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Oral history interview with Laura Andreson, 1981 May 20

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Laura Andreson on May 20, 1981. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Ruth Bowman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an –Ed. attribution.

Interview

[00:00:05.55]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, this is—

[00:00:07.07]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, you keep—

[00:00:07.56]

RUTH BOWMAN: Ruth Bowman interviewing Laura Andreson on May 20, 1981, in the marvelously large, high-ceilinged living room of her home. I don't know very much about your early years. I know you went to school in the East, but I don't know—

[00:00:27.39]

LAURA ANDRESON: No. I was born in California, and my father was born in California, and my grandfather came here in 1868.

[00:00:36.72]

RUTH BOWMAN: To do what?

[00:00:37.62]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, he came around—he was escaping the conscription to the army of Germany when they took over Schleswig-Holstein, which was Denmark. And he went with an uncle, and sailed to Liverpool. And then, I just really—I have a marvelous record of his life that I had never realized that he'd done so many things. And he sailed from Liverpool, around the Cape to Argentina, where he went to, I guess, the Galapagos Islands to pick up guano, and went back to Liverpool again. He was only 16 when he sailed with his uncle.

[00:01:14.13]

RUTH BOWMAN: And what was he doing with guano?

[00:01:16.58]

LAURA ANDRESON: They were taking it back to Liverpool for fertilizer. And then, he came back again, and I discovered somebody did historical research of him. Is this important?

[00:01:26.80]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes, what was his name?

[00:01:28.12]

LAURA ANDRESON: His name was John Andreson. And it should be S-E-N, but he took his mother's name. My name is really Jens. Because his father's name was Jens, but they always gave the son the middle name, which was their mother's name. So when he left Germany, he changed his name and took his uncle's name on account of the army in Germany. And so then I found out that he went to Argentina—then he came back to Liverpool and delivered the guano, and then came back to Argentina, and was there six months. But I've never found out what he was doing there. But then, he picked up his uncle's boat again and then went up to San Francisco, and he left the ship there. These were all sailing ships, you see, at that time. And got himself a little boat. I guess, a little ship—not a boat, but a—what kind of a thing would go up to the Sacramento River?

[00:02:23.32]

RUTH BOWMAN: A boat.

[00:02:24.26]

LAURA ANDRESON: Boat? So he went from San Francisco up the river to Sacramento and did that for a bit. And then, he sold that out, but in the meanwhile, I think he met my grandmother in San Francisco, who had a very interesting experience, too. Because when she came to San Francisco, there was no isthmus [Panama Canal –Ed.] and she had to go across the isthmus on a donkey. And imagine, in all that jungle, and so forth, to get to the Pacific coast to pick up another boat? Isn't that fantastic? So then, he came back, and he went to Arizona and bought out a steam brewery, and he learned the brewery business there. Should I tell you all this?

[00:03:08.47]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes, it's interesting. It feeds your life.

[00:03:11.05]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, it does. And so then he came back to San Francisco, but he came by the way of San Bernardino with a sack of gold dust, because he was paid in gold dust for this beer business. And he saw a brewery there, so he bought the brewery and then went up to San Francisco and married my grandmother and brought her back to San Bernardino. So he was in the steam beer business for a while.

[00:03:34.36]

Then, he got involved in real estate. He built two big hotels there. He started the first bank in San Bernardino. I was just amazed to think that he had done so much, you know? And right on the main part of town, there was a little adobe house, and that's where my father was born. And he had three sons and two daughters.

[00:03:58.69]

RUTH BOWMAN: And you're where in that?

[00:04:00.79]

LAURA ANDRESON: What?

[00:04:01.57]

RUTH BOWMAN: This was your grandfather? Three sons, and two daughters.

[00:04:02.56]

LAURA ANDRESON: My grandfather. So one of his sons was John Andreson II, or Junior, I guess it was then. And so then, my father grew up in San Bernardino, and then married my mother, who was a bakery woman there. And she came from Denver by stagecoach to Lone Pine where her husband started a bakery there, and then, she came to Los Angeles in the late 1800s.

[00:04:33.89]

RUTH BOWMAN: And that was her parents?

[00:04:35.35]

LAURA ANDRESON: That was her parents. And they settled down in old Los Angeles here. And I remember some important, wealthy man in Los Angeles used to—they knew their driver, so he would drive up with a coach and take my mother out by Bullock's, where Bullock's is now, which was a big walnut grove. And you know, I wish I'd taped all these things, because it's so fascinating to hear the stories of my father and my grandmother. Their past is really history. So I must do that.

[00:05:09.37]

RUTH BOWMAN: Your mother's family was in the baking business?

[00:05:12.16]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:05:12.65]

RUTH BOWMAN: A commercial baking business.

[00:05:14.41]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, if you call a little bakery in San Bernardino where the cowboys came in every night and shot out the lights, and then every other business was a saloon. But she was—she baked, had someone bake bread for her.

[00:05:30.03]

RUTH BOWMAN: That has no relationship to clay, does it?

[00:05:32.16]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, I don't think so, but I can wedge bread pretty well. [They laugh.] Well, I was just fascinated in reading the history. And then, the history of my father amazed me, too. I didn't realize that he'd done so much. He started working in the bank, and it gave him ulcers, I think, because every—

[00:05:52.67]

RUTH BOWMAN: He was working for his father, or working in the bank?

[00:05:55.37]

LAURA ANDRESON: He was working for his father and the bank. And he had to be nice to everyone, and this sort of riled him up a bit, because I guess he had some rather difficult customers. He was a teller. And then, he became vice-president.

[00:06:09.18]

Well, to bring back my background, every weekend, we would take a mule team, and he had a marvelous team of mules, and we'd get up at three o'clock in the morning and we'd go up

to the San Bernardino mountains by that old switchback. And I was reared in the mountains from six months old until I was about—until I went to university, I guess, which was when I was 26. But every summer, we'd go up there.

[00:06:38.14]

And he was then president of a building loan association, and he made his living primarily by buying orange groves at $100 an acre, and then, building them up and then selling them. And so I remember at one time he said, "You know, Laura, I'm a very wealthy man. I have $300,000 now." And I thought, gee, that's an awful lot of money. [Laughs.]

[00:07:09.22]

But that experience of the mountains really affected my life, because we were as free as a bird, and he'd go out and catch a dozen trout for breakfast every morning, and the deer would come around, and the bears. And when he was young, his father used to take him up to where Lake Arrowhead is now, and there was a mill in the bottom. And he would leave the family there all summer so that they would be protected. And my father said he remembers when the bears used to come in there and lick the grease off the frying pans that they hung on the tree. It's just his experience of how he used to go hunting and walk from San Bernardino up to the top of the mountains and get a couple of deer and bring them down to the house, you know. I've got all the pictures of this, too, when I was a child.

[00:07:57.88]

And they first—we finally lived in tents, and then we bought a portable house that he took up on a wagon and put it all up, and I remember it had one living room with a bed. One of the beds was on top of a tin tub and we'd have to take our bath every day. [Laughs.] And every night, we'd have huge bonfires, and all the camp would come in and sit around and they'd tell stories.

[00:08:25.47]

RUTH BOWMAN: What kind of stories?

[00:08:26.44]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, about the past and about their experiences. My entire Andreson family moved up there, too, but they had a tent, tent place at Skyland. And then, I remember the fires that we used to have and how frightened we were of fires. And in 1911, there was a tremendous fire that burned from one end of the mountains to the other. And my father was a volunteer fire fireman. And he had an old—we always had Cadillacs, old Cadillacs, and he would go out with a crew and backfire to keep the fire from coming up. And I remember that very well. And we had to move out of there a couple of times because it was really very dangerous.

[00:09:16.99]

And he saved Pine Crest, which Dr. Bayless owned at that time, and which was a very fine resort. And he saved that, so Dr. Bayless gave him—and my uncle, who was also there—gave him a large piece of property right down on the point, which was nice. That was in 1912, I guess. And so he and my uncle built their houses there. And then, there's Mr. Drew, which was one of the Drews that started the first bank. His son built another house there. So we had a little community down on the point, where it was just really exciting. And they used to have big motion picture companies come up there, and—Hart? What was his name? I've forgotten William Hart, is that right?

[00:10:07.87]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes.

[00:10:08.14]

LAURA ANDRESON: And all the movie people would stay in this place, and then they would take some of the famous pictures of the past with Griffith, and so forth.

[00:10:17.38]

RUTH BOWMAN: When in all this process—

[00:10:19.93]

LAURA ANDRESON: Did I get excited about ceramics?

[00:10:21.93]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, yeah.

[00:10:22.80]

LAURA ANDRESON: Nothing until 19—well, no. My father felt that—he sent my brother to Harvard, and he was a graduate of the Harvard Business School, but he felt that women should sort of stay at home.

[00:10:38.16]

RUTH BOWMAN: How many of you were there?

[00:10:39.15]

LAURA ANDRESON: Two, my brother and myself. And he was—he really didn't want me to go away from home. I think I was his pet, and he just wanted to keep me around there. I drove his cars. And he was a big man, and the only car he could get into was a Cadillac. So every year, we'd have a new Cadillac. And I was so embarrassed in driving around this Cadillac that I've been driving Volkswagens ever since. [Laughs.] Well, maybe I'm—am I rambling too much here?

[00:11:08.24]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, no. No, this is fine.

[00:11:11.82]

LAURA ANDRESON: Let's see. So we built a house there, and it was really very exciting, because it was a beautiful country. And we—I don't think we've had fire like that since that time. And of course, it was all dirt roads, and father had this old Cadillac with lots of seats on it. So every night, we'd get in the bus and go down to some creek where the men would fish, and we'd have a—cook supper out in a bonfire. And there were lots of mills up there then. And we'd go by a mill and maybe look around and see what they were doing. And I remember that.

[00:11:56.11]

RUTH BOWMAN: Lumber mills?

[00:11:56.77]

LAURA ANDRESON: The lumber mill. And the snakes were very, very bad; that's the only thing that frightened me as a child, were rattlesnakes. And, oh, it was so lush. It was so beautiful. It really affected my whole life. And that's why I think I'm interested in gardening. And my father was very much interested in gardening, too. We always had a chicken yard. And before I went to school, I would go—before I really decided I was going to go to university—because I had a friend in San Bernardino who was teaching junior—and she's a—her name is Ilse Ruocco, and she's a very famous person in San Diego, in fact. She was named a woman of the year. She had a big design shop there. And she was a professor at the university there.

[00:12:40.26]

RUTH BOWMAN: How do you spell her last name?

[00:12:41.29]

LAURA ANDRESON: R-U-O-C-C-O. Ilse Ruocco. And her husband was an architect, and got a fellowship in the National Architectural Association or Society. And so they're very important.

And, well, she was teaching there. And she was getting a salary every month. I said, this is silly. I'm going to go and be a teacher, too. So I applied and was able to—was accepted. And so I came down to Los Angeles to UCLA, which was, at that time, the southern branch, and was probably the finest school in the West.

[00:13:23.41]

It was run by about 13 women, and they were all from Columbia. They were Mrs. Sooy and Ms. Geer, and really very outstanding teachers. And they'd all been reared—trained, rather, at Columbia. And they had Arthur Wesley Dow, and Fenollosa, and they were—so when I went East to see the Fenollosa exhibit at the Boston Museum, it was very exciting to think that this was a great influence in all of our lives.

[00:14:02.71]

RUTH BOWMAN: The teacher of your teacher.

[00:14:03.88]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's right. And so then, I got into UCLA, and—well, I've never been in such a dynamic school, really. I saw what they were doing, and I was very impressed. And Barbara Morgan, you know the photographer? She was one of my teachers. And Annita Delano, who was—I think had this same sort of a record made of her life was one of the teachers. And well, it was just a dynamic place.

[00:14:34.00]

RUTH BOWMAN: Mostly women?

[00:14:34.78]

LAURA ANDRESON: Mostly women. And we were very much involved with the Pasadena Playhouse. And when Norman Bel Geddes came out here to put on "The Miracle" play, why, we went and helped with the stage settings, and so forth. And it's just very exciting. The only thing we didn't have—you see, it was a teachers' college, and we weren't being trained professionally.

We took everything. We had art history. We had painting. We had life drawing. We had stagecraft. We had commercial art. We had perspective. We had costume design. You name it, and they had it. Because they were training teachers, you see? And they felt if they went to school and they had to put on a stage setting, why, they'd have to know how to do it. Or if they were teaching costume design in those days, and interior design. And so it was a marvelous—and a lot of the most outstanding educators in our West came from UCLA at that time. And then [during my first year –Ed.], I got tuberculosis. I stayed in a room.

[00:15:51.24]

RUTH BOWMAN: When was this? In the early '30s?

[00:15:52.98]

LAURA ANDRESON: This was about 19—well, I went there. I went to UCLA in 1926, and it was the end of my first year. And no one in the family had had tuberculosis, and they really thought this was ridiculous, because I didn't have a cough. And I had a little hemorrhage, and I went to the Tipton, Dr. Tipton, who was a marvelous person, and she sent me to a Dr. Cunningham down here [in Los Angeles –Ed.] who was a specialist in that. And so they took a test, and they said, yes, I had tuberculosis.

[00:16:24.49]

So my brother came down for—he wanted to go to Stanford. My father finally made him go to Claremont where he'd be close to home, which my brother never quite recovered from. And so I went home and was in bed flat on my back for six months. And the doctor said, "Don't lift your arms. Just lie flat and rest." Well, I did this, and of course, every month, you run a little temperature. And he said, "Stay in bed for six weeks until your temperature goes down. And then, take it every day."

[00:17:05.38]

So I took my temperature at two and at seven and so forth, and it went down almost immediately, I guess. And then, I'd run along, then my temperature would go up. So then, I stayed in bed for six months. And the family and everyone and our local doctor thought there was absolutely nothing wrong with me, because I was weighing 118 pounds then. I wasn't emaciated.

[00:17:31.99]

But it taught me one thing, to be patient. To be very calm and patient. If anything goes wrong, I'm never frustrated or upset about it. I mean, I can have a whole kiln of pots come out that are just ruined because of the weather, or something happened to the kiln, and it doesn't bother me at all. It may knock me down for four or five hours, but then I bounce right back.

[00:17:59.29]

RUTH BOWMAN: You're sure that it was that T.B.—

[00:18:00.49]

LAURA ANDRESON: I'm sure it was.

[00:18:01.72]

RUTH BOWMAN: It wasn't your parents or your family.

[00:18:03.47]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, no, no. No, no. I'm sure it was just staying in bed for six months. Just made me real—and made me realize that life is very precious. And at that time, you see, tuberculosis was very, very serious. We had these tubercular sanitariums all over the South. Well, anyway, so then I went back the next year, but I wasn't—and in the meanwhile, I decided I was interested in learning, so I went to, I think, every school in Southern California as sort of an extension course, or I went to Redlands University, and I'd drive over there and take a course with one of the art teachers. And I took clay at that time, and I was fascinated with it and loved it.

And then, I would take the red car down to Claremont, and I studied with Mrs. Jenkins, who was a teacher down there. And this was in the—this was when I was about, oh, I guess, about 20, after I had graduated from high school. And I never took a college preparation course because, well, that didn't include art, and I always—I loved to draw. I really—

[00:19:19.99]

RUTH BOWMAN: How old were you when you loved to draw? When did you start?

[00:19:22.66]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I've always loved to do that. I've done that since I was ten years old.

[00:19:28.27]

RUTH BOWMAN: Do you draw from your imagination, or from what you saw?

[00:19:30.79]

LAURA ANDRESON: From what I saw, generally. In those days, I would copy things. Which is not bad, really. Arrow Collar ads and all sorts of things. [Laughs.] And then, I liked to build things at that time. I mean, I loved carving with a knife, and making all sorts—for our cabin up there. We make all sorts of items, like candle holders, and so forth and so on. And out of tin cans, too. So I really was a craftsman.

[00:20:07.66]

A very skilled painter, but without any imagination, and without any real creativity, you know? And I still think I'm a better craftsman than I am an artist because my pots are not—well, they don't have the freedom and the ease that the great potters have. But on the other hand, I'm a traditionalist, and I like to make pottery I can use. And I got involved in porcelain in the '50s, and it's made everything that I make now look like eggs, you know? They just are beautiful, simple forms.

[00:20:45.11]

RUTH BOWMAN: Where did you get your concepts of the difference between art and craft?

[00:20:50.24]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I don't—well, when I went to Japan, I think.

[00:20:56.48]

RUTH BOWMAN: This was after you got out of school.

[00:20:58.19]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, you know, there was always the fine arts and the "minor" arts or decorative arts. There was no difference—there was a great difference between it. And there was—to me, there was no difference between a painting and a piece of a beautifully carved ivory or enamel. I mean, to me, everything was art that was a sensitive, creative, inspirational thing to look at, to see.

[00:21:28.47]

Because if it doesn't affect you emotionally—if it's a typewriter, and it's cute and funny, or if it's somebody took a cup, and then see how many times they can manipulate it into a piece of sculpture, well, why not just use form itself? And why use a commercial product for that? And that has influenced my whole philosophy, I think. And then, not only that, but I think we had, really, a fine training in aesthetics in—not that you can make an artist, because I don't think you can make an artist. You can give them all the academic knowledge and analysis of art, but unless you've got it in here, you haven't got it.

[00:22:18.99]

RUTH BOWMAN: So from your point of view, it's a spiritual heritage?

[00:22:23.88]

LAURA ANDRESON: It's a heritage. I think it's just like music. I think you have good ears, or you have sensitive eyes, and you have—well, it's like—I mean, these primitive people, they didn't go to school to learn art, and yet, look at the wonderful things they produce. And I feel that you learn by doing things over and over and over again, and by comparing one to another and thinking, well, now, this is a little better than that. Maybe I'll do this the next time.

[00:22:54.45]

RUTH BOWMAN: Who are the people who helped you figure out which is better? What "better" means?

[00:22:59.40]

LAURA ANDRESON: Better? Well, I guess it was Mrs. Geer. It was the whole design area of the UCLA Art Department. Because whatever they did there had a—well, Barbara Morgan, for example, and Annita.

[00:23:14.07]

RUTH BOWMAN: Annita?

[00:23:14.94]

LAURA ANDRESON: Annita Delano. They were very imaginative. And they—well, Barbara is just way off in the cloud half the time. But she's very sensitive to what is right in a composition, or in a color, and in the content. All those things go together. It's just not content. Like they say, well, you have to have content in your work, well—like doing something that you could write about much better or photograph much better than you could reproduce and copy in clay, like a piece of pie in clay, for example. Now, to me, that is not art. You know? It may say something about a pie. It may look exactly like a pie, or you have a plate with an egg on it and bacon. Technically, the contemporary potters are just fantastic. They can make lizards look just like lizards. They can make golf links, or a subdivision of the city in a little form, but that isn't art to me. I mean, take a photograph of it.

[00:24:28.97]

RUTH BOWMAN: What you're saying is that the form has to be original and unique to the artist?

[00:24:33.32]

LAURA ANDRESON: I think the form has to be unique. It has to be an expression of the artist's idea about whatever they're doing. And it must have some content. Now, Ben Shahn, for example, has content in his work. And so does—Giotto has content in there. But they're great works of art because they are sensitive to the relationship of one form to another, one color to another. If it's two-dimensional, then it's related to the surface that it's on. If it's three-dimensional, why, then it has depth and it's trying to do another thing.

[00:25:14.42]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you're really talking about subject matter, or beyond subject matter?

[00:25:19.19]

LAURA ANDRESON: Beyond subject matter.

[00:25:20.44]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes. You were at UCLA, and you graduated, and then, you went East?

[00:25:26.74]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah. Then, every summer—and then, I graduated in 1932. In 1933, one of the women who were going to teach us there was going to have a baby. So I started—I had a botany teacher, Dr. Johnson, and he thought I had great talent and ability in botany, and he thought I should be a botanist. So I thought, well, I'm going to teach. I really should have several subjects that I could teach in high school, or wherever I was going. Because we didn't aspire to be university professors at that stage of our life.

[00:26:05.98]

Now, they graduate from the school, and they immediately want to step into a university job. They're not content to go down and really learn teaching by going to junior high school, and then, maybe senior high school. Or, you're so professional, and you have a doctor's degree and you know your subject, but you may not be a good teacher, because you're just interested in standing up there and giving your knowledge to the students, but the students are just are not really—very few good teachers are born.

[00:26:40.10]

And you have to like people, and you have to be interested in the students. Now, they don't care whether they get a job after they get out of the university at all. They don't care whether they're having emotional problems in their love life or whatever it is. They don't care. They're just so removed from the human qualities that teachers should have toward their students. So that's the one thing I'm crabbing about mostly.

[00:27:10.88]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you went to study how to be a botany teacher?

[00:27:13.94]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, then I went to—after I graduated, I went to Claremont and took Comparative—I remember, Comparative Morphology and Anatomy of Green Plants with Dr. Munz, who is the top botanist in this part of the world. And he was so tough, and I got an "A" in the course, so I was very encouraged.

[00:27:32.66]

And then, I decided I'd take some more education there. Well, I really wasn't working for any degree at all. I was just killing the time between when I graduated. You see, my father felt that I had disgraced the family by going to university, because he didn't think I was very smart. But I graduated at the top of my college at university and was a valedictorian. Which was terrible, because I'd never given a public talk in my life. And this was in 1932. And of course, he was very proud then, and he was very much interested in taking motion pictures. So I still have the motion picture of my standing up there, shaking, I'm sure.

[00:28:18.02]

And I had to write my own speech, which was just awful. And I had—and I had someone who took me up on the hillside above the university there, and I'd stand up on the bluff and she'd be down below, and I'd repeat this. [Laughs.] I'd written—oh, it really took off three years of my life. But anyway, so I managed to do that.

[00:28:46.51]

So then, of course, Mrs. Sooy insisted that I take this honor, because she said it was an honor for the art department. And therefore, I would have to do it. So I did it. I never learned to say no, I'm sorry to say. [Laughs.] And so then, I went to Claremont. And then, this woman was about to have the baby, so then I came back to UCLA to take her place. And my first salary was $900 a year. And that didn't really last over the summer, so I'd always have to borrow to carry on the summer. And the salaries were very low then.

[00:29:29.03]

RUTH BOWMAN: Were you living at home now?

[00:29:30.83]

LAURA ANDRESON: No. I was living—let's see. Oh, I had a little room over a garage down near the southern branch. This was on Vermont. And I had a car. And in order to sort of supplement my salary, I accepted a job teaching—well, in fact, I was teaching night school in San Bernardino High School. And then, they wanted me to come to San Bernardino Junior College. So I took a class over there. So I would commute from Los Angeles to San Bernardino three nights a week [laughs] for maybe $150 a month, or something of that sort, for all of it. But anyway, I worked very hard all my life. I wonder that I still have any energy left. I'm really amazed, because I really have worked very hard. Even when I wasn't teaching and going to school—

[00:30:37.32]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oops—

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[00:00:04.91]

LAURA ANDRESON: Even when I wasn't painting and going to school, and I didn't have a job. I would plant. I would turn the backyard into the most fantastic garden you ever saw, like 500 ranunculus, maybe ten flats of snapdragons, and so forth. And then I turned a chicken yard that we used to have in the backyard there by the old barn, into really the most beautiful garden you ever saw. And it was just hard work. And I'd even go up the mountains and get boxes—climb down and get boxes of a leaf mold to bring back to the garden. I just worked very hard. I don't know why. And I've had every disease that you can mention. I've had smallpox. I've had tuberculosis. I've had cancer. I've had—you name it, and I've had it.

[00:01:02.87]

RUTH BOWMAN: And you'd just get right up and go back to work?

[00:01:04.68]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I think it's made me stronger and stronger. It's really amazing.

[00:01:10.90]

RUTH BOWMAN: So there you were teaching and commuting back and forth. And what made you decide to go East?

[00:01:16.26]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, then I had a friend who was teaching down at Santa—the one who inspired me to go to school in the first place, Ilse Ruocco. Her name was Ilse Hamann then. And she was teaching at Santa Ana Junior College. And I had a friend who was—well he taught there too. His name was Evans Ecke. So they decided that we should go to Columbia and get our master's degree.

[00:01:48.12]

RUTH BOWMAN: All of you?

[00:01:48.74]

LAURA ANDRESON: All of us. So every summer we'd drive back in an old Pontiac that I had, over dirt roads and just—it would take us a week to get there. But we always, we'd go by Canada. And one summer we went by the way of Cuba and all through Florida. So I really, I don't think there's any state that I haven't been in yet, just by going to Columbia. And the students were so well trained at UCLA that everyone that went there got straight A's. And it was very exciting. I love New York. And it was a part of my education. We stayed at the International House.

[00:02:36.78]

RUTH BOWMAN: 125th Street, or 120th Street, I guess.

[00:02:38.76]

LAURA ANDRESON: 120th Street. Yes. And then they gave a summer tour to Europe. And what was her name? I can't think of it at the moment. [Miss Ruffin led the tour, which gave us eight units of graduate credit, six weeks in Europe for $600.00. –Ed.] She was a painting teacher. I was getting my master's degree in painting back there, which I did. And I can paint a rose that looks just exactly like a rose, I tell you.

[00:03:07.44]

RUTH BOWMAN: That's what they were teaching?

[00:03:08.52]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, that's what I can do. And that's what I—

[00:03:11.10]

RUTH BOWMAN: Teaching verisimilitude.

[00:03:12.86]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I suppose, yes. But not entirely so. Because who else was back there? Well, Polly [Blank –Ed.] got her degree there. She's the one that owns this house, actually. She owned the house. Her father built it in 1928.

[00:03:28.65]

RUTH BOWMAN: This beautiful house?

[00:03:29.52]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:03:29.94]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, it's so beautiful.

[00:03:30.78]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, and it's so well-built. Well, so she went back there. But I don't think she was there at the same time because she was there in '28, I guess. We were there during the Depression. And it was pretty sad.

[00:03:51.24]

RUTH BOWMAN: Who were the teachers at that time?

[00:03:53.62]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I'm trying to think. When she comes back, I'll ask her about that because—

[00:03:57.99]

RUTH BOWMAN: But she also studied painting?

[00:03:59.34]

LAURA ANDRESON: She studied painting.

[00:04:00.87]

RUTH BOWMAN: Are these her paintings?

[00:04:02.79]

LAURA ANDRESON: These are hers—that one, and this one. And that's one of her students' over there, John Layton over there. And that's John Jones over there, who's a great etcher. And he's one of our best. And this is Morris Graves.

[00:04:21.96]

RUTH BOWMAN: Early.

[00:04:22.68]

LAURA ANDRESON: Early, yeah. I bought that for five dollars. And I bought the one in the dining room for five dollars.

[00:04:30.54]

RUTH BOWMAN: From Morris Graves?

[00:04:31.29]

LAURA ANDRESON: From Morris Graves.

[00:04:32.22]

RUTH BOWMAN: Was he down here?

[00:04:33.06]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, he never went to school. He wouldn't go to school. So he decided he would just paint. And he didn't have any money. And he was a friend of this Mr. Ecke, who went back and forth to Columbia University.

[00:04:52.11]

RUTH BOWMAN: With you?

[00:04:52.66]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. So he used to come and stay at our house in San Bernardino. And we'd get out. And I was making pottery then. And so he made—I remember we made a big urn for some Pacific Art Association. We made 20 of them. And he was pleased with that urn because he liked that. On the back of all of these, there's another painting. And I hadn't seen him in 40 years. And I saw him a couple of years ago up at his wonderful new home near Eureka. And he said, "Laura," he said, "I never will forget you." Said, "You were the first one that ever paid me for a painting." I said, "Well, Morris, I loved them." And this was before his bird [period –Ed]. Then he got into the bird feeling. And we stayed there all day with him. And it was just delightful.

[00:05:44.54]

RUTH BOWMAN: So there you were at Columbia. And you got your master's degree.

[00:05:48.47]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:05:48.71]

RUTH BOWMAN: And what did you do with it?

[00:05:50.84]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I came back. By then I started teaching at UCLA. And I've been teaching at UCLA since 1933.

[00:05:57.77]

RUTH BOWMAN: Without stopping?

[00:05:59.33]

LAURA ANDRESON: Without stopping.

[00:06:00.26]

RUTH BOWMAN: Even when you retired, you still kept on teaching?

[00:06:02.54]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, I didn't. I got my research grant. So I kept on going out there, because I worked so hard to build that department. We had Christmas sales and sold pottery. And I must have made about $2,000—well, the first sale was, we'll say was about $500. Then it finally got up to $7,000 every Christmas. And it was an institutional thing out there. Everybody came and bought. And we had just a picnic, really. And in those days, I taught four classes of beginning and advanced pottery. I taught—we didn't have graduates until 19—'til after the war, Second war, not the First one. [Laughs.] I remember that too. So—what did you ask me?

[00:07:07.82]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, we were back when you were teaching at UCLA.

[00:07:11.00]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes. So I taught everything there, because I was trained in everything. I didn't teach pottery until 1936. But I was interested in that. But I taught stagecraft. I put on some of Mrs. Sooy's great, fantastic fantasias—whatever you want to call them—performances that she did at UCLA. And we still have movies of that. And I knew nothing about costume. And I had to design I think about a hundred costumes for this undersea performance—lobsters as big as six feet tall were to be carried around. And someone has a movie of that, which would be very interesting to see.

[00:07:57.95]

RUTH BOWMAN: Do you remember who?

[00:07:59.75]

LAURA ANDRESON: Mrs. Baker—Marjorie Harriman. That would be fun to have, because that's when we—you see, I graduated from the campus out there. But the graduation took place in the Hollywood Bowl, because we didn't have any place large enough for the classes. And so there were only four buildings out there then. And they were preparing the land by using mules and plows.

[00:08:41.13]

RUTH BOWMAN: This was in Westwood in the mid- '30s.

[00:08:43.60]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. Westwood. That was—not in the mid '30s, that was—we moved out there in 1929.

[00:08:48.48]

RUTH BOWMAN: I see.

[00:08:48.81]

LAURA ANDRESON: And then I graduated in '32. But that was very interesting to see that place grow, I tell you.

[00:08:55.72]

RUTH BOWMAN: They're still doing it.

[00:08:56.46]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, I'll say. But we taught everything. Because we were trained to. And we were a teachers' college. Now this was the whole premise, that we were training teachers. And so, therefore, they had to go out into high school, junior high school, elementary school, arts supervisors for high school. And so that's why we had this sort of background, which wasn't bad.

[00:09:25.62]

RUTH BOWMAN: You're really saying, then, that, or you're implying that teaching was more—was broader and deeper in those days.

[00:09:35.01]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes. It wasn't specialized at all. In fact, that was the period of the Bauhaus too, you see. And you can mention the Bauhaus to a student now, and they'd never heard of it.

[00:09:47.46]

RUTH BOWMAN: You're kidding.

[00:09:48.27]

LAURA ANDRESON: I'm not kidding. They are absolutely—they are so in a little groove of their pottery business that I mentioned someone—I said, "Oh, I have quite a collection over the years. And I have a fine Hamada." "Hamada? Who's Hamada?" And these are people are getting their master's degree in ceramics.

[00:10:11.54]

RUTH BOWMAN: And they don't know who Hamada is.

[00:10:12.59]

LAURA ANDRESON: They know don't know who Hamada is.

[00:10:14.39]

RUTH BOWMAN: Do they know who Leach is?

[00:10:15.92]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I doubt it. You know, they're just so busy inventing things and making—expressing their ideas.

[00:10:29.18]

RUTH BOWMAN: What do you think the cause of that is?

[00:10:31.91]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, it's the—I think Rose Slivka gives the best article in *Craft Horizons* of the rise of the present situation of anyone I've read.

[00:10:51.08]

RUTH BOWMAN: When was this, did she write that?

[00:10:52.91]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I have to have it here, because I was very impressed with it. But you see, it was the rise of the individual, that they didn't want to be associated with crafts. That was a lowly, mechanical job and had nothing to do with art. So they all became—they either painted on clay or they—well, the painters did the same thing. The painters use all sorts of materials on their canvases, like sand and so on.

[00:11:24.95]

RUTH BOWMAN: What you're saying is that the craftsmanship and the "form follows function" are very important.

[00:11:31.86]

LAURA ANDRESON: It's important to me, yes, to a degree. But I think if it's a very functional thing, you have a functional pottery—a clay. You have a sculptural clay. And you have the combination of the sculptural and the functional, so that you have three classifications. And pottery is a classification which aesthetics is important as the form and its function. Do you know what I'm talking about?

[00:12:07.86]

RUTH BOWMAN: So that the artistic value, which you questioned about yourself, is really—has to be there.

[00:12:13.53]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's right.

[00:12:14.16]

RUTH BOWMAN: At the beginning, you said.

[00:12:15.33]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's right.

[00:12:16.68]

RUTH BOWMAN: But you aspired always to the aesthetic—

[00:12:20.49]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, absolutely. And we always made functional pottery. Ceramics was pottery. Now it's more sculptural than it is pottery.

[00:12:34.17]

RUTH BOWMAN: And does that bother you, or do you like looking at it?

[00:12:36.24]

LAURA ANDRESON: I wouldn't mind it at all if the work that they did had some aesthetic quality to it.

[00:12:43.47]

RUTH BOWMAN: And that's in color as well as shape and glaze?

[00:12:47.10]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. It has to be the total thing, you see. I mean, they all have to be there.

[00:12:54.78]

RUTH BOWMAN: What was a typical day in this pre-World War II life of yours? What did—

[00:13:00.15]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I went there at eight o'clock in the morning, and I left at six o'clock in the evening. Now they're only required to have 16 students, maybe two graduate students. I had 125 students. I always had—I figure I'd had about 5,000 students in my career, if not more. And I was there weekends. And even if it was just—and we put on big social events. We always had—at that time, we had a man there by the name of Jack—not Jack Carter. [George Cox –Ed.] See, that's the only thing. Coming with age, you do forget. But I never remember names very well anyway. [Laughs.]

[00:13:52.67]

RUTH BOWMAN: You remember shapes, forms, and colors.

[00:13:54.25]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's right. [Laughs.] And so we put on big exhibits. As a student, when I was there, we had a very active arts fraternity. And we'd have big dinners every month. And we'd be responsible for all the refreshments of the receptions in the little gallery that we had there. And we were just totally involved in the whole activity of the department.

[00:14:22.63]

And we were neither divided—we weren't the painters. Now they're the painters, the historians, and the design division. And they never cross paths, you know? And so they're sort of separated. And they're always kind of fighting. The historians want to separate from the art department. The painters want to have all the professors. The design people have very few professors. So there's really a sad division now.

[00:14:52.04]

RUTH BOWMAN: But before World War II, this was not so.

[00:14:53.79]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, that was not so.

[00:14:55.13]

RUTH BOWMAN: And so what was the impact of the war? What were you doing? You were teaching during the war too?

[00:15:00.20]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes.

[00:15:01.76]

RUTH BOWMAN: And all of these 5,000 students, do you hear from them? Are you in touch with them?

[00:15:05.63]

LAURA ANDRESON: Indeed. I've had four of them named after me. There are four Lauras floating around. And I see them every once in a while. David Cressey down here has a Laura. He's a potter. And is in charge of the architectural pottery for many years. And then there's one in the East—a young girl [Marie Hatch –Ed.] I had as a student. And there's another one I'm trying to think of, I guess. Oh, another teacher up in Ventura [Deborah Burns –Ed.] named their daughter after me.

[00:15:38.84]

RUTH BOWMAN: So that you hear from them. Do you see their work?

[00:15:40.79]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes. And they come up and rush to me. I get letters, fan letters. "You don't remember me, but I'll never forget you." Well, I sort of rocked a big cradle there because I thought to get acquainted with the students, we should sit down and talk over a cup of tea. So my morning classes we had tea at ten [a.m.]. Then at in the afternoon, at three, we always had tea. And I sort of got everybody together and we sit down and had discussions.

[00:16:08.51]

I had sabbaticals, which were nice. And every year I'd go to Europe. Or one year I took 14 months off and went around the world, and never bought a ticket, just went from one potter to another, [laughs] and one museum to another. That was so nice, because Miss Geer, although she had a tradition in the past, she had no concept of the present. So we were completely devoid of the whole scheme of the modern art, I mean Picasso, and all of that going on all the time. Well, that was something we never touched in our art history. It was only Giotto and Persian art, and so forth that we were—

[00:17:01.73]

RUTH BOWMAN: Life stopped at the Impressionists.

[00:17:03.41]

LAURA ANDRESON: That's right. That's right. [Telephone ringing.] But then—excuse me.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:17:10.70]

These marvelous sabbaticals, you can go see all that you've learned in the university. I think I've been every museum in the world and—not really. But I mean, every city we'd go to, we'd go to museums. And Polly's interested in architecture and painting. So I think I've seen every Romanesque church in Europe.

[00:17:33.98]

RUTH BOWMAN: How nice.

[00:17:34.49]

LAURA ANDRESON: And we always bought a car—Volkswagen—and drove. And so that all those things I learned in school became a reality. And this is very exciting, I think my life is. I wouldn't change anything about it.

[00:17:50.57]

RUTH BOWMAN: We've talked a lot about your teaching, and about students and training. But we haven't talked about your own work and the way it developed. And I know it's hard, but how did you start? When did you make your first pot?

[00:18:02.06]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I made my first pot when I went to UCLA. And since the first semester I went home and went to bed, and then they didn't let me work in clay. So I didn't do it until we moved out to the new campus. That was 1929. And then we had a room. The whole art department was on the top of the library, up three flights. And we had a barrel of clay. And we had a table. And that was our entire equipment for the ceramics.

[00:18:39.68]

So all we did was to make—being a teacher's college, we learned all the techniques of slab, and coil, and pinch pots. So we did that, and then we'd make it, and then we'd throw it back in the bin. And then we finally moved to the third floor of the education building. And Miss Newcomb was our teacher. And I don't think she—well there were no schools of ceramics in this part of the world. And there were no books. There was no communication. We were influenced by the Orient. But to take a train to New York and to never have the radio or the television, we were isolated out here, really. And I taught myself ceramics. There were two books—there were about four books, some so technical it was far beyond me. But I got as much as I could out of what we had to work with.

[00:19:51.16]

There were two schools in California teaching ceramics. One was at USC with Glen Lukens. And one was at UCLA. And we got this new department, which was quite adequate and quite nice. It had a little glaze room. And she had one kiln. We only worked in earthenware, stoneware. And Al King—have you talked to Al King? Well, he he's a very important potter in California. And we had a reunion of all the potters from the past. There was Ricky Petterson and Susan Peterson, and, oh, some of the old timers from in the '40s, really, and '50s. And Al King was sitting in the audience.

[00:20:53.29]

And we were telling about our various experiences in the past and how limited we were. And he was just furious because he said, why, I don't know—he always had a quart of Irish whiskey in him whenever he—and he was really destructive that day. And he said, "Well, there were wheels around." I said, "Well, I never had a wheel until Carlton Ball taught himself and went up to Mills and had a wheel made." And it was during the war. And I sent my students up to Mills to learn how to throw, and they came back here and taught me how to throw because I had to teach 12 months in the year. We had Fourth of July and Christmas Day off. So they came back and taught me how to throw. And then I really could out throw any of them after they became very expert. [Laughs.]

[00:21:54.97]

RUTH BOWMAN: And what other potters did you have contact with?

[00:21:57.91]

LAURA ANDRESON: At that time?

[00:21:58.54]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yeah, in the war.

[00:21:59.71]

LAURA ANDRESON: In the war?

[00:22:00.58]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes, did you meet the Natzlers when they came, for instance?

[00:22:03.13]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, we did. I was a very good friend of the Natzlers. And they came in '39. And Marguerite Wildenhain came in '39.

[00:22:09.94]

RUTH BOWMAN: Marguerite?

[00:22:10.39]

LAURA ANDRESON: Wildenhain. And she's a she's a graduate of the Bauhaus. So she had her techniques, and the Natzlers had their techniques. And I went over and took some—she lived over on Washington someplace—and I went over, and Peggy Lecky, who's a bookbinder here in town, she was a neighbor of theirs. And so she said, "Laura, you must come over and meet the Natzlers. I want you to know them." So I went over and met them. And I was very overwhelmed with their work. And they were working in the red clay out here at Alberhill, red clay. And she was throwing very thin. But she had a technique that she used that I didn't—well, it was hard for me to learn that. But anyway, she said I had ability. But she would center with a piece of chamois. And I'd get all involved with the chamois. And then she'd throw it.

[00:23:16.38]

And, well, I don't know—I did all right, anyway. I only took about six lessons, I guess, and then something happened. We were all involved in the Red Cross, and we developed a Southern California Design Association, I think it was called. And so we would go out and we'd make visual aids for the people teaching in hospitals and so forth. And then we—I tell you who is—she would know a lot about that, Peggy Lecky. And then, let's see now, where am I?

[00:24:03.93]

RUTH BOWMAN: You're in the war.

[00:24:04.95]

LAURA ANDRESON: I'm in the war. Well, so then the boys started coming back right after the war. And then I think we had our first—when did the war end? In '40—

[00:24:17.53]

RUTH BOWMAN: '45.

[00:24:18.30]

LAURA ANDRESON: '45. And then we had our first master's degree in ceramics. We had three men in our department. We had George Cox, and we had—who's the great Egyptologist? I can't think of that his name. His father was very important. Well, we had his son there. And he—

[00:24:44.83]

RUTH BOWMAN: Not Breasted?

[00:24:45.49]

LAURA ANDRESON: [James –Ed.] Breasted.

[00:24:46.56]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes? Wow.

[00:24:48.43]

LAURA ANDRESON: That's right. So he was there. And then we had Bob Lee, but he moved over to Theater Arts. So that was the extent of our male faculty. Now, I think, there are about two women and about 60 men teaching out there. That's the way it's changed.

[00:25:19.18]

RUTH BOWMAN: All along, before the war, were you involved ever with the WPA people? Were they involved?

[00:25:24.58]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. Yes. We had WPA. In fact, I still have a couple of pieces—one piece out in the garden that was made and given to me by the artist, I guess. Some of them got it back, I believe. But we also had something else in which the students were sponsored by the government, and they were working—they would help you in the classes. I never had any teaching assistants or any laboratory assistants. Now, our present department has a full-time teaching assistant, a full-time laboratory assistant, with only 28 students [twelve in 1980 –Ed.]. And he comes in. Better not put this on the record. He's only required to come in five hours a week.

[00:26:21.77]

RUTH BOWMAN: That's perfectly legitimate for the record. That's printed in the book.

[00:26:26.25]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, anyway—and they are not getting $1,200 a year now, but they now are getting $18,000. They go up to as much as, even in junior college, to $35,000 a year.

[00:26:43.28]

RUTH BOWMAN: So in those days, there were WPA or government-funded teaching assistants.

[00:26:48.65]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, they'd come and work for you.

[00:26:51.11]

RUTH BOWMAN: Like apprentices?

[00:26:51.66]

LAURA ANDRESON: They'd prepare clay for you. And I guess and help clean up, or something like that, yeah.

[00:27:01.45]

RUTH BOWMAN: So then after the war, the whole emphasis began to change, and you got lots of students.

[00:27:07.57]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes.

[00:27:08.26]

RUTH BOWMAN: G.I. Bill?

[00:27:08.89]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes. We had lots of men. G.I. Bills, then they came in. And they were excellent. In fact, I've got them all over the country. Art Adair, who was head of the—some college—Rockford College.

[00:27:26.98]

RUTH BOWMAN: Adair?

[00:27:27.58]

LAURA ANDRESON: Adair. Art Adair. And Frank Weir, and they were working down here the

school in Pacific Palisades, someplace down in there. And well, it's really nice to—and they remember you because we had such good times together. I mean, it was just like one big family. And they'd stay there all night. They'd work all night. And I'd have to go out weekends.

[00:27:55.42]

And then my biggest problem was keeping that place clean, because with 125 students making a mess, why, you had to really be responsible for the equipment. And I only had $300 a year to run that department on. So we had to scrounge around and make things and build things. And we moved from the third floor of the education building down to the new art building, which is now the architecture building. And then we moved from there up to the present building. And I had the job of inventorying all the equipment in that art department, and seeing that it gets all from one building to the other.

[END OF TRACK AAA_andres81_2235_m]

[00:00:03.75]

LAURA ANDRESON: When we were—when we finally got a department up there, Ricky Petterson of Claremont was one of my students. We had more romances going on in that department. David Hatch—and [Maria named their daughter—Ed.] Laura Hatch, after me. They were having a romance. We really—I've had more things going on in my department than marriages. Now, they don't bother to get married. But I liked it. And in fact, David [Cressey –Ed.] had—this is when we moved to the new building. He wanted to marry Donna, his wife, and they said, "But you know, Laura? She wants to come to school too."

And Donna's—and he married Donna. And he—and she said, "She's going to have a baby. And we don't know how we're going to manage with a baby." "Well", I said, "we can take care of the baby down here." We were in the basement. I said, "She can bring the baby down here." It won't cause—and she'd come in, and nurse it, and take care of it. So we put the baby in the shower. I—Every place I go, I design it. I have to draw the architectural plans. And knowing what I want, I always got it, which was—made all the other teachers in the department just furious to think that I got everything I wanted. But I knew exactly what I wanted.

[00:01:27.37]

RUTH BOWMAN: You had to have a shower because you got covered with clay dust, right?

[00:01:29.47]

LAURA ANDRESON: Why, sure. You go out to a meeting, and you were working in the kiln, it was so hot, you'd have to get in there and change your clothes. So we had a shower. So we put the baby in the shower, in a crib. Then the baby got quite big. So we had to move her to another little room off of the glaze room. And—

[00:01:49.24]

RUTH BOWMAN: She came to school every day, this baby?

[00:01:51.07]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, whenever the classes came, why, she'd come. And her father was getting his master's degree, and her mother was getting her master's degree in jewelry. So it was really lots of fun. And who was chairman then? Um—

[00:02:10.86]

RUTH BOWMAN: Were you ever chairman?

[00:02:12.15]

LAURA ANDRESON: I've been chairman four times. But only acting, because I wouldn't accept it as a real full-time job. I mean, I was too much interested in my classes, and my

students, and my own work.

[00:02:24.45]

RUTH BOWMAN: When did you start selling your pots?

[00:02:27.21]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I never did sell my pots until I retired, because previous to that, I was always donating my pots to the Christmas sale. And people would come buy it there. And I meet people—"Oh," she said, "I have the most beautiful pot of yours. And I said, how much did you pay for it? Oh, I think it was $15 for a big bowl." You know what they're getting nowadays.

[00:02:53.64]

RUTH BOWMAN: No.

[00:02:54.27]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, [inaudible] that little bowl right there that he gave me is worth around $1,600.

[00:03:03.32]

RUTH BOWMAN: And that goes for Laura Andreson's work too,

[00:03:07.29]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, I never charge— They say, what? Now you're undercutting us. My students say, "You're undercutting us, Miss A." They always call me "Miss A." Because they said, "You're underselling. And we can't sell our things with you going around selling everything a third of what we sell it for." I said, "Well, that's all it's worth." They still say, "Well, you're living in 1936, Laura. Get out of it now." So I've really, now, I've gotten up to selling a pot, a good one, for $100. And then they add on another hundred when it gets into a gallery, you see.

[00:03:44.69]

RUTH BOWMAN: There are four pots that you gave to the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

[00:03:48.38]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:03:49.01]

RUTH BOWMAN: The Four Seasons.

[00:03:50.33]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:03:50.84]

RUTH BOWMAN: How did you get to the concept of doing themes or—

[00:03:55.07]

LAURA ANDRESON: I didn't. They did that.

[00:03:56.78]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, they did—

[00:03:57.53]

LAURA ANDRESON: They did that. I didn't do any themes at all.

[00:04:00.33]

RUTH BOWMAN: But they do look like spring, summer, winter, and fall.

[00:04:02.54]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, that's Edith [Wyle's –Ed.] idea. [Laughs.]

[00:04:05.67]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh. So you don't give names to what you do.

[00:04:09.63]

LAURA ANDRESON: No I don't. But I—we always named our glazes after our students. So we have "Glunk's Stony," we have "Sue's"—well, I can—"Flora's glaze," we have "Mariki's Mistake," and, you know, just—so I know my glazes that way. And once in a while, we give a glaze—we weren't like Glen Lukens, who was very romantic about his glaze. And he—oh, he named them fantastic names. But we do have a "Celestial" glaze that I really think it looks like the stars and so forth. That's nice.

[00:04:54.60]

RUTH BOWMAN: Do you in your research get involved with firing—changes in firing techniques?

[00:05:02.52]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh my, yes. Oh my, yes. I'm sorry. Mrs. Natzler was here just last week. And she took 30 of my pots. I—

[00:05:14.67]

RUTH BOWMAN: Is she doing a—

[00:05:15.60]

LAURA ANDRESON: She's taking some slides, and Susan Peterson is writing a book on ceramics. And she wanted some pictures of my crystalline glazes and my—what was the other one she wanted? Crystalline and my luster glazes.

[00:05:34.32]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, your luster glazes are always on a dark ground?

[00:05:39.42]

LAURA ANDRESON: No.

[00:05:40.08]

RUTH BOWMAN: No.

[00:05:40.86]

LAURA ANDRESON: I have one. I have—no, she has them all up there now. But I—the next time you come, they'll probably be back.

[00:05:48.78]

RUTH BOWMAN: But you—

[00:05:49.29]

LAURA ANDRESON: I have one in there.

[00:05:50.46]

RUTH BOWMAN: Now, here you were. You were teaching, teaching, teaching and working

sometimes.

[00:05:55.95]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I would work. We had exhibits, but not many exhibits. I mean, we'd have, well, Claremont was the one down here that started the exhibits. Every year, they'd have a ceramic show. And I would have to submit about four or five pieces. And they would sell out immediately, because they didn't charge any commission for selling them. And my prices were not over $25 for anything I made at that time.

[00:06:28.62]

And I still think $25 is a good price to pay for a pot. I mean, it probably is worth more when you have to fire ten pots to get that one pot to look like that, you know. But I do it because I love to do it. I make pots whether I took them out there and put them on a—on a fence and shot them all, use them as targets until I couldn't move. [Not really! –Ed.] I'd have—I'd have to move out of the house. So I'd have to—I have to get rid of them some way. And I generally give them away.

[00:07:00.24]

And when—we had established a scholarship fund out at UCLA when we had more money in our [savings account, i.e., the UCLA Ceramic Society—Ed.]—I think, I don't know how much it is. There was some money left from one season. So when I retired and the new teacher was coming in, Bernie said, "We'll establish a Laura Andreson Scholarship at UCLA." And I said, "Fine." So that started it. So now, I really get a very adequate retirement fund.

[00:07:36.39]

And my father bought a lot down in Balboa, which has gone up in price. And we lease the lot, which gives me more money than I can spend. And my needs are very simple. I mean, everything in this house looks expensive, but everything we bought here, we bought these rugs in Turkey for $100 each, we but these masks up here for not more than $20 a piece, or $15 a piece in the flea market in Paris in those days. We got these Tarascon figures there for, I think, probably paid $25 a piece for those.

[00:08:20.06]

And this is a pre-Columbian pot. I think I paid $25 for that. And I—when I took my trip around the world, I was always collecting pottery to show the students, because I had a case there. And I would give them a history of ceramics as I went along teaching. And I'd take—I have lots of Maria Martinez pots. And I have a beautiful plate like this that I paid $7.50 for when I went out in the summer to Gallup to be with the Indian—Miss Delano always camped out there in a hogan every summer. And she invited us to come out, so we'd go out and take trips out there. And we'd go to the Corn Dance, and we went to the Snake Dance, which was 1929, 1930. And so I have all these pots. And I just put them in the case. I never think they were very important, because $7.50, that isn't bad. And so I lost a lot of my good pots that way.

And then when—we took this trip around the world in '57, why, I collected—I had students in every country. I had one of my students from after the war in the embassy in Ankara. And I had a friend in Tehran who was connected with the embassy. So they'd say, "Well, Laura, buy anything you want, and we'll ship it for you." And when I got to Japan, why this chap, Boyd Kessinger was leaving the embassy in Turkey. And he said, "Laura, I'm going to have a van shipped with all my possessions." And he said, "I have so much stuff, but I have so much space. So just get whatever you want." So these rugs came by him.

[00:10:23.36]

I've been lucky all my life. I really have. And all the things that I have, this brass, and this Japanese pottery, all of Hamada's things, he just took it to the mail, to the PO, and shipped it back here. And box after box, I've got so much oriental pottery that I really don't know what to do with it. And I've got to find a home for it one of these days because I'm not going to live forever. And I would like to give it to a museum. Or they said, "Oh, sell it. And get rid of your Volkswagen and get a decent car with an air conditioner." And I said, well—so and I have lots of Hamadas, because we visited him for a week—and Kawai and Ganishka, and

well, you name it.

[00:11:16.80]

RUTH BOWMAN: It helps to have an eye.

[00:11:18.36]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, yes it does. And I didn't buy things with the idea that they were going to get more expensive. I bought it not for the name, but I bought it because I thought it was beautiful, like that Persian bottle over there. That's the most expensive thing I bought. And I paid $25 for that and thought, "Gee, I don't know whether I can afford this or not."

[00:11:40.92]

RUTH BOWMAN: 17th century.

[00:11:42.03]

LAURA ANDRESON: What?

[00:11:42.36]

RUTH BOWMAN: It's 17th century, isn't it?

[00:11:44.01]

LAURA ANDRESON: It's—

[00:11:44.61]

RUTH BOWMAN: Or earlier.

[00:11:45.60]

LAURA ANDRESON: Earlier. It's about 900.

[00:11:47.28]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, really?

[00:11:48.09]

LAURA ANDRESON: And this Ming plate here I bought for $10 in Japan. And I have a—hare's fur Sung pot that I paid $25 for that I haven't seen one as good in any of the museums. See, we were there fairly soon after the war, so that things were just so reasonable. And this—Mr. Kessinger met us there. And he's a very sharp businessman. He is a—

[00:12:21.21]

RUTH BOWMAN: Boyd is his first name?

[00:12:22.08]

LAURA ANDRESON: Boyd. Boyd Kessinger. Von Kessinger now. He has an antique—he's been in the antique business. And he had—he was the one who helped me get things in Istanbul. And I got some Yortan pottery, which is from the third millennium. I'm going to have an exhibit at UCLA, by the way, this coming year of my collection [in March 1982 –Ed.].

[00:12:44.58]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, how nice.

[00:12:45.45]

LAURA ANDRESON: And some of my latest work when I get around to do it.

[00:12:49.50]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, so this tape could be useful for whomever writes the catalog.

[00:12:54.45]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, they don't—they won't have a catalog.

[00:12:56.67]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, they might have an exhibition.

[00:12:57.72]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, this would be useful for Martha Longnecker down at the Mingei International Folk Museum [in La Jolla –Ed.] because she's going to put on a big retrospective show. And she has a grant from Washington to write a very extensive catalog. So this would be helpful.

[00:13:16.52]

RUTH BOWMAN: The microfilms of this will be in Washington, so she can—

[00:13:19.86]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah.

[00:13:20.31]

RUTH BOWMAN: And here.

[00:13:20.97]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah.

[00:13:21.57]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, anyway, so getting on, where were we? We were after the war, and the department was building up. And I was asking you when you worked and where you worked.

[00:13:31.77]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I worked there. I always worked at school. Always. And I worked right along with the students for these sales. And we'd pitch in. And then we had such a—we had a luncheon club out there that was really lots of fun. Boyd was one of them. And Art Adair was one of them. This was right after the war. And so once a week, we'd take turns in preparing a luncheon in the glaze room. And really, it got to be so extensive that we had to abandon it because we were competing with each other. [Laughs.] And so, they keep remembering these fantastic days that we had when we were there and that—top of the education building. Now, we were going on from—

[00:14:13.36]

RUTH BOWMAN: Your working—

[00:14:14.44]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, my working. Well, then I went to Columbia. And this is the only success story I can tell you. When I went back there, I—trying to think of the names of the teachers. Mr. Baker was one of them. [And Miss Ruffin, Mr. Martin—Ed.] They knew I taught at UCLA. And they said, "Laura, why don't you bring an exhibit back to Columbia? And we can show it in the cases in the hall." And I said, "Sure. I'll drive back." So I worked one summer and gathered, I guess, about 40 pieces to take back, filled the back of the car, and drove back there.

[00:14:57.07]

And then after the exhibit was over, why then, I said, gee, I don't want to haul this stuff home. I'm going to see if I can't get rid of it here in New York. So I thought, well, I'll start at

the best place. And then work down to Macy's. But I found Macy's was pretty smart, too, at that time. This is in the '30s. So I asked around. I said, "Who—which is the best gallery in New York?" They said Rena Rosenthal. Do you know that one? Yeah.

[00:15:24.44]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes, Rena Rosenthal is the sister of E.J. Kahn.

[00:15:29.32]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, really?

[00:15:29.95]

RUTH BOWMAN: The architect.

[00:15:31.15]

LAURA ANDRESON: Really?

[00:15:31.87]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes. And she had a gallery on Madison Avenue and 62nd Street.

[00:15:35.59]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, she did. Indeed, she did.

[00:15:36.43]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes.

[00:15:37.03]

LAURA ANDRESON: So I and Henry Dreyfuss—I knew Henry Dreyfuss at that time. He was a friend of the family. And so—I think Henry was designing some things for her too.

[00:15:49.18]

RUTH BOWMAN: Marvelous little gallery.

[00:15:50.62]

LAURA ANDRESON: Marvelous. Just wonderful. So I was—I'm very timid, really, about selling anything. And I remember—oh, I'll tell you about that later. But I went in and stood at the door very timidly. And I said, "May I see Miss Rosenthal?" And the clerk said, "Well, I don't know whether she can see you or not. What do you want?" "Well," I said, "I have some ceramics to exhibit at Columbia. And I'd like very much to see if she'd be interested in carrying any of them." And so then, Rena was sitting in the back. And she said okay. So I came in. She said, "Well, what is your pottery like?" "Well," I said, "it has lots of texture." I said, "It's mostly earthenware," because we didn't do stoneware in those days. And I said, "It's bright in color. I have very nice yellows, and blues, and textural surfaces, and so forth." And I said, "Some of the glazes run like the oriental glazes, particularly the yellow uranium, transparent glazes."

"Well," she said, "I might be interested." She said, "Can you show me some?" I said, yes. And meanwhile, my friend was driving—this Ilse Ruocco was driving around the block. [Laughs.] So she found a place to park. And we brought them in. And she was very excited about them. And she had a—she said, "Oh, I'll take them all. How much do you want for them?" I said, "I haven't the slightest idea. Any price you put on them will be satisfactory to me." "Well," she said, "would $25 be enough?" I said, "That's wonderful." And so she said, "Well, I'll take them all." So she took them all. And she had a whole window in her gallery there of all my pottery. And I tell you, this was the biggest success I've ever had in my life.

[00:17:45.64]

And so my father, who always sort of thought I wasn't very good anyway, and he—although he liked me very much, but he thought—so I wrote and told him the success story. And I still

saved the letter that he wrote back, how proud he was that I had made a success in New York. [Laughs.] So that was my first sale, really.

[00:18:07.32]

RUTH BOWMAN: You were going to make another reference to another sale.

[00:18:09.69]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh. I forgotten about it now.

[00:18:14.96]

RUTH BOWMAN: Okay, you said you'd tell me later. Tell me later. So there we were.

[00:18:20.39]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:18:20.76]

RUTH BOWMAN: And I'm trying to find—

[00:18:22.71]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, and then I got into galleries when I came back up to—up in San Francisco at the City of Paris. What's her name? I've forgotten. [Beatrice Judd –Ed.] She was a wonderful gal. And so I used to be asked then to—we were having little galleries like she had up there in San Francisco. And then who was another one? Green? They had a gallery out in Beverly Hills. Made furniture. Well, I'll think of that too.

[00:19:04.44]

RUTH BOWMAN: Dals—Dalt—

[00:19:06.76]

LAURA ANDRESON: No.

[00:19:12.22]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you were represented here in Los Angeles?

[00:19:15.22]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, in this one gallery. And then in San Francisco, she wanted to carry my work too. So then, I'd make some things and send it up there. They—oh god. They just must have been awful because they were just earthenware, red clay, and—

[00:19:34.30]

RUTH BOWMAN: So when did you start firing hotter?

[00:19:37.18]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, not until after Carlton Ball established himself in Mills. And then I bought my first high fire kiln, which is—I still have it out at UCLA, which had about this much space in it.

[00:19:50.77]

RUTH BOWMAN: About two cubic feet.

[00:19:51.88]

LAURA ANDRESON: Two cubic feet. And then we—then he—see, when my students went up there, they found out the clay that they used. And they were very excited about it. And so then he was using clay from Garden City Clay Company in San Jose. So then we went up and

bought—we got crocks from this company. It was a—they made crocks, and sewer pipe, and that sort of thing. So we'd go up, and load our car up, and bring all this clay back to UCLA. And then we finally, they were nice enough to give the formula of the clay. So then we bought the materials and mixed our own stoneware. But we did it all by hand. We had no pug mills, we had no—the equipment was nothing.

[00:20:38.45]

RUTH BOWMAN: You must have gotten quite muscular.

[00:20:40.46]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I was pretty strong, I tell you.

[00:20:42.83]

RUTH BOWMAN: For someone who had T.B.

[00:20:44.10]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, I really had. And then I had this breast removed. And this arm, you'd think I just couldn't use it. I can't carry a cup and saucer. But I can throw a pot.

[00:20:58.55]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, that's beautiful.

[00:20:59.46]

LAURA ANDRESON: I can do anything. And I just ignored that. I think anyone who has a problem with—psychologically with that operation is crazy because all you have to do is get in work again.

[00:21:14.27]

RUTH BOWMAN: And you've been working at UCLA. You don't have a studio here.

[00:21:19.16]

LAURA ANDRESON: I have a little place in the garage, but about as big as a closet. It used to be the—used to be the washroom. So I have—I'd take you out and show you now, but it's such a mess, I'd like to tidy it up a little bit. I've been making—

[00:21:35.15]

RUTH BOWMAN: Before I bring my camera, you mean.

[00:21:36.41]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. That's right. [Laughs.]

[00:21:38.00]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, so you've been working at UCLA. Did you work weekends? What did you do weekends?

[00:21:43.16]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, went out to school. I taught extension courses. And that's how I met Polly Blank. She went to UCLA and got her master's degree at Columbia. Polly came out and took an extension course. And she's—oh, she really made some beautiful pots. Really imaginative. And so then when her father died, why, her mother said, "Well, this is such a big house. Why don't you ask Laura to come and share a room here?" Because there's three huge bedrooms upstairs. And—

[00:22:19.97]

RUTH BOWMAN: That was a while back.

[00:22:20.90]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, and so I lived here ten years. That was in the '40s. That was in the '40s. So I lived here ten years without paying any rent. [Laughs.] So I feel I owe Polly $10,000 at least, in those days. And then when her mother died, why this house belonged to the family, the estate. So we said—"Well," Polly said, "I don't want it. I really don't want to live here anymore. I want to get a nice modern house, a Neutra, or something."

[00:22:52.56]

"Well," I said, "Okay, but I think it's an awfully nice house." And we had Minnie here, who was taking care of Polly's mother. And I said, "What's going to happen to Minnie and the cat?" "Well," she said, "it's just too much." Well, so it went up on the market. And people would traipse through here and they'd say, "We'll tear that down. And we'll lower the ceiling, make a modern ceiling here, and we'll do that." And it disturbed Polly to think that they were going to ruin the house. And she said, "Well, maybe we should buy it, Laura." I said, "Well, all right." So you know how much we paid for this house? $32,000.

[00:23:32.09]

RUTH BOWMAN: Good heavens. Gorgeous house.

[00:23:33.74]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah. $32,000.

[00:23:35.19]

RUTH BOWMAN: Beautiful view, everything.

[00:23:36.50]

LAURA ANDRESON: And that house next door just sold for $300,000. So you see, I'm very wealthy as far as property goes. [Laughs.]

[00:23:46.25]

RUTH BOWMAN: If you chose to sell it—

[00:23:47.57]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. No, it wouldn't.

[00:23:48.95]

RUTH BOWMAN: Which you wouldn't, with the beautiful floors and the lovely art.

[00:23:50.81]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, it's so great, really.

[00:23:53.81]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you work—are you still working at UCLA?

[00:23:56.63]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh yes. I have research grants.

[00:23:58.82]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, I see.

[00:23:59.21]

LAURA ANDRESON: See, now I have to keep up my brownies. In order to get research, you have to produce things and have a certain amount of recognition, and that sort of thing, which keeps me busy. But—

[00:24:12.08]

RUTH BOWMAN: Do you find it difficult to write about—

[00:24:13.70]

LAURA ANDRESON: I can't write. I took "Subject A" three times. Do you know what "Subject A" is? Bonehead English. And it's given me a great inferiority complex. And I split my infinitives now and then, and I really—

[00:24:29.57]

RUTH BOWMAN: That's just grammar. But what about—you talk so well.

[00:24:32.57]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, no. I—my vocabulary is very limited. When I hear Bernard Kester speak, why, I think I'm— [a total failure with words –Ed.]

[00:24:39.26]

RUTH BOWMAN: Was he a student of yours?

[00:24:40.34]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. He was a student of mine. He took my—he took my classes when I took that trip around the world. And he's a magnificent teacher. Boy, he's as good as Polly, because Polly—they don't give A's unless they really earn it. Nowadays, in order to keep the classes up, they just pass out A's. You know?

[00:25:02.62]

RUTH BOWMAN: Some of them do.

[00:25:03.57]

LAURA ANDRESON: Some of them do. I think there are few honest ones left. I don't know.

[00:25:08.70]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you're then making—

[00:25:11.46]

LAURA ANDRESON: So now, I'm doing my research in glazes. In fact, I'll give you the list of the researchers I've had. I've tried everything. Now, this year, I'm going to go into next year, if I get it, which I don't know. Now, they don't give you—a regular faculty, you get $5,000 for research. And it isn't anything they can spend on themselves, except I can get film, and I can get supplies, and I can hire a research assistant, which is just someone to carry my things for me and help me wedge my clay because I really am at an age now, I'll be 80 in a couple of years. And that—you know, you wear out. The old machine can't go on forever. And so I have to have somebody wedge a big hunk of clay so I can throw it the size that I want. Otherwise, I can throw little things like this just by the dozen.

[00:26:10.26]

RUTH BOWMAN: But you like doing the big ones.

[00:26:11.61]

LAURA ANDRESON: I like it for contrast.

[00:26:12.61]

RUTH BOWMAN: Somebody said you're getting very big.

[00:26:14.46]

LAURA ANDRESON: What?

[00:26:14.84]

RUTH BOWMAN: Your work is getting bigger, someone said to me.

[00:26:17.43]

LAURA ANDRESON: Bigger?

[00:26:17.70]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes. Someone said—

[00:26:18.42]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, I don't think so. I have some pots from the '40s that were pretty big. I'll take you and show you the—what I have left in there.

[00:26:29.84]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you're still working. You're doing research. Now, in this period that you were beginning to show and sell—actually you've been selling for over 40 years too. It's just that you haven't been selling for your own profit.

[00:26:42.45]

LAURA ANDRESON: No. I haven't—I have only sold—I have demonstrated and made pots. Well, I've sold to school. I have sold at least $2,000 worth of pots there every Christmas sale. And now, when I sell, since I have plenty of money, well, I take most of the money I get, except for the materials and so forth, and give it to my scholarship fund. Now, I have about $28,000 in my scholarship fund out there, which is drawing interest. And for a while, it—oh, I give about $1,500 to $2,000 every year to that scholarship fund.

[00:27:21.84]

RUTH BOWMAN: And do other people give to it, too?

[00:27:23.07]

LAURA ANDRESON: No.

[00:27:23.42]

RUTH BOWMAN: No? It's just your own private fund?

[00:27:25.41]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah. I take [one-third of –Ed.] it off my income tax, which is nice.

[00:27:30.39]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yeah. But—

[00:27:30.93]

LAURA ANDRESON: But it only brought 3% for all these years now. So I said, gee, I could have taken that money and put it in a building, a loan, or T bonds, and had given out a scholarship just to a student, you know? It's just for people in the craft area, really.

[00:27:51.27]

RUTH BOWMAN: What do you think the things that you have done—which of the things that you've done, do you think are original?

[00:27:58.95]

LAURA ANDRESON: Original? My glazes, I think.

[00:28:01.56]

RUTH BOWMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what about your shapes?

[00:28:02.97]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I think they're—I think they have certain life to them. And I think they'll live for a long time. I don't think they'll ever get out of style. You know?

[00:28:12.83]

RUTH BOWMAN: You know contributes to that, what makes it that way?

[00:28:15.87]

LAURA ANDRESON: Because I'm making something that—well, I'm confused because I used to make things very earthy because I was working in stoneware. Now, I'm working in porcelain. So everything is like a beautiful egg, you know? And no reason at all. But some materials produce things that look like lava, like this so over here. Now, that has a textual—I love. I wish I could do that, you know? I wish I could work in that. But I've got in this thing of working in porcelain. And the thinner I get it, the more pleased I am.

[00:28:54.43]

And I like the ring of it. And it's a marvelous surface to put your glazes because there's no variation. And my glazes are like the Natzlers. Only theirs aren't porcelain. Theirs are almost earthenware, hard earthenware. But these have a ring to them, and they're strong, and they're pleasant to drink from, and eat from, and—I just—I still like the word, "beauty," which is a dirty word. No one—beauty, if you talk about beauty, they think of I don't know what. But they—you just don't mention that word anymore. But I like things that are beautiful.

[00:29:41.23]

RUTH BOWMAN: Maybe beauty is coming back. Maybe you helped.

[00:29:43.96]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I don't know. It goes around like this, you know. And another thing I like, I—I'm inspired by nature. I think nature is such a wonderful artist. You can't—just look at beetles. Look at birds. Look at flowers [shells, rocks, seed pods, etc. –Ed.]. You couldn't possibly create anything as beautiful as those. Well balanced, perfect in color, and so exciting.

[END OF TRACK AAA_andres81_2236_m]

[00:00:04.90]

LAURA ANDRESON: Inspired by an egg, a robin's egg.

[00:00:08.26]

RUTH BOWMAN: You're anxious to be inspired.

[00:00:09.67]

LAURA ANDRESON: I'm inspired by these things. I'll see a rock. I'll see lichen on a rock, and I think, "Ooh, that rock is so beautiful. How can I reproduce that wonderful quality in a glaze?" You know? Or in form, too—I've got—well, I haven't got it. Yes, I have one out there—rocks. I've always collected rocks, and seashells, and seed pods. And I think most potters do. I know that the Natzlers do. She has a marvelous collection. And I'm inspired by natural forms, not by man-made objects. Now, that's the thing that is popular right now, is having—making a boot so it looks so much like leather, but doesn't smell like leather; it doesn't feel like leather. But those are the—kids are getting prizes.

[00:01:05.20]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you want clay as clay and rock as rock, but you want them to be related to each other. That's what you're saying.

[00:01:13.06]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, inspired by each other. But I can't be inspired by an old boot or a purse. Now, that Levine—

[00:01:20.98]

RUTH BOWMAN: What you're saying is that whatever has happened in Pop and Funk doesn't interest you.

[00:01:25.78]

LAURA ANDRESON: Not at all. In fact, I'm so bored and so upset about it that I won't go to a show. It just makes me sick.

[00:01:32.35]

RUTH BOWMAN: What about someone like Peter Voulkos?

[00:01:34.81]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, he's a good sculptor. He has strength and power. I know Pete quite well. But he's doing an awful lot of things with his tongue in his cheek and getting $1,000 a throw.

[00:01:47.56]

RUTH BOWMAN: You really have—you're suspicious of this crossover between potting or ceramics and sculpture.

[00:01:58.93]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, they call it ceramics, but it's sculpture. But it isn't even good sculpture. I can't see putting a typewriter—I mean, they do it with—

[00:02:06.89]

RUTH BOWMAN: You're talking about Arneson's typewriter with the fingernails.

[00:02:09.30]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, and his teapot made out of genital organs. I mean, they're doing it for sensation. They're doing it for attention. They're doing it as sort of a joke—a big joke.

[00:02:24.62]

RUTH BOWMAN: But you have humor and wit.

[00:02:26.54]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, I have humor and wit, but I don't want to preserve it. I mean, how can I? Why do I want to—I don't want a typewriter sitting there as a work of art, you know?

[00:02:39.35]

RUTH BOWMAN: You want a different kind of harmony, is what you're saying.

[00:02:41.36]

LAURA ANDRESON: That's right. I don't want man to imitate man-made objects. I really don't think it's necessary. I mean, an iron is an iron.

[00:02:55.40]

RUTH BOWMAN: You don't like the Campbell's Soup can aesthetic.

[00:02:57.53]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, I don't.

[00:02:58.85]

RUTH BOWMAN: So what you're saying is that everything you make has a strong relationship to function, to nature?

[00:03:06.77]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:03:07.49]

RUTH BOWMAN: Where do you get your colors, though—your ideas about color?

[00:03:11.00]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I just love color, you know? And that's why I worked in the porcelain. Because stoneware, you can't get anything but stoneware. And this wonderful surface—what time is it now?

[00:03:26.90]

RUTH BOWMAN: It's about five past twelve.

[00:03:28.94]

LAURA ANDRESON: Five past twelve. Well, how much more have you got on the tape?

[00:03:33.56]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, well we can stop talking anytime.

[00:03:35.33]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, you can. All right. Because I'd like to show you some of my pots in there.

[00:03:40.01]

RUTH BOWMAN: Okay.

[00:03:40.52]

LAURA ANDRESON: So then you'll know a little bit. I'd love to have you meet Polly. I think you've met her. She said—

[END OF TRACK AAA_andres81_2237_m]

[00:00:02.89]

RUTH BOWMAN: Just want to make sure everything's functioning. What happens here is—oh, okay.

[00:00:12.01]

LAURA ANDRESON: All right?

[00:00:12.87]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yeah. As I said, in the past two hours—we've done two hours of taping.

[00:00:19.23]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, I know.

[00:00:20.10]

RUTH BOWMAN: And we did talk about your early childhood experiences, the way you went to school, what traveling you did, a little, superficially, about the exhibitions you participated in. We began to talk about the technical aspects. We haven't really talked very much about your friends, and whom you admire. And as we were sitting down, I mentioned the fact that the Archives is interested in craftsmen. And I speculated that Peter Voulkos might have had something to do with the California explosion.

[00:00:51.78]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, my, yes. He was one of the leaders, really.

[00:00:55.02]

RUTH BOWMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Did you know him when he was getting started?

[00:00:56.55]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, I did. Indeed, I did. He was a potter at that time, you see. And he was making fantastic, big jars. I mean, he was such a strong Greek that he could manage 100 pounds of clay and bring it up into a very nice, wonderful piece of pottery. And he was a painter, too. So therefore, he used the surface of the clay as a means of expression in his painting ability. And he did that very well. I think his designs fit the pot very well.

[00:01:30.58]

RUTH BOWMAN: Was that in the '40s or '50s?

[00:01:32.29]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, dear, I can't remember. I guess it was in the '40s.

[00:01:37.45]

RUTH BOWMAN: Because he's not such an old man right now.

[00:01:39.55]

LAURA ANDRESON: No. But he's done enough to kill himself—

[00:01:42.27]

RUTH BOWMAN: About 60, or so.

[00:01:42.56]

LAURA ANDRESON: —on the way. He had terrible poisoning from his casting. I don't know what it was, zinc poisoning, or something. We were all just worried about him. But he seems to survive everything.

[00:01:56.95]

RUTH BOWMAN: At any point in your teaching life at UCLA, did he or any of his colleagues make the impact of the new uses of clay? You know, the—

[00:02:11.53]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, I think that article of Rose Slifka was a very good one about how the painting influenced the potters, and the potters influenced the painters. And that, I think, was one of her best articles. And I think she—they were not going to make functional pots anymore. This was not being an artist. So therefore, they went into sculpture, and they made their pottery into sculpture. And many of it was not functional at all. You couldn't use it. But it was a piece of artwork. And they charged enough to make it so, you know.

[00:02:50.38]

RUTH BOWMAN: How do you feel about that in relation to your work?

[00:02:52.81]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I don't think—I don't think my work is great art, but I think it's—I try to make something that really pleases me aesthetically. It's traditional. I got in this porcelain thing. And so then all my things became very perfect forms. And why, I don't know, when I admire the freedom of throwing clay and showing that it is clay. Maybe I'll get back into that. I don't know.

[00:03:20.47]

RUTH BOWMAN: You mean clay as clay?

[00:03:21.85]

LAURA ANDRESON: As clay, yes. It's plastic, and you can push it, and you can kick it, and you can step on it, and so forth, which he did. He made a joke of his pots. He'd throw a hunk of clay on the floor, and then everybody'd put their footprint in it, or they'd smash it with their fist.

[00:03:38.05]

RUTH BOWMAN: So the process is visible, is what you're saying?

[00:03:40.39]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:03:41.05]

RUTH BOWMAN: And you make the process invisible?

[00:03:43.57]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I think I make it very pure. I think I'm a—well, compare me to a Greek potter to someone in the Haniwa area—or not the Haniwa so much as some of those early Japanese potters that just had the feeling of the clay, which I think is nice. Like those little figures over there, they have a quality of clay about them.

[00:04:09.43]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you're really involved with pre-Colombian, as well as Oriental, and, also, the ancient Near East.

[00:04:19.89]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes. I think I've been influenced most by the Danish. Because when I went over there, I was so fascinated with their glazes. And actually, the forms are very simple and very pure, like Stig Lindberg. His work in Gustavsberg, where we went to visit—I think I told you about this, didn't I?

[00:04:44.79]

RUTH BOWMAN: No.

[00:04:44.93]

LAURA ANDRESON: Didn't I?

[00:04:45.18]

RUTH BOWMAN: No, not a bit.

[00:04:45.92]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, we took this trip around the world for 14 months and visited all the potters we could find.

[00:04:52.65]

RUTH BOWMAN: You did mention a trip.

[00:04:53.34]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. And when we were in Gustavsberg, why Bernard Friberg was very kind to us. And he gave me a couple of pots. And he's a huge man. And he threw little, tiny pots like this, just as delicate and as pure—and his glazes were just—the tactile quality pleases me. When I have a pot that I'm going to use, I want to be able to feel pleasant when I pick it up and not, sort of, be revolted at its sandpaper texture, you know? So that started me off. And then I got interested in glazes, because we didn't have any glazes, and I had to teach myself how to make glazes. And there were no books, so we just experimented. And I've been experimenting ever since.

[00:05:37.75]

RUTH BOWMAN: And part of your work now at UCLA still is—

[00:05:40.96]

LAURA ANDRESON: Experimenting. We're doing a big project in salt glazing now.

[00:05:44.66]

RUTH BOWMAN: Salt glazing?

[00:05:45.28]

LAURA ANDRESON: Salt glazing.

[00:05:46.30]

RUTH BOWMAN: Which means?

[00:05:46.99]

LAURA ANDRESON: Which means that you bring the kiln up to a certain temperature and throw salt into the kiln. And the salt unites with the silica in the clay and forms a pebble-like surface, like an orange peel. You know what a sewer pipe, old-fashioned sewer pipe? Well, that's salt glazing. They did that. In fact, Pacific Clay Products had a big pipe plant down there on Pico. And we used to take our stuff down in these big, huge beehive kilns as big as this room and put our little pots in there to have them salt glazed. And, of course, it's very high temperature, and it's very impervious to water.

[00:06:24.71]

And that pot over there is salt glaze. That's the fellow [David Wulfeck –Ed.] who's out at UCLA now. And he does beautiful work. And there are so many young people now that are doing really excellent work that aren't being recognized and aren't being exhibited as much as the old-timers, I think.

[00:06:47.42]

RUTH BOWMAN: What do you attribute that to?

[00:06:50.06]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, there's so many of them. There's so many fine potters now. They've had the advantage of all the literature, and all the master potters, and teaching, and workshops that, really, they're all much better than I am. I will have to say that because it's a fact. I wish I had their background, so I don't have to fuddle around and still struggle with the clay to get a fairly big pot.

[00:07:16.46]

And I can't wedge clay anymore, 50 pounds. So I have a boy wedge the clay out at school and center it on the wheel, and then make a hole in the middle, or open the ball. And then, from there on, I can do anything I want with it. But physically, at almost 80, I'm really not able to do that strong work that I used to do.

[00:07:38.27]

RUTH BOWMAN: But you're still experimenting with shape, as well as glaze?

[00:07:42.29]

LAURA ANDRESON: I'm trying to perfect my shape. That's my trouble. You know? I have a certain form in mind. And the Boston Museum wanted a pot. And it's just a perfect pot in glaze and in color. I think I showed it to you, didn't I?

[00:07:59.96]

RUTH BOWMAN: But you showed it to me unglazed.

[00:08:02.33]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, well, this is glazed now. And the curator back there, Jonathan, Fairbanks—said, "Now, I'd like that." But I lifted it, and I had sent it to show. And they'd cracked it. There was a very fine crack down the side. I said, "I can't sell you that." I said, "I wouldn't think of it." He said, "Oh, I'll take it as it is, because," he said, "I think it's beautiful. And in a case that we want to have of yours back in the Boston Museum, we'll use that." So I may have to give it to him, I'm sorry. Because I made ten of those pots, and I haven't yet gotten one that I think had the spirit and the quality of that.

[00:08:41.86]

Now, that's the way the Chinese did, too. And we were talking about this the other day, Polly and I. And I feel the more—if you repeat yourself over and over again, you perfect yourself. You finally achieve the ability to do something with the freedom and ease, and it looks like it's alive, and it looks like it has a breath of life in it when you handle it, and so forth. And I don't get many of those pots.

[00:09:11.69]

RUTH BOWMAN: Can you define a little bit what you mean by the breath of life?

[00:09:15.98]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, you look at it, and you respond to it. And you say, this is right. This is alive. And this has the hands of the potter expressed, and the spirit of the potter, in that pot. Now, I do that. And I think most potters do, really.

[00:09:35.03]

RUTH BOWMAN: So it's almost as if you were looking into a mirror and saying—

[00:09:40.04]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, yes, I suppose that's true. Yeah.

[00:09:42.68]

RUTH BOWMAN: That's really magic, isn't it?

[00:09:44.27]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, it is. And we feel the students nowadays don't have the background in training. And they're not interested in—well, I hate to say composition and color and harmony and—beauty. That's the word. They're not interested in that. They want to be different. They want to do something that no one has done before. And they change. Every time there's a new exhibit, why, that person will now be doing the latest thing that was done in that exhibit. If they're doing shoes, then everybody will do shoes, or bags, everyone will do bags, or landscapes, or golf links. And they say they're expressing their time. But I think the camera can do that so much better than the potters.

[00:10:30.71]

RUTH BOWMAN: What about humor, though? What about humor in—

[00:10:32.99]

LAURA ANDRESON: Humor? Well, if you want a cartoon, all right, make a cartoon. That's the way I feel about it.

[00:10:40.28]

RUTH BOWMAN: Do you feel that way about Robert Arneson, for instance?

[00:10:42.71]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I think Arneson is doing pottery in order to, more or less, shock the people. You see, they get attention by either making it 10 feet tall or having something you say, well, why make a plate with an egg and bacon on it? You can—that doesn't smell like eggs, and it doesn't taste like bacon. Why not take a camera if you want a picture of this to preserve it for posterity? You know? But no, they must make it in clay. And technically, they're fantastic. They really are.

[00:11:15.74]

RUTH BOWMAN: Do you think—

[00:11:16.82]

LAURA ANDRESON: But this is just my own opinion, you see. I'm of another generation. That might influence my attitude a great deal.

[00:11:23.42]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, I think that you have said in many different ways that you are interested in the pursuit of something harmonious.

[00:11:32.81]

LAURA ANDRESON: That's right, something that's pleasing to the eye, that people say, "Oh, I'd love to feel that. Let me handle it." The surface texture, the color, you respond to all these things. Some people do. Some people don't. Some people don't even see it. I think they haven't any eyes, really, or any soul, in many cases.

[00:11:54.59]

RUTH BOWMAN: When you chose to go into porcelain and fire higher and use a different clay, I gather, was there any philosophical motivation for that? Or was it just that you had reached a point that you didn't want to do what you were doing?

[00:12:12.35]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I think Al King did this to me. He came out and gave a seminar at UCLA. And we experimented with—we put everything in the clay, into the porcelain, to make it plastic. And some of it smelled so badly that when you worked in it, you really couldn't get it off your hands. You'd carry the smell all around with you.

[00:12:34.82]

RUTH BOWMAN: Sulfur?

[00:12:35.36]

LAURA ANDRESON: No. It was—I've forgotten what we put in it. I think it was glycerin or—we put everything in it. Anything you could think that would be a medium in which it would make it more plastic. And one was very plastic. But then I went down to the hospital. And I said, "Do you have something we can put in this clay that will kill the bacteria, so we won't smell so badly up there?" And they gave me something to put in there they use in surgery, which we did. And then we went on with that clay.

[00:13:07.82]

RUTH BOWMAN: How amazing. Are you the first person to have thought of that?

[00:13:11.35]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, no. This was Al King. He gave the seminar, and we were just trying everything—sugar.

[00:13:15.67]

RUTH BOWMAN: Did he tell you to go to the hospital?

[00:13:17.14]

LAURA ANDRESON: No. I did that because I thought that was—we'd have to do something to kill the smell.

[00:13:23.98]

RUTH BOWMAN: You put sugar in the clay?

[00:13:25.18]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, sugar in the clay. We put glycerin. We put urine. We put—you name it, we put it in there to make it more plastic.

[00:13:33.58]

RUTH BOWMAN: And was that—by making it more plastic, that did what in turn? That made it more—

[00:13:39.19]

LAURA ANDRESON: Made it so—

[00:13:39.64]

RUTH BOWMAN: Thinner?

[00:13:40.00]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, so you can throw it and control it. Someplace—I have some clay out there. The older it gets, the more plastic it becomes. And I thought it was due to bacteria because the Chinese throw a horse into—an old, dead horse into a clay bin, a clay bed, and that will start the bacteria going. So we thought it was bacteria. But it isn't. Later, we discovered it's the particle of the size of the little plates of clay. And the bacteria breaks down the size of these little plates, so they're smaller and smoother, so they go together and slide more easily over each other, you see.

[00:14:23.03]

RUTH BOWMAN: I see, so that when you mix what you're—I think what I'm getting out of this is that every time you work with clay, you don't necessarily follow a formula. You continually change what you put in.

[00:14:38.96]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes, always. I have a new clay here now that I'm testing for Westwood. And it throws—oh, I can throw it as thin as paper. But we're testing it. I guess all the potters in Southern California are doing this. And I was very impressed with its mechanical ability to be handled on a potter's wheel, you see. But then I'm going to test all my glazes on this. Because my glazes, in some cases, don't fit the commercial porcelain that they make at Westwood [Ceramic Supply Company –Ed.], like kai and kenji, which are the popular. And being a big factory, you can never trust them. They get dirt in it, and then you have spots. And you have a nice celadon plate, and you have these black spots in it. Well, some people don't mind that. But if I'm making it pure, I want it to be pure, you know?

[00:15:33.73]

And so that's what I'm doing now. I'm working on this. And then I have a very fine casting body that I developed. And it takes my glazes very well, and, particularly, my crystal glazes.

The only trouble is the materials change all the time, and we have to constantly substitute something for Kingman feldspar because that's no longer being produced, or Monterey sand or Monterey feldspar or—oh, I guess I can name about ten feldspars that have just gone off the market.

[00:16:08.53]

Well, I based all my old glazes on these materials. Now I have to turn around and redo them. I can calculate them. But I know what various materials will do. So I just, if it is too dry, I'll put in some more flux or put in things that will cause it to melt. And this I had to learn all by myself. I read every book I could read. I have enough material to write a book. But so much has been written, I wouldn't think of writing one now. [Laughs.]

[00:16:41.09]

RUTH BOWMAN: So that every time you open the kiln, you're telling me that you may have a surprise.

[00:16:46.79]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, indeed. Now we're working on a new theory. I have this new porcelain book that's written by an Englishman. And I love it. It's just exactly what should be on the market. And he has given lots of suggestions in there. And I have never taken the time. I've just taken Kingman feldspar. And that has in it a melting agent. And it has some stiffening agent and some fitting agent in it.

[00:17:18.44]

Well, there are different kinds of feldspars. Like, Cornish stone comes from England—that's hard to get now—or lepidolite, with lithium in it, or spodumene. So now I'm taking one basic glaze that he gave in this book, and I'm substituting a percentage—he put dolomite in it, which has magnesium in it. And magnesium has a tendency to make beautiful colors in the glaze—changes the colors from, well, copper would come out to, maybe, orange, and cobalt, which comes out blue, would come out purple and pink.

[00:17:57.74]

Well, that's fascinating, so we got that going out of school now, too. And we're going to fire a bunch tonight to see what the glazes are like. And then we're going to start adding coloring agents to it. And then, not only that, but I can take one glaze, a white glaze. And what I do with it, I can change it to—not changing the glaze—I can change the color of it completely by what I put on top of it, by what I put underneath it. And we have—our coloring oxides come in—is this too technical?

[00:18:31.37]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, it's marvelous.

[00:18:32.63]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh. They come in carbonate oxides and sulfates and nitrates. Well, I found that I can do this. I can take a pot, and nitrate is a material that has—the coloring agent is dissolved, I think in nitric acid. I'm not sure. But it comes out in a crystal form. And it's like comparing watercolor to poster paints. It's very—you can take and take a brush and paint on it just like you would with watercolor. But once it gets on there, you can't get it off. And it penetrates the clay. So I take my porcelain pieces and dip it in this big bucket of cobalt nitrate, or copper nitrate, and then put a glaze on top of it. And some glazes will change completely. If it has iron in it, I'll get a completely new glaze. And I do the same with iron.

[00:19:30.66]

RUTH BOWMAN: Is it hard to control?

[00:19:32.40]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I don't want to make two things alike. If I did, I would be very unhappy. I mean, if I could produce a glaze and a form, like those red things I did when I was—some years ago. Everybody wants them. Well, I'm bored. I want to have something that, when it comes out, I've never seen this before, you know? Then that's bad because I lose an awful lot.

[00:19:55.23]

RUTH BOWMAN: But what you're saying, you work for yourself.

[00:19:57.18]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, I work for myself, sure. I don't think about commercial business because I don't need it. I don't need to sell my pottery. I have a good—a very good retirement, and my expenses are minimum. And so the only thing I need is a new car now. [Laughs.] That old Volkswagen is giving up. But—

[00:20:20.28]

RUTH BOWMAN: What would you say—

[00:20:21.48]

LAURA ANDRESON: —I do it just for my own self. I make pottery for myself, really.

[00:20:25.26]

RUTH BOWMAN: And this Boston thing of reproducing your past, or they're buying—the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which has chosen to represent you fully—

[00:20:35.61]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:20:36.12]

RUTH BOWMAN: Jonathan Fairbanks came, really, to choose from your past work? Or did he want—

[00:20:41.82]

LAURA ANDRESON: Anything, anything. He said, "Make anything, and just send it to me." That's how he trusted me. Of course, I told this to one of the curators out at our museum. "Oh," he said, "that's Jonathan. He'll take anything that's conservative." [Laughs.] But Sam Maloof brought him out here. And Sam said—well, Sam has a whole bunch of his furniture in there. And he said, "You know, you're the first contemporary potter that they've had in that museum." So it must be conservative.

[00:21:16.59]

RUTH BOWMAN: The Boston Museum is very strong in Oriental art.

[00:21:19.98]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, I know.

[00:21:20.67]

RUTH BOWMAN: You've been there?

[00:21:21.24]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes—Fenollosa, and all my friends there. They were my teachers' friends [at UCLA. They were influenced by the Oriental art at the Boston Museum –Ed.]. So I know that very well.

[00:21:29.70]

RUTH BOWMAN: So that perhaps they view you as traditional, although, out here, you don't view yourself as traditional, do you?

[00:21:37.95]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, I think I am. I think I'm—like Bernard Kessler says, he says, "Well, Laura, you know you're avant-garde now." And then the cycle goes around. Then I'm old hat again, you see. [Laughs.] Then I go on right on my own merry way. I'm not going to change what I'm doing now. I would like to be as free and easy with the clay as some of my students and some of the people I know.

[00:22:04.47]

RUTH BOWMAN: Aside from the problems of the physical weight and the problems of wedging, are there any other restrictions that you feel when you go into your studio?

[00:22:17.27]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. I can't lift those heavy shelves up in the kiln anymore. So I have to have a boy put the shelf, my top shelves, up. I can go up about this high. But beyond that—and most potters have arthritis. And sometimes I get a little in this knee. And if I lift something too heavy, then my back is out. But I find that happens to young people, too.

[00:22:40.43]

RUTH BOWMAN: You're not working smaller because of it, though?

[00:22:42.77]

LAURA ANDRESON: No. No.

[00:22:45.32]

RUTH BOWMAN: You really don't feel, when you finish your work, that it represents your latter days?

[00:22:50.48]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, I don't. [Laughs.]

[00:22:53.27]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you are avant-garde?

[00:22:55.16]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I don't know. I think I have a lot to do yet. I'm getting Polly involved in this now, because she's the creative person in this house. I'm just—as she said, through persistence, I've really gotten there, to where I am. And I don't give up. I can get a kiln, and the whole thing is—there is maybe one piece in it. But I am very depressed at the moment, but then, ah, the next day, I bounce right back and start right over again.

[00:23:23.46]

RUTH BOWMAN: What is Polly doing?

[00:23:25.38]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, she's going to make some—we're working in the salt kiln. And we're combining various clays, inlaying them, and pressing things on them. And she's going to experiment with that. I've got quite a crew out there now. [Laughs.]

[00:23:44.64]

RUTH BOWMAN: When you say quite a crew, that includes the young man who's helping you?

[00:23:48.52]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's my research assistant, so-called. Then a young—

[00:23:51.86]

RUTH BOWMAN: What's his name?

[00:23:52.86]

LAURA ANDRESON: His name is Gary Steinborn. And I have a new one every year. And sometimes—he's really not an art major, and he hasn't the—he's copying Indian pots now. And he's studying with Michael Frimkess down in Santa Monica or Venice. And he's able now to throw very thin pots. And, of course, he uses a different clay. It isn't porcelain. I'd like to see him do one in porcelain.

[00:24:33.64]

RUTH BOWMAN: And who else is on this team?

[00:24:35.44]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I always—I never can say no. That's my big problem. And this young lady called and said she was here, and she was from Connecticut. And she would like very much to come and meet me. And I said, "Well, I'm awfully busy. But you can come." This was Monday. "You can come Monday, and I'd be glad to show you what I have here. I haven't much." I said, "I'm really—I haven't any pots now." Mrs. Natzler took them all, and she's photographing them. They're my good ones. And I must get up and see her, too.

[00:25:10.81]

Well, anyway, she came. And she was so charming. She's from—she'd been ten years in Bogota, and she did pottery down there, learned through someone who was English. And she was so fascinated. She said, oh, I wish that I could come and be a student out at UCLA. I think she's a graduate from—she graduated from Radcliffe. And her husband was from Harvard and, apparently, from a very wealthy family.

[00:25:47.05]

And she said, "I am with a friend now, and he's looking for work in the movies here." Her name was Jane Bass. Have you ever heard that name? Well, anyway, I said, "Well, I'm doing research out there if you'd like to come out and join us." I said, "I can't pay you anything. I only give this—this boy only gets five dollars out of my research grant—$5.50, I guess. And oh, she said, "I'd just love to."

So yesterday, the three of us were all—we were just going 90 miles an hour, making tests to put in the kiln that they're going to fire this weekend so we can see how it comes out. Because we have 14 different clays that we're combining. We're pressing one and the other and sprinkling volcanic ash and pressing that in and sand that I brought back from Oregon from a beach that's just nothing but ilmenite sand and some garnet sand and brass filings. And we're just having a ball, just trying everything under the sun in these clays.

[00:26:59.89]

RUTH BOWMAN: And you're charting and recording all this?

[00:27:01.90]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, of course.

[00:27:03.04]

RUTH BOWMAN: I see. And who's going to write all that up?

[00:27:05.47]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I wrote up my experiments in my copper reds. And I don't write very well. I don't have much confidence in my—because I took "Subject A" three times, which is bonehead English, and it's given me an inferior complex when it comes to writing.

But I express myself as I feel. I need a ghostwriter, you know?

[00:27:32.46]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, you're doing very well here, I'll tell you that.

[00:27:34.41]

LAURA ANDRESON: [Laughs.] Well, so that's the latest thing we're doing. And I'm very excited about it. And every time I—I think I've had about 20 different research grants, starting out at $300 a year. Then it got up to $400 a year. And I don't get any of this, you see. The person that helps me—or they'll buy the materials for the experiment, or they'll buy any equipment that I need, if it isn't too expensive, like a new grinder or something of that sort. But it's been very fascinating. A lot of teachers won't have much to do with it. But see, I've been retired since '70. And I've had a research grant right up until this year. And this year, it was fairly substantial. I got about $2,500. So I can—I already spent $250 for bricks for the new salt kiln. And that's the way I do it.

[00:28:31.24]

RUTH BOWMAN: And who does the fundraising for you?

[00:28:33.76]

LAURA ANDRESON: I don't have to. The university is given thousands of dollars for research grants. And some of the people in the university get $5,000 and $6,000 and $7,000.

[00:28:46.24]

RUTH BOWMAN: But you've never asked for anything you didn't get?

[00:28:50.41]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And then you have a chance to justify why you needed it. And in the fall, they will allow you to ask for more. So last year, I only got $1,000. And I practically spent that in the summertime with, like, cobalt, which was around five dollars a pound—now it's $140—and silver nitrate, which I use in my luster glazes. Well, you know what happened to silver. That's gone up, too. So that the—and clay. I found a bill of mine that I was cleaning. I designed that lab out there. You'll have to come out and see it sometime. And I designed a little kitchen and a shower in there. Because sometimes you have to, if you're firing, you're going out to dinner—

[END OF TRACK AAA_andres81_2238_m]

[00:00:03.85]

LAURA ANDRESON: And—what was I talking about?

[00:00:09.34]

RUTH BOWMAN: We were talking about the costs and the money.

[00:00:12.79]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes. And so I've established a tradition out there that we stopped—when I taught, we stopped at ten o'clock and had tea, and sat around the table and discussed the problems, or discussed the history of ceramics, or anything they wanted to talk about. Then at three o'clock, the next class, we'd have another tea party. And so yesterday, we had a big one. And it's very interesting how these students react to a friendly gesture to be interested in what they're interested in, and so forth. So they all come in there and sit, and we'd just have about a half an hour of just fine conversation among the students.

[00:00:55.27]

RUTH BOWMAN: And what happens to that conversation? Do you ever tape it or—

[00:00:58.18]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, we never have.

[00:00:59.20]

RUTH BOWMAN: What kind of topics? History of ceramics?

[00:01:01.18]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, no, anything. Yesterday, we were talking about architecture and earthquakes, and what would happen if we had an earthquake in this building and so forth, and what has already happened to that art building. The patio on the west side went down to, oh, I don't know how many feet, because that's all filled in there, you see.

[00:01:31.58]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't want to interrupt you. I'll be back about 12:30.

[00:01:34.52]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, yes, all right.

[00:01:35.80]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'm going to get lunch.

[00:01:36.35]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, 12:30 is okay. Where are you going? Oh, you're going—

[00:01:39.03]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'm going downtown.

[00:01:39.80]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, all right.

[00:01:41.12]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 12:30?

[00:01:41.69]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, 12:30. This is—

[00:01:43.61]

RUTH BOWMAN: It's okay.

[00:01:45.72]

LAURA ANDRESON: All right. [Laughs.] So that was a very interesting thing. Because you see, the university isn't very far-sighted in many things. One was parking. And we had a beautiful canyon running down in that campus. Did I mention this before? And we used to go down there and get the most wonderful red clay out under a bridge. Where the flagpole is at, there's a bridge that goes down very far.

And so they came along and decided they would fill in all that wonderful landscape. They could have cantilevered garages there that would accommodate everybody in Westwood in this canyon and put a building on top of it, you know? It cost I don't know how many thousands of dollars in our present art building to go down with the foundation far enough so it would support that building. So we were discussing what would happen to our pots, what would happen to a kiln if we had—we were talking about one of them was on the emergency committee of a catastrophe. This is how we brought it up. But I was in the Santa Ana, Long Beach earthquake.

[00:03:03.32]

RUTH BOWMAN: In 1933.

[00:03:04.52]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah. Was it 1933?

[00:03:06.59]

RUTH BOWMAN: Think so.

[00:03:07.31]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, I think that was a big one.

[00:03:08.60]

RUTH BOWMAN: The big one.

[00:03:09.17]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah. And I had a friend teaching down there in the junior college [in Santa Ana –Ed.], and I was down there having dinner with her. And we had this earthquake. And all the plates just landed on our laps. And we ran outside, and the telephone poles were going like this. And we saw a grocery store down there with all the groceries, the cans all over the street. So she was firing a kiln at that time. And we made a dash back to that building and turned off that kiln, but everything inside was just a mess. Well, those things you have to think of. Every time I go in that building, I wonder.

[00:03:42.83]

RUTH BOWMAN: How to turn off the gas, you mean?

[00:03:44.45]

LAURA ANDRESON: No. We know how to turn off the gas. We've taken care of that. But all the things that might fall down on you, you know. But that's life, so you don't think much about it.

[00:03:54.92]

RUTH BOWMAN: But in California, you mentioned this canyon having clay, and that was right on campus.

[00:04:01.73]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:04:02.06]

RUTH BOWMAN: And you were using that?

[00:04:03.11]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes. It was marvelous red clay. In fact, I used to have the students do sculpture, the first thing when they came in, to get the feel of the—did I mention this—of clay. And so I'd always say, "Do an animal. And like the Chinese or the Japanese, catch the spirit of the animal. I'm not interested in all the little details of the animal. I want this to feel like a gorilla, or I want this to feel like a duck, but no feathers, no eyes, no nothing. Just look at a duck so much that you have absorbed it so that you can do it without looking at a duck."

[00:04:44.87]

RUTH BOWMAN: You're talking about this clay as sensation. I mean, this is—again, you're talking about process. And you sent these students down into the canyon to dig up their own clay?

[00:04:56.54]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, sure. We went out in the desert and dug up our clay. We got volcanic ash out there and made glazes with it. Yes.

[00:05:05.05]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you don't just order from catalogs?

[00:05:07.36]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, no, if we can find clay. Now, I brought some clay from up in Seattle, and we're experimenting with that too. Well, I can go on forever just experimenting, and never making any pots, but then I have to make something to try it on when I get a good glaze. And I think, well, now, what would be the appropriate form for this to be placed on? Would it be a thin pot? Would it be a thick pot? Would it be a—I visualize the pot after I have the glaze. Now, that's quite—

[00:05:43.81]

RUTH BOWMAN: That's different, isn't it?

[00:05:44.92]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, that's different. I never make something and think, oh my gosh, what am I going to put on that pot? And that confuses me. And then I really go to pieces because I don't have the total picture of what I had in mind.

[00:05:56.50]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you start with the color and the texture of the exterior and work your way back to the form?

[00:06:01.24]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, I do. And also the function influences me. If I'm making something for gardenias or something for red beans, it will have an entirely different character in color, in glaze, and so forth.

[00:06:16.88]

RUTH BOWMAN: You mean most of the pots you make are for use?

[00:06:19.58]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, of course. When I make a bottle, I think, well, now, this isn't a very practical bottle because you can't get much in it, but you could put a cymbidium in it and an orchid in it and a green one in this color, and it'll be just exquisite.

[00:06:36.23]

RUTH BOWMAN: So that a lot of your pots are not complete until that mental function is in it?

[00:06:43.10]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, that's right.

[00:06:44.09]

RUTH BOWMAN: So when you did an exhibition, did you fill your bowls ever?

[00:06:49.34]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, but I'd like to.

[00:06:50.81]

RUTH BOWMAN: Did you tell people what belonged in it?

[00:06:52.79]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, I never did.

[00:06:54.32]

RUTH BOWMAN: It's only for yourself?

[00:06:55.52]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes.

[00:06:56.48]

RUTH BOWMAN: So when that small pot over there with the dried whatever in it was made, you thought of those dried, round—what are they?

[00:07:05.47]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, they're seed pods. No, I didn't, but I thought of it as something that would hold small stems. Because, you see, the Natzlers have a trick. Maybe [inaudible].

[00:07:18.01]

RUTH BOWMAN: That's all right. You can say that.

[00:07:20.83]

LAURA ANDRESON: If you want to be elegant and you want to be expensive, you make something that seems very impractical to use. For example, you wouldn't enjoy champagne out of a beer can as you would out of a tall, stemmed glass, delicately blown and beautiful in this form. Because it's an occasion. It's an expensive drink. Therefore, beer is not so important, and that can go into a heavy salt glaze mug, and it perfectly seems to be. The same way with tea. I wouldn't put tea in a very dark cup because I lose the quality of the color of that tea. So the aesthetics of the color of the tea and drinking the tea is a part of that cup that I made.

[00:08:07.79]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you think of eating and drinking as ceremonial?

[00:08:14.69]

LAURA ANDRESON: I think eating, someone said the other day, is love. Making food for people is a—

[00:08:21.29]

RUTH BOWMAN: A gesture of love.

[00:08:22.01]

LAURA ANDRESON: A gesture of love.

[00:08:23.63]

RUTH BOWMAN: Therefore, you are building the support, framework, in color and texture for something to be delivered to someone else, a visual—

[00:08:34.13]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, a visual experience.

[00:08:35.99]

RUTH BOWMAN: And a tactile experience as well, is incorporated.

[00:08:39.03]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah.

[00:08:39.50]

RUTH BOWMAN: So that in your mind's eye—let me get this quick—a teacup is not complete until there is that amber fluid in it—

[00:08:48.38]

LAURA ANDRESON: That's right.

[00:08:48.86]

RUTH BOWMAN: —in your mind?

[00:08:49.55]

LAURA ANDRESON: That's right.

[00:08:50.15]

RUTH BOWMAN: So when you're choosing the glaze and the shape, you also are thinking of the content?

[00:08:54.95]

LAURA ANDRESON: Why, certainly. It was meant to drink out of. And you're meant to put something in to drink from.

[00:09:02.33]

RUTH BOWMAN: How many of your things do you think—how many of your works do you think people use functionally as you had envisioned them?

[00:09:09.47]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I don't think they'd put—they'd bake—these all, you can oven bake them, you see. I don't think you'd put chili con carne in one of my crystal bowls, but you might put fresh strawberries and papayas, and that sort of thing in it.

[00:09:29.59]

RUTH BOWMAN: When you say crystal, you mean crystal glaze?

[00:09:31.70]

LAURA ANDRESON: Crystal glaze, yes. Because you see, I guess our training in the past, we were meant to make art a part of everything we do in life. We had courses in Mrs. Sooy, who was very important in those days. We had to select the colors that would be most desirable to our complexion and so forth. In fact, I got my hair cut when I took that course because they felt that I'd look better if I had my hair cut, instead of a bun on the back of my head.

[00:10:08.65]

RUTH BOWMAN: And who was this that was—

[00:10:09.76]

LAURA ANDRESON: Louise P. Sooy. She was a great influence.

[00:10:12.85]

RUTH BOWMAN: S-U-I?

[00:10:13.75]

LAURA ANDRESON: S-O-O-Y, Sooy. And she was a great influence in so many of those old

students that are there. Mr. Kester is a product of that. Jan Stussy is a product of that. Gordon Nunes is a product of that.

[00:10:30.01]

RUTH BOWMAN: So if you look at any of them, you know that, don't you, still?

[00:10:32.32]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well—

[00:10:33.58]

RUTH BOWMAN: Certainly Bernard.

[00:10:34.42]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, Bernard. Oh, yes. Art is a way of life. And if you don't live it, why, then you're not sensitive to it. That's what I feel. And the students don't have it now. They're never made aware that this head over there is beautiful for certain reasons—its texture, its color, its concept, its substance, and so forth. I mean, they don't have that nowadays. They just see what's fashionable, and what they can do to shock someone, like Arneson making a teapot out of male genital organs. No, that to me isn't art. I think that's just shocking to some people, or it's funny.

[00:11:26.12]

RUTH BOWMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative], What do you think has happened in the society that divorces people from the material culture you're talking about? What do you think did it?

[00:11:34.79]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, it doesn't necessarily mean wealth, material network. You could take an ordinary barn or a shed and make that just as beautiful as you could a very elegant house by the color you put in there—if you put burlap drapery or the color you choose, what color you paint the floor. The whole thing is an aesthetic experience.

[00:12:00.20]

RUTH BOWMAN: And you don't think people are making those choices based on what is harmonious?

[00:12:04.64]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, no. Now they just—oh, I'm just shocked. I go into that woman's building down there with these broken down, dirty, old sofas, and they're just—everything is collapsed. That was in the other place where they had it. I think it was in Chouinard's, old Chouinard building. Anyway, it just doesn't show any sensitivity at all. And people's houses you go into, you wouldn't think they were in the art field at all. They have nothing that to me has a real aesthetic thrill when you look at it. Now, I can't stand some of this stuff in contemporary art. I really cannot. This old car that was in the last Sunday's paper—

[00:12:53.53]

RUTH BOWMAN: Kienholz's car?

[00:12:54.48]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, Kienholz's car. Now, I can't relate that to art.

[00:12:59.47]

RUTH BOWMAN: You don't think art can be about anger and disillusionment?

[00:13:02.68]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, yes. I think Ben Shahn does it. I think Giotto did it. I think Goya did it. But what they said wasn't the aesthetic response to that.

[00:13:19.93]

RUTH BOWMAN: You mean the rage was contained in a language which came from beauty?

[00:13:24.55]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's right.

[00:13:27.19]

RUTH BOWMAN: And now the communication—what you are saying to me is then that Kienholz and Arneson don't speak to you. They just cut you off, that you don't get their message?

[00:13:42.59]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I do a little in his sculpture. I mean, I think his portraits are very interesting. I like those.

[00:13:52.76]

RUTH BOWMAN: You're talking about Arneson?

[00:13:53.90]

LAURA ANDRESON: About Arneson, yes.

[00:13:55.31]

RUTH BOWMAN: Even his self-portraits?

[00:13:56.72]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. Some of them, I think, are very nice. I am so tired of using a cup as an inspiration to make sculpture. I mean, I've seen so many cups put in precious boxes. They spend as much time on the box and lining it with velvet, and charging $1,000 for this wonderful—and people buy it. I don't know. I think they have awfully good PR people supporting them too. I think the Natzlers got started because of Dalzell Hatfield.

[00:14:31.58]

RUTH BOWMAN: So we talked last time about dealers, and you said that you basically don't work that way.

[00:14:38.37]

LAURA ANDRESON: No. I'm not—Well, you see I'm a unique situation, because I earned my living teaching. And teaching to me was the most important thing in my life.

[00:14:48.98]

RUTH BOWMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you're still teaching.

[00:14:50.06]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, I still am teaching, having fun.

[00:14:54.92]

RUTH BOWMAN: [Laughs.] What you're saying then, in summary, is that your lifestyle has allowed you the freedom to use the language of beauty.

[00:15:05.00]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's right.

[00:15:06.26]

RUTH BOWMAN: Whereas a number of these artists through the marketplace have had to

build uniqueness, newness, newness as a value.

[00:15:16.55]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes. Well, Polly has a quote. And I'll give it to you after a bit. Because it's—may I get it? Can you shut this off for a minute?

[00:15:27.80]

RUTH BOWMAN: Sure.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:15:31.88]

LAURA ANDRESON: This is the thing. "Creative thinking may mean simply the realization that there is no particular virtue in doing things the way they have always been done."

[00:15:46.22]

RUTH BOWMAN: And who's that a quote from?

[00:15:48.14]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, this is from Polly's *Forbes*.

[00:15:53.12]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, I see, Rudolf Flesch. "Creative thinking may mean simply the realization that there's no particular virtue in doing the things the way they have always been done." I think that's neat.

[00:16:05.86]

LAURA ANDRESON: Don't you think that's nice?

[00:16:06.88]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yeah.

[00:16:07.34]

LAURA ANDRESON: And I approve of that. So I'm not very creative, I don't think. [Laughs.]

[00:16:12.71]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, you don't?

[00:16:13.46]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, I don't.

[00:16:14.21]

RUTH BOWMAN: I think the world feels differently.

[00:16:16.07]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well.

[00:16:16.64]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, the idea of infusing the standards to be met in the work process and then tying the product together with its aspects and its future participatory activity, its location where you sit it in the house. So really, the people who have been buying your work are those people whose harmonies are related to your harmonies.

[00:16:40.62]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's right. I think so.

[00:16:42.57]

RUTH BOWMAN: So that's why a dealer wouldn't work? No, a dealer would work if you wanted to bother.

[00:16:46.68]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I don't want to bother with dealers. I want people to be able to afford my pots, you know? And if I have a pot for, say, $50 and they sell it for $100, it embarrasses me, because I wouldn't pay more than $50 for that pot. That's the way I feel about my work. I want people that haven't much money and love it to get it.

[00:17:11.19]

RUTH BOWMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, that flies in the face of every value we now have in our society.

[00:17:15.36]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, I know.

[00:17:18.15]

RUTH BOWMAN: You talked about potters before. Is that what you call yourself?

[00:17:21.69]

LAURA ANDRESON: I'm a potter, sure.

[00:17:23.10]

RUTH BOWMAN: What else are you?

[00:17:24.27]

LAURA ANDRESON: A teacher. But you see, I really feel that my greatest contribution was building the lab out there physically, and by having these sales, and buying all the equipment, and my contact with the students. Because I've had 5,000 students in my career. And some of them are my dearest friends.

[00:17:57.86]

RUTH BOWMAN: Like who?

[00:17:58.46]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, Anne Robbins—she was a student of mine—and Dave Cressey. And Bernard Kester was a student of mine. And I just feel I have great friendship with those—they're going to have a big wing-ding. I don't like these things. They're going to have a—this fall, I'm going to have an exhibit at UCLA. And the Ceramic Society is going to have a day in my honor. And this bothers me. If they just had a picnic, that would be all right. But I suppose there'll be talks and so forth. Well, I've gone through that. I'm not interested in that anymore. But anyway, I suppose I'll have to do it.

[00:18:48.90]

RUTH BOWMAN: Whose idea was that?

[00:18:49.95]

LAURA ANDRESON: This was Helen Slater. Do you know Helen Slater? Well, there's an awful lot of potters here. And I feel that I'm not particularly interested in just getting in with the top potters. I think everyone has something to contribute. And some of them are very good, and they're never recognized as being good potters.

[00:19:13.35]

So there's a certain snobbery in people and the present teacher there wouldn't think of belonging to the Ceramic Society. "Those are just a lot of little old ladies doing things." But those little old ladies get a great joy out of doing those things. And if you can help them to do something that is worthwhile and not make little piggy banks or something—not banks, but little—well, it's no worse than making sculpture out of a teacup, I suppose.

[00:19:49.68]

RUTH BOWMAN: The artist's intention concept really is interesting. What the artist intends and how that artist is perceived is something that's thought of over and over again. Who owns your pots, do you think?

[00:20:01.50]

LAURA ANDRESON: I don't know. I would hate to estimate the number of pots I've made in my life, and I don't know who has them. Now, Otto Natzler has the number on every pot that he has made. He knows exactly who has that and which ones he can buy back and redo, and increase the price double again. I don't think of that monetarily. I do it because I couldn't help but do it. I mean, I just love to do it.

[00:20:33.51]

RUTH BOWMAN: I'm not clear in my own mind—and I've thought about this a lot—what the ratio is between an artist's economic survival.

[00:20:45.84]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's something different. You see, I'm unique because I had my teaching salary.

[00:20:50.86]

RUTH BOWMAN: But there are lots, and lots, and lots of artists who teach who are very dissatisfied with the market of their work. They really feel that their names aren't—

[00:21:04.18]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah, that's true. That's true. And there's some very good potters among the teachers too. I don't know why that is. Well, Adrian Saxe, for example, is teaching at UCLA now. And he is—because the university doesn't require any more than six hours a week of his being at the university, he can go home and create things that—he'll work maybe five or six days on one pot. And it's very intricate. It's very embroidered. And I like his simple, utilitarian pots so much better than his grand, sculptural things with the little horse on top, which is just trivia to me.

[00:22:00.19]

RUTH BOWMAN: It doesn't come out of—

[00:22:01.42]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, technically it's fantastic. He can do anything, that man. And he gives marvelous lectures at schools. He gives wonderful workshops. But he's primarily interested in becoming famous as an artist, not as a potter particularly.

[00:22:20.95]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, if you think of Rodin, it's sort of nice to belong to that club.

[00:22:25.60]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah.

[00:22:26.85]

RUTH BOWMAN: Do you ever think of yourself in relation to the clay sculptors?

[00:22:30.73]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, I don't.

[00:22:33.16]

RUTH BOWMAN: Did you ever make figures?

[00:22:35.11]

LAURA ANDRESON: Only those animals that my students made. That's about it. No.

[00:22:40.93]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you really are totally content.

[00:22:44.05]

LAURA ANDRESON: I'm totally content. And if I had to live my life over again, I wouldn't change a thing. Now, that's pretty good, isn't it?

[00:22:50.50]

RUTH BOWMAN: [Laughs.] That's unique.

[00:22:51.40]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yeah.

[00:22:52.29]

RUTH BOWMAN: If we look at this curriculum vitae or—

[00:22:56.59]

LAURA ANDRESON: This is just since 1970, realized, since I retired.

[00:23:01.15]

RUTH BOWMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah, starting in 1970 there are one, two, three, four pages of exhibitions, which means basically that your days are constantly interrupted by people wanting something, or wanting to do something.

[00:23:21.40]

LAURA ANDRESON: That's right.

[00:23:22.00]

RUTH BOWMAN: Since you don't initiate any of these exhibitions.

[00:23:23.98]

LAURA ANDRESON: Not one of them. I've never gone out and asked for a show or an opportunity to exhibit. Now, this Rodell Gallery, Marsha Rodell down on San Vicente, she asked me if I'd bring some things down. They were having a porcelain show. And I said, I never—say, "No, I just don't think I can now." I say, "Oh, I'll see if I can't find something for you."

[00:23:51.96]

RUTH BOWMAN: You find it difficult to say no?

[00:23:53.95]

LAURA ANDRESON: I find it difficult to say no. Now, that's odd.

[00:23:58.09]

RUTH BOWMAN: I have to figure out then how you find the time to work.

[00:24:01.33]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, in the last three weeks I've made 36 large pots. I haven't finished them, but I've thrown them, and they're all ready to be fired now. And the little ones, I can turn out about, oh, maybe 15 a day if I wanted to, just going out there and throwing. And the only thing is my time with my garden. My garden takes about three hours a day. If I don't take care of my garden, things die. And I put love into that, so I have to—

[00:24:39.37]

RUTH BOWMAN: Your garden is related to your pots, except it's much more ephemeral, is what you're telling me?

[00:24:44.62]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's right.

[00:24:45.85]

RUTH BOWMAN: The garden is necessary to the pots?

[00:24:47.83]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, I just like to garden. I think essentially I was in my past, some life before, I was a gardener. [They laugh.]

[00:24:56.81]

RUTH BOWMAN: And working in that clay or that soil doesn't give you the same kinds of feelings, or it does give you the same—

[00:25:03.41]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, yes. I love to build up—I love to feed, you see. So all my plants grow like mad, and then they all have to be trimmed like mad too. But all my life, I've liked to garden.

[00:25:18.92]

RUTH BOWMAN: Which means that you study aspects of gardening in the same way you study aspects of glaze.

[00:25:24.23]

LAURA ANDRESON: Yes, that's right, what will make them work. I overdo everything. I overdo my pottery. Everything I do, I overdo.

[00:25:34.08]

RUTH BOWMAN: What do you mean by overdo?

[00:25:34.68]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, I do too much of everything. I plant too many things. I wouldn't be satisfied with three tomato plants, but I have eight tomato plants. And we have so many tomatoes we don't know what to do with them. It's just overabundance.

[00:25:52.14]

RUTH BOWMAN: So abundance is something that you must want.

[00:25:55.56]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I guess I do.

[00:25:57.78]

RUTH BOWMAN: When you were a child, was there abundance?

[00:26:00.51]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I don't remember it.

[00:26:03.39]

RUTH BOWMAN: As you described your childhood, it sounded neither austere nor—

[00:26:08.73]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, I had freedom. I could do anything I want, and no one said no to me, I guess.

[00:26:18.54]

RUTH BOWMAN: I was talking to Helen Lundeberg recently about childhood, and how it impacts on your work. And it seems to me for the past hour you really have been talking about providing for the world. I mean, all these things, you're providing something. So providing for the people who like your work seems to be—

[00:26:42.87]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I suppose. I'm always very flattered when anyone likes my work. I think, "Oh, gosh, isn't that nice? They like it," you know? And then there are a lot of people that don't like it.

[00:26:54.48]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, really? Who?

[00:26:55.30]

LAURA ANDRESON: Oh, they think, "That old hack, why's she doing that again? My God, I've seen that before," you know.

[00:27:00.69]

RUTH BOWMAN: People say that to you?

[00:27:01.65]

LAURA ANDRESON: No, but I know they do behind my back.

[00:27:05.61]

RUTH BOWMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. How do you know that?

[00:27:06.45]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, for example, the students, just the year or two before I retired, they were saying, "Now, Miss A"—they call me Miss A—"Miss A, we're going to make a potter out of you yet." I said, "Well, all right." Well, then they were making, oh, boots and so forth, several of the students there. And I said, "Well, go on and make your boots. I don't want a boot in my house." I said, "I've got plenty of old ones I can bring down and put in the living room without having them in clay." And so then after I quit there and I had that exhibit retrofitted, they were so amazed. Then they all wanted to come back and take work with me. You see, I had become a success in the eyes of the people who saw my show. Isn't that interesting?

[00:27:58.92]

RUTH BOWMAN: You really have a very cynical view of the marketplace.

[00:28:02.28]

LAURA ANDRESON: Well, I do.

[00:28:03.06]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yeah.

[00:28:05.22]

LAURA ANDRESON: Kenneth Price bothers me too, that exhibit he had down here of those little things, little Mexican reproductions and little—and selling them for how many thousand dollars apiece?

[END OF TRACK AAA_andres81_2239_m]

[00:00:04.99]

RUTH BOWMAN: You're really quite angry about—

[00:00:07.60]

LAURA ANDERSON: Oh, I am, indeed. I'm angry about the fact that people no longer make art for people. They make it to elevate their own importance. The individual now is the important thing. And when they do shocking things, and things that have no relationship to art, I just go to pieces. And I refuse—I will not go to any more shows of the contemporary work. I can't take it. And I don't know what they're doing. I don't understand it. It doesn't give me a thrill. I would rather go into the Persian area of the [Los Angeles –Ed.] County Museum and look at that.

[00:00:57.37]

RUTH BOWMAN: Rather than look at Ken Price's [cross talk]—

[00:00:59.77]

LAURA ANDERSON: Rather than look at Ken Price; I can't stand it. [Ron –Ed.] Nagel's another one. They know it. They—well, I just—I'm old hat, really. I just can't take it.

[00:01:12.91]

RUTH BOWMAN: No, it seems to me you've defined your area very clearly. What about this ambiguity that's a necessary value, though?

[00:01:21.52]

LAURA ANDERSON: Well, like here, like in this little quote, it says "you've done it before"—What was that? "The virtue of doing things the way they have always been done is not creative," you know? Well, I'm very—I'm still doing it in my old way. I'm still playing around with color and glaze and forms that I can use in everyday life.

[00:01:45.01]

RUTH BOWMAN: But you're interested in change, you're interested in surpassing what you've done before.

[00:01:49.66]

LAURA ANDERSON: Well, I hoped I could.

[00:01:52.45]

RUTH BOWMAN: When you have this big party, is that a birthday, in September?

[00:01:58.09]

LAURA ANDERSON: Well, they said they was going to celebrate my 80th birthday, but actually, next year I'll be 79, and then the following year I'll be 80. But they didn't mind that. That was all right.

[00:02:10.34]

RUTH BOWMAN: In anticipation of your 80th birthday, in 1983.

[00:02:12.17]

LAURA ANDERSON: In anticipation. [They laugh.] Well, I really—I have amazing strength. Polly said, "I don't understand how you can go the way you do from morning till night." And I just—they say, "Well, will you come to this meeting?" I said sure, so I go. But I don't do so much night driving anymore. I don't think it's too safe when you're alone at night and it's late.

[00:02:41.90]

RUTH BOWMAN: But your energy and your momentum come from a lifelong habit, it seems to me.

[00:02:47.75]

LAURA ANDERSON: I think it's very true. I've worked hard all my life.

[00:02:51.50]

RUTH BOWMAN: Who told you to do that?

[00:02:53.27]

LAURA ANDERSON: No one did.

[00:02:54.38]

RUTH BOWMAN: Did your father?

[00:02:55.28]

LAURA ANDERSON: No. We had a very active family. I mean—what was it? There was a movie out about a family, that everybody was doing everything in the house, and it was just a bedlam. Our family was like that. My father was interested in motion pictures. My mother was quilting. My brother, I don't—he wasn't there so much of the time, but he was doing something always, and—

[00:03:22.67]

RUTH BOWMAN: You mean like *The Time of Your Life*?

[00:03:24.14]

LAURA ANDERSON: Yeah. *The Time*—that is right. And so I've learned to concentrate with—Polly can talk to me for ten minutes, and I don't hear a word she says. And it irritates people when I do that. And my brother did that. And—well, we had to, if we were going to study and go to school. We had to—we all lived in this dining room, which was a warm place in the house, and we all worked around the big dining room table, and we never bothered each other. Isn't that odd?

[00:03:58.25]

And everybody was busy. Everybody was working. My mother would stop at twelve o'clock, clean up and be a lady in those days. And then the ladies would call on them and leave their cards, you know? And it was a very social small town. I think it's a city that really makes a mess of life now. I just got back from Yakima, up in Washington, and I know—I lived in the country out there, and I know that's another different life. I'd like to have that kind of life now.

[00:04:33.47]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you'd like to work hard, but have social amenities which—

[00:04:37.91]

LAURA ANDERSON: Yeah.

[00:04:38.51]

RUTH BOWMAN: —don't happen in Los Angeles. Here you are right smack in the middle of the city, or slightly above it, but the middle of the city. And you chose to be here.

[00:04:47.84]

LAURA ANDERSON: Well, yes, because I was invited to come to this nice house.

[00:04:51.32]

RUTH BOWMAN: Yeah.

[00:04:52.19]

LAURA ANDERSON: And when you put so much into the soil, and get a garden going, you just —and it's getting very difficult now to live here because the people in the back, we were having lunch out under the gazebo, and some woman screamed and yelled and said, "Help me, help me!" We're in that sort of a neighborhood. And so I said, "What will I do? I can't let that woman be murdered in the backyard here on the other side of the fence." So I went to the fence and shouted, "I'll call the police." And I guess the man let her go, and she ran in the house, and then he tried to tried to run in the house.

So I—then all night long back there, I—they're doing something back there. Last night I awakened at one o'clock and they were—sounded like bottles breaking on the garage floor, and they've done building in that garage. I don't know what's going on back there, but it kind of frightens me, because if they do any shooting back there, it might come over this way, you know?

[00:05:58.51]

RUTH BOWMAN: So you think society is breaking down around you. You yearn for the countryside.

[00:06:04.95]

LAURA ANDERSON: Yes. I yearn for peace and—

[00:06:07.59]

RUTH BOWMAN: And yet you can go out in that back garden and into your workshop and work six hours running without any trouble?

[00:06:14.97]

LAURA ANDERSON: Oh, no trouble at all.

[00:06:18.06]

RUTH BOWMAN: The power of concentration is something that you don't find very often.

[00:06:21.57]

LAURA ANDERSON: Really?

[00:06:22.74]

RUTH BOWMAN: People don't—people allow them—want to be distracted. That's what television does.

[00:06:27.18]

LAURA ANDERSON: Yeah, I guess that's right.

[00:06:28.50]

RUTH BOWMAN: You watch television?

[00:06:29.34]

LAURA ANDERSON: I watch television. I watched mostly 28 [public television –Ed.]. I love the dance programs, and the music programs, and that's mostly it. I look at the news, which I don't know why. Just to know what's going on, whether another building is burned down or how many murders we've had here in the city in the last month. Why, I don't know, but it's really very distressing.

[00:06:57.06]

And then we have new neighbors there, which distress us because as they're Syrian—no, I guess they're from Iran. And they're a great family. I mean, they have—they're always having parties in the backyard, and when you sit with a book out there to read, you just can't do it, have to come in. And so we eat in the garden today, but they're there today, and they just moved in, and we have absolutely no communication with them because they're—the children are running around the yard screaming to the top of their voice, and that's what you get when you live in the city, you know?

[00:07:39.87]

RUTH BOWMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:07:40.80]

LAURA ANDERSON: And we've never had it before. Now this house here is as quiet and delightful—

[00:07:47.68]

RUTH BOWMAN: So what you're saying is that you're searching for harmony in an environment in which you can concentrate and produce.

[00:07:54.24]

LAURA ANDERSON: Yes. And feel safe.

[00:07:55.83]

RUTH BOWMAN: And feel safe. That people are constantly wanting to participate in the—in the fruits of your work, that you have no problem with getting your work seen or getting your work supported.

[00:08:09.57]

LAURA ANDERSON: No, that amazes me.

[00:08:11.38]

RUTH BOWMAN: And so that your life is going essentially very well, were it not the threat from another way of life?

[00:08:16.77]

LAURA ANDERSON: Yes, that's right.

[00:08:17.37]

RUTH BOWMAN: Which is constantly irritating and upsetting.

[00:08:19.32]

LAURA ANDERSON: Yes, that's right.

[00:08:20.01]

RUTH BOWMAN: That sounds pretty good for 1981.

[00:08:22.20]

LAURA ANDERSON: Yeah, I think so. [Laughs.]

[00:08:24.37]

RUTH BOWMAN: I think we're going to end this interview, unless there's something else that you want to tell posterity about how you feel and what your work goals are. Your fears and your hopes and your memories.

[00:08:38.13]

LAURA ANDERSON: Well, I hope—I hope that people will express themselves, not repeating themselves of what's gone on in the past, but express themselves now in as beautiful way as they have through all the periods of art. That's all, I guess.

[00:08:58.14]

RUTH BOWMAN: I think that's a lot—

[00:08:59.31]

LAURA ANDERSON: And bring it into their life so they live with it.

[00:09:02.96]

RUTH BOWMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Are you asking people to really look around themselves and see, and consider—

[00:09:08.10]

LAURA ANDERSON: Yeah. Well, it isn't their fault. Actually, I think most of us are aesthetic snobs. I think I'm an aesthetic snob in my own particular field. And Polly is, too. And Bernard is, too. And when you get people that have other things to offer, you don't look for the fine qualities that they might have in kindness to their—or their family, or their interest in something besides like that man that lives down the street—electricity and health food. You like people that have breadth, and you like people that think in the whole realm of culture like you do. You know?

[00:09:58.91]

RUTH BOWMAN: And that's why I hear so many good things about you, because I hang around with these museum people and art historians who really know your work.

[00:10:06.48]

LAURA ANDERSON: Well, isn't that interesting?

[00:10:07.98]

RUTH BOWMAN: I really thank you for spending this time with me.

[00:10:10.38]

LAURA ANDERSON: Oh, I've enjoyed it. I hope—I always think of a thousand things I should have told you before.

[00:10:16.17]

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, can always add it to the tape.

[00:10:18.18]

LAURA ANDERSON: All right. [Laughs.] What time is it now?

[00:10:22.11]

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh, it's—

[END OF TRACK AAA_andres81_2240_m]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]