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Oral history interview with Gerald Williams, 1978 February 22-1979 April 19

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of recorded interviews with Gerald Williams on February 22, 1978, January 9, 1979 and April 19, 1979. The interviews took place in Goffstown, New Hampshire, and were conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. 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.

Interview

ROBERT F. BROWN: February 22, 1978. This is an interview in Goffstown, New Hampshire with Gerry Williams. The date is February 22, 1978, Robert Brown, the interviewer. You were born in India, weren't you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. My parents were missionaries. They came out in the middle '20s. And I was born in 1926 in Asansol, Bengal, India.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were your parents out there for? Were they—

GERALD WILLIAMS: My parents were educational missionaries. They had come from Kansas. They were married in Calcutta. I have an older brother, Norman, who was born first, and then I was born in 1926 in a hospital called Railway Hospital, downtown in Asansol. My parents ran a school that was quite a unique school. It was called Ushagram.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What does that mean?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Ushagram means "Village of the New Day."

ROBERT F. BROWN: Okay.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Dawn Village. And their emphasis was largely on teaching the Indian children how to become better people when they went back to their own villages. The general concept of education in India at that time had been [inaudible], and was dedicated to the theory of teaching Indians to become clerks, and not to become better citizens in the villages. [00:02:15] So this concept of educating children for better life in the villages was rather unique and unusual for that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, the colonial—the prevailing theory was to equip them to serve the colonial government, is that right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: In effect, it was. Yeah, all higher education was geared toward white collar work. And my parents broke with that. They initiated a school where the children built their own houses out of mud. They had an emphasis on handy crafts; they had a farm, and they had an art department. They had drama and theater. They did a large amount of their own work, in terms of the upkeep of the place. And it was rather revolutionary for the time. And my early childhood, therefore, was brought up in this environment of quite a liberal way of looking at life, being influenced by their work in Ushagram, by the concepts that they were involved in, concepts of self-help, of strengthening and agrarian society; increasing health and standards of safety and houses, and so forth. [00:04:04]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were these Indian pupils from a sort of a middle class? Low—or genuine rural population? They weren't from an elite?

GERALD WILLIAMS: No, they were lower middle-class people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How would they be found to be brought to such a school?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, since it was a missionary school, a Methodist board funded it, and my parents were Methodist missionaries. Generally speaking, the children came from other "Christian stations," as they were called, around in Bengal. So they were the children of Christian families that had already been Christianized—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: —and therefore were acceptable in the environment of the school that my parents had. That didn't mean to say that they did not accept Hindu children, which they did. But for the most part, it was for

children of Christian families, serving their own Christian communities, and presumably furthering the Christian theology that they were there for.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, now, you grew up, then, right there on the campus, did you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You got to know and played with these—these were your playmates, were they?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Absolutely. The first children that I played with were Indian children, they were children of servants. And I didn't speak English for the first three years of my life; I knew nothing but Bengali. So English, in effect, is my second language. And my earliest memories are of playing in a gang of children who roamed around climbing walls and throwing stones at lizards, and things like that. [00:06:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It was a very happy, free environment, in which I was fairly accepted, though I think probably because of my white skin slightly apart from the other kids.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As you look back on that, do you think that those children have a different outlook from those that you might have been brought up with, say, in America?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, absolutely. One, for instance, never went by certain trees at night, because particularly at dusk, that's when the ghosts, or the, what they were called *bhoots*, came out of the tree. And I can remember skirting certain big trees with a great deal of apprehension, because I knew that the tree spirit was there. I don't think that necessarily is common in America. I'm trying to think of what other attitudes would be different—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about reverence for life? Was there greater—a different attitude there?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I can't say that that would be so different, except that they were a non-consumer-oriented society. America is quite wrapped up in things that they were not wrapped up in. Therefore, little things went a long ways. I think the earliest memories were of a great deal of playing. And the playing was always done in games with nothing, with a stick or a stone.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: And therefore, imagination was important, I think, and the development of that at an early age with my peers probably might have contributed toward some development of the imagination later on, I don't know. [00:08:12]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You said that you returned when you were about three or four, you came back to the United States briefly. Was that just a short visit?

GERALD WILLIAMS: My parents had furloughs every seven years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

GERALD WILLIAMS: And they would come back to America for a year and a half or two years, to take a degree in a college or something like that, and go back. Kind of a rest, in effect.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What sort of effect did it have on you, your coming here for the first time?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, I have a vague memory of sliding down a snowy wall of Grand Canyon, for some reason. I don't know where that memory came from. But that's one of my earliest pictures of America, obviously a composite of something. The first memory of America, I have nothing of. It was the second and third visit here that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Home was really India, as far as—when you were a very small child.

GERALD WILLIAMS: As far as I was concerned, that was home. For my parents, home was always Kansas. They came from Wichita, from Salina in Manhattan, and Beloit, in Kansas. My mother's parents were wheat farmers in Beloit, and in Stockton, North Central Kansas. My father's mother was in journalism in Salina, Kansas, she helped run a paper. And originally, his family had come from West Virginia. But my deepest roots probably are with the Kansas farm people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean in terms of your family's genealogy, or in terms of later? [00:10:02]

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, in terms of my heritage; that is, I have them to think of most when I think of my heritage in America. I think of the heritage of my mother's farm family, you know, the summers in Kansas, the heat, the wheat, the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Those are the people you recall.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Those are the people I identify with for the most part, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you—you went back to India. Did you resume—were you ready for school by that time, the time you went back?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes—

ROBERT F. BROWN: About 1930 or so, you went back?

GERALD WILLIAMS: The first time I went back, I went to school in Darjeeling, above Calcutta. The concept that they adapted was the concept that all English people had in India, and that was during the hot periods of the year, the summertime, everyone went to the hills.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: And whole families, the entire government, as a matter of fact, would go up to the hills, as it was called, up where it was cool to escape the heat of the summer on the plains, which could be very severe. So the school system was always geared to the summertime, just the opposite from what America is. And we went to school first in a place called Mount Hermon in Darjeeling, it was a school run by the Methodist mission, principally for children of missionaries. But it also included Indians, and I can remember some Tibetan princesses being in class with me, too, at that time. It was perched on the side of a 7000-foot mountain, and looked at Kangchenjunga across the range, every day. And it was an extraordinary place, with beautiful scenery, and a delightful environment in which to grow up in school. [00:12:02] And I went there for—it seems to me that I finished—the chronology is a little mixed up here.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you were there several years?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Several years before we returned once more, in '35.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you would—when would you go back down to your parents' school?

GERALD WILLIAMS: In the winter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In the winter.

GERALD WILLIAMS: That is, we'd be up in the summer from March through November, and then for three months in the winter, we returned back to the plains, as we called it, to our parents' home.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The children down on the plains who were in your parents' school, had they gone to school just in the winter when it was cooler?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. Essentially, it was the same system, so that they—but many of them lived on the premises year-round, and therefore, it was there home, in effect.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I suppose even at this young age, you felt because you, and most of the English and American—Europeans were taken up to the hill, you felt apart, even further apart from many of the Indians.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. As soon as we went into a European school, then the break began very quickly with the children that we had been friends with before. Our friends then became the American and English children we knew. It then persisted from there on. There was little very visceral relationship between the children we had known as playmates when we were very young.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you recall your reactions as you witnessed this separation taking place? Do you think you had any, as a child?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I can't recall any strong feelings about it, except that it just took place. And I can remember being very shy with children that I had been very close with before, so that having been away from them for nine months, they were suddenly strangers. [00:14:08] I think the reaction was a typical child's reaction to playmates one hasn't seen for a long time. And then our worlds just separated, because we then were involved in a school regime that was geared toward America and college, whereas the children that we had formerly

been playmates were geared to an education that would enable them simply to go back into the villages, or to become teachers in villages, or to do whatever they were doing. The world's diverse, and became quite different. It was unfortunate, but that's the way the system was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There was no thought on your parents' part of you or other Europeans to stay in India and working sort of following those—your Indian contemporaries back to villages, because you were outsiders. They didn't think of that? Whether you would stay on and—

GERALD WILLIAMS: After school—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did they think you would eventually go back to America and have a career, or at least a development in America?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, the options were entirely my own. Many of my classmates, who graduated from high school with me in India returned to India, after having gotten college educations. They went back as medical missionaries, or as teachers. The pull was very strong. That was our home, and regardless of how different we were from the overwhelming majority of Indian people, we were still strongly and umbilically tied to India.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: And it was an important place; the food, the sights, the sounds, the language were all familiar to us. [00:16:02] And so many of my classmates went back there. I didn't.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your father was close to some Indians, wasn't he? You'd mentioned some of his friends. He knew Gandhi?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. Because of his unusual educational philosophy, which was unusual for that time and place, he became friends with a number of people who were not only high up in the education system, and some of his educational philosophy was later adapted to the official policy of the West Bengal government, their educational policies, but he also became friendly with, and was sympathetic to, the Nationalist movement which was underway at that time. I lived through, up until the time I left to come to America, the height of the Nationalist movement against the British, the Gandhi movement. And he was friends with Gandhi, went to stay with him at his ashram several times, built a toilet for Gandhi, as a matter of fact, and took many pictures of him. Had some very rare movie pictures of Gandhi that—Gandhi never took any moving pictures of himself. The people were aware that what he was doing was for the good of the Indian people, and not for the perpetuation of a Western theology or a Western educational autocracy. It was making India a better place to live in, which is essentially what he was doing. [00:18:06] He was sympathetic to their politics—my father was sympathetic to their politics, to their language, to their drama, to their art, to their literature. And he was a friend of Tagore's, he knew C. F. Andrews at Tagore's place. He was widely respected by the people in India.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he optimistic about the future of India?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Politically?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, politically and economically, the lot of the people?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, that's a difficult question to answer. He—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And were you? Were you aware of this as a young man on your way back to school?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I would like to answer affirmatively and say yes, I was aware of it. But to be truthful to you, I was simply a schoolboy. While I knew what was going on, I was not particularly and keenly aware of it, until really, I came to this country where, in retrospect I saw what was going on and began to appreciate it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But your father was engaged with—

GERALD WILLIAMS: He was, had to be, yeah. Yeah. He was very sympathetic to the Indian congress movement, and was at one time the only white man in a huge crowd of people who were gathering for a sympathetic demonstration. And he wore a Gandhi cap, and he was all but tossed out of India by the English, who looked at him as an undesirable alien. [00:20:00] But the war intervened in effect; that is, in '42 and '43, we were in Bengal, and the Japanese invasion was coming up into Burma. His school was taken over by the English as a military fortification, and it had to be evacuated, in case of the Burmese invasion of India, which did not take place. And I, at that time, left India. I graduated from high school in Northern India at a place called Woodstock, where I went. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where, again your education had been college preparation?

GERALD WILLIAMS: College preparation, yes. College preparation. That is, the curriculum was geared toward education here. At the same time, there were English kids who were geared towards matriculation, Cambridge examinations were what they were going toward. Indian and English kids in school were doing that. But we were all geared toward the American system, took courses preparatory to come into college.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: But when I graduated, I left, and at the time that the height of the anti-British movement was going on, I really left India.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In the early '40s, then?

GERALD WILLIAMS: The early '40s, yeah. I left in '43, and '45 is when independence came. When I left, they were tearing up railway tracks and lying down a railway in railway stations, and going to jail. There was a great deal of activity that was disruptive of the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you aware of any of this the month before you left?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Oh yeah, sure. We knew, because it was commonly around us all the time. [00:22:05] We knew what was going on, but I wasn't particularly—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you were right, your father was respected. And he was for the independence.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, he was very much for the independence movement. It was not particularly a popular stand with the mission people. They were, generally speaking, on the side of the British; their presence depended on friendship with the British government. Any foreigner could be ejected at any time, as an unsympathetic, undesirable alien. And American missionaries were, who became antagonistic to the British government, in obvious and overt sympathy with the Indian movement.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: But he managed to skate the thin ice and survive until he was ready to come back, and leave India, which he did in 1944.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you left a year before him, though? You left in '43?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I left in the spring of '43. I graduated from Woodstock in Mussoorie, India, in 1942. And I had been—I had gone through high school, in this school in Northern India, having left the Darjeeling school when I was very young, I just did the first two standards there. Then came to America for two years, went to Horace Mann in New York for two years, then went back to India and completed high school in Woodstock. Then came to this country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you came to this country for college?

GERALD WILLIAMS: That was primarily the reason, aside from the fact that it was not especially desirable. I could have stayed in India and gone to a university there. [00:24:02] But the whole impetus of our training, and so forth, at that time was to come to college. And we were Americans, essentially, and it was not [inaudible] that we stay there any longer than necessary.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you were in college, then, where, in Iowa, for a year or so?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. I came to college—to Mount Vernon, Iowa, a little college called Cornell, took summer school there, and then completed the first year before I was drafted. So I had only one year of college, that's all the education I ever have had, aside from what I picked up on my own. And the courses I took there were essentially liberal arts, there was nothing very extraordinary about it. But the war was on, the draft was on, and I registered when I was 18, but decided that I would be a conscientious objector.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this a sudden decision?

GERALD WILLIAMS: No. My brother, Norman, had taken a similar position before me, though he had not been drafted. He was living in Vermont, but I was made aware, through him, of the viability of the political position.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: But more importantly, everything that I had seen in India made it possible for me to see that I could do that, too; that is, the opposition of the congress party members in India led to jail sentences for moral or political or ethical reasons. [00:26:01] That I was not faced with the kind of glamor that many American

boys were who felt moral outrage at the war, yet didn't know how to do it, how to express that outrage, or didn't know the avenues through which they could legitimately express that concern, and still not come in essential conflict. What I did was to register as CO with a 4E classification. And after some trouble in college with the local draft board, was given the status, and was assigned to CPS camp, Civilian Public Service camp.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They did have that option available?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It was available, yeah. By that time, the war had been on long enough and there were enough men who were taking that position on all levels. Essentially, one had to identify oneself as being a religious objector. Ethical objectors at that time were not acceptable, and ended up automatically in prison. But if you could be—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was about 1945, was it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: This was '43.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Forty-three?

GERALD WILLIAMS: If you could be identified with religious background or concept, which I could have easily enough, because I was a missionary's son, then the assumption was that you could get your status. But there were many men who couldn't make that, or didn't want to, and they were not given the classification; they had no alternative but to go to jail.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You're saying it troubled you to so easily slide into the approval of these people—

GERALD WILLIAMS: No, it didn't trouble me. I mean, it wasn't that it was a problem. [00:28:00] It was just making the distinction in hindsight now, between what I went through and what many Americans went through. It was still very difficult, it was a traumatic experience. I had a great deal of trouble with my draft board, and they were very antagonistic toward me. The dean of the college was very antagonistic toward me, and it was in the middle of the war, when it was a, to say the least, an unpopular position.

But what made it easier for me were two things; one is that I had just come from a country where people who were taking similar stands to that which I was taking were put in prison, and your honorable men, like Nehru and Gandhi, and all the congress leaders, so it wasn't a bad thing to me to stand up for my rights and end up in jail. It wasn't that with some people, you know, going to jail would be unacceptable. And secondly, I'd come from India. I wasn't rooted in a home community, and it was easier for me to make a personal decision without having to think about my cousins and uncles and aunts, and friends who would be antagonistic toward things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, this Civilian Public Service, it was called, you were for a couple—how long was that?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I was there for about two and a half years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was this about, roughly? What years were those?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I went into CPS in the fall of 1944, and came out in '44, '45—I think '46, if I'm not mistaken. [00:30:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What kind of work did you do?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, the first camp I was assigned to was in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. And it was a forest camp. There were about 120 men there, all shapes and sizes and colors.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, that was exceptional itself in those days, wasn't it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. It was one of a whole series of whole CCC camps that had been taken over under the administration of the so-called peace churches, Quakers, Mennonites and Brethren, and administered by them, which they later became very uncomfortable about. And we did, you know, it was very pleasant work, clearing trails in the Great Smoky Mountains, and sort of made work. And it kept us out of the limelight for the most part. Most—many people were unhappy and recalcitrant, and there was a good deal of dissatisfaction with the social significance of the work. But from there I went into—I volunteered for a malaria experiment in New York, and was at Welfare Island in a hospital, testing a drug under the Army's Research and Development program for a year. We were given malaria, I think there were 12 men in my unit who were given tertian malaria, and tested with a new drug that was later discarded, because its side effects were undesirable.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you felt you'd be helping society much more there, than cutting trails—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Oh yeah, it seemed—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —for non-existent visitors to the Great Smokies. [00:32:00]

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. It's debatable as to what is socially significant. Within that context, the simplest interpretation is that it's a little bit more socially desirable to be testing a drug for malaria than cutting trails, although that's debatable. The very position one takes, regardless of what one does with it, is perhaps the most important thing than what made work you do. But one had to satisfy one's own interests, and so forth.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And at that time, what was your chief interest, would you say, in this? In this CPS work? Was it doing some good for the public?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think most of us were—most of us felt keenly that—or many of us felt keenly that the difficult moral position we were in, one could be against war and killing. At the same time we were under the obvious social disapproval of the majority of our fellow men, fellow citizens. So it was important to make everyone, and to justify, in effect, the high purpose of our position by doing work that was morally acceptable, it was socially acceptable. And certainly guinea pig medical experiments were of an order that could be accepted by most people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But the hated objector by the majority of people was a prime reason for thrusting you into work that you thought would be of benefit? [00:34:04]

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, not necessarily—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about—did you all think about the boys that were off the Army, were getting killed and maimed?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Oh, sure, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you thought you wanted to do something equivalent.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think it was the same thing that motivated many conscientious objectors to become medical men in the army. That is, they wouldn't pull the trigger, but they would help with wounded, and so forth. That became a moot point, as many of them testified afterwards, that there was a difference between being in the medical corps and being a soldier with a gun. We went back one more step; that is, we wouldn't go into the army, but we wanted to do work that would help soldiers, because malaria was a big problem in the South Pacific. And the drugs we were being tested with were then being used in the South Pacific, in the armies. And it was certainly better to try to save someone's life, than to try to take it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, after that year at Welfare Island, New York, was your health shattered? Or did you decide to go on to something else? Or what happened?

GERALD WILLIAMS: We stayed and worked in the island. It was in a hospital or a year, as attendants, while we were under medical supervision for aftereffects of the drug. And the aftereffects were not so severe that we didn't recover, and there was no problem, as far as I know. But from there, I went to lower New York State, in a place called Big Flats, just outside Elmira, where there was another one of these agricultural whole CCC camps. [00:36:05] And by that time, the war was winding down. And I think it was over in Europe, and was almost over in Japan. And I had become radicalized by then against conscription and against cooperation even with the administration of the CPS camps. And I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did this come about, did you say? Your radicalization? How did that come about?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, it was just a matter of eventually coming to see that cooperation with the system was, in effect, tantamount to acceptance of it, at least in my rationale at that time. So I stopped working with a group of men, and we were arrested and clapped in jail in Elmira. And we became—the five of us became a small cause celebrity that summer, because we were testing that unconstitutionality of the CPS camp, and suggesting it was involuntary servitude, if one was kept in there against one's moral and religious wishes. So we were in New York building a defense, a legal defense, with the help of an organization called the "Workers Defense League" in New York, a socialist-oriented group that was helping with legal defense of COs. It was the only group that would do that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This wasn't—

GERALD WILLIAMS: ACLU refused to handle any CO cases.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This socialist group was simply an incidental link with the COs, and—[00:38:01]

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —they did with socialism themselves.

GERALD WILLIAMS: They're—no, they're—well, they were a socialist-oriented group. They were helping defend sharecroppers in the South against constitutional violation of their rights.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

GERALD WILLIAMS: So they took us on, because we were, in effect, another disenfranchised minority.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, you argued that your CPS service was distinct from, say, a man who is drafted, and who is made to serve two, four years? It was involuntary servitude, yours. But his isn't? Or did you try to lump him with you? And you said that all of us are—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, conscription itself is involuntary servitude. The CPS camps were administered under the conscription law—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see, so you were contesting the whole thing across the board, right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: —and therefore, we were challenging the conscription laws being involuntary servitude. It was thrown out by the Supreme Court. I think it got to—it wasn't accepted, obviously, by the Supreme Court. It got to the Supreme Court, I think. But I was tried in Jamestown, and it went against us, so I was in prison, in jail, in county jail in Buffalo for a couple of weeks, waiting to be sprung on bail. So I've seen quite a lot of county jails in the East, both during that period and other periods.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were you treated, rather brutally, especially so, because you were—

GERALD WILLIAMS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They just accepted you again on other—

GERALD WILLIAMS: The county jails are among the most brutal institutions in America, one doesn't really realize that until you've been in it. And we were simply part of the prison population. [00:40:00] There was no animosity toward us. We were all unfortunates. But I find it—I think it has been a fascinating experience in an area I later used—as I'll tell you later about my major prison experience. I used in my political work in clay later on, when I was starting to become—using clay as politically motivated themes, in politically motivated themes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: So I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: How long were you then in prison, or on trial?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, these were just short periods, two to three weeks.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Awaiting trial or awaiting bail, or something like that. Then when we were convicted on that charge, then we were out on bail, and I spent the summer in New York working with our defense league. Then it was settled out of court. There was a compromise, a compromise arranged through an admirable woman named Frieda Lazarus, a lawyer in Brooklyn. And the compromise enabled us to stay out of prison on parole for a year, which I accepted.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, that simply meant you had to check in and let people know where you were, let a probation man know?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But you were, by then, out of the Civilian Public Service?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Oh yeah, that was all behind.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

GERALD WILLIAMS: And it had long since been forgotten. But then I started to come up here into New England. My brother was living in Vermont, I lived with him for a while in Jamaica, Vermont. Then I went toward the coast, and ended up—and I did various odd jobs, going up the coast. [00:42:06] I stayed in Sebasco Estates for a while, cutting trees. Then I ended up in Vinalhaven in the Penobscot Bay.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In Maine?

GERALD WILLIAMS: In Maine—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: —where I lived for about three years. I built a cabin and lived on the island there, and was friends with lobstermen and other people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did you make your living, just odd jobs?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Odd jobs. I was a carpenter for a while. I dug clams for a while. I did just odd work around the island.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As you look back on that, what do you think was going on in you at this point? Were you—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, it was a period of necessary contemplation, I think, in effect. What it was doing was to allow me to decide what I wanted to do, and what I wanted to be after a period of enormous and very traumatic psychic activity, involving the entire war and my effects in it. It wasn't—my psychic traumas weren't over yet, but I was there trying to decide who I was and what I wanted to do. I had not thought of anything very strong, except that I thought I would return to college and finish my education. And I presumed I would go into teaching or something.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Your routine, then, probably was, what, a good deal to yourself? Or —

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, it was very introspective. Very introspective. I was under the influence of Thoreau and Emerson, and—[00:44:03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Actually reading them, or—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah, reading them. I deeply identified with them. And that's why I was on the coast. I built a cabin. I sheered sheep on the islands out there. I did all kinds of things like that that were geared to a philosophical combination of self-sufficiency and of—combining the sea and agriculture for some reason. I thought that was very romantic. And I thought that I might want to stay there indefinitely. But it was a period of just figuring out who I was, and what I was doing. It was a very introspective time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Severe, but at the same time a time when you could sort of luxuriate, right, in the romantic way you just mentioned, right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. I was screwed up, there's no doubt about that. But rather than being forced by anyone, particularly my parents, into a mold, they were happy enough to let me figure things out for myself.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they in touch with you at this time?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Oh yeah, they were living in New Mexico. And they were sympathetic, and they were always supportive of anything that I wanted to do, and anything that my brothers wanted to do for themselves. They wisely knew that everything took time, and one—they certainly had confidence in me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was your brother working into something by this time? He had been conscientious—

GERALD WILLIAMS: My older brother—yeah. My older brother was involved in a summer camp in Vermont for a number of years. [00:46:05] And he's now with congress in Washington. But he's been a strong influence on my life, and I admire him greatly. But it was in Vinalhaven first that I decided to become a potter. And the decision to be a potter came quite intuitively one day, and struck me like the light that struck Paul on the road to Tarsus. I was reading a small book called, I think, *How to Support Yourself With a Small Business*, something like that, by a man named Arthur Morgan, who founded Antioch, and who was an educator. And there was a short paragraph that just leaped out of the page at me, without any prior feeling at all about it. It described a rather bucolic existence of a young potter in the Southern Highlands somewhere, and how he made pots, and so forth. That just absolutely came out of the page at me. And from that moment on I was a potter, even though I had not seen any pottery, except in India. I had never had any experience with it. I didn't know anything about it, and there was no intellectual commitment in the slightest. But it was a momentary and psychic recognition that came from

my intuitive understanding of who I was and the nature of my background, my true psychic background. [00:48:09] And from that moment on, there was no question. I was totally dedicated to potting. So I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What do you think it was, then, that combination of commitment through a craft in a bucolic setting? Or, what do you think it was that so struck you and held you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: No doubt, a number of factors. First, there were scenes of craft activity from my background in India, not only in my father's school, where I can remember seeing the potter work and the weavers, and so on and so forth, but the entire society around me was essentially a handicraft society. And I was aware at all times of the work that was being done, the dignity of it, the essential importance of it, and the casual but very organic way in which it could become part of society. Secondly, Gandhi's philosophy had been transferred to me through my father, the philosophy of again, the dignity of labor, of the essential goodness of work by the hands, his political and personal philosophy against industrialization, which I had begun to intellectualize over and to understand. Then in addition to that, I have come to believe in reincarnation, that there is continuity to what we do, and that significant things that we are engaged in, in this life, relate in some way to previous existences. [00:50:09] We are, in effect—we are, in effect, often continuing predispositions that have been part of our existence in other lives. Therefore, it seems reasonable for me to say that since there was nothing that overtly led me to pottery, that it was an intuitive understanding at the right time in my life, where nothing else was impinging on it, that allowed me to be intuitive, and allowed me, therefore, to choose that motivation that was intuitively important to me, which is clay. And I've never regretted it one minute, or a second since then. So it was a perfect choice for me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was in late '40s, was it? Did you do—did you just continue your life up there for a bit more?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It was about '47 and '47. Yeah, then I had just decided to be a potter. And I went around and began to visit potters on the mainland in Maine.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Were there [inaudible] then?

GERALD WILLIAMS: There were some. Blue Hill was the most prominent center, Blue Hill up near Bar Harbor.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: And I visited their pottery, and bought an old wheel from them, a hideous monstrosity, hauled it down. I'd built a house and a cabin and a little barn by then, and put it in there, and dug some clay. And without knowing anything about it, I had wanted to begin to make pots on whatever level I could. I decided that I didn't want to go to school, that I wanted to learn on my own. [00:52:03] I assumed that maybe an apprenticeship might be the offering [ph]. But then conscription came along again. And I was forced to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Again? How would that have happened?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, it was conscription law lapsed for a certain amount of time. They revived it. And by that time, my political understanding had progressed, or had retrogressed to the point where I didn't want anything to do with the system. Even registering as a 4E or as a conscientious objector, I just said at that point, I wouldn't have anything to do with them, because that was the most ethical position I could take at that moment for myself. So I sent a letter of refusal to them. A date was set for my trial. I was tried in Portland Court by a judge who was very vindictive. Sends me to two years in prison. So I went to Danbury for a year before I was paroled, Danbury Federal Penitentiary. And I spent a year there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did you do during that year?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I was a librarian. I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was going on in—

GERALD WILLIAMS: In my mind?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Do you recall?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, an awful lot was going on in my mind. But the—it was a very difficult experience to confront myself with it, going to jail voluntarily is not—for me wasn't a very easy thing for me to do, to be confronted, to say that you're going to be locked up for a year was a hard thing to—and a dreadful thing—to accept. [00:54:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because you were ready to move on in your—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, I was beginning to open up, and I wanted to get going. But I realized and recognized that this was a necessary, if not karmic, act that I had to go through. And I accepted it on that basis, and have made use of the experience in some of my later work. The people that I met there and talked with, and the experiences that I had have been seminal on my formation of some of the things that I have worked in later.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were there a good many others there at that time who were similarly in prison?

GERALD WILLIAMS: There were a small group of about 10 people, 10 COs.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Most of them, again, were what was called "non-cooperators," that is, people who refused to register for the draft. And they were Quakers, for the most part. And they had similar positions to mine. They were college men. One guy that had a PhD, which was against all laws for criminals, because most of the people in there had no education at all, that's why they were there. But to find an educated man there was quite unusual.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. Whereas a little earlier, those Quakers had a mass radicalized position. They went on to the public service—now at least—

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right, yeah. By that time, most of us had reached the point where first the Quakers refused to have anything to do with CPS camp during that, the second conscription. [00:56:06] And many of the young men were taking the position that I was, that it was intolerable to cooperate with a system that was essentially evil.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Now what was your feeling about the 90 percent of the people there, the uneducated? I think you mentioned that the reason they were there was because they were uneducated.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, they were—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did you mean by that?

GERALD WILLIAMS: —many of them were illiterate. It was obvious that—or it was mainly obvious to me that a large number of the so-called criminals come from, at least in that prison, urban areas, where people who can't read and write screw up with the law. The law does not protect them, and, as a matter of fact, makes them take the burden of some misdemeanors. There were Italians from Brooklyn, and blacks from Harlem there that, you know, were in on drug violation, a lot of car violation. They could hardly read and write. And there was something wrong with the view of society that put people—that penalized people who were like that into prison.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And sometimes it relatively trivial things, wasn't it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. I'm sure there were some scoundrels in the midst, and there were all kinds. And there was a Nazi there, and a lot of war people—soldiers who were there because of war records, they kept their files as [ph], the deserters and so forth there, serving out life sentences for deserting, and that kind of thing. Ridiculous nonsense. [00:58:01] But they were real and important people to me. And I say with as much sincerity as I can that it was a privilege to be amongst them. I thought of them as being my friends. We were all there under unhappy circumstances, and we were making the best of it as we could. But they were an extremely interesting group of people and am delighted to have known them.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: How long were you at Danbury, about a year, you said?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I was there a year, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that was the end of your time, that stint?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. And I came out, I was on parole, and I then came directly to New Hampshire from Maine, and I've been here virtually ever since. I had been told that there were people that I should see here through the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had you been in touch with the League ever before that?

GERALD WILLIAMS: One of the first people I saw was a man named Charles Abbott, who has been teaching at MassArt in Boston for many years. He was a potter in South Berwick, Maine at that time, and I visited him on the rounds. He advised coming to New Hampshire, and gave me the name of a person named Richard Moll, who was also a potter here, with whom he thought I might be able to work out some apprenticeship-like arrangement. As

it turned out, that was not feasible. But I did come to Concord in the fall of 1949—in the fall of, yeah, '49. [01:00:07] And then I got a job at the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, then called the League of New Hampshire Arts and Crafts. And David Campbell was the director there. And Mr. Campbell gave me a job as stock boy, with which I rented a room, and I also had the privileges to work in their pottery laboratory on my off hours and be in their class.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was the laboratory? They gave lessons there?

GERALD WILLIAMS: They had adult education lessons in the basement of their headquarters. And I worked there for one winter, with both Richard Moll and Vivika Heino was a marvelous teacher, and I owe her a great deal because of what she taught me in terms of glaze chemistry and analysis, and general attitudes toward work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were you learning? I mean, what were you—what did you want to do these first months of potting? These were really almost your first months, except for those few attempts out in Maine, right? Those first attempts before you went to prison. What were you learning, now what did you want to do? Were you respectful of the teachers? You just, whatever they thought you should know?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, primarily there were two things. The first was to respond to whatever the teacher's curriculum was, in terms of a loosely-organized curriculum. The second was to practice work on the wheel, which is the key to much of pottery, and still is. So I have to spend as much time as possible on the wheel, and learn how to throw, and then learn how to glaze and experiment. [01:02:04] It was glaze colors, and so forth, at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you take to it right away? Were you enthusiastic?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. I think I was what is called a "natural thrower," that is, it's always been easy for me to throw. I've never had any trouble. And so I was mechanically-oriented in that direction. I have always been interested in colors. I was interested in chemistry in college, and that came easy to me. I spent long hours at night in the laboratory by myself there working, practicing. Then I got an apprenticeship with a man named John Butler, who had come up from Pennsylvania to start a pottery here in New Hampshire at a northern town called Ossipee.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: He built a bit pottery there, brought in a lot of money and had a couple of apprentices and assistants. Primarily the year that I spent there was spent in setting up his studio and his production line. He cast lamp bases and things like that, for the most part, and in building the kilns. So it was a matter of someone who had no experience getting a little experience in production studio, and its methods.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you found this was a valuable thing to have at that point?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, I was happy to have any kind of experience. He gave me a small stipend and room and board, so I was able to subsist without outside income, which was difficult to do, otherwise. And I learned about kiln construction. [01:04:02] We hadn't fired the kilns. I learned about casting and methods connected with mold making and plaster, which are not taught very widely now. I learned something of the cultural background; the potter, he had been a follower of Leach and the philosophy of the Leach Studio in St. Ives, England, and his young assistant—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Which was what? What was the philosophy he picked up from there?

GERALD WILLIAMS: The philosophy was a production studio under the guidance of a master.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: In which a line of work is designed, primarily utilitarian, to be produced by a number of people who were working in the studio, who were geared to certain things. It didn't really come off, because the circumstances were entirely different. But it was an attempt in that direction. It was—

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ROBERT F. BROWN: At that point with John Butler, though, you didn't see his studio really get underway. It didn't succeed. You learned a good deal that stood you in good stead?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. The thing that it really did for me was to expose me to a professional environment of people who were very serious. In addition to John Butler and his extremely interesting wife, was a young assistant named Joseph Trappetti, who later became the Director of League of Arts and Crafts. And Joe's wife, Coreen Trappetti, is now a well-known painter in New Hampshire. They brought a good deal of expertise with

them from Philadelphia, where they had worked with John Butler at the Philadelphia School of Art. And they steered me through many bumbling moments when I was all thumbs, or elbows. I think I then left the Butler Pottery with a feeling of the viability of a professional life, and its availability to me as a person. I then started to work on my own and build up my own—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you interested in eventually having a production shop yourself?

GERALD WILLIAMS: No, not really. I was not interested in the methods that they were using. I was interested primarily in throwing—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: —as a production method, although I was interested in the concept of the production philosophy. [00:02:00] It's probably there that I have gotten my preference for this style of thing, a preference that has been reflected in the magazine [ph], studio, potter and other things that I do, a preference for work that is essentially utilitarian, that is not necessarily art-oriented in the way that much of the ceramics in America is now. Preference for a group of people, or more than one at least working together in a cooperative unit. And some of the technical information that I would need for that kind of an operation I received there. Information on types of clay, glazed materials, information on refractories for kilns, and so forth.

ROBERT F. BROWN: At that time, was there much of a temptation on the part of a new potter, to try to become a potter artist? Or did such a thing exist in people's minds at that time?

GERALD WILLIAMS: The artist potter—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The individual doing a unique piece, one after the other.

GERALD WILLIAMS: —yeah, was a very strong and viable role that probably most of us wished to emulate. The artist potter actually is a syndrome that started in France and went to England, and then was transferred to America. The war was over in America, and there was a sudden enormous explosion of activity due in part to the influences that Americans had been exposed to abroad. And these were being brought back and transferred into the American scene. [00:04:00] Furthermore, the universities were accepting the GI bill students, and large numbers were doing what they wanted to, which was often artwork.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: That began to feed the growth of this, and the intellectualization of the craft has resulted in an extension of the art potter, the art craftsman, artist craftsman concept, and has extended it into the craftsman becoming wholly and artist now. The people who were prominent then were essentially artist potters—Wildenhains, when I first started were important people, both Marguerite and Frans, they had come from the Bauhaus. Edwin and Mary Scheier were important figures then. They worked at the University of New Hampshire, and they were widely and internationally known. So the picture in front of me was one probably that I was trying to emulate, and have used, for the most part, in my own work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you had also the utilitarian interest at that very time developing. Utilitarian objects, right, the production. Then on the other hand, the pottery as an art form, or as something like sculpture, right? Where you had these two models?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. I have always been, for the very first, interested in the idea that pottery is useful, essentially. That its strength lies in its desirability as utilitarian objects. It's a popular art, in effect. [00:06:03] That's both its strength and its weakness. But to me it was a strength, and I wished to align myself with that aspect of it. The second and important creative stream, I think, in my early life was my association with folk art, particularly through my background in India. And I wished to align myself with that concept as much as I could in a sophisticated, industrial society, feeling that there are basic image prototypes that Jung talked about that we all take part in. At one time I did a lot of research in folk art and symbols in folk art. I was very strongly attracted to symbolic designs. Spent a lot of time in libraries researching, and designs connected with those things, using my pottery in the earliest years of it. It was somewhat artificial, I admit, but a necessary part of my early work, up to the point where I then was able to not be so self-consciously using those elements, but to perhaps have absorbed them by that time and make use of them, much more effectively as something that came from within myself.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, were you being shown, or showing fairly early on? Even—you were with a League, right, into the early days?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you show? Were they selling? Were they providing an outlet for you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, from the very first, when I left the Butler Pottery, I had to earn a living. [00:08:04] So I was making pots to sell, and I was selling them through the League shops, is one of the big advantages of being here. That was that the League provided outlets for one's work, and one could therefore sell pottery as a production skill, and produces work that people can generally afford to buy. So I was making pots to sell, and the marketplace was the League shops. They had about 14 shops, and the big fair every summer, until I began to outgrow that and kind of expand my markets into the East and throughout the country later on, where I was providing work that couldn't—I was proving more work than could be sold only in the New Hampshire area. I then started going to New York and Baltimore, and San Francisco, and places like that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you go to these people and send them photographs of your work? How did you make your contacts in San Francisco, and—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Generally they were personal contacts. And at that time, there were not too many potters working.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: So it was perhaps a little—there were fewer potters, so there were only a certain number of outlets available for those people. One just simply went and made personal contacts with them. Since I had to—there was a direct relationship between eating and making pots, it was important that I make the pots and get them out. So when I married, then we would do what I'd already started to do, and that is to make a lot of pots and put them in the car and take them to New York, or to Philadelphia, or pack them up and send them to some other place, Cleveland or Chicago, or California. [00:10:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. To shops with which you had contact?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Specific contacts, yeah. People that had either seen my work here, or I'd become acquainted with them somehow, and asked for it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So '53, well, it was in '53 that you began building this studio here in the house? Or you began on your own, in your own studio?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. The very first studio that I had of my own was in Concord, and it was in an old milk room of a big barn. It had a cement floor and no toilet. I had a chemical toilet, it smelled everything up. I'd bought a small, second-hand electric kiln for $30, and $100 worth of chemicals. And I had some clay, and I made a wheel, and I started my own. I lived—I had a bed in there, and I lived and worked there and sold my work elsewhere. I spent a lot of time experimenting at that time. I made lots of things and threw them away. The learning process probably was comparable to four years of school, where I simply worked very hard on my own, experimenting and going to museums, trying everything under the sun. Visiting as many potters as I could find, talking with them, watching their work, seeing shows, reading books, absorbing the entire environment that was both visual and written.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you pretty confident of your abilities by that point?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I was confident that eventually I would be able to do competent work, though I realized that I was far from making competent pieces at that time, since the techniques were not developed, and the skills were not very high. [00:12:08] But I knew that sooner or later I'd be able to do what I wanted to, because I have always felt that if you really wanted to do something badly enough, all you had to do was to do it. There was nothing that would stop you. And I've always felt that about any of my work, or anything—any project that I've done, I have felt that way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were you principally learning from these visits to other potters, do you recall? What was their substance that you—

GERALD WILLIAMS: The reason why I went there probably had to do with as much trying to pick up tips on how they had solved things, as with taking with them and to them, and being reassured by what they were saying, and who they were and what they represented, to asking specific technical questions on clay or glazes, things that were going wrong or that I wished to know more about. They were truly my teachers in that time, as I would have gone to a teacher in a school to ask a technical question, I went to people around here who knew more than I did about it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And who—can you give—describe some of those people who were principally important to you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: When I first came here, there were the Scheiers, who were very well-known. And they were helpful and supportive.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what were they like, as friends and teachers?

GERALD WILLIAMS: They were always open, and, ah—and helpful to young craftsman, particularly people who were trying to make it on their own. They were very sympathetic. [00:14:00] And since they were teaching at the university, they were generally available. They participated in exhibitions and fairs, and so forth. Other people were—friends of Richard Moll, who helped a great deal, Charles Abbott, who gave me the entire notes of all his glazes that he had taken for many years, passed them on to me, which was a gesture that I felt was incomparable, because he was literally giving me all his notes, his private notes. Then there was a couple in Hopkinton named the Baileys, who were old-time potters.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were the Heinos—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Heinos, excuse me, Viv and Otto Heino were very helpful, and very supportive. And as I said, she was my first teacher.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And I owe her a debt of gratitude for whatever technical knowledge I have in relation to my work. In the last analysis, what you're doing is to pick up techniques. You have to develop your own style and your own preferences and your own philosophy. And what comes from you has to come from the deepest part of you. And you develop that only through long association with material, and a commitment to the material. But it was a period that was expanding in many ways. The League was expanding. I was expanding at the same time. The whole movement of crafts in America was expanding. And my career has, in effect, almost paralleled the rise of what would be almost the second generation of craftsmen in America. [00:16:13] The first generation might be considered the progenitors of the modern movement.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And I came on the scene at a time when they were just beginning to shift into the second phase, what I call the second phase. Now I think there have been a number of phases since then, but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: How would you characterize that phase at that time that was—was there a difference between it and that of the progenitors? The work? The attitude toward it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, the—work here in America was, for the large part, quiescent.

[Audio Break.]

GERALD WILLIAMS: Crafts and pottery in America were, for the large part, quiescent during the early part of the century, from the early 1900s to about 1920. There was not much going on. It was industrial or oriented toward pseudo industrial type of things. Then there began to be a few artist craftsmen. In this area, for instance, there were only two potters during the '20s that were reasonably significant. One was an old Swede, and another was a woman who taught at the university. And aside from that, there was very little activity. Then the first group of people started to come in, largely through the war. There were many Europeans, European craftsmen who came over here because of the war. [00:18:02] They started to exert an influence on things. That's when, for instance, the American Craft Council started in New York. People like Carl [inaudible] and others were seminal in the development of organizations in New York that later became identified with the national movements now.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: So when I came on the scene, that first sort of generation, jump had taken place. Then the next group of people, like myself, started, and I'm now—I am now part of—I mean, what's going on around me is a second or third generation beyond that, young people that I'm totally unfamiliar with who are doing fantastic things, it really was increasingly complex and important. But it's interesting to look back on that first period.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What was the role of David Campbell, who was then director of the League, wasn't he, in the first half of the '50s? What was he like? What was his effect, would you say?

GERALD WILLIAMS: David Campbell was a very dynamic and important catalyst in not only New Hampshire crafts, but in the national craft scene as well. When I first came here, he hired me to help out in the League. And he was the director of the League. He had been an architect who had taken over the directorship of the League before the war, and came back after the war. He was extremely intelligent. He had a limited craft background, as such; he didn't do any craftwork to speak of. But he was a practicing architect for most of his life. What he brought to it were the professional requirements of design, as being important to the function of any craft.

[00:20:09] High quality. He was always in favor of standards, and of high standards. He encouraged the development of outside influences in this area, not only in New Hampshire, national people coming to New Hampshire, but international people coming to America. And he then went on to help form and develop the American Craftsman's Council, Crafts Council, as it presently functions. He died—I'm not sure when, at a time when his influence had been at its highest in the American craft scene. He was responsible for high quality national exhibitions, for the museum in New York. While he was a difficult man to work with—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, he was?

GERALD WILLIAMS: —because was he was very mercurial—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Hmm.

GERALD WILLIAMS: —highly intolerant of mediocrity. He was nevertheless a person who probed and propelled the craft a world along, into another plane. I think he was an important person.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He was mercurial, and, say, at very demanding standards. How did these apply, then, to the 14 craft shops in New Hampshire, where I suppose the public was a mix—was, to a large extent, rather unsophisticated? [00:22:01] How did this filter down? How did this—

GERALD WILLIAMS: He was a very good PR man, for one thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: Since he was an architect, he was architecturally-oriented. It was important, therefore, that he deposit little buildings in different communities. The buildings would then be the repository for crafts. And these crafts were always at high-level. He organized and extended the big New Hampshire Craft Fair onto a very high-level, at a time when it was one of the few national, few important craft fairs in the country. Now, there were hundreds and hundreds of craft fairs. But at that time, it was an important craft fair. And the manner in which that was constructed, the architectural unity of it, as being a showcase for fine crafts was an important concept. And he took crafts, in part, out of the folksiness of the back woods, and put it into the showroom. I think that was one of his contributions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm. Mm. Well, again, perhaps you, along with him and others that recognized that crafts was no longer a folk tradition—I mean, you were all developing it artificially, in that sense, right? And it was something to be shown, to be looked at and bought like a newly-minted object, right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. Certainly what would characterize crafts in America, I think, as Rose Lipka [ph] said, most craftsmen are intellectuals. Now one would add that they are university intellectuals. [00:24:01] The craftsman who comes from a folk tradition is only in small enclaves around the country now, in the Southern Highlands, and so forth. But most of them are trained to be craftsmen, and received their training through university or colleges. Therefore, I think it was obvious to people like Campbell and Mrs. Webb, and others, that crafts were, in effect, an art form, and should be considered as such. Justified being shown within that context, and being regarded in the marketplace within that context, too. And their effort, essentially, was to educate the American public to accept fine crafts in a higher cost bracket, because it was justified as an art form.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Hmm. Hmm.

GERALD WILLIAMS: The tradition of folk art as inexpensive utilitarian objects that are satisfying certain utilitarian objectives was soon bypassed, for the craft shown by exhibition. And that's what the fairs were. They were exhibitions of craft objects. And the books and the galleries and the museums were all geared toward that concept.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, I detect a certain cleavage from your feeling that crafts should, in part, be utilitarian and functional forums, and seen as such, right? Would there—[00:26:00]

GERALD WILLIAMS: I accept, to a certain large degree, that you can't operate in America as you do in India, or as we did in the eighteenth century here. The difference for that is that—the difference being that while I recognize that one has to sell, make and sell, crafts within the environment of our own culture, still there are certain basic things that one could be motivated by. I believe that I'm more sympathetic to the concept of crafts as utilitarian objects, and I'm sympathetic to it as an individual expression of a creative art form. And even though some of my pieces might be construed within that second concept, as being products of creative intelligence as an art form, I don't think of them as such. And I prefer to make utilitarian objects as beautiful as possible with all the skill and intelligence that I know. But that doesn't preclude that I can't do other things as well, such as political effigies and interpretive work that comes from my own experience or my own feelings.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In the political and in the experiential sense, these things are utilitarian? Meaning, utilitarian objects?

GERALD WILLIAMS: The political things, or the utilitarian things?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, they are utilitarian, in a sense, to you, because they come out of your—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, they come out—well, I think of them as coming out of an expressive folk tradition; that is, aligned more to objects that are expressions of personal or social environment. [00:28:00] If I do an effigy of, say, as I did of Kennedy's assassination, his death, I think of it as being something that comes out of a social consciousness; that is, we were all involved in Kennedy's death. If I were involved in minimal or earthworks, I might have a different concept than that, it would be strictly—not strictly, but it would be more aligned with only my needs, and no one else's needs.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I see. There is an overt propagandistic quality to your Kennedy thing, whereas if you were an earthwork artist, you might be much more private, much more abstract, expression?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. I've never particularly been abstract. I've always felt that if I had something to say, I wanted to communicate it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: And much of my work in that context is communication. I have a point of view, it can be anti-war, it can be sympathetic to blacks, or it can be expressing an outrage, or a deep hurt, or something of that nature.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: Within that, I want to do anything that I feel like doing. When it comes to the utilitarian pots, I like to think of people using them, and the quietness of a covered jar, or a vase that is aligned to a sum pot [ph], or to a Medieval English pot, where it was functioning for a purpose, and it was being used by people for that purpose. And I feel warm when I think about that. I feel a kind of psychic relationship with people all the world at any time in our history that have done things like that. [00:30:13] It feeds my creative energy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You see it, in a sense, that there's a convergence at the right moment and in the right hands of the forum and what it's trying to express? I mean its usefulness and its design as a convergence, or anything—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Precisely. The two are indissoluble in that context.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's very—that's, perhaps, one of the ideal moments for you in your work, when you do that?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think the true test is when it comes to the point of one being unconscious about that relationship. If one can achieve the quiet mastery of technique and materials, and then start making use of it without having to describe it, or to analyze it, or to ponder it too carefully, but to intuitively—to intuit it is perhaps more to the point, then it becomes more useful. I think I think—I think I spend less time trying to analyze what I do and more time trying to evoke from some interior place what—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, if it were a conscious act, I don't see how it could be convergence, because there'd be this intrusive, intellectual decision-making between design and function. [00:32:02]

GERALD WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is a second interview with Gerry Williams, Robert Brown, the interviewer. This is January 9th, 1979. We've talked about some things in the 1950s, Mr. Williams, but maybe you could say something about your family, your family life. You were married in the early '50s, I believe.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes, I was married to Julie Blake. We have two daughters. Julie had three children from a previous marriage. My daughters are Jennifer and Shelley, now 21 and 19. They're growing up very fast.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: My wife, Julie, was formerly a radio woman and a television personality who worked in the New England area. I first met her when she interviewed me on her radio program. Married, I think, a year later. And we lived in Manchester for a short while, and then I started to build a pottery and eventually a house out of a piece of property we bought in Dunbarton, on Route 13.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was she immediately interested in your work? Why were you interviewed? Did you happen to be a local potter?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, I guess I was sort of local color. I was teaching at the Currier Gallery Art School at the time, and many of the people in the Manchester area who were into the arts were involved in the art school. [00:34:02] And she came across a number of them. One of her close friends was a student of mine. So having nothing better to do on a certain afternoon, she invited me to be interviewed on her radio station program. That's how it all started.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is this—did this affect your life a good deal? I mean, when you were married and moved out here, was this quite a different existence from your rather primitive one when you were alone in Maine and in Concord?

GERALD WILLIAMS: The problem never really came up, except that I was suddenly the father of a grown family. So I had to immediately think about things that I had not been thinking about before. Under normal conditions, one marries and has children, you grow into them. But I had to grow into them sort of overnight. She kept working while I built up our property here. So there was not a great financial crunch to support the entire family all of a sudden. She worked for about three years at the radio station, until we had built the house out here in the studio. And then we moved out, and she quit her work and came to help me. By that time—

ROBERT F. BROWN: When was that that you moved out here?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, it must have been around 1961 or ['6]2, I guess. [00:36:04]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: The very first building we put up was a small 10 by 30, 15 by 30 building that was our pottery. Then I worked in that during the first year, and lived in Manchester. The second year, I started the construction on the house, and all of this was done by myself, or, as I say, with the help of our friends, which meant that everyone who came by was dragooned into helping nail and hold up boards. And by the end of the second—by the end of the third year, I guess, we were living out here. And from there on, this was our center of activity.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was in the '50s, you first chose this place? Or in the '60s?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It was in the late '50s. And I had started to go around the countryside in a circle of about 15 miles outside Concord, around Concord, because I felt that I wanted to be halfway between Manchester and Concord. I was teaching in Manchester, but the center of much of my activity at that time was Concord. So I happened to find a place exactly halfway between Manchester and Concord, and it was a property that was being sold by an old farmer, who became a friend of ours. And we bought about six acres and started to work immediately at clearing the forest and putting in the construction. And we've done everything ourselves here.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were there other artists around this immediate area at that time?

GERALD WILLIAMS: No, there weren't. I was really about the only one in this township. [00:38:04] Since then there have been other people who have come in of one kind or another. But it's been a fine place to live and work. The community has been reasonably supportive. I have not had much to do with the community activities. Julie, my wife, has had a great deal more to do with the basic organizations of the town. She is an active member of the church and has supported various women's groups of one kind or another. I have tended to simply work on my own, and our mutual and basic interests, however, are outside the community. There usually was friends in Manchester, or elsewhere in our professional work took us to Boston and New York. Now it takes us all over the country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But at least the local people here were not hostile, were they?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Not at all. The advantage of living in New England, I think, is in part due to its cultural affinity with the type of living that colonial people had. It's still very close them, as a matter of fact. The farm community, such as Dunbarton, is rather close to its colonial heritage. And craftsmen, as such, are not aberrations, but part of the community. They accepted us for what we were. I think they saw that we worked hard, and that was the basis for their acceptance of us. And Julie, as I said, has been a very strong supporter of the community, and they have appreciated that and liked her for it. [00:40:07] I think they have accepted us as

part of the community. As much as we could be accepted, people who have been here several generations are still not accepted.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure. That's really difficult, too. But they do respect, also, your working on your own, don't they, and keeping to yourself? That's one thing—

GERALD WILLIAMS: I think the major acceptance factor in rural communities in New England is the work factor. If you can demonstrate that you work hard and that you are reasonably solvent, and that you're doing things for your betterment, and that you're not disturbing community, and you are assisting it in whatever way you can, I think they'll accept you on that basis.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And we built two or three houses here, and people have seen that we are responsible people, and want to settle here, and make our life here. Our children were born, brought up here. They went to school in the local Dunbarton school and the Goffstown school. All their friends are here, this is the basis of their life. So we are, for all intents and purposes, an integral part of the community.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now the first building you built here was a studio. What did that consist of? What was the basic thing you needed there? You needed a kiln, didn't you? And did you—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. When I started off, I had a small electric kiln, and bought several more. And the first studio was a very haphazard affair, as I look back on it now. It was just sort of a—almost a temporary shack, although it stayed there for 10 or 12 years. [00:42:00] Parenthetically, it was built with the help of about a dozen of our man friends one weekend, who put some foundations for it into the biggest patch of poison ivy in the entire county. And they all felt the results of it the next week. Onto that, I built a kiln wing that then housed the kilns, then later on I constructed a completely separate, but attached new studio, which was to take over. That was a large building about three times the size of the first one. This was the complex that burned in 1972. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: By then, or by even the early '60s, you had assistants here or something? How could you maintain so many kilns? How many would you have had by—well, how many burned, say, in 1972? Was that—that was the—

GERALD WILLIAMS: How many kilns?

ROBERT F. BROWN: The nucleus, as you just said.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Of what burned?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, the entire structure burned.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah?

GERALD WILLIAMS: But to answer your first question, I have had, and at that time I began to have a series of apprentice-like relationships with young people who came through. Some of them were students from surrounding schools, who were looking for employment during their off-periods in the winter. Some were insipient craftsmen who were looking for additional training, and so forth. And as I began to expand my own professional career, these people came in and started to work with me. So the pottery, from the very beginning, had often more than one people, one person in it, more than myself. [00:44:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And I know that's a big current interest of yours, apprenticeship. But at that time did you consciously think to impart certain things to these people?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, not at all. I was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You needed help? And that's why your—

GERALD WILLIAMS: I think it was simply a matter of practicality. Though there have always been—I was one of them—a number of people who want to learn by doing something with someone who knows what they're doing. So the osmosis that takes place in those circumstances was important. And I accepted people as they came in, without any real attempt to organize the work period. My operation, essentially, has always been a one-man operation, and not a—not what's called a "production studio," where limited mass production is carried on. Therefore, I have been able to accept people without it disturbing the essential flow of my own personal work. And sometimes I have taken advantage of a person like that who's come in to design certain multiples that they have worked with, or I have assigned them to assist in.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And at the time when I was fully supporting our family, up until about 1973, I guess, when our magazine first started, our production was large enough to include limited multiples of certain production things. [00:46:00] And people helped me with that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: Then as we started the magazine and my time became more and more divided between the new duties of the magazine and my production work, I had to give less and less time to the studio production. Now I give about half my time to the studio, and about half time to other activities.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But it still—you are the studio. I mean, these people simply are assigned certain parts of it.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Exactly, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You're the initiator, and—

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. You had some experience in the production line, you told me last time, in the Butlers' place, and the like, in Ossipee.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There, you rejected that, didn't you, and went on your own the best you could?

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right. And I left there because I was through with my apprenticeship. The concept that Butler had tried to start came in its spiritual origin from the Leach Pottery in St. Ives, in England.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And to a large extent, many of us in America still have that as a gentile ideal in the back of our minds, at least, even though things have gone far in a different direction. I have always thought of it as being a useful ideal, but not at all times practical for me, personally.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm. Where does it fall down for you, would you say?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Essentially, I'm a—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Bernard Leach's—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Essentially, I'm a one of a kind person; that is, I like to do things that are very limited in production, but each one has a certain style and a certain embellishment. The Leach concept depends on semi-skilled labor for the production of a certain item. [00:48:10] And they may have 15 or 100 different items, each one is reproduced under certain conditions. I find that slightly inhibiting when it comes to my own personal preferences. In addition, I have, not especially wanting to, but I have continually changed my style and my outlook. I like to think of it as being an advancement of my own knowledge and creativity under the general assumption that change is for the better, good Americanism doesn't always follow. But my own personal growth has taken me through a number of different stages, each one of them requiring a certain amount of research and development, and therefore a static condition of a pottery, which is reproducing certain things, doesn't always lend itself to my own personal situation.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In 1960—perhaps you had met him before, but you went to India with Allen Eaton?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had you been involved with him, or known him a bit before then?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I had read his books. And one of the books that brought me to New Hampshire, as a matter of fact, was Allen Eaton's book, *Handicrafts of New England*. [00:50:00] So I had known his writings and admired them very much. Became acquainted with him, and when he found that he was being given this task of taking a group of American craft objects to India to set up in an international World's Fair, he thought of me, because of my background in India. And he thought it would be neat if I could help him with the language, and so forth. I was delighted. So we got together, and it was quiet a horrendous experience. I simply assisted him. I had no particular responsibility in the project. He had a tumultuous relationship with the U.S. government during that

period. He was so extraordinary a person that his iron will came in conflict frequently with the bureaucracy. As a result, when he took on a project, he gave it his entire force of personality and energy, and soon his little project was wagging the—was the tail that was wagging the dog. And this bothered the bureaucrats no end, until they finally, in a fit of irascibility, sort of fired him from the project. But he refused to be fired. So he and I took off for India without any official sanction to be there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was the project that he finally took over and made so more important than the government had wanted?

GERALD WILLIAMS: All right, the government, in their wisdom, sets up international exhibitions. [00:52:05] They're exhibitions that have various technical subjects. This happened to be on agriculture, supposedly, it was to be in India, in New Delhi.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of American agriculture?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. The exhibition was international, but the Americans had the responsibility of putting up a pavilion. So they got together machinery and cows, and everything that they do, to show American scientific agriculture, for the most part. One small aspect of it was to have a handicraft exhibit, what they thought would be quite simple and innocuous, would be kind of to show the folks in India that the Americans, too, had a little bit of culture. Allen Eaton saw this as a golden opportunity to propagandize the entire Asian continent on the fact that Americans also were craftsmen; they were craftsmen here, and that very fine things were being done, and that people abroad should not think of America only within the context of technology and money. So he scurried around, and I helped him, getting things together from the Southern Highlands and the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, from Maine and from Pennsylvania, all the people he'd known through his incredibly rich and complex associations all over the country. And we picked up what was essentially a collection of American contemporary folk art. It was not the kind of work that is now involved, that is, studio, that is, exhibition and museum type of thing, the art form. These things were quilts and blankets, and carvings, and things like that. [00:54:03] And they were good, honest pieces done by people, for purposes. There was a story, usually, behind every one, though.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. This is something you'd mentioned before, the folk thing, which is nearly dead now. And Eaton was very much a foster of that, very much liked that idea when he was at the League here, and also in Southern Highlands.

GERALD WILLIAMS: He was. He was a devotee of American folk craft, and had, as a matter of fact, been prescient and seen the demise of the folk craft movement, and began to do everything he could to help it survive, and to preserve it, that is, build an archive both in terms of object and in terms of literature that would enable us to know what our heritage was. And this was his intent in doing this job for India.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you liked his folk crafts as well, did you? So you were interested?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I was very much interested in that. Of course, I was interested also in two things; one is being an assistant to this enormously energetic and complex man, and learning from him, which one of the basic things I learned was that there are more ways to skin a cat than you can believe. The second thing was to get to India, where I wanted to get back. I had a very strong, umbilical connection, still, with India. I had not returned since I had left in 1943, so it was a tremendous thing for me to be able to get there, even if it was only for a month or two.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So what—by the time you got to India, what had happened? [00:56:02] Eaton elaborated the folk craft, so well beyond what the bureaucrats could tolerate?

GERALD WILLIAMS: He was doing such a good job, that he infuriated the bureaucrats. And just before the whole exhibition took off, he was, I think the word might be "fired" from the project. But by that time, he was so involved in, in effect, he was indispensable to the proper exhibiting of the material, and explaining it, that he took off on his own, feeling certain that once we got there, they would have no alternative but to get us back in again. So this is really what took place, they just—

ROBERT F. BROWN: When you got there, what happened?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, strangely enough, I was still on the roster of employment, such as it was. That is, I was listed as a member of the American group, but he was not. They had hired a local designer to come in and put the things together, which infuriated us. So—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean someone in India?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Someone in India, yeah. An American and an Indian. They knew nothing about the material,

and had no interest in it, particularly. They were just going to put it up. So he, with incredible tenacity and goodwill, simply stood around, and finally took over. They finally simply let him stay on. And in effect, we did what we went over there to do. We had paid our own way, as it was, from funds that were raised. We were not paid by the government, so that there was nothing, really, that they were losing by it. [00:58:03] And as a result, he put the exhibition together, and millions of people saw it. Many, many of them were quite astounded that things like that were being made in America. They had a wholly one-sided view of the kind of people who lived here. And I thought it was extremely successful. He even got Nehru to come in and sign the guest book, which infuriated the Americans, the administration.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really? How did they manage that?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, the big night was—Nehru was coming through the exhibition, so everyone is galvanized; you have no idea what it's like when an important person like that in the East comes into a place, it's just like a god has come. So Nehru came striding through, trailing hundreds of sycophants and American people, American officials. And as he strode by our little exhibition tent, Eaton, who was waiting like a spider in his lair for Nehru, darted out, grabbed him by the arm, and said, "Your sister wanted me to give you her very best regards." And Nehru pulled back and couldn't really dismiss this little man who, by that time, was wearing a Pagri. Someone had—Eaton had gotten someone to tie a Pagri on his head. So here came this little gnome-like, white Indian charging out at Nehru. So Nehru looked at him, and Eaton went on to say that he was a good friend of Mrs. Pundit's, and wouldn't he, Nehru, come and sit down and be the first person to sign our little guest book in the camp? [01:00:09] So Nehru, still with some humorous smiles, came over and sat down, wrote his name in a flourish. The American administrators were just fit to be tied over this upstaging that little Allen Eaton had accomplished. But that was the kind of thing that Eaton pulled off everywhere. He was just an extraordinary person.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How was the trip for you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Oh, it was a very seminal experience. I spent a month and a half in Delhi, and then I sent back up to Mussoorie, where I lived as a child and went to school in the winter, saw my old school. Then I went, most importantly of all, to where I was born in Bengal, in a place called Asansol. And that was a traumatic experience for me because the school environment which my parents had built up had changed almost completely. Other people were in the administration, and there was quite a bit of community change. But it was important for me to see. And when I left India, I felt that I had done an important thing, and did not need to go back again to see the place where I had lived.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was still there, but it wasn't there, so to speak? Is it—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, it had moved in one direction and I had moved in the other direction. But it was important for me to have seen it, to know that it was still there, and to satisfy my own psyche that it still existed, but that we had both changed. [01:02:05] And therefore, I did not have to go back, nor do I have to—though I would like to sometime—go back.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was it possibly also a confirmation of your own strength, your own course in life?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes, I'm sure it's also—

ROBERT F. BROWN: To have to be back there in that nursery [ph]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. I had never felt, as many of my classmates did who went back to India, but five or six of my classmates went back and became missionaries or servants in the diplomatic service, or whatever, never really escaping from the orbit of their childhood. And this has occurred again and again. I found it in Japan, too, talking with missionary children, who were often lost. They were psychically aliens in a world that could not accept them either as Americans, or as, in that case, Japanese. In my case, going back to India was an attempt to relive the childhood, rather than going on and saying we're all adults, let's do something else.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

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ROBERT F. BROWN: This is a third interview with Gerry Williams, Dunbarton, New Hampshire, April 19, 1979. We've talked about many aspects of your career, but I'd like today to dwell on your works themselves. And perhaps you could talk a bit about what you were thinking about, what you were doing, influences and the like, perhaps even before you went into your own first apprenticeship in pottering.

GERALD WILLIAMS: When I first got the idea of being a potter, I was reading a book by Arthur Morgan on small businesses. And a paragraph—and it leaped out of the page at me, and it had talked in a rather romantic

manner about a potter in North Carolina. But from that moment on, I knew that I wanted to be a potter. I had not had any prior experience in potting, I had not been to art school. None of my friends or relatives were involved in the work, so there was a period of very intuitive decision-making that took place, in which I believe I made this decision intuitively. Not having, therefore, any prior experience nor education, and wishing indeed not to go that route, but to find my own private route, I started to think about where I might get first influences and experiences. And one of the very most important things that I've felt intuitively that I wanted to do was to see as much primitive art as possible. [00:02:03] I'd lived in India and had been brought up in an environment of relative primitive cultures, and therefore it was part of my background, but one of the first things that I felt a very strong need to do, when I decided to be a potter, was to go to a library and read as much as possible about primitive art. It was an overriding, overpowering need on my part. So I happened to be at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, and spent almost a solid month in the library, poring through all their books on primitive art, including the Indian work, taking voluminous notes and diagrams, and relating to it on as emotional, and again intuitive, level as possible, not thinking that why I was doing this, or what purpose I would make of it, what use I would make of it, but just rather immersing myself in this as I felt a very strong need to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This led where you were convinced you wanted to be, interested in pottery now, right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: In pottery.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did this come out, do you suppose? How did this—as the influence—

GERALD WILLIAMS: I've always had a very strong interest in symbolism. And in primitive work, I felt a very strong sense of the symbol being used in their art forms. I related to this. And I started early on to translate some of those symbols that I was particularly interested in, into my designing for pottery. [00:04:00] And have felt, as a matter of fact, that all throughout my professional career, I have really dealt with symbols in one manner or another, whether they've been highly aesthetic symbolism of form, or whether they've been very articulate symbolism of social commentary, or whatever, they nevertheless have been things that I have consistently felt from the very first moment of my interest in a professional career in pottery, until the present. And I expect it to continue, as a matter of fact.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: So having done that, I then came to New Hampshire and began to work in the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen in their adult education courses, trying to learn technique, and learn what pottery was all about. Then I apprenticed for a year—

ROBERT F. BROWN: To John Butler?

GERALD WILLIAMS: —to John Butler. And my—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, were you able at this point to begin to translate some of these—this immense store of knowledge, or notes you'd made on symbolism in primitive art, into, what, the decoration or the forums of your own work?

GERALD WILLIAMS: For a while, I didn't do any decoration at all, just being preoccupied with learning how to throw the pot, learning what glaze was all about. Learning how to manipulate the material, and to use some of the basic techniques.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: So it wasn't until—actually, I started to work on my own after the apprenticeship that I began tentatively and hesitantly to explore some of the decorative techniques that made use of those symbols that I had early on found an interest in. [00:06:04]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But at that moment—those first years, so when you were doing pottery, learning here in New Hampshire, it didn't—the symbolism, this intense study that had preceded your coming here didn't come out in your work. Is that right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Not really. I guess it was sort of latent.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

GERALD WILLIAMS: I worked with Vivika Heino in Concord, New Hampshire for a while, and her interests were primarily in developing form on the wheel, and in glaze color and texture. And from her, I learned a great deal about different kinds of materials, how they react in glaze, and so forth. So I was really working in that context at first, in order to get a reparatory, so I could start working.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was she a very sympathetic teacher, from your point of view?

GERALD WILLIAMS: She was a very good teacher, in that she was very knowledgeable. She had a great deal of experience already, and she was a very authoritative instructress. She brooked no nonsense, and if you cracked a smile while she was lecturing, she'd let you know in no uncertain words that you were not paying attention.

ROBERT F. BROWN: She did lecture, though? What was she trying to get across in a lecture?

GERALD WILLIAMS: There were technical lectures having to do with glaze theory, or computation, things of that sort.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And material that I have used ever since then in a very basic way, and built on for my professional work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So it was immediately practical? Or at least it was eventually practical, everything she—

GERALD WILLIAMS: It was all useful, it doesn't matter what you get at that early stage there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

GERALD WILLIAMS: There's nothing that you can't use in one way or another. Even at the workshop of John Butler's, where I apprenticed for a year, in which there was an emphasis more on casting ceramic forums than in throwing the ceramic forums, I received a great deal of information and technique that I have since used, such as the use of plaster for mold-making, how to make a mold, how to cast in it, how to do [inaudible] at the clay, and things of that nature, which are useful now. [00:08:22] And which, as a matter of fact, are coming back into style with a new look on multiple forums through casting, and so forth.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you have—were you optimistic then that you were catching on pretty fast? Did you feel you were a quick learner?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I was probably a natural thrower. And I've seen a few people like that, that have automatically, and without any effort, apparently, sat down and made pots on a wheel, and had an instinctive sense of style, though rudimentary in the work that they first do. So it was never difficult for me, nor did I feel any special frustration over the techniques that I was faced with. It was—I learned to throw very quickly, with—very soon producing small forums that were, in effect, learning forums, but were also potentially useful for turning into money, since I was determined to spend my life earning a living. So I had to learn how to make pots that other people wanted to buy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Could you see in those early years as you look back, did you have a style even then? Was there some distinctive way of doing things yourself?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Hmm. I think it's true that one has, early on, a consistent style that one keeps in later life as well, even though the form of it might change. [00:10:12] There is certain basic similarity between the work that I did then and the work that I do now, which changes a matter of embellishment and so forth, but the truth actually is that we are endowed, even at that early moment, with certain intrinsic and artistic beliefs. And these beliefs are what channel all our activity and our thoughts and aesthetic judgments. Therefore, if that's fairly well-developed at that time, what you really do is to build on it and mature on that. So I think that my work, while it's changed a great deal, has a certain similarity in some of the early styles. One sometimes also sees an early piece, and as I've sometimes done, been amazed that it was really fairly well-made. I'm not putting myself in any special category, except that it's fun to know that while you may have thought your work was very rudimentary at that time, there was actually a certain finesse to it that is presently recognizable.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And because of your later technical aspirations, you might very well think that, well, my work then was much cruder, because you have become much more sophisticated in technical matters since then, haven't you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's true.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were some of the shapes and sizes of the work? You said it was small at that time. Do we have any examples of that? [00:12:02]

GERALD WILLIAMS: I have very few early pieces. And they were almost wholly utilitarian, that is, they were sugars and creamers, and pitchers and bowls, cereal bowls and things like that. I did some plates early on. They were the kind of forums that were also an aesthetic and production style in New Hampshire at that time, that were connected with the work being sold through the fairs at the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen. Work

being done by the Sheiers—utilitarian work being done by Edwin and Mary Scheier, and by a couple who live up the road about seven miles from here. One of the early potters in this area, I can't think of his—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Could you in general kind of characterize that utilitarian style at the time here in New Hampshire?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It was a kind of latter day colonial type of work, built on the sensibilities that come from utilitarian work. Not highly decorative, and not in any manner connected with, say, post-Victorian work, or with the European sensibilities that resulted from that. Nor was it Oriental in context. In the last—about five years ago, I did a fairly extensive study of colonial New Hampshire work, particularly in connection with Daniel Clark, and did some lecturing and so forth. [00:14:00] And discovered that the pieces that were being made then were the direct antecedents of work being done at this moment, well, on a certain level, and there were other levels, too. But it was kind of interesting, to find a glazed, but simple and utilitarian forums still being done when I came on the scene here, when things rapidly changed—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they earthen colors? Were they red ware?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It was all earthenware, what we called "earthenware" at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: Red clay, often dug here in New Hampshire. Sometimes the clay came from as far away as Kentucky. Stoneware was not widely known.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this was you were—essentially the kind of work you were doing at that point.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Essentially, it was my start.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

GERALD WILLIAMS: And it was my start under Vivika Heino, and a man named Richard Moll.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But surely, they were working at a more sophisticated level as well.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Oh, much more sophisticated. But in terms of the encouragement for students, which was what we were, they suggested forums that were consistent with this. And the aesthetics reflected by our environment, that is, the environment of the arts and crafts movement here in New Hampshire, was connected with that, essentially, because the production were developed for sale at the fairs suggested utilitarianism, suggested simplicity, suggested antecedents with the colonial period.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, that's interesting that on the other hand, then, they had their own more sophisticated aesthetic too, right? The Heinos did, and the like?

GERALD WILLIAMS: They did, yes. And the Scheiers as well.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. But you, as students, were encouraged to work in the simpler mode, at least in the beginning. [00:16:02]

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right. And that was entirely consistent and proper, because one has to learn.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But this was also a time when the League—there were a large number of indigenous potters, weren't there, that had been encouraged by the League, and who were working in this mode? So this was sort of the thing that indigenous and new potters like yourself would do here, is that right? It was a living, going thing, was it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It was going thing, although I must correct you by saying when I first came, there were only two potters in the state.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh.

GERALD WILLIAMS: The Scheiers and the Baileys is the name I was trying to say a little while ago. The Baileys and the Scheiers were the two production potters.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And since then, large numbers of people have come in, and the whole scene is changed. It's become much more sophisticated, and a common denominator extant all over the country exists here, as well.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But at that time, even though there were very few—two production potters, they were still being able at that date to work within a tradition, it was the tail end of a—

GERALD WILLIAMS: In looking back on it, I believe it was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Whether conscious or unconscious.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. Right.

GERALD WILLIAMS: And most probably, it was unconscious.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: But it existed, and I pay tribute to that, and I feel, in effect, that I am part of that heritage, and I'm happy to be associated with it, and I actively associate myself with that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. When you went to work casting with John Butler, did you get into a new mode, then? Or was he essentially working in a production, in a rather indigenous style?

GERALD WILLIAMS: His social sensibilities came from the Leach pottery in England. He wanted to set up a little Leach pottery here in New Hampshire. And he was to be the Mr. Leach, and he was to gather a group of people around him. [00:18:01] They would have this production factory that would produce reasonably good ware. He started out, however, by casting ware instead of throwing ware. I didn't care what it was, just so long as I got some more experience. And it was always good experience for me. I welcome and encourage anyone to get as wide a base as possible of information to use later on, or not to use, as the case may be.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, your first work when you were on your own, this was at Black Hill, is that here? I think you've talked about it before. Could you describe that, going on your own. Then let's get down to some specific pieces that you—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Okay. When I started, let's see, I was working—I was studying in the League, and my mother died. That became a watershed for me. So I went to our home in Albuquerque and lived there for a while. These thoughts and emotions began to take shape inside me. I came back and I was determined to be a professional. I found a small barn. It was a milk room, on a section of town outside south of Concord, called Black Hill. It was a road and a section, and I refer to that as the "Black Hill period." So this is where I first started.

I bought a little 12-inch electric kiln for $30 and set it up there. I made a wheel, had the flywheel cast at the local foundry, bought $100 worth of glaze material and a barrel of broken flowerpots, clay from Kentucky, and started working on my own. [00:20:00] That was when I began to work in a professional capacity, trying to earn my living on my own, and trying to learn in the process. So my forums there were first utilitarian. I did an enormous amount of experimenting for the next 10 or 12 years. I was experimenting continually, both in terms of the glazes, or in forums or in decoration. And one had to—I had to learn everything that others, perhaps, learned now in four years of school over a very intensive period on my own, from being influenced and getting material and getting information from other sources as well, people, museums, books, and so forth, at the same time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You say you had to learn them, you felt compelled?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I felt compelled to, because—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean you would feel as though you were in a rut after you had done the same thing for so long, then you would want to try something else?

GERALD WILLIAMS: No, not especially. It was just that there was so much to learn, the field was wide open, and I was a total blank slate. So anything I did was useful for me. While I knew that the work that I was making, the pots that I was producing, were simplistic and very rudimentary, I felt instinctively that I had a potential, that I knew inside myself, as misplaced or whatever the judgment might be, that I could produce good work, and I wanted to, and therefore I was moving in a forward, hopefully upward direction at all times. And that meant a great deal of experimenting, a great deal of throwing many pots, throwing 90 percent of them away, breaking them, giving them away, and keeping only a small portion that would then be translated into money in the shops for me to live, eat on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now what were the sorts of things that you approved of then, and kept? [00:22:01] Do we have any examples here? Anything we can—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, a couple of early pieces—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Some description of it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: There are a couple of early pieces here. This is the style that I started to work in when I first started to decorate. And this is a pot, a vase, about nine inches high, and about six inches wide. It comes from the latter part of that first period, when I discovered through my interest in primitive symbolism, how Sgraffito could be used on the side of the pot, and symbols that, in some cases, came directly from some of my early research, could be incorporated in the forum. So this pot here, that has a small man and fish, and different symbolic designs on it is a fairly good example from that period of work. And I did a great many pots that had this kind of design on it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This basic forum, the basic, overall forum is the conservative sort of colonial style forum that you were speaking of earlier, to which you've now applied this symbolism?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, I imagine, basically speaking, that's true, although at first what I was referring to were the simple pitcher type things—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, okay.

GERALD WILLIAMS: —and the bowls to eat out of, and so forth.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's what I wanted to ask. Because this is not quite the—

GERALD WILLIAMS: No, these have become another aesthetic in relation to the fact that they are less functional, except that they're vase forums. And they rely much more on decoration, rather than the forum to carry the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Certainly do.

GERALD WILLIAMS: —than the function, to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Not merely the abundance of decoration, but the nature of the glaze, this gold, or gold-like glaze here. [00:24:06] Why was that put on, do you know?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Unfortunately, I was infatuated with gold luster at one small period of my development. And I fool around with it in this context. That's less important than the Sgraffito through colored slips, both green or blue, or black, depending on whether I used cobalt, copper, or copper and manganese together.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And I enjoyed doing this, because it made a very sharp line for me. It made an articulate design that, again, which I was trying to put on my pots in such a way that the symbolism became an articulated symbolism.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean one that was clear?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Clear, if that is clear to me sometimes, not always to the viewer. But clear to me. It was a sharp image, and not a soft image, as the Oriental images. It concerned not nature in its softer, more naturalistic elements, but intellectualized, Western-oriented concepts, stemming, I think, in part from the Greco-Roman tradition, rather than the Oriental tradition.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I'm assuming—the man with this enlarged, sort of fetal head, isn't it? And then the fish, which is upright on its tail, I'm looking at here.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Then suggestions of sun and stars and the like. It's sort of—

GERALD WILLIAMS: None of them had any particular story, except again, I was just playing with elements of symbolism. And I believe in the deepest sense, they are psychic elements in my nature, and come from a psychic understanding, and have been articulated in some way. [00:26:18] Perhaps they have a meaning that even I am not aware of. Obviously, there is some reason why they were put in this context of fish and a sun, and a man and a flower. Why those are related together, I don't know, except that I assume they came out of my subconscious, and there is a reason, as there is a reason for all things, there is a reason for their being there in that sequence. But I got eye strain doing these things. Now, do them by the hundreds, and they would take me half an hour to an hour or more, even a day sometimes, to do. And they were really turning me into a blind man.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you work with a design in front of you? Or just in your head, after you put on the slip and cut away, freeform?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I always worked directly on the pot.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I sometimes do, in sculptural forums, make designs, two-dimensional designs on paper, particularly when I was doing my social sculpture, social commentary sculpture.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: But in things like this, I generally put the slip on and then drew with a soft pencil a series of images or forms, until they began to coalesce into an attractive relationship that was consistent both with the form and the shape of the form, and the position on that form. Like things that had continuity that moved around, that were not one-sided, or didn't have a beginning, a back or a front, or a beginning or an ending, and that allowed one to see the contour and the circular motion of the wheel, which is what the pot was made on. [00:28:16] And then I would scratch through with a tool, just a bent wire, usually, or a piece of canton [ph] ribbon that had been bent around and tied with fine wire, onto a stick. This was done at a point where it was leather-hard, so that the slip could be removed just enough so that the surface of the clay below it was showing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And yet there's clear evidence of the removal. I mean, it's as though—it's comparable to roughly blocking out a wood carving—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Exactly. And I wished to leave there, so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —part of the texture.

GERALD WILLIAMS: —so that's part of it to show it is not a brushed design, nor is it a painted design. But it's a design made—it's actually in relief, because your—positive and negative, because you're removing the—one part of it to make a negative, so that the positive will stand. And in the last couple of years, I returned this, as a matter of fact, this technique, to see what would happen if I went back to a very old, early technique, and what happened to it in the process, if I was still satisfied with it, or how I would change it. And while I found that I had changed in its—in my sophisticated understanding of design, and so forth, yet essentially it hasn't changed very much. So again, my thesis, at least on the spur of the moment, is that we don't really change very much, from the very beginning. [00:30:00] And the very best artists, or the very best craftsmen, have that innate quality, that sensitivity, that nervous alignment of perceptions that is fairly well-defined, although it develops and flowers later on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, in this at the time, did you feel you had succeeded quite a lot? In this sort of thing? Now, you told me it ended in eye strain, but I mean, apart from that, the tedium of doing it. Do you feel that you were succeeding, and this is a very strong object, and the textural ghost of the scraping away is a very important, integral part. And I find that also that it contrasts with the throwing work itself—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —which has a continuity and a homogeneity to it.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, I liked doing it, and I felt that they were fairly successful. And I did a lot of them that were a good deal more complex than this. And I felt satisfied with them, although looking at it now, it looks pretty primitive to me. But for what it was at the time, and where I was at the time, I feel that they were reasonably good examples of what I was able to do at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you were pushing your technical abilities quite a lot at this point. You always have, haven't you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, I've never been satisfied at all with anything that I have done, although I have been—let's see, I have learned accept them for what they are at that time, the limitations inherent in the lack of experience, or lack of knowledge or lack of sensitivity.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

GERALD WILLIAMS: But for what they were at the time, and who I was at the time, I feel that they are reasonably—I feel reasonably happy with them. [00:32:04]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And at the time, as you just said, you weren't ever satisfied. You always wanted to try something else.

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right. For instance, the next type of thing developed with wax-resist—that is, instead of scratched away surface, as this vase here has an example of a fairly early technique where I went to the wax line with a water soluble was called Cerumol, and laid on both the design and positive and negative sections. Using the same slips and the same glaze, and often similar type of patterns, I began to develop this a lot more. For one thing, it was not as much strain on me, I could do it faster, and it was consistent with my need to develop on another level. So I did a lot of those things from time to time, using a lot of figures, things that were very complex and were, again, continued articulation of patterns and stories, or symbols that interested me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And this technique you found was—it's somewhat comparable, say, to lithography for a printmaker, right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It is, right. Very much so, yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —so to speak, with the wax.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Right. Yeah. And I block out certain sections. For instance, this would be put on first, this blue section, and then it would be waxed over, and then I'd put on this section, putting the slip over the whole pot, and it would be covered up by the blue section. [00:34:05] The wax would cover up the blue section so it wouldn't take the cobalt and the copper and manganese section. And they became very complicated, because I was blocking out areas all over the pots, and working much as batik would be used.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the drawing came through? That was left when you dipped it in the slip, or put the slip on?

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right. That was put on first.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure. Yeah. And again, these are more or less symbolic forums, but in this particular example, they're much more simplified and generalized, it seems to me.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: The forum itself, this is a sort of an open-mouthed vase, about the same size, a little shorter than the other—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes, these were still in earthenware. A red pot. And my sign—in the very first pot I made was a little hand-carved hand, actually it came from the Santa Clara bear claw that I had seen in Northwest New Mexico. And in the very first ones, I put my initial on each side, G and W on each side of it. Then I left off the initials and just put the little imprint, the hand imprint for a couple of years. Then I guess I lost it, or got tired of it, and started writing my name, which I have done ever since.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. And this was an important thing. When you put that on, did that mean you liked it? That was one of the 10 percent you were going to keep?

GERALD WILLIAMS: You mean the paw? Well, I put the paw on everything that I kept.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

GERALD WILLIAMS: But I wouldn't always be satisfied with it after it came out of the kiln. If it was a disagreeable glaze treatment, or I didn’t like the forum, or it just didn't appeal to me, I'd simply get rid of it. [00:36:05] I had a cellar full of pots like that that I sold for, like, 75 cents to—I remember once, a guy came and said, do you have any seconds? This was a dealer from Cape Cod. Ooh, I said, "I have some down here." So I took him down there, and here was my huge pile of these rejected pieces. So he bought almost every one of them. And I didn't learn until later, of course, he'd sold them on the open market and made a considerable profit out of them, which didn’t please me, but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: No. No. And that's a problem, isn't it? That these are sold, and bought and sold, and it's yours.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, the problem was my naivety, and not his chicanery. It simply—one shouldn't sell those, one should destroy them.

ROBERT F. BROWN: These others I'm looking at here on a slide of this time, right, particularly the one on the right with a thin neck, you'd recall certain of the Greek vase shapes. Are these conscious, or again out of the intuitive process, certain shapes that may or may not be historic?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Mm. Well, that covered jar, which has a sweeping cover on it that comes up to a wide knob, actually came from European influences via the Wildenhains, and went to the West Coast where Marguerite

worked, who influenced Peter Voulkos, who then influenced a lot of other potters, to that kind of forum. And some of the forums that potters use today can be traced, I think, in that context to specific people or specific influences. [00:38:07]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. In your case, what was the case here in the '50s when you were—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, probably both the Wildenhains and Voulkos. Voulkos was just starting out, Peter Voulkos, on the West Coast, and was doing—was in his classical period before he went into abstract expressions, and then clay. So he was making forums that were quite classical in their context, and I think influenced by the Wildenhains, who had brought the influence over from Europe, from European work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you yourself—you were interested in such shape yourself, then?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Oh, yes, like everyone else, I was influenced by exhibitions and shows that these pieces were traveling around in. And they would come—a show of contemporary work in the early '50s would come to the Currier Gallery, and I would lap it up. Or there were photographs and magazines, and I would be influenced by that. But in large, I think that my development occurred along several lines, and not just one line. And the pieces that I am now influenced by probably are closer to utilitarian line of work that's really done all over the world. But colonial New England work is an early influence—was an early influence on my work. It was an aesthetic that I studied very carefully, or when I first came.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, this early period is all red ware. Did you—and yet you glazed it with cobalt, manganese and blues, and then there's a basic buff color ground here as well. Did you ever think to, or want to retain that red ware on the outside? That reddish color? [00:40:00]

GERALD WILLIAMS: Not essentially. I've never been terribly fond of unglazed red ware.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I've felt that, unlike porcelain and unlike some stoneware, red ware just didn't appeal to me that much. It happened to be a medium in which I was working at that time. It was a style, and the technology was wrapped up in the development of red ware, or earthenware. So I was always more interested in covering it with a glaze, using glaze color or a decoration, as I later got more and more in to use it as a way of saying certain things, essentially. And was not interested, at that time, in the unglazed surfaces.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, this was characteristic, then, of your old time in South Concord, in Black Hill, right? This is what we can—

GERALD WILLIAMS: To a large extent, this is the material that I produced during that period, and also in a period where I worked at a studio that the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen rented me in the back of their building, at 205 North Main. And I worked there for about a year before I moved elsewhere.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they your main outlet?

GERALD WILLIAMS: At the time being, they were the main outlet. But as my professional career advanced, it became obvious that they couldn't take all that I wanted to sell, and therefore, I started to expand my markets and went outside the state. Until later on, either I or my wife and I, once I was married, would take long selling trips down to Philadelphia, out to Cleveland, to Chicago and places like that, and we would sell our work. [00:42:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where, at shops mainly?

GERALD WILLIAMS: At shops. At shops. And take orders and come back and fill them, and go out again. It was an interesting—though a rather hectic way of making a living. It was rather simplistic and rather primitive, but it was very exciting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, by this time you developed an acquaintance here, fairly widely, with other craftsmen? There were growing numbers of them now, weren't they?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. By this time, the movement had started to expand. The war was over, this was the Second World War, and of course and the generation that had gone through the war, and had, under the GI bill, gone through the universities then had become teachers, and they were now beginning to be the first echelon layer of teachers that, then, this generation learned from.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And as that base widened and developed, the professional craftsmen had increased as well.

So now we have a very wide base in the pyramid that we all have a position on in one way or the other.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But it was a much, a much smaller number of inhabitants in the '50s.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, it was, when I first started.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I noticed in some of these pieces, things reminiscent of archaic Greek Aegean decoration and relief sculpture. Could you comment—were you actually going to see such things?

GERALD WILLIAMS: At that time I was very much involved in getting as much influence into my head as possible from all kinds of sources. And one of the most important sources were museums. [00:44:00] And I spent at least an afternoon every week in some museum, either in the Boston Fine Arts Museum, or anywhere, the Metropolitan, wherever I could get to. And I absorbed, like a sponge, anything that I could find. My interests were principally in the primitive sections. I loved the Egyptian, Greek, Syrian-type of things. I was not at that time as influenced by the Oriental work as necessary. But it's an interesting phenomenon, I think, and that is the phenomenon of the, quote, "self-made" artist, or person, something that is not as common nowadays as it once ways, because everyone goes through the university system now. But that was a time when it was commoner for an artist not to have gone through the university system, but to come to it by some intrinsic necessity of its own. Therefore, I am interested always in how these so-called self-made artists trained themselves. What are their methods of learning about aesthetics, learning about techniques? Do they make use of libraries, of museums, or watching other people work and studying the exhibitions?

ROBERT F. BROWN: At that time you were making sketches, making verbal notes?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I had notebooks.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. And again, you can't tell, or perhaps remember exactly what attracted you to these ancient Western cultures. Do you know what was it in their figure, or symbolic representation that appealed to you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: What appealed to me was the power of their symbolism. And I related, and have always related myself to the folk artist, essentially, and feel that in my sculptural work, for instance, that it's much closer to the folk artist and the very basic concept of folk art than, say, to the refined aesthetics of sculpture in its fine art context. [00:46:20] I have no training as a sculptor, so that I'm not involved in that kind of thing. But I am involved in making very direct statements via the material, and being as powerfully symbolic as possible. And I think that's what folk art was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: So I didn't have to go to college to learn this, I really had it in my background in the first place, from India. And secondly, I could see it in every museum in the country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now in these pieces here, where the use of human figures in at least two out of the three, what were you trying to express in those, do you think? They're very powerful images. They're simple, it looks—

GERALD WILLIAMS: I can't remember what they were at the moment. I think that was my Miro [ph] section period, something like that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But the placement of a human form on the side of a pot, how did that strike you? Why did you suppose you did it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I did it because I had to in the first place [laughs], or wanted to. All art is human-oriented, as Karl Marx once said, was quoted widely by the people, "Man is the root," so that art is involved in beliefs and sensibilities, connected with social endeavors. Man is a part of that. I was interested in that, and have always been involved in the symbolism with man, as such, and the symbolism of muma [ph], the male-female context I advanced to at early time by the Adam and Eve symbolism, and made use of that a lot in my pots. [00:48:08]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I wonder what effect did it have? Why would you put it on your pots? You were interested in that symbolism, and you just wanted to sort of have a picture of that on one of your creations?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, one says—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You reckon it affects the overall response to your—well, in yourself, to your work, when you've gouged, say, an Adam and Eve in the side of your pot? You've got the shape and form, and whatever usefulness there is in the pot. Then on the other hand, you also have this narration.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. Well, I would agree with you in the inference of your question; that is, why have so much? One is enough. But at that time, I was very interested in doing this kind of decoration and wished to develop it. And the only plea that I would have in my defense is that it was a period of my development that I wished to purse, and did it. Now I'm not as interested in over-decorating the pot, I'm much more interested in what the form itself says, as via porcelain, and so forth. But in another way, maybe it was waiting for a certain aesthetic that comes from the material; that is, I had to wait maybe for porcelain to come along, or my experience with porcelain to come along before I could truly appreciate that kind of intrinsic quality of the forum.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, I'm not pleading one side or another, although I could comment that in all of this, you have shied away from the natural material school of crafts and design. [00:50:01] For example, you mentioned earlier that you glazed the red, where you don't leave it exposed, et cetera. Well, no point in getting into the various reasons for that, because I assume it was simply your feeling at that time.

GERALD WILLIAMS: It was my feeling at that time, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Influenced by what contemporaries were doing, influenced by these many things you were studying.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. And then later on, I came to appreciate the natural character of the clay, as the stoneware and porcelain.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

GERALD WILLIAMS: So at this period, it was important for me to do that, and the results are interesting, if not pleasing sometimes, to me anyway.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, some are very, very direct and powerful, and very nice, I feel, despite the strength of the decoration, somehow, that that and the shape and the placement, as you said earlier, the shape of the piece and the placement of that decoration on the piece all go well together.

GERALD WILLIAMS: A man who's always been interested in decoration saying things one way or another, I suppose I was forming concepts that had preceded me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Well, another phase, as you described to me, was what—you were working with stoneware. Can you describe how you got into that? What it meant to you at the time?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. The technical shift was one that was pretty scary, because I went from what I thought was a pretty hot cone one into a hot—an extremely hot and almost frightening cone six, which is only a couple of cones up. Now of course, cone six is a very cold, cold temperature to me, because I'm working much higher than that. But at that time it was a little like breaking the sound barrier, or the one-minute miles, or whatever it is, so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And everything had to be done more precisely?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Everything had to be readjusted. For instance, the first thing I learned was that the glazes that I used at low temperatures, which were lead-based, could not be used at high temperature, because the lead volatilized out beyond cone three and created enormous bubbles, and all kinds of things. [00:52:13] So that was the first technical lesson I learned. Remember, I am a self-educated artist; that is, I'm having to learn everything on my own.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

GERALD WILLIAMS: So I didn't have anyone to steer me clear of the rocks, and mistakes were multiple.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So in fact, you had some big bubbles on pieces.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Oh, enormous.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

GERALD WILLIAMS: So the first thing was to learn the technology of high-temperature firing, which meant shift principally to Feldspathic glazes, rather than lead, or fritted glazes. I then had to start testing glazes all over again. So this meant a whole new batch of complex chemical formulas that had to be tested and tried, and developed for the higher temperatures. Then I went from that into cone—from cone six into cone nine, and nine into 10, 10 into 11, so I'm now firing between 10 and 12, cone 10 and 12. And in this period, I had then to go from earthenware, which was the red ware, into a stoneware, because earthenware will not go above cone one, that's about its capacity.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The very body, the matrix itself crumbles, or doesn't perform predictably?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. It has so much iron on it that it tends to fuse and melt, and lose its shape. So one has to go into more refractory materials, and this is what the stoneware clays will provide. And the normal range for stoneware is then about cone nine or cone 10. So it was apparent that I quickly had to get to cone nine and cone 10. [00:54:01] So that was achieved. And I began to work with forums that were stoneware in shape, and in aesthetic orientation.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what does that mean, stoneware and shape, and—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, the clay is rougher and stronger. One can, therefore, make pots that are more vigorous. They can be large forums. The clay will stand up well in big shapes. They are generally not really refined pieces, because the material is rather coarse and sandpaper-like, not as refined, say, as earthenware and red ware, and certainly not as refined as porcelain. So that brings about forums that vigorous peasant-like—one can, in this context, begin to like the surface of the clay as much as the glaze that one puts on it. So you work much more with raw, unglazed surfaces, because the color of the clay is enhanced by the height of the firing, and the type of firing. Reduction firing increases the warmth of the stoneware clays. And glazes are, therefore, muted, because they react with the iron of the stoneware, and the glazes tend to be browns or creams, muted greens, blues, and so forth. Not bright pastel shades, color is available at low temperature in glaze firings. Or at high temperature in porcelain.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Porcelain. Yeah.

GERALD WILLIAMS: So the aesthetics connected with that resulted in pots that were essentially utilitarian, muted in colors, a lot of browns, heavy use of iron for iron-saturated glazes. [00:56:04] Some celadons the result of iron in reduction atmosphere in a glaze, and forums that are vigorous, utilitarian, useful.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And yet rough and slightly irregular.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Rough and irregular, because one didn't have the feeling of the preciousness that one has with a very refined clay, such as the earthenware or the red ware, or one has with porcelain. One has the sense of this coarseness being pulled through your fingers, or being manipulated by your fingers, and the sensibility in your mind is consistent with that, with that coarseness and roughness. Strength, power, masculinity is an essential element of this, instead of refinement femininity.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this accorded, I assume, with certain things of your whole life at that time, is that right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I guess so. One thing was marriage, certainly, and the need to have a consistent masculine image in the social structure of which I had become a part. Secondly, my markets were expanding, and I needed to earn more money to support my family and my habit, and therefore, I had to make more pots faster, and get them into certain markets to get a return on them for income. It was also a period of great technical expansion for me too, because this was when I started to work with new technology, photo-resistant earthenware, and photo-resistant wet fire. And I was exploring not only forums, but technology as well. [00:58:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You're moving, as you said, in a way yourself, from the earlier phase where things are more precise, and in a way more refined, into things that are rougher. Your whole aesthetic tends to become—or did it tend to become more irregular, more abstract? More allowing for accident, perhaps even?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, a word that commonly is used is "looser."

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: One is tight or loose as a creative person, whatever that means. I don't know what it means, except that there are times when you are in control of things, and times when you want not to be in control of things. The tendency among many potters, craftsmen and artists in general today is to be as loose as possible, perhaps anticipating the drug culture, but more probably having to do with the release that Albert Einstein brought us, when he said that the universe was not mechanistically-oriented, but was actually quite a good deal more complex and freer than we had imagined. Space can bend back on itself, and so forth. So artists—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you, for your part, could feel comfortable with this looseness?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. I was more at home with my material, in the first place.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: I was being also undoubtedly affected by the new breezes that were blowing from other

sources, the source of work through Peter Voulkos, and other were new, where the clay was being distorted and abstracted a great deal more. [01:00:00] In addition, I was, I think, more confident in myself and in my professional career, that what I was achieving, at that time at least, was reasonably good; therefore I had more self-confidence in myself.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And the pots I made were still utilitarian, but they were much wide—much more widely ranged in terms of their glaze and surface treatment. They weren't as tightly concerned with decoration as they had been with earthenware.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Could we, perhaps, look at a few of these examples of this? It looks here to be a very large jar. Can you describe the decoration, and what this meant to you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's a stoneware vase or bottle, about 18 inches tall. And it, in effect, is a continuation of the kind of decorative treatment that I had been involved in in my early period.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes?

GERALD WILLIAMS: That is, using the wax-resist line in a much more abstracted manner, but still concerned with symbols. Those are—the decoration which is all over that in wax on the raw clay, covered with a blue ash glaze, those symbols are still, in my inner mind, connected with my early period. So there are really elements of symbolic design that I am abstracting a lot more effectively, perhaps, over the side of the pot, and making use of the new stoneware technology.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. They're not in registers as the earlier ones; they're scattered. They're more overall a dispersal of them.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, less controlled, freer. I think they're also coming under the aesthetic sensibilities of the Orient, where the brush is the controlling factor, and not the scratching line, scratching tool. [01:02:13]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], which is more an instrument of precision.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Precision, and Western-oriented.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. But the overall shape here is very whole and even and uniform, isn't it? Of this particular piece?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

GERALD WILLIAMS: It is a forum that I am very fond of, and like to do a lot of, because it's utilitarian first, you can put cookies or glass eyes or ashes in it. The cover, I like the technology of fitting two parts together. And that covered jar has a celadon glaze on it with applique sections put over the surface, and waxed off, leaving them unglazed, so they stand out from the pool of gray-green sawed-on glaze around them.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: As if they were islands in an ocean, or elements of intellectual organization in a sea of emotion. Whatever.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This does a given element of irregularity to the other one, the even underlying shape, in this case, yeah, because of the relief nature—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —of the applied pieces.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, I often find myself using contrapuntal elements on one, two or more levels, where the rhythmic nature of the instrument that you make the pot on, the wheel, is defined and shadowed in some way by an element that is at variance to it. Either abstracted, or irregular, or hand-built, or something like that, so that there is another element of interest in it. [01:04:10]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, I detected that in this vase from your first phase, where the decorative element, the Sgraffito work, is more the latter, whereas the evidence of the wheel, of the continuity of that is also apparent. So this is evidently, then, this contrapuntal thread has gone throughout your work.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Flip this over, do you mind?

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ROBERT F. BROWN: Now you worked closely with Allen Eaton for at least two months in India, and you'd known him a bit before. And I suppose you saw him afterward. Could you give some characterization of the man?

GERALD WILLIAMS: He was a legend by the time I had met him. He had had wide experience in setting up three of the major craft organizations in America; the first was the Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild, the second was the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, the third was the American Craftsmen's Council. And he had not only experience in the field with craftsmen, but had very important contacts with government officials, and had a liaison with government people of all kinds. And that was useful. He was a man who had infinite compassion for the craftsmen, and felt a kinship, I think, with the things that were made the spirit, essentially, things that had the emotions of real people linked to them in a very real way; thus, the old quilts and the whittlings of the Southern Highlands people, who did things for Aunt Emma, or because Uncle Ben needed it for his deathbed, or something, was an important reason, rather than, say, for an exhibition or art gallery, as we do it today. [00:02:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: He wasn't even particularly interested that these things be exhibited or not?

GERALD WILLIAMS: He was always interested that they got their due, but primarily because he wanted the people to get their due. And he was full of anecdotes about the people who had made the objects that he loved, and had deep-rooted relationships with many people all over the country. He never learned how to drive a car, so that he traveled everywhere by train, or he was very clever at finding someone like myself, who would drive him places, which I was delighted to do. And in spite of that seeming handicap in this twentieth technological age century, he probably visited more fairs and saw more craftsmen than anyone that I know of during that period. He had an enormous amount of energy. He had an inexhaustible source of energy. His willpower was profound. He looked gentle and weak, but he had a steel spring in his back. He was an erudite man without giving the impression of being a man of learning. He wrote well, he was a keen observer of the craft scene, although he, himself, I think never did anything. He was a man who had come into it through an exhibition that he had done on the West Coast, a Pan American exhibition. [00:04:05] And he was a great credit to the American craftsman scene. One of the few people of that kind who gave the American craft scene stature and dignity, and who—through whom, many hundreds and thousands of people learned about quality of craftsmanship, and about loving and cherishing things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you think his not liking crafts to become art objects, art for art's sake, had a lot to do with this broadening of the public's awareness of good quality and good craftsmanship?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It certainly did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: A populist—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. It certainly did. And he was, in that sense, a man whose time had come, because the craft scene has moved through a succession of events into the art world. In a way, he was a craft—he was a cultural ethnologist, because he saw the vanishing group of American craftsmen who were folk-oriented, and aligned himself with them, and wished to preserve them, but recognized that they were having their day.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did he line up against, say, the American Crafts Council, and the magazine, *Craft Horizon* and all, which happened over the years, that tended toward promoting at least exhibitions?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I can't truly say what they thought of him, because I don't know. [00:06:04] I do know that he was in on the initial councils that took place when the American Crafts Council was being formed, and therefore had a voice. But I suspect that the voice was listened less and less to, as the impetus for the movement was organized through the council ACC toward museum and exhibition-oriented things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you count your own work, by and large, more or less in his camp, of there are two camps, right? Because you said, when we first talked, you felt your work was rooted in utility, and utilitarianism, with sometimes excursions into reflections, expressions of social consciousness. But by and large, basically utilitarian. You liked to think of it as usable?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I think that would be fair to say. And I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did this continue into the 1960s, I mean, which was a time when—well, it began with that excursion to India. But at the time also, you did work with a textile collection in Mexico.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. I think of my own work being aligned, essentially, with the folk artist, all over the world. And the work that I've done through my effigies are, in a way, linked directly to that; they are not, I believe, part of the fine arts mainstream, insofar as I don't think of them as being trained from an academic sense to be art objects. They are made for certain social reasons and for certain personal reasons. [00:08:01] And those, I believe, are the kinds of objects that folk all over the world have been used to making for thousands of years, regardless of where it is. The utility of my objects is basic, although some of the things are not necessarily utilitarian. But I, through the magazine, otherwise, have a core belief that crafts be linked in forum to utility. That is essentially their function. I'm not a sculptor and I'm not a painter, I'm a potter, therefore, utilitarian or useful vessels are the kinds of things that is my meter. And I make no apology for the fact that that's a case that's simply a core belief of mine. I do not try to be something I am not, and within that context, I believe I am being true to my own—spirited to my own culture.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you did, was it in the beginning of the '60s, perhaps earlier, do some technical experiments. Could you go into those a bit?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I've always been interested in advancing certain ideas that seem to have potential to me. And at that time, I was very interested in the technical side of pottery; that is, trying to understand and to explore its techniques. I have worked with two techniques that I helped develop, one was called "wet fire" and the other was called "photo-resist." I have also done some exploratory work in plastics. [00:10:06]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Could we go into each of those?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Surely.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The wet fire technique, was that something originating with you? Or was that something based also in certain traditional—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Essentially it's based on the Raku technique, which is, as you know, Japanese in origin. However, the difference is that in the Raku technique, the pot has been biscuited first, and then the process, essentially, is one in which the biscuited object is put into a low [ph] or enamel-type kiln, and enamel-type glazes are put on them, and then they're fired in a very short period of time. In the process that I worked with, which I named "wet fire," there is no biscuiting of the object. You take wet clay and it's put directly into the hot fire, then biscuited off, then glazed and thrust back into the fire, and glazed at the higher temperature. So when the process is working, one can have a finished piece of pottery in an hour and a half from the time that it was made with wet clay to the time that you hold it in your hand as a finished, fired object.

ROBERT F. BROWN: With the glaze all on it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: With the glaze on it, yes. Normally this takes weeks or at least days to accomplish. The technique first suggested itself when I was teaching at Haystack, and a student said, while we were doing some Rakuing, "What would happen if I put a wet pot into the kiln?" And knowing from past experience that one did not put any moisture into a hot kiln, otherwise it turns to steam and therefore explodes, I said, "Let's try it." [00:12:08] Interestingly enough, it came through without exploding. So I began to think about that, and wonder why that was, from that most casual moment, which under normal circumstances might simply have been forgotten, a seed developed. And I kept thinking about that, as to why it was. If one could do that, then one could bypass a whole section of the ceramic process, that would allow you to accelerate the technique.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Namely, what, the drying, and the long—

GERALD WILLIAMS: The making and drying, yes. So over the next two years, two or three years, I worked with a number of different kinds of clay, a number of different inclusions in the clay, and redesigned the kiln, so that it became a double-chambered instrument, each chamber of which was used for a certain specific project, part of the process. We developed a certain clay body, it had three or four ingredients in it. We found a material called Kaowool, that's a ceramic fiber, we put that in the clay. The clay, made of this object, totally wet, is then put with tongs into a red-hot kiln, and it does not explode. The theory, I believe, is that it protects itself by an envelope of evaporating moisture from direct exposure to the air to the heat, after it's dried and then fired, in effect biscuiting, it's pulled out and then glazed and put back in again in the second chamber, and fired off. This technique, I've demonstrated widely. It's not essentially a studio process, because while the objects that I began to make had a certain commercial value—that is, people were beginning to want to buy them for the objects that they were, I thought it would more specifically as an educational process. [00:14:18] For instance, I've done a lot of workshops like this in schools where the children who are normally turned off by the ceramic process in

their classroom because it takes three weeks for the thing to dry and then another three weeks for it to be put in the kiln, were tremendously excited by an afternoon of wet firing, where they could make the little pots, or they could make dragons or horses, or whatever they were going to make, pick them up with tongs, and then with the excitement of a picnic, have a great deal of fun firing these things off. And in a short while, they would see what it looked like, what the glazes looked like. And they could experience the intimacy of the fire, and what it meant to put a piece of clay into the fire, and how it hardened, and how the glazes melted, and so on and so forth. So essentially, I believe it's an educational process. It teaches young people, anyone, through an accelerated appreciation of the various stages to understand what's taking place, and then go on to pursue your work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. So the end product was not the main thing that interested you in your work?

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right. Essentially, it was the process that was important to me. Although the end product was, with proper control, as viable an object as, say, anything else was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In your own work—

GERALD WILLIAMS: In my own—yeah. Yeah. In my own work, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did it affect your own work at all? This rapidity of this process, as opposed to the—well, no doubt you always have a number of things, whereas you're waiting three weeks, let's say, for something to dry, you're continuing to make other things? [00:16:11] So perhaps the difference isn't so great.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, I think it was—the technique was waiting to be developed, because it was part of the general freeing up and loosening up of the art form—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of your work?

GERALD WILLIAMS: —of my work, as well as other people's work. And what it was, essentially, was to make something that would—that would allow you to be much more spontaneous, much more loose, a freer treatment of the material that its traditional and very highly-organized matter would mean.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Japanese traditional process, it involved carrying the preparation of the wet—of the object further before it was fired, is that right? The biscuiting you spoke of.

GERALD WILLIAMS: The Japanese technique, Raku, is a process where the pots are made beforehand.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: Then they are taken to the house or the workshop, whatever, and glazed and then fired in a small kiln, and then pulled out. So the technique is intimately connected with, in its then form, with a tea ceremony.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: My own criticism of the wet fire technique that I developed is that it's dangerously close to the concept of instant pottery, as we have instant coffee and instant hamburgers, but seen within the context of its educational purposes, I think it's valid. [00:18:17]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But otherwise, you have problems with it because of this equipment that you can—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, like every process, it's deceptively simple. It appears that its very simplicity would allow it to be successful a hundred percent of the time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But no one had done it before, so it couldn’t have been that simple.

GERALD WILLIAMS: No one had done it that we know of, that no one had made a system out of it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. So it couldn't have been that simple, because if it were so, recommended itself—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, there is nothing new under the sun, and undoubtedly someone had done it before.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

GERALD WILLIAMS: But it has not been used within current memory as a viable technique. I can't say that it has swept the country in its—as a forum, and perhaps it shouldn't and won't. I had thought that perhaps it might have commercial value. And as a matter of fact, I made vague overtures to get the process copyrighted. But I was not interested in following it through. And if it does have commercial value, it'll lie somewhere in the future.

And I'm not interested in that in the slightest.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, the other process you mentioned, photo-resist, what—

GERALD WILLIAMS: The process of photo-resist, was started at about the same time, almost concurrently. [00:20:03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this, when, in the early '60s? Somewhere along there?

GERALD WILLIAMS: In the middle '60s.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: And it was at a time when potters in America were exploring with the Victorian concept of decals, and they were using decals in witty manners, seeing contemporary things, using commercial decals to put on things. I intuitively thought that there had to be some way of putting the image onto the surface of the claim without going through that complicated process of making a decal, which includes silk screening, and so forth, which bored me. So I found that there was, indeed, a commercial technique that Kodak had developed for its micro-circuitry industry, they were printing circuits on metal and ceramics with this material called "resist." And I wrote to Kodak, and they sent me some material from Pathé in France, came in yellow cans, all crunched into odd shapes. And I started to use this material in exploratory ways. The main thing was that I took what was essentially and industrial technique and developed it for the studio, within the context of what the *Studio Potter* would be used for. So there are several systems that are used in this context, they depend on one material called KPR, Kodak Photo Resist. The KPR material depends on a contact, positive transparency. And it depends on the projection of ultraviolet light for its effectiveness. [00:22:03] The second system is called a KOR, Kodak Ortho Resist, and that can be projected with a tungsten light. So that becomes much more interesting, because you can work on a three-dimensional surface.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You're projecting this onto the clay, right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Onto the clay. Onto the clay, which has an emulsion already applied to it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: Then once that emulsion is activated, it has a chemical called butyl acetate with a ceramic medium applied. And that polymerizes the material. It's not a iodide surface, such as a film is. It locks on to the extent of the projection of the light, the material that you put on it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It locks on—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Locks it into the polymer. Polymerizes it. Then you dried-off wash it, and what comes out is a picture on the emulsion. Then we fire it. The emulsion burns off, leaving the ceramic material behind, so that it becomes an impervious surface with a photograph on it. It's really a lot of fun. I did quite a bit of it for a couple of years, primarily an experimentation. It does take time, and I've written some material on it. I have not carried it on any farther than that. But other people have worked with that technique and expanded it, slightly. And there are other methods as well, photo-transference, that ceramic people have been using in America.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did this accord with your basic aesthetic in terms of your work? I think at one point you were quoted—or you had written that you thought the wheel was sort of a center of things. [00:24:06] Throwing the pot was the basic thing in ceramics, to apply this sort of—from outside, this photographic image to your—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, I still feel personally that the wheel is the center of my own involvement in clay. I like it, and I like the things it does, and I like making utilitarian objects under a limited production method. But that does not exclude other things that could be done within the ceramic sphere, including photo resist, wet fire, and anything else. The more we expand our horizon, the more possibilities there are. And I don't think we should limit ourselves to any special type of thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. For you personally, were these excursions? Curiosity?

GERALD WILLIAMS: They were excursions. But I've always been interested in, and fixated by, certain ideas, so that when something interests me, an intuitive sense takes over so that I really have to follow it to the end, or to the end of whatever road I wish to travel at the moment. That was simply a special interest. I've always been interested in things that haven't been done very much, too, that's to be done—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you already doing workshops by the mid-'60s? Some form of teaching, regular teaching? You taught at the Currier Gallery in Manchester, New Hampshire in the '50s, right? [00:26:00]

GERALD WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then did you continually teach?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I began to get invited to teach at summer workshops in successive years. And in addition to that, there was a time when I was sort of on the road, doing colleges and universities in succession. That is, I went up into Canada on one tour, down into the Southern Highlands on one tour. I've done stints at Cortland, New York University, Brookfield Craft Center, Haystack, and so forth. These were one, two or three-week courses, either specialized or general.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What led me to ask that was, you mentioned the wet fire process came from some curiosity on the part of the student.

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sometimes the excursions maybe got initiated by a naïve question in a class, or a workshop.

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, the workshops, then, you were in other workshops. Now more recently, you've been involved in initiating workshops. You conduct such right here? You—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. After a while, we began to say, why should we go out, because we've got the garden to plant, and we like to have our kids around, and so forth. For several weeks in the summer, could we possibly do something here? So we began what we now call the Phoenix workshops. We bought a piece of property that came on the market across the road directly. We put up an octagon studio that serves as our graphics classroom. And in the summer, I give over the whole studio here to a six or seven week stint of people coming in working various courses. We usually give a kiln building course for one weeks. [00:28:02] And then there's a beginner's pottery course, which my friend, Peter Sabin teaches. And we've had an advanced course, porcelain courses. Last year I initiated the first of a series that I called master classes there, limited to six people, and they're very intensive, two and three-week periods with people who are quite advanced, who are beyond the other classes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But as you said earlier, are these people that are all working on part of your work, or some aspect of your work?

GERALD WILLIAMS: No, these are all classes. I have nothing—they don't have anything to do with my work. It's just a teaching situation.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They're here.

GERALD WILLIAMS: They're here. They live on our premises of [inaudible] down by the pond. They eat at our table, Julie and my daughter cook for them. Then we simply teach here. I teach some of the courses, other people come in and teach other courses.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They're not involved in the production of your work.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Not in the slightest.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

GERALD WILLIAMS: It's a summer teaching program, essentially. It's summer school, summer crafts school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you enjoy teaching? Do you feel it's a central part of your need to grow?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I like teaching, because I like to relate to other people. I learn as much as they do, which is sort of a cliché. But it's obvious that no one truly works creatively in a vacuum, and an environment where many people are doing many things creates an ambience of creativity that's very important to have, such as the development of the wet fire process, from a question that someone asked. Furthermore, I feel that in a way, I have something that people are perhaps looking for, and that is a sense that I am wishing to develop in which people try to understand themselves and the spirit of the work, rather than the technology of the work. [00:30:22]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: I can take it only in short doses, however.

ROBERT F. BROWN: These what, these—

GERALD WILLIAMS: These classes, yeah. I would not want to be connected with an academic institution.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Does a good deal leave you when you're teaching, or is it exhausting in ways?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It can be very exhausting, particularly if the group is a very demanding one. But I've tried to figure out a way in which I'm not zapped, because I have 15 or 20 other things that I am doing at the same time, that I try to keep going, such as the magazine or books, or my own writing, or some other project.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And having it right here in Dunbarton means you're not as fragmented.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Precisely.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You can go back to the sustenances.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Exactly, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Whereas you couldn't when you were, say, at Haystack—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Precisely.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —or elsewhere.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Precisely.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you have any general—any comments on some of the better-known craft centers where you have taught, or have been involved? For example, Haystack? Have you known that for many years?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I first taught there in '64, and I taught there a second time. I'm going back to teach there this summer. I'm also on the board of trustees of Haystack. It's a fine and extraordinary school. Penland in North Carolina is also an unusual, equally fine school. And there are other places, there are many, many other places around the country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What is the strength, would you say, of Haystack, in your opinion? What is the strength of it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I think its usefulness has been to develop a non-academic, short-term, intensive course in a certain discipline, in which you work with a master craftsman, or a person who is especially endowed to teach. [00:32:22] In addition to that, there is what they call a Haystack mix, which is important, that is out of all this comes an extraordinary energy and extraordinary vitality that everyone seems to get something from.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How does that come about, particular through personalities that are there?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I think personalities have a great deal to do with it. Fran Merritt, the former director, was the kind of person who generated this kind of activity without being a part of it, essentially. He was successful in getting very good craftsmen, key people in their field, come and teach there, almost on a prestige basis, certainly not for money.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Penland, what's the strength there per se?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Essentially the same thing, although I think the Penland School is a little more free-wheeling, it's a different environment. More open, more suggestive of horizontal experimentation. Haystack is perhaps, within that simile, more vertical in its creativity. It's a tight little unit on a rock by the ocean in Maine. Penland is spread out, it's a huge farm, it's like being on several mountain tops.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is there more cross-fertilization among crafts there, perhaps? [00:34:01]

GERALD WILLIAMS: I wouldn't say so. I think it occurs equally as well, in both places. It can also be a disaster, I suppose, if you get the wrong person—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But what you meant to say is it's a bigger place, maybe? It's less isolated? People are less under themselves at Penland?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, one physical difference is, at Penland, for instance, the glass studio would just start building all kinds of little units outside, because they had plenty of space to move into. At Haystack, you can't do that, because you're on a rock, and you can't seem to sort of get off that, and you're sort of confined to this little

environment. The restrictions are useful as far as discipline is concerned, but at the same time, one would like to be able to freewheel a little bit more.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, here in Dunbarton, you, in effect, have a fairly freewheel ability with this land around you, don't you?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. Yeah, we can work outside, as we do with the kilns, or we go across the road and use that field. We work in the pond. Most important work is done skinny dipping in the pond.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] What is that, a really freeing of everything?

GERALD WILLIAMS: We wash all our inhibitions away.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now from the names alone, I can't tell. But now conferences, too, you've been involved in a number of those, I suppose, principally in the last 10 years?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. Conferences—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The American Crafts Council, of other groups?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, there have been some American Crafts Conferences, one in Wisconsin many years ago that I attended and was a speaker at. There was one two years ago in Winston-Salem, American Crafts Council conference. We held a conference last year on apprenticeship in Purchase, New York, that we organized and developed. [00:36:08] And I was the project director for it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what is, in general, the aim of a conference, in your opinion? What should it be, if it isn't?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, the aim of a conference is to explore certain subjects, and bring a certain amount of expertise to it, through people who can develop that expertise, from their experiences. At the same time, it is expected that it be a free-wheeling think tank, in a way, and that new ideas be generated. That isn't always the case. It sometimes becomes more a social event than a thinking event. The conference that we held at Purchase had a very narrow definition; that is, it was a conference specifically on apprenticeship, and therefore we were able to get 75 or 80 people to zero in on that experience, wholly, without any essential distractions, or anything that would mitigate the emphasis. And it was a very powerful group of people, in a time when much thinking was done, and some new developments in progress from that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these people weren't all in your field, in the crafts, right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: No, not all of them. It was essentially a craft apprenticeship conference. But there was a psychiatrist, a poet, industrialist, government people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this because—you organized it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was because you felt apprenticeship was a critical issue these days? [00:38:00] Or just something of—did a lot of people express an interest in it?

GERALD WILLIAMS: It seems to be—there is no idea, in my estimation, that spring's fully armored from our brow. There is an atmosphere from which it's generated; that is, social context exists before the idea can be formulated and become a reality. People in the crafts had been thinking about apprenticeship for a long time, and talking about it. The National Ceramic Educator's Association had been doing something. The ACC had been doing something, but no one really did anything. When I gave a paper on apprenticeship at the conference at Winston-Salem, there was a lot of interest generated on the part of some of the people who were there. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is based on your own apprenticeships there?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Based on that paper.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: Our conference came about specifically, because the National Endowment heard about it and wanted to fund a conference which I had suggested at the other conference. When they heard that I was suggesting the National Conference, they said, all right, we'll fund it. So with that funding, then, the conference became a reality. So we spent six months getting anyone that we wanted to together, and almost without exception, everyone was kind enough to give up valuable time and come. And it was an important thing. As a

result, a book is going to be published. We have a national committee that is exploring further avenues of research and contacts and development with apprenticeship. [00:40:00] And then I went to Japan last fall to speak on apprenticeships, specifically to the international craft conference. And there I found Third World people very interested in the concept. The Japanese were very anxious to do something about it, and wanted to know more about it, because they have a strong entrenched craft apprenticeship system, but they see their culture in head-on collision with the industrial technology, and see much of the old type of crafts disappearing as a result of this conflict.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you and the ACC and the Ceramic Educators also see some danger to the development of craftsmen, and that's why you thought apprenticeship was a route that should be taken?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I think we all recognized that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I was wondering how did your concern—or it was a concern, was it? You were a bit troubled and so was the ACC, and Ceramic Educators? Is that why—

GERALD WILLIAMS: It's not like everyone was—not everyone. But many people are concerned that the quality of crafts and the integrity of the craft community persist. And there has been a sneaking suspicion, one might say, that with the burgeoning of crafts, that it's becoming an easy thing for many people to do. Therefore, its cutting edge is being blunted. Universities are tending to train teachers, as always, rather than practicing craftsmen. [00:42:02] The American craftsman is becoming very interested in making a lot of money, therefore, the spiritual content of the craft movement is in danger from inroads being [inaudible] by the impact of such things. Apprenticeship is one way in which this can be alleviated, and that spirit strengthened. It does not mean that we have to use medieval concepts of apprenticeship. What we want to do is to research the concept and make it viable and responsive to the twentieth century.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And in a nutshell, that spirit is—you said it in other words earlier—but that spirit that you feel you have in your crafts, what is that?

GERALD WILLIAMS: The spirit is perhaps the most complex of all. How can you describe it, because you can't see it. But the feeling, perhaps, can be identified by its belief and concern with its root first, with understanding and believing in the heritage that it's a part of. Secondly, doing it for its own sake, and not for some other reason, that is, money has never been a reason for an artist to paint a picture, or a potter to make a pot, essentially. That is, quality is its own reward, in essence. Furthermore, the feeling of love that one has for one's work, whatever it is, is important to develop. [00:44:07] And love comes through the intimate association and understanding, and the spiritual rewards that one gets from it, not the material rewards, necessarily. So apprenticeship is one way. I'm sure it's not the only way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But what you're describing, the spirit that you wish to retain, it has to evolve and be embedded within a person.

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And thus, such a system is apprenticeship, working under a senior -person, or—is practically the only way—

GERALD WILLIAMS: It is. It's one of the few ways. I hesitate to be so dogmatic and say it's the only way, but I believe very strongly that it's a very important way in which a young person can see that love and spirit that an older person has who's worked in the field all his life or her life, and therefore, can have that symbiotic relationship between the two that will develop in the young person.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But whether apprenticeship is *the* answer, remains to be seen. There probably will be several, but at least you and many others have concluded that a growing trend in craft education doesn't implant that spirit.

GERALD WILLIAMS: It tends not to, although the academics would defend their position vociferously. I believe that perhaps a combination of the two is what would be desirable, and that is getting a good technical training in a college, university, and then—or after or before, having a living experience in an environment where everything is going on, not only the business, but the intrinsic qualities being developed the same time. [00:46:16] And I think that we would like to help develop this concept, at least to see that it persists and is encouraged in the craft field, which is my field.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Going back—now in 1972, you, with others, I guess, did two things: you established the Daniel Clark Foundation and the magazine, *Studio Potter*. Can you explain what led to those? What they were meant to do, very briefly?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I think I have to start with a personal note, that is, we had a fire here in 1972.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, in 1972.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Burned the studio down. So that was sort of a watershed for me, in many ways. I became, I think, less interested in the technology of pottery as I have described it, and more interested in some of the other aspects of it. One aspect was the inner communication between fellow potters on many levels. I felt at that time, and for about 10 years before, we had been thinking that the communication on a publication level was very inadequate; specifically, the one journal in our field simply did not speak to the professional potter earning a living. [00:48:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this *Craft Horizons*?

GERALD WILLIAMS: No, it was *Ceramics Monthly*.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

GERALD WILLIAMS: *Craft Horizons* as well had, in our estimation, alienated itself through its philosophy, from those of us who were earning a living. It had become much art-oriented, its emphasis largely was pieces that were being done for exhibition and for museums. So a group of us here in New Hampshire, about 25 people got together and decided that it was time to start a magazine. Not knowing what that would be like, we thought first it would be a newsletter, then sort of a mimeographed journal, then finally we decided it would be a magazine. Of those 25 people, only two ended up actually working on it, and I was one, and Peter Sabin was the other. So we started the magazine called *Studio Potter* with $25 donated by about five people. There were a couple of other people as well, who were lending support, but not working actively. We're now in our seventh year, and we have about 10,000 subscribers all over the world. It's published twice a year.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it's certainly a far from humble magazine. It's quite well-printed with very fine illustrations.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. To allow us to be a nonprofit organization and get funding, we formed a foundation called the Daniel Clark Foundation. Daniel Clark was a name we picked from an old colonial potter who used to live up here and work outside Concord. [00:50:00] So we used his name and called it the Daniel Clark Foundation. That was a nonprofit organization, through which we got some initial funding from the National Endowment, the local Arts Commission, and some private charitable funds. The Daniel Clark Foundation has gone on and has done other things as well. One thing was to sponsor a film called "An American Potter," which, incidentally, was done on me, filmed on me here in this studio by a young filmmaker named Charles Musser. And this was a film that's now being distributed all over the world. In addition to that, to the Daniel Clark Film Library, we have formed the Daniel Clark Books, a publishing arm.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So the foundation, then, has sponsored the film, which is on—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What are some of its other activities? It's also the conduit for monies—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Exactly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Plus, of course, subscriptions for *Studio Potter*, right?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, the Dan Clark Foundation is the overall parent organization, that has Daniel Clark Films, the Daniel Clark Books. It was, as you said, the conduit for monies; for instance, it received the money for the apprenticeship conference from the National Endowment. It has received another contract from the National Endowment for a book on apprenticeship, which Daniel Clark's Books is publishing. And it has assisted in other conferences, such as an energy conference in Vermont, and some other things. We hope that as the need arises, the Daniel Clark Foundation, which is a nonprofit organization, can receive financial help from various foundations that can be used to useful purposes in the ceramic field. [00:52:10]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you feel that the *Studio Potter* has met your expectations of providing practical inner communication among potters?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. The response by potters, almost uniformly, has been excellent. They have gone to a great deal of trouble to write long and complicated articles, and give much, very important information freely through the pages of our magazine. I think they all recognize that its publication, essentially, by an inter-dependent community of craftsmen and our willing to work for it. This is one of the great things in America, and that is that there is a free exchange of information.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: No one hides anything, or pulls anything back.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's been useful. The magazine, it's still an exciting editorial job. We meet, many people—Julie and I travel to one place one part of the year, and Peter to another place in the same year. We do two geographical areas every year.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And hence, in each issue, there's that special—

GERALD WILLIAMS: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —geographic, the way it should—

GERALD WILLIAMS: That he does one time, and we do the other time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I noticed an editorial in one issue, you were already calling for an archive of *American Ceramics*, you feel that—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes. Archive of what I was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —feeling of history.

GERALD WILLIAMS: —what I was calling for was the development of a new department called—new concept called "Craft History," which, in effect—part of which would be an archive, the development of an archive of American crafts, which I am glad that you're doing already. [00:54:08]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why do you call for craft history? Why do you—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Because crafts have really come into their own.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And in what form would this take?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, for instance, in academic institutions, which was my main concern at that time, craft history was lumped into art history, and it was treated as a minor art, as it is in most academic institutions, if it's thought of at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: But the field has become mature enough, and has been stable enough long enough to warrant development on its own. Therefore, I feel that more and more there should be courses based on the history of crafts, and not crafts in art history.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: There should be specific research programs devoted to the preservation and understanding of craft as a history, not only in this country which has a very rich history in the crafts, but in other parts of the world as well. And it fully warrants the development in universities and colleges, in connection with that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Your two recent trips, one this fall and one two falls ago, the first to China, and now to Japan this fall, have these—were these long-time wishes of yours to see these two—

GERALD WILLIAMS: They were. I had worked on going to China for three years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: Had tried to get a group of American craftsmen to go, and had been turned down by the Chinese many times. So I went with another group. And it was an extremely important and seminal experience for me, and it took me many weeks to recover from the impact of seeing China. [00:56:03] I'm disappointed, I must say, in the recent developments in China. I think it will probably go the way of all Western flesh.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did you see there then that—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Well, at that time, it seemed to be motivated by different things; that is, it was not so intimately connected with the petrochemical industry, as the West is. Education was based on a different concept. Farming, agriculture and industry seemed less important; consumer products seemed not as powerful a

motivation as it is in the West. And I felt that they had, while they were still far from an ideal realization, they were trying to understand the pitfalls of what had taken place in the West and were trying to avoid them. But now, however, with opening up of China to commercial exploitation by the West, I fear that that day will soon arrive.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And in ceramics, what did you find in China?

GERALD WILLIAMS: We were not able to see a great deal of ceramics, because for whatever reason, they wouldn't let us go to the place that we wanted to. We wanted to go to Ching Te Chen, the source of the Ming porcelain industry. While they did let Europeans in, we knew they would not let us, for whatever the reason was. And the things that we saw in ceramics in China were mostly for the export trade, and they were not things that they were making for themselves, hence they were of little interest to us. [00:58:01] But we did see things that they were making themselves, peripherally, by the road and so forth, that were dynamic and very vital. I know that a lot of material is going on in China, because we've published an article on it just now.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you see a similar thing in Japan this fall? The fall of '78?

GERALD WILLIAMS: Japan is another story. It has a long and very vigorous tradition of crafts. But under the onslaught of Western technology, of technology industrialization, much of that is going by the boards. And they're concerned that this is all fleeing from their culture. I was in Kyoto, and Kyoto is the capital of—almost the capital of crafts in Japan. It was a beautiful city. It was very stunning, and exciting to be there. But I recognized that perhaps all things change, and crafts among them. I don't think that crafts will ever disappear, so long as human endeavor still persists. But it will undoubtedly change. I don't wish to hold back that change, but to make certain basic things survive, if possible.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, in your own work for your own part, you feel you've had leeway enough, the freedoms that you lacked in the beginning, where you—when you came back to this country during World War II, they were harrowing times there for you, because of your objection to the war.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you feel that since then, you have pretty much the leeway that you wanted as you look back? [01:00:01]

GERALD WILLIAMS: I think it's been a good place to work in. I think I was lucky to start when I did, because I saw one generation going, and another generation coming in. In a way, I've bridged the gap between the two generations.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: Alan Wheaton's generation and Rick Hirsch's generation are two that are quite dissimilar, although they have a lot in common. But perhaps that's why I like to have a perspective, and why I can interpret some things to the young people that they may not be able to understand.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You bridged a generation.

GERALD WILLIAMS: In a way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Secondly may be the point that Francis Merritt made in the introduction to your 1970 show in Manchester, New Hampshire, that in the '50s, there were three great trends that were burgeoning in America; the development out of the WPA in the '30s, and the release the pent-up energy from the war. A second was an interest in folk art. The third was an interest in developing crafts for their own sake, as art objects. The machine could take care of utility. I know you don't side with one trend or another. But he's suggesting, and do you agree, that the time when you were beginning, the '50s, was a time of sort of an unleashing a good deal of activity, of energy?

GERALD WILLIAMS: I agree. Certainly my feeling is that the war, well, many bad things came of it. One thing certainly was that the craft scene exploded because of contacts that are made by Americans going abroad during the war, and seeing cultures such as Japan and Europe, bringing those things back. [01:02:08] Secondly, the GI Bill of Rights, which enabled young men and women to get a college education, and thereby do what they wanted to, essentially, and not what they had to do. I feel very optimistic about the future of crafts in America. I think that at no time will that route be subjected to enough change so that it would be destroyed. And I'm happy that I can have some small part in continuing that. I think it's important that we try to understand it as much as possible, and interpret it to young people who are coming on ahead.

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ROBERT F. BROWN: Let me see this, how this is sounding.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now this third piece is—can I call it a jar? This one that's on here now?

GERALD WILLIAMS: No. No, it's still a vase.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Still a vase, okay. Greatly contrasted lower part, and then a very nice yellowish brown—

GERALD WILLIAMS: It's a pot that I did a lot of in this period. And that is what happens to the clay, to the soft clay, which becomes more and more important as you work in the material, you become more and more responsive to its essential element, to not have the clay harden and then do something to the clay after it's hardened, but when it's still in its soft state to manipulate it. This was thrown and then immediately it was destroyed, and pushed and scored with a stick, then sort of modeled in a manner that I must admit has become a style, or was becoming a style at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: For you? Or—

GERALD WILLIAMS: For many of us. It was the attempt to abstract the wheel so that it became much less rigid, and much more amorphous.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Almost try to obliterate its traces, once you've gotten the thing raised up?

GERALD WILLIAMS: The term now would be used is to erase the memory of the clay. It's interesting how electronics creeps into art, but the fact is, it's often fun. I now find that I am enjoying a lot of different techniques equally as well; that is, I enjoy doing what this vase indicates that I did on the wheel, distorting it and manipulating it as if it were a piece of living flesh that you could control, and then letting it stiffen and harden, and that irregularity is preserved. [00:02:14] On the other hand, there are other techniques, such as Sgraffito, which I still like to do, or to work only in color on porcelain, which I also like to do. Then there are many other techniques, or put a photo resist image on, so that this technique, and the ones similar to this that I was engaged in at this time, were developing within my repertory at this time. Now I can shift it. I make teapots, for instance, now, in this manner, right on the wheel, instead of normally, as is normally done, make the components and put them together as if one were sticking, gluing elements of a jigsaw puzzle together. Rather than that, working directly with soft clay and applying the elements of the spout handle, and cover—while everything's soft, everything distorts a little bit and it moves. And it's all made more responsive to the essential nature of the wet clay. So with this pot, it was done that way, and then tried, bisqued, and then a white clay is put on it so that you could see the scorings through it, and an iron stain put on the rim. It's a piece that stands about 16 inches high. Again, one of the pieces like that first one, in which the wax has been put over the surface, this is a compote or a platter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GERALD WILLIAMS: You see a lot of the clay coming through, unglazed but scored, so that the warm, toasty color of reduced stoneware clay shows, and is made part of the elemental design. [00:04:06]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You were very, by what, the mid-'60s or so, you'd become very comfortable with this—

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yeah, and it's—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —stoneware, and the limited range of color, and then the irregular—

GERALD WILLIAMS: I think it hadn't become as much a cliché as it did a little later, and it was still fairly fresh in the buying and selling environment, and the exhibition environment. But now, there is a tendency to get away from this a little bit, and try a new type of thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You introduced, then, into this otherwise rather cruder technique than the earlier one, or the porcelain, then you began to introduce the wet resist thing, which you have spoken of already—rather, the wet fire and the photo resist.

GERALD WILLIAMS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the effect on these rather irregular forms, earthy colors and forms, if you'll let me use that word, of photo resist must be quite a contra—counterpoint.

GERALD WILLIAMS: It is. Although again, the photo resist, in my mind, is consistent, again, with my imagery and

my preoccupation with symbolism in the very first moment of my professional commitment, and so that photo resist became just a more sophisticated form of imagery that I then wished to put on the pots. And my interest in developing it, I think, again was consistent with my early need to understand and to explore the articulation of primitive work. And I worked on the photo resist for a number of years, developing it, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, we talked about that. [00:06:00]

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]