduate students get a stipend and they are called CFPRT Fellows.] So for the last two years--before I moved to Santa Fe--I was able to work with these graduate students, and we rushed . . . --it was a little sloppy, I have to say--[because we were hurrying so much].

JL: OK. But you accelerated?

JB: We accelerated. Exactly. And we did get it done--the physical processing. And then after I moved to Santa Fe, because of the miracle of the Internet, I was able to work on the database Finding Aid that way.

JL: Sort of the post-production?

JB: Yes. They were supposed to send it to me. At that point it had been converted from Word files to an Access file. That's how the [online] database was created.

- JL: So, this is sort of post-production, you might call it?
- JB: Yeah. Yeah.
- JL: Yeah. But at the end, what you had, were--how many boxes? Are they still in boxes?
- JB: Yes, they are in acid-free boxes now.
- JL: Right, right.
- JB: But they are not transfer boxes. They are in what are called "document boxes," which are smaller. There are about three or four document boxes that are produced from each transfer box. They're about--what are they? --five inches wide--something like that--by 12 inches deep.
- JL: So, they're nicely preserved and--
- JB: Yeah. And there are--I actually have that information. There are 550 of them, plus 56 oversized boxes--550 document boxes and 56 oversized boxes. [The CAFAM collection is, I think, their largest institutional records collection.]
- JL: So, those [oversized boxes] would be for the posters and so forth?
- JB: Yes, exactly. [And] the memorabilia.
- JL: Do you remember that--was there a moment where you sort of said, "Holy smokes, I'm done."
- JB: [laughter] I think that moment didn't come until after I had completed the Finding Aid just this past summer.
- JL: Right, right.
- JB: I actually had to leave--when I had to leave [to go to Santa Fe], I actually went back to L.A. the following spring--we moved to Santa Fe Thanksgiving of 2010, is that right? No, '09, Thanksgiving of 2009. And in the spring of 2010, I went back there and lived in L.A. for six weeks, I think? Six or eight weeks [actually eight weeks], completing a lot of, you know, just problems that had come up. And I remember the last day there, because my husband came to pick me up, and he was very **[01:36:00]** eager to . . . go! [laughter]
- JL: And that's that!
- JB: I had just finished going through thousands of photographs, and I didn't feel like, you know, it was really as good a job as I would have liked. It was rushed, so I couldn't really relish that moment so much, although, certainly there was some relief—absolutely!
- JL: Did you have any idea this would be a 14-year project?
- JB: Absolutely not.
- JL: No?

- JB: I didn't have any idea, and . . . when they [the CAFAM staff] first came to me and said, "Well, what should we do with these?"
- JL: So you just said, "Well, let me take a look." [laughter]
- JB: Yeah! You know, I was very naïve.
- JL: Yeah, yeah. Well, it seems--I would imagine that you probably know the Craft and Folk Art Museum better than anyone, inside out. Or at least have a very unique perspective.
- JB: [laughter] [inaudible]) I'm sure. . . . You know, everybody--I learned [later] when I was doing the oral history that everybody has a slightly different memory of what went on.
- JL: Sure, sure.
- JB: And having almost completed the archives when I started the oral history, I did have a better idea of, at least what the documents revealed. But, yeah, it was very enlightening and very enjoyable, and very satisfying to have it done.
- JL: I mean, you relived the entire time you were there.
- JB: Yeah, I did. But even in a much broader sense than when I was working there, because I was looking at the whole thing--[not just the library].
- JL: Did it give you a new appreciation or a richer appreciation of the place?
- JB: Absolutely. Absolutely. [Appreciation] for everyone. I mean, certainly Edith provided the vision, and the motivation and the initiative for almost all the projects, although Patrick was very good about also providing, you know, the additional look at product design and so on. But all of the staff, in particular, the design staff and the exhibition staff. These were people, most of them are still alive--who were really, if they weren't before they started working there--they were absolutely fascinated with the material. And also very much in touch with what was going on in the world during those decades, as well as in the craft and folk art world.
- JL: And did you conceive of the oral histories as kind of an adjunct [to the archives] or a just--
- JB: I guess I did at first. As it turned out, there's a separate unit--it's part of the Research Library, but it's really a separate unit at UCLA--called the Center for Oral History Research. And a wonderful woman is the head of it, Teresa Barnett. And she offers a class, a two-part class, which I took, about doing oral histories. And as soon as she heard that I was thinking about doing an oral history of CAFAM, she said to me after class--one day, she said, "You know, you have to consider giving that to us."
- JB: [And they lent me digital recording equipment and "held my hand" through that whole process.] And so, all of the recordings are there, and I have copies of them here, and I've transcribed about half of them. [laughter] That's my project for this year.

JL: Yeah. And is that also a volunteer effort?

JB: It is. [Later in 2012, Joan asked Frank Wyle if he could fund the transcribing of the rest of the recorded interviews—and he did; all the rest were done by a good—and fast--Boston company, Audio Transcription Service.]

JL: Gosh, Joan. And when did you find time to relocate to Santa Fe, and write a book, and do all that?

JB: [laughter] I swear I--you know, it's a cliché. I really have been almost more busy since I retired. I've been very--I've continued to be very active with the Art Libraries Society, and they co-published the book with Scarecrow Press, which is now [distributed by] Roman & Littlefield actually. But anyway, I had a lot of support from ARLIS members, especially [01:41:00] the Museum [division] of the ARLIS organization for the book. And I did that [the book] --I don't know, I mean-- after I retired certainly. I didn't try to start that until I had retired at the end of 2002.

JL: Were you looking to write a book that needed to be written?

JB: Well, there wasn't--yeah, I mean, except for ARLIS--ARLIS has a very good journal that has just been taken over by the University of Chicago Press, by the way. I mean, not editorially taken over, but they're going to be publishing it. They have a very good journal called *Art Documentation*, and I had published a couple of articles in there on small art museum libraries. I did a survey of small art museum libraries, and that was really what gave me the idea to write a kind--I thought of it as a kind of handbook--on the administration of art museum libraries, which are very different from other kinds of art libraries, certainly very different from academic or public libraries. You have to deal with curators, and archives, and all kinds of material that other art libraries don't deal with.

JL: And in a whole other language, in some ways, talking about art.

JB: Oh, sure. And a special interest of mine from childhood has been museums. I was born in New York City and, you know, was taken to museums and dropped off so my parents could do other things. [laughter]

JL: That's a good idea.

JB: So I spent a lot of time in the--at the Metropolitan and so on. Anyway--

JL: But that must've been--even with all of the knowledge you already have, that must've been kind of a massive project, writing that book.

JB: It was, it was. [It took three years of my life—April 2004 – April 2007.] I often described it as more of an administrative project in a way because I edited that book--that is I developed the ideas for it, I solicited the essays in it, and I wrote the introductions to each chapter. But the essays were written by--oh God, I won't be able to remember the number . . . [I copy-edited all of

them, but that's easier than writing them.] So, it was written by art museum librarians for art museum librarians. [43 art librarians wrote 61 essays.]

JL: So, a real variety of perspectives?

JB: Yes. And there are essays in there by librarians, including Linda Seckelson, who is at the Metropolitan now. And, you know, people from the Museum of Modern Art and from--the cover of the book is a gorgeous picture from the Morgan Library and Museum.

JL: I saw it online. It is gorgeous.

JB: They did a great job. Scarecrow Press hired a designer that did a really good job. I was very happy with the way it looks.

JL: I'm sorry, did you say that you came to them with the idea of the book or they commissioned you, or how did--

JB: Well, I came up with the idea. It had been--ARLIS, like most [professional] organizations, has subsections--specialized sections, and they have a museum librarians section that I had been active with for a long time. And so we talked about it. I talked about it with that group, and they agreed that something like this was necessary. I wrote a proposal. I decided finally that I didn't want to try to write a book of standards, that I really wanted, because many art museum libraries, even in the largest museums, it turns out--not in places like the Met--but in some other places that you would be surprised at--[have very meagre resources]. There are either solo librarians--that's true at the Guggenheim and at the Whitney--they're either solo librarians or librarians with a very small staff--so a lot of what is done, we have to kind of make it up as we go along. We're professional librarians who [01:46:00] have been trained, and who stay in touch with each other about standards. We do the best we can, but budgets are small, staffs are small.

JL: Oh, I know.

JB: Yeah.

JL: We know all about it. Like I said, in our little nonprofits, right?

JB: Yes, that's right. It sometimes--I used to say they give you--the granting agencies give you just enough to fail. That's a gross exaggeration. [Laughter] But, you know--you never get as much as you really need, and so you are always "making do."

JL: But it also accounts for the fact that there are all these dedicated people in these fields--because you have to be, right?

JB: That is true. I have found that librarians, in general, are the most generous people and they just--they love their work. If you didn't, you'd get out.

JL: Well, was there something else--I've realized now, I've kept you on the phone for coming up on

two hours now. . . . You know, this--in the print magazine, this is going to be a fairly short item for space, but--

JB: I figured it probably was, and I probably shouldn't have gone on so long.

JL: Well, but the beauty is they now have a website, too, and what we've started [to do] a lot of the time, is--when we have interesting material that won't fit on the page--we can do, you know, sort of a web exclusive, and I think that's what I'll end up doing.

JB: I was--in fact, I haven't read it yet, but I did notice the article that you wrote about the [actor/woodworker, Nick Offerman] on [the TV show] "Parks and Recreation."

JL: Oh, right, right!

JB: I noticed that it said at the bottom that the actual interview was on your--

JL: Yeah, well, you should [read it] because he--it was just too good not to use--because he is a very articulate, funny guy, and we just thought--

JB: It really made me want to meet him.

JL: Oh, he's so nice. I mean, you know, how some of the people are in "The Biz"--but he is just a lovely guy, really lovely guy. And if you get a chance, read that interview.

JB: I will, definitely.

JL: He's a joy. He's an absolute joy. So I think I'll do something [similar] with this.

JB: I think I have some photos here that I could send you. You are--A.C.C. also has photos. In fact, I added [a few] to the timeline, the A.C.C. timeline.

JL: Oh yeah, yeah.

JB: Yeah. So, if you go to it and look in--well, in 1965, you'll find the Egg and the Eye logo. That's also on the press release.

JL: Yes, right.

JB: But there are some other photos of the Museum. If you look in--I think it's 1973--we decided to use that date as the founding date for the Museum.

JL: Joan, are there any pictures of you at the Museum, currently or--

JB: No, but I think I have at least a couple that I could send you.

JL: Yeah, send us some possibilities. I don't know what they'll end up using, but something I could send on for possible illustration. Or they might ask you for something else. I don't know, but--

JB: I understand.

JL: If you could send it this week, that'd be great.

JB: I think I can send it this afternoon probably--tomorrow at the latest.

JL: Great, wonderful.

JB: And I'm going to send you the slightly revised version of the press release, too. [laughter]

JL: Yes, please. Now was there anything else that we didn't talk about, or a question that you wish I had asked?

JB: Oh gosh. I did make few notes here. Alma Eikerman, who was a fellow at the American Craft Council--

JL: Sure, the metalsmith, right?

JB: Yes, a jewelry maker and metalsmith. I did not realize how important she was at the time, but when I was an undergraduate at Indiana University, she was on the faculty, and she taught an introductory studio art course that I took, that was really, I think, transformative for me in terms of my outlook on art.

JL: Really?

JB: She really made the whole art world--I mean, it sounds kind of trite, but she really opened my eyes to seeing art in a completely different way than I had before.

JL: How did she do--

JB: And that was back in the '50s, so, you know, [laughter] that was a pretty critical time. **[01:51:00]** Art was changing a lot.

JL: What was it that she did?

JB: She had us go to the library. [laughter] She had us go to the art library, and I guess in retrospect, I'm semi-horrified, but it was a wonderful learning exercise. She had us trace pictures. She had a whole list of artists from way back when to contemporary and she had us look for examples of their work. And just, really, I mean, tracing was just a tool to make us really look at the whole picture. And I gained an appreciation for--certainly for abstract art that I had not had before.

JL: So, she exposed you to new kinds of art at the time?

JB: Exactly, exactly.

JL: Oh, isn't that--and then you surely you went on to find out who she was--

JB: Exactly. Exactly.

JL: Yeah, yeah, oh gosh.

JB: So that was kind of interesting.

- JL: Yeah, huh. Well, it has been a delight to talk to you. This has been so fun. . . I like archives myself. . . You know, I have to say, it's the kind of thing I enjoy, too . . .
- JB: Well, I would love to meet you [in person]!
- JL: I know! Well, if you're ever in L.A.--
- JB: [We now spend winters in San Diego and we always visit friends] in L.A.
- JL: Yeah, I live in La Cañada.
- JB: Oh yes, that's lovely out there.
- JL: So, right in the Pasadena area. You have my email address, and maybe we could meet for lunch sometime, or if I ever get to Santa Fe.
- JB: Well, certainly if you get to Santa Fe, do give us a call or email me that you're coming, and I'd love to have you over.
- JL: I know!
- JB: We do get to L.A. We were there briefly just before Christmas, visiting my son and I did go to CAFAM and see the show.
- JL: And have they at least given you a party, Joan? Or a plaque, or something?
- JB: [laughter] No, no, no. We went out for coffee. I met Suzanne Isken. And I mean, we had emailed a lot and talked on the phone, but I had never met her in person, and I like her a lot. I hope she'll stick it out! [laughter]
- JL: Oh, good. Yeah, yeah. Now, is your husband retired as well now, or?
- JB: Well, officially, yes, although he still does a lot of writing, but he's enjoying being in the garden a little more.
- JL: Oh, that is nice.
- JB: For a long time, he taught [and was the Dean of the Theatre School for eight years] . . . at CalArts [California Institute of the Arts], but in the middle of all that, he got in touch with an ex-student of his, Ted Danson, and became president of his production company, and ended up making eight movies for him as a producer.
- JL: Oh my gosh!
- JB: So not with--as it turned out, Ted wasn't in any of them. [laughter] But he gave the support for those movies to be made, and my husband won three Emmys as a result.
- JL: Did he really?
- JB: Yeah.

- JL: Which movies? [They were all movies for TV; two were for HBO: *A Lesson Before Dying*, for which he won an Emmy and *Miss Evers' Boys*, for which he won two Emmys.] . . . Yeah, well you know, if you know any sort of prominent people, like that actor, Nick Offerman, who makes things at a certain level or have beautiful craft collections and--you know--that people don't know about, we'd love to know, because that does get attention--sort of--for the magazine and the movement.
- JB: Well, I showed that article to Beny because he has a special interest in woodworking, [though] he doesn't do anything like that. But we both knew Sam Maloof and so forth. You know, we might think of someone. We certainly would let you know if we do, but that's unusual. I think that is unusual.
- JL: I suppose so. Does Noah Wyle have any kind of interest, or collection, or--
- JB: You know, I don't know. He must have some, but I don't know. That's something that I've never heard anybody talk about, and I've never been to his house. Beny got to know him a little bit better than I did, really, because he talked to him about some potential projects.
- JL: I always wondered, sort of, if he had his grandparents' interests in any way. [01:56:00]
- JB: He served on the board, for a while, of CAFAM.
- JL: Did he?
- JB: But I think I heard that he finally promised his grandfather that he would continue to contribute to the Museum [only] if he didn't have to go to [board] meetings.
- JL: Go to the meetings, right.
- JB: Yeah, he may have a collection. I mean, it's hard to imagine that he doesn't have something from his parents--or grandparents, rather.
- JL: Right, right.
- JB: But I don't know what those are. Nancy is--well, I guess it's his aunt, Nancy Romero, [Edith and Frank Wyle's oldest daughter], who was married to Frank Romero for a long time--
- JL: Oh yeah.
- JB: She has a wonderful collection. She lives out there to the east, Altadena, somewhere--not that far from Sam Maloof. . . . I did interview her for the oral history, too.
- JL: Oh. Well, we're all--you know, as I said, we're always interested in people who are a little bit out of the box, who can maybe bring in a different audience for this work, so--
- JB: I really have to congratulate you and the A.C.C., the *American Craft* editorial staff and board. I think, recently, it's just gotten so good.

JL: Oh!

JB: The longer articles, you have--you know, there's more of a focus on people and it's just more interesting.

JL: Yeah, I agree with you!

JB: It used to be more of a kind of insider's publication.

JL: Exactly, yeah, yeah.

JB: Which I enjoyed, but this is--it's much bigger than that now.

JL: Well, you know, it has to be, I think, it has to be. And it's really very easy--we all know the material is very easy to love. It's just, I think, how you deliver it, and they are doing a really nice job. I agree with you, but I'll pass it on. Thank you.

JB: And all right, well, this has been great for me, and--

JL: Oh, thank you, Joan--

JB: --I will send those things to you, and I will be in touch. And if you have any further questions, don't hesitate.

JL: I will. I will. You check your email often enough then?

JB: Oh yes, I do.

JL: OK, good, all right. Well, thank you so much for giving me this time, I thoroughly enjoyed it. And I really hope to meet you [in person] one of these days.

JB: Likewise. Thank you, Joyce!

JL: And congratulation. Well done! [laughter]

JB: [laughter] Thank you! Take care.

JL: You, too.

JB: Bye.

JL: Bye.