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Oral history interview with Mary Ann Scherr, 2001 April 6-7

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Mary Ann Scherr on April 6 and 7, 2001. The interview took place in Raleigh, North Carolina, and was conducted by Mary Douglas for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Mary Ann Scherr and Mary Douglas have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MARY DOUGLAS: This is an interview of Mary Ann Scherr conducted by Mary Douglas at Scherr's home and studio in Raleigh, North Carolina, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, April 6 and 7, 2001.

Mary Ann, I'd like to start by asking you to talk about where you were born and what year you were born.

MARY ANN SCHERR: Afraid you were gonna ask that.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs] Sorry.

MS. SCHERR: I was born in Akron, Ohio, August 3, 1921 [Mary Ann Weckman].

MS. DOUGLAS: Could you describe your childhood and family background?

MS. SCHERR: My dad [Clarence Alexis Weckman] was a natural inventor, untrained, unschooled. His academic elementary education ended with the eighth grade. He was born in Dover, Ohio, and was 16 years old when he moved to Akron, Ohio. His parents were from Alsace-Lorraine, at the time French governed, and Paris, France. My mother's name was Loretta [Gorbach] Weckman. Her parents were from Berlin, Germany, and Breganz, Austria. They came to this country in late 1800. My mother and dad were both born in this country. Dad, a skilled mechanic, was hired at the B. F. Goodrich Company in the hose-making department. After observing the equipment of the thread-covering machinery of the rubber hose, he decided he had a better idea, and designed and invented a piece of equipment that was eventually licensed by every rubber company in the world. Goodrich bought it from my father for a dollar. New at the job, and just 17 years of age, my dad, unaware of his design-invention potential at that time, was grateful to receive the dollar and especially his new position as foreman in the hose department.

My father met my mother the following year, married, and then they had three daughters. He invented a couple other pieces of equipment, and kept a job throughout the Depression. He lived a frugal, stable life, with enough of a consistent salary that supported our family during the Depression years.

My mother was a talented woman who was never encouraged to pursue any of her abilities. She was a fine classical pianist, interested in art in her own way, and at 16 became an intern with a dress designer who worked each season with Paris couturiers. She draped and completed garments for many influential families. I designed many of my clothes. Throughout my adult life my mother translated my sketches and made the clothes that I designed. We worked together to make up the 1956-57 collection of maternity fashion prototypes for Lord & Taylor, New York City. These designs were first published in a national magazine and were sold to the fashion industry.

When my father retired, he worked with me in my studio, and, as well, taught me many mechanical bench tricks while we completed the Stainless Steel Commission for the United States Steel Company [1965-69]. At that time President John Kennedy asked industry to present an alternative alloy for use in U.S.A. currency. U.S. Steel commissioned me to design and fabricate a collection of jewelry that would illustrate the beauty and durability of their metal, stainless steel. Showcases were added to the contract, and the collection of 32 pieces traveled on a tour of major U.S. cities. While stainless steel was not selected as the new coinage metal, the collection toured throughout the United States for over two years, and was then featured in a solo exhibition in the American Craft Museum in New York City. The exhibition was featured in national news publications.

My parents lived in Akron, Ohio, all of their lives with three daughters.

MS. DOUGLAS: Are your sisters younger, older?

MS. SCHERR: We're all one year apart. A little bit more than nine months apart [laughs].

MS. DOUGLAS: What were you like as a child?

MS. SCHERR: I was the youngest, so I was able to get away with nearly anything. My sisters were never really interested in any of the arts. We each were given a three-penny allowance; I used my money at the local bakery to buy bakery paper for drawing. I always spent my money on paper. I have one of those bakery scenarios somewhere in my files.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were you always interested in art?

MS. SCHERR: Mother said that I was around five when I first started being totally launched into art. I remember moving into another house, where I had to locate a new bakery. I was nine at that time, and I was still drawing on bakery paper [laughs].

MS. DOUGLAS: Were either of your sisters artistic?

MS. SCHERR: No. Not at all. Amazing, not at all.

MS. DOUGLAS: What was your early education like, going to grade school?

MS. SCHERR: Grade school? I was invited back to my grade school, Schumacher Elementary School, as one of their outstanding students. For me, that was really rewarding. The school that seemed so large was so small. I guess everyone has experienced the feeling. I had the same experience with high school. I was invited back there as one of their professionally successful students, to give a lecture on "Being Prepared."

MS. DOUGLAS: Did you take art courses in high school?

MS. SCHERR: High school curricula were very different in 1935-39. "College Preparation" was offered to those preparing for further study in established academic areas. The students interested in music and art or trade-school programs were placed in respective classes. Sam [future husband] and I first met each other in art class. I was two years ahead of him. The teacher asked me to take over the class one day when she had to go to a meeting. He was supposed to be doing art work, but he was in the back of the room writing his next class test answers on his cuff. So I helped him. [Laughs] We later met again in 1940 at Cleveland Institute of Art.

MS. DOUGLAS: So talk a little bit about, after high school, your education, what you pursued.

MS. SCHERR: After high school, 1939, there were few jobs and very little money. I wanted to study art and enrolled in adult education art courses at the University of Akron. To pay for the courses I interviewed at one of the local stores to see if I could work as a clerk. I had made several small mask jewelry brooches with yarn and metal in my garage studio, cork jewelry. The interview was friendly, but he said, "No, I don't think you should be a clerk and I want to talk to your mother." My mother and I went back to see him, and he said, "I am not hiring your daughter because if I do, she'll never go on to study art. I'm telling you to let her go to art school."

With the Depression still controlling our lives, my parents did not have enough money for tuition at that time. My dad, working as hard as he did, still didn't have the extra for all three daughters. They respected my dream and mortgaged their home to put me into the first level of art school. I nearly destroyed the dream by being naive, and extremely foolish. This was my first time away from home, 17. Never smoked, never drank. A new life of self-management. My roommate was a wild one, and introduced me to a group of people from the school who were also less interested in art than play. In the first semester I joined many parties instead of art homework -- I learned how to drink practically overnight. I also learned how not to drink. I didn't realize that the secretary of the school was also my landlady. She reported my behavior, that is, getting home at six o'clock one morning. I was summoned by the dean of the art school. I appeared in his big office, and to my surprise, my mother and dad entered the dean's office at the same moment. "We are expelling you!"

This shocking announcement was made in those first six weeks of the art school semester. He said, "You don't belong." He made me feel horrible. I felt that I had betrayed everyone, after all my dad and mother had sacrificed for me to be there. The dean asked me to leave until the final paperwork had been recorded.

I sobbed. I was sitting alone in that dark auditorium thinking how stupid I had been.
He called me back to his office and said, "We're giving you another chance, but you must move to a place we approve. I know the landlady. You may stay for one semester on probation."

At the end of each semester we were assigned what was called "concours" instead of tests, a competitive process among student peers. I won several first and second awards, in each of the art classes. This was an immediate, really fantastic turnaround. I was awarded a scholarship for the following semester. I learned so much about myself and, more important, the need for excellence in every effort. My first semester away from

home was grow-up time. The dean was a very wise person. He told my parents that some of the better students have a very difficult time in their adjustment to personal discipline.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were you taking other courses there besides art, or was it all art?

MS. SCHERR: It was all art and art history; the first two years were foundation courses.
Students interested in art education studied at other academic programs at Western Reserve University, a campus in the same area in Cleveland, Ohio.

MS. DOUGLAS: What courses were you taking there?

MS. SCHERR: Basic foundation courses. Introduction to the many possible general art directions. In the two foundation years, we discovered areas that seemed most desirable for a future career. I wanted to do everything. I wanted to be a sculptor and a painter and a designer, and I was interested in everything but metals. I was there on scholarship throughout the two years, and then World War II in ‘42 changed all of us. I had a weekend graphic design job. President Roosevelt’s voice interrupted the radio music with the declaration of war with Japan. I was shocked and scared. The art school emptied; all the male students left to go to the war. Following a first summer job as a cartographer at Goodyear Tire, in Akron, Ohio, I was offered a full-time position as supervisor of the cartography department at Goodyear Aircraft Corporation. This was a war, and I left school, thinking I would return, with the scholarships.

At Goodyear Aircraft, along with designing charts, I made graphic war-incentive posters, assisted with a really amazing kind of general activity of visual evaluations relating to the production of Corsair and B-29 aircrafts. I was invited to the Pentagon in Washington to be interviewed by the Navy for a position as illustrator for war posters. I would have had to become a Navy person. This meant six weeks of boot camp. While interviewing in Washington I was embarrassed with my clothing. I didn’t feel comfortable in a red civilian suit with everybody else in Navy uniforms. I declined the offer and returned to a new position at Goodyear, as the Morale Incentive Assistant Director, managing major public gala programs for employees, war heroes, and visiting celebrities. The Japanese war was in the last stages. I moved to Chicago and was hired as a layout graphic designer in the Burton Browne Advertising Agency. That was in ‘43, ‘44.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, these -- these job opportunities that came up as a result of the war seem like amazing opportunities.

MS. SCHERR: There weren’t very many men who were available to work the graphics positions that needed talent. The shortage of men resulted in women being finally considered. Frustrating as it was, the time was ideal for women to be considered for professional positions. It wasn’t easy to get a job as a graphic designer. My timing was perfect, the wars were ending.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, you had studied graphic design at Cleveland?

MS. SCHERR: Yes. When I decided to leave Goodyear Aircraft, I was working in the isometric drawing and engineering department. The war with Europe was over; the war with Japan was slowing; it seemed time to move on. I designed and I sent resumes to many Chicago studios, locating addresses for the Chicago studios from library telephone books. I moved to Chicago assuming I would find work and was offered several jobs. I was hired by the Burton Browne Advertising Agency on North Michigan Avenue, Chicago.

MS. DOUGLAS: And you -- you didn’t want to go back to Cleveland? To the Art Institute?

MS. SCHERR: Not at that time. A neighbor from Akron, Ohio, was performing in a local theater. I caught his show, and we resumed a friendship. He called one day saying he had just lost his partner, and he was scheduled to start a national tour, a six-week engagement, nightclubs and theaters. We had danced a few times, and he asked me to join him as a partner, “Come on. Just do it six weeks.” I thought, I can do that. I took a leave of absence for the six weeks, but we stayed on tour for a year. We were in different nightclubs and theaters all over the West Coast and Canada. Bob Hope saw our act and recruited us for a part in the movie *42nd Street*. We signed contracts with Warner Brothers to participate in the movie. Can you imagine watching reruns of the movie now? We were billed as “Duke Alden and Toni.” I was Toni.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, had you had any background in performance?

MS. SCHERR: No. I loved dancing. My partner, Duke Alden, was a very skilled performer. He taught me ballroom dancing on a train. He also taught me how to dance other unique techniques. We had wonderful reviews all over the West Coast. At a nightclub in San Francisco, a friend from Ohio was shocked to see me on stage. He said, “You’ve got to get out of this; you’re an artist. You’re not a dancer by training. Get out of here.” I considered his words, the strange life I had begun to live, and determined that he was right in his assessment. I left, left Duke, broke the movie contract. I look back on that world; it would have changed my life. One of many decisions that

changed my history.

MS. DOUGLAS: And how old were you at that time, when you were --

MS. SCHERR: I was 22.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs] So you went -- where did you go from there?

MS. SCHERR: I returned to Chicago and continued with the graphics position for about a month. I needed to calm down a bit after the excitement of show biz life. I decided to go back to Cleveland/Akron, and perhaps finish my education. Just for the lark, I interviewed graphics and illustration positions. Did I really want to go back to art school? I can draw; I can do all these things. I'm now 22, and maybe it's time to get a job. I was offered an illustrator position at the William Taylor & Sons Department Store in Cleveland. I learned how to skillfully render any object.

I re-met Sam Scherr, who had returned from WWII and re-enrolled at the Cleveland Institute of Art, majoring in the comparatively new industrial design program. A year later Sam was hired as a product designer with the General Motors Corporation in Detroit, Michigan. He heard that the Ford Motor Company, Dearborn, Michigan, was searching for a designer. I interviewed with George E. Walker and was hired at Ford as an interior and accessory designer. I designed hubcaps, hood ornaments, color, instrument panels, and door escutcheons for all their automotive models; Ford, Mercury, Lincoln, and Lincoln Continental.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you're both living in Detroit?

MS. SCHERR: We were both living in Detroit at that time. We decided to marry, but faced many basic problems. Sam is Jewish; I was Catholic. There were family conflicts with his parents. Fortunately, my parents really liked Sam. We were far enough away from Akron to avoid ongoing disapproval. We married.

We were both known in the automobile field and were offered dual directors positions with Chrysler Motor Company. Sam had begun to rekindle his dream to build a design business, and the automobile industry wasn't broad in scope. For me, designing color, interiors, hubcaps, escutcheon panels, and hood ornaments was also limiting. For Sam, his plan to be in a control space of his own took shape. Sam said, "Let's open our own place. There are no designers in Ohio; let's go there."

MS. DOUGLAS: In what town did you locate?

MS. SCHERR: We went back to our hometown, Akron, Ohio. Industrial design was in an infant stage throughout the country. Major designers like Raymond Loewy and Henry Dreyfus were on both coasts, and new small offices were starting up through the country. There were none in the 100-mile radius of Akron, Ohio, an industrial center. Those were beginning lean years, but we became one of the important, emerging design offices in the country. *Fortune* magazine named our company [Scherr & McDermott International] as one of the ten new, "best" design offices in the country. We designed the Tappan Range, Hoover Sweeper, [Rubbermaid, and Sun Rubber Co.], to name the caliber of products the office serviced.

In the early 1950s Sam responded to a U.S. government invitation for industrial designers to assist underdeveloped countries, in the quest for the development of export and import products. Three offices were awarded contracts: Jack Lenor Larsen, textiles, Russell Wright, ceramics, and Scherr & McDermott, product development.

Scherr & McDermott designers were awarded additional contracts in Korea, Japan, and later, with the Kennedy Administration. We also worked in South America with the program "Products of the Alianza." At that time, we opened an office and showroom in the Empire State Building in New York City. Each week, Sam and I, along with his staff, worked in New York designing products that would be made in South America and distributed internationally. I designed clothing, jewelry, and toys.

MS. DOUGLAS: What years were these?

MS. SCHERR: This was from 1954 through 1969. We located many American craftspeople to work in these countries as teachers. During the Johnson Administration, nepotism entered our vocabulary. President Johnson's brother-in-law, Tony Taylor [Lady Bird Johnson's brother], imported South American products for his retail shop in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Because of his close connection to the White House, we were denied the right to hire him as a consultant. This law also denied me the ability to be contracted as a designer and instructor. So my designing remained stateside. Prior to the nepotism fury, I accompanied Sam to our office and studio in Seoul, Korea, where I taught many people unique designing and metal techniques.

MS. DOUGLAS: So in other words, because the two of you were married --

MS. SCHERR: There was a government scandal over inappropriate gifts of alpaca fur, given as incentives related to hiring relatives in special positions. It is labeled “nepotism.”

MS. DOUGLAS: You weren’t allowed to work together.

MS. SCHERR: We worked together on all levels, I just was not permitted to be separately contracted to travel or work in a specific contract because my name was Scherr. But I’m skipping around, I know.

MS. DOUGLAS: No, you’re not, but I wanted to ask you about this program, this [pre-Johnson] government program, a little bit more. Exactly what were you doing? You were providing design services to foreign countries?

MS. SCHERR: We exchanged many teachers and students in Korea, South America, and Japan. We brought artists to the U.S.A. to study specific subjects where they would learn current technology that could be incorporated in producing products for export. We searched for special U.S. talents to teach weaving, metal, glass, and ceramics in both Korea and in the South American countries of Bolivia, Peru, Columbia, and Ecuador. We developed industries using indigenous materials. In Korea, we concentrated on brass, wood, textiles, and metal. Our contracts covered the education of the exchange students. One student, Sung Huon Qwan, became the Seoul University Chair of the Ceramic Department after his study at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

MS. DOUGLAS: Did they work in your firm?

MS. SCHERR: They studied in our firm, and they attended art schools. In 1960 I taught design and metalsmithing. The U.S. instructors taught all techniques in our Seoul, Korea, demonstration center. Any Korean citizen interested in learning was invited to the center to learn techniques and to investigate the processes being demonstrated by the instructors. We researched materials that could be used in the design of the products. As incentive to create a natural image, we used native symbols to illustrate possible design concepts.

MS. DOUGLAS: Did you have clients overseas that you did product design for?

MS. SCHERR: Our firm was so determined to develop a Korean program that would re-build a sick economy that finding a viable industry within which to partner was not a consideration.

There were some very small existing industries, especially in the limited production of brass and wood products. The country was so poor and devastated by their history of being occupied by countries -- Mongolia, Japan, and China -- as well as the current war with North Korea, that knowing and practicing their forbidden, original, Korean culture, and their sense of their own historical image, had lost significance. Our involvement as part of their economic recovery was the task of reestablishing their heritage, and providing directions that could generate new industries. The growth potential for individual expression and production, along with the serious requirement to develop and showcase products for foreign markets, was the critical goal of our contract. These were government-sponsored training programs, and we taught them to make products that could be exported, using their materials. The country was so damaged by poverty and the affects of the war from the north. The main street was a dirt road. There was no electricity and only a few buildings, and a few structures had central heat. The people seemed accustomed to having nothing, including spirit.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, this would’ve been right after the Korean War?

MS. SCHERR: ‘55. We managed the program there until 1963.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it was sort of economic redevelopment for them?

MS. SCHERR: Yes. A.I.D., Aid to Industrial Development for underdeveloped countries. The program “Products of the Alianza” was initiated during the Kennedy Administration, and it had the same goals as the Korean program. We advertised for essential talents in all the craft medias, looking for artists hired as instructors. The American Craft Council [ACC] was instrumental in the location of the many crafts people who worked for us.

MS. DOUGLAS: For this project?

MS. SCHERR: We hired them in specific medias in each country. We paid their travel living costs, and salary. Our contract with each covered all levels of their performance.

MS. DOUGLAS: And they would be teaching?

MS. SCHERR: They would be teaching, demonstrating, and designing products indicative of the host country materials and culture.

MS. DOUGLAS: Let me go back and ask you to talk about when you opened -- when you and Sam opened your

design studio in Akron. What kinds of projects were you working on? Who were your clients?

MS. SCHERR: At the start, we accepted any and all projects connected with an art requirement -- trademark designs, graphics promotions, murals, book illustrations; and I sculpted small clay prototypes that would be made into rubber toys. Sam designed letterheads and logos; I painted murals in restaurants and private homes, and designed and rendered children's books and plastic games. Sam searched for any kind of art work. We were commissioned to create toys with Sun Rubber, including the current remake of the "Hoppity Ball." Sam finally got a large project with the Tappan Range Corporation. The studio/office designed the first eye-level range. He also designed the Hoover Vacuum Sweeper that was shown in the Louvre in Paris for a year as one of the 100 best designs of this century. We were on our way as a major design office.

MS. DOUGLAS: How many people were working in your office at that time?

MS. SCHERR: We started with three and eventually had about a hundred designers [laughs]. Sam had offices in New York, in the Orient, in South America. Our employees included the people who were directing our offices in these other countries. We also designed product displays for international fairs all over the world.

As a team, Sam and I were invited and contracted to survey and evaluate the jewelry industries in Guyana, South America. We were guests of the government and traveled throughout Guyana, viewing both the cottage industries and the large manufacturers that produced souvenirs and boutique jewelry for Trinidad, Barbados, and other islands, providing suggestions for further popular, trendy, products.

MS. DOUGLAS: And what was the name of the firm?

MS. SCHERR: Scherr & McDermott International.

MS. DOUGLAS: McDermott was a partner?

MS. SCHERR: Yes, I was just a designer.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that's amazing. So you were considered an industrial design firm?

MS. SCHERR: It was Scherr & McDermott Industrial Design International, with the primary office, in Akron, Ohio.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were there other design firms in Akron at that time?

MS. SCHERR: Not at that time; now there are several.

MS. DOUGLAS: What about Cleveland?

MS. SCHERR: The designers in Cleveland were also the faculty of the CIA. Victor Schreckengost was the first industrial designer to deserve the identification. In 1946-47, I believe, we spawned the first authentic design office in that area. When our office closed in 1976, two of the men that worked for us moved to Cleveland and opened their design office. Our office had hired a whole generation of industrial designers from a small, a very small core. I think Sam and I opened the fields of metals and product packaging. I backed into becoming a metalsmith. At that time, I was interested in creative everything, anything two- and three-dimensional. I'm most comfortable in most areas. I loved drawing, painting, sculpting, and then metal.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, maybe this is a good point to talk about how did you get into metal?

MS. SCHERR: After working professionally in the field, and then full time in the studio, our first child, Randy, required that my creative work become a half-time, home studio. The other half was divided between our child and the hated housework routine, an attitude that has been in affect since we married. We then had another son, Scott, now a music and sound director; a daughter, Sydney, a fine metal and enamel artist; Randy, the oldest, industrial designer, turned real estate developer. And that's when I did the cookie jars. I did a full series of cookie jars for the company, and I did them at home because I needed to be with the baby --

MS. DOUGLAS: You designed the cookie jars?

MS. SCHERR: Sam's studio acquired the cookie jar project and turned it over for me to design and sculpt the originals in full-scale plastiscene. I designed the nursery rhyme series, the cookie jar beginnings. That project became famous, not because it was a good design; it became collectible because it was part of the Andy Warhol collection. When first produced by Robbinson-Ransbottom Clay Manufacturer Company, in Ohio, I kept the first two samples of *The Cow Jumped Over The Moon*. I hid them away; they seemed so trite [laughs]. I designed several others using nursery rhyme themes. The cow became special, as history proved.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, so you were making the prototype.

MS. SCHERR: [Laughs] Yes.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, that's wonderful.

MS. SCHERR: Well, at that time the role of product designer in the world of contemporary art implied sleek, minimal, current design thought. When the first cookie jars came to market, I felt embarrassed with my childlike effort. Thirty years later, the photo of the cookie jar *The Cow Jumped Over The Moon* was pictured on the front page of the *New York Times* and *Newsweek* magazine. I was awed! Andy Warhol had included two of them in his remarkable collection of everything. Imagine -- the cookie jar I was so ashamed of all those years. A cookie jar that originally sold for $2.99 auctioned off at Sotheby's, New York, for $19,000. The full collection was purchased by the Movada Watch Company for over $250,000 [laughs].

MS. DOUGLAS: That's wonderful.

MS. SCHERR: I had two of the first sample cookie jars. I had given one to my son, and I had one. Recently, a friend, an antique collector, called to advise me that the *Cow* was pictured in a cookie jar auction in Ohio. It has become a desirable collector item, with the *Cow* in all the cookie jar books. While I did not pay $19,000, I did pay a large sum to purchase two more, so that each of us in our family has one in our collections.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's wonderful. Well, we got into the cookie jar because we were talking about how you got into metalsmithing, and what happened to Sam's design firm.

MS. SCHERR: He had sold it and opened a gallery in Ghent, Ohio. This period, 1975-76, was a very troubled, changing time in the design field. Industrial design was being invaded by interior designers, decorators, and any person who assumed the label. There were no established boundaries or credentials related to the necessary training. Major industries at that time were aware of the high cost of consultant designers and developed internal design divisions. They had begun to lure designers from prior consultants' studios.

Sam was made an offer he couldn't refuse. The salary level was remarkable. He became the designer with a company called Kromex in Cleveland, Ohio; tabletop products. He disliked the nine-to-five conformity and the kind of squelching atmosphere of not being self-regulated. He resigned and opened the gallery of ethnic art and sculpture in Ghent, Ohio. Around this time, the national organization, American Craft Council and American Craft Museum, was in search of a director. Barbara Rockefeller, the board president, invited Sam to be interviewed. He was hired, sold his gallery, sold everything, and we moved to New York.

[END TAPE ONE SIDE A.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Do you remember what year that was?

MS. SCHERR: 1976. He moved from Akron to become director of the American Craft Council and president of the American Craft Museum. That's when they were still combined on 54th Street.

MS. DOUGLAS: What were you doing at the time?

MS. SCHERR: I was teaching at Kent State University. I was chair of the metals graduate program and head of the undergraduate program as well. I moved to New York City in 1979. I was very involved at that time with body monitors [jewelry connected to conditions of the body]. This is a major activity that started in 1969. To cover this subject, the last 30 years has remained consistently active, with the monitors and cosmetic cover-ups.

MS. DOUGLAS: Isn't that amazing?

MS. SCHERR: To catch up with the chronological order, 1949, and the introduction of metalsmithing in my life. Our son Randy was about six weeks old, and I had begun to feel abandoned by my profession. I searched about for solutions that would give me pleasure beyond a baby and the smothering apartment walls. The only class that suited my available hours was a jewelry class. I registered into a metals night class at the Akron Art Institute. The instructor was a fiber person with no knowledge of metalsmithing. Regardless of her naive instructions and the first failure, I was hooked. Our son became ill, and I missed all but two classes. I stayed hooked and started collecting tools. The metal sheet was an open, alluring, canvas of possibilities. Two years later, I taught all of the Akron Art Institute metals courses.

Kent State University hired me to teach design and product design, an adjunct position. At the same time [1950] the worldwide craft movement was beginning to take real form. The chairman of the art department, Elmer Novotny, said, "You are the only person on our faculty that has had any metalsmithing." I said, "I had only the two night classes of a jewelry class. I don't know anything about metal." He replied, "You know more than anyone else in the department; stay a chapter ahead of your students." I did. I found very little basic information, and taught a few of the techniques I had already tried. This was 1951; there were only a few

publications, except in books teaching “tin can art.” At that time, I had a studio in my home. I did not know that there were grades of solder. I also didn’t know much about the character or use of hammers that I had purchased as part of a collection of old tools, and knew little about other tools. I entered a competition with the very first pieces fabricated, earring mobiles. I was awarded a first award. That really shook me up.

MS. DOUGLAS: No Robert Von Neumann book [*Design and Creation of Jewelry* (Philadelphia: Chilton Co., 1961)]?

MS. SCHERR: He published his really fine metals book a little later on. His metal work was stunning. He was self-taught. We hired him within the Korea project as a participant in a Japanese research project.

MS. DOUGLAS: That’s amazing. To teach yourself metalsmithing seems --

MS. SCHERR: The Kent State metals program and the graduate school emphasis was beginning to attract an audience of students from many sources. The metals studio was moved to a larger space; the curriculum included enameling, with Bill Harper and Mel Someroski. We were fortunate to have students, Jaclyn Davidson, Hiroko, Sydney Scherr, and Lisa Gralnick.

Metalsmithing today is so complex. The most intriguing issue about metals, for me, is that I may never learn all there is to know. I am still finding techniques I’ve never investigated, including the current fascination with the hydraulic press, another venue of smart ways to create forms. In the early 1970s Heikki Seppä changed the vocabulary of the metal artist. In his investigations of shell forms he is responsible for a unique system for moving metal in very different ways. He researched and restored many of the processes that were used in ancient times.

MS. DOUGLAS: Because of the --

MS. SCHERR: His ability to manage metal with tools he designed.

MS. DOUGLAS: I’m trying to think what those forms are called.

MS. SCHERR: They’re called shell forms.

MS. DOUGLAS: Spiculum?

MS. SCHERR: Spiculum, anticlastic, synclastic, and many more, that served as word descriptions for his unique metalworking vocabulary.

MS. DOUGLAS: That’s something else.

MS. SCHERR: I was also self-taught. The metals department at Kent State University had grown into a major study. I felt the need to add hollowware to the schedule. I studied one semester with Fred Miller, at the Cleveland Art Institute, and learned about the equipment needed for the study of classical silversmithing at Kent State.

MS. DOUGLAS: I’m curious as to -- when Kent first came to you and asked you to teach metals, when you were teaching product design and graphics, that’s amazing in this day and age that a dean would come to you and say, “Teach metals,” because now they’re all trying to shut the programs down.

MS. SCHERR: Many programs are now closing. My daughter, Sydney Scherr, and I are now in 2001 charged with a full metals program, and the outreach programs at Meredith College in Raleigh. The metals and jewelry department is well supported and encouraged to continue to develop, with a generous budget for tools and equipment. The courses are very popular.

MS. DOUGLAS: What was it that was happening that created the original demand [in 1950]?

MS. SCHERR: The craft movement had affected an international demand for craft knowledge. Following WWII, 1945-60, the desire for education, the freedom to explore careers, caused a serious demand for personal development. The universities were searching for faculty, and craft organizations were developing. The American Craft Council began to interest artists to unite; their national conferences enjoyed a real growth period. The SNAG organization [Society of North American Goldsmiths] invited several known metal artists to attend a meeting of like-minded participants. In my naive stage, I read the invitation and concluded that I did not qualify, because I had never worked in gold and therefore was not a goldsmith, as expressed in the SNAG name.

MS. DOUGLAS: That was -- you were still teaching at --

MS. SCHERR: Kent State University

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I think that was sort of a misnomer anyway.

MS. SCHERR: Each metal has a label: blacksmith, if you work in iron or steel; a silversmith makes hollow forms; and goldsmiths make jewelry. A pewter metalworker is a whitesmith. The titles merely suggest the area of interest.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well now, you started -- you said you started teaching at Kent State around 1951.

MS. SCHERR: 1950.

MS. DOUGLAS: And how long did you teach at Kent?

MS. SCHERR: I taught there from 1950 to 1978 -- until I moved to New York.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow. And did you --

MS. SCHERR: I was a tenured associate professor by that time. I was awarded a master's degree of fine art equivalent. 1986, I received an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, from Defiance College for my work with the research and development of body monitors. The MFA has been honored in all the schools that followed, Parsons School, The New School for Social Research, Meredith College, and while the degree position was not needed for the classes taught at Duke University, the level of my experience is respected.

MS. DOUGLAS: Kent State awarded an MFA?

MS. SCHERR: Based on the scope of professional experience. The need for a liberal arts education 1940 was not considered essential in either high school or art school. Higher education now realizes that being an artist is not just learning skills. Programs today include a basic academic curriculum. I have added to my limited academic education through auditing courses most of my adult life. While in high school, the history classes were my least favorite subjects, and while teaching at Kent State, I enrolled in the history classes throughout the years to correct the misjudgment.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, did you continue to teach design and other courses at Kent?

MS. SCHERR: No. The metals program became a departmental major study and as quickly, a graduate study. I directed the metals division until I moved to New York City.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you created the metals program at Kent essentially.

MS. SCHERR: Yes. The courses were very popular and became nationally known.

MS. DOUGLAS: 'Cause you went from teaching one course to --

MS. SCHERR: It happened very fast. I had exhibitions of student work. We suddenly had 25 majors. This seemed to be happening over the whole world at that time.

MS. DOUGLAS: The GI Bill have anything to do with that, or -- ?

MS. SCHERR: Yes, I had several students who were GI. The NEA [National Endowment for The Arts] visited the Kent State campus and encouraged everyone to consider art as a professional career. All of the crafts medias were enjoying new life. The Penland School of Crafts [Penland, North Carolina] and the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts [Deer Isle, Maine] were becoming well known. The NEA awarded grants to individual artists. I was fortunate to be invited to submit a grant proposal, but did not understand that the invitation was based on further development of the body monitors, a huge disappointment for me because there was no time to prepare a proposal for the Washington, DC, waiting jury.

MS. DOUGLAS: That must've been a very exciting time.

MS. SCHERR: That was an exciting time. And the next most intriguing period was in the '70s, when the Vietnam War invaded everyone and every level of life. I was at Kent State when the revolt caused the four deaths of the students by the National Guard.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were you there at that time?

MS. SCHERR: My studio was on the grounds where the killings occurred. One of the boys killed lived in the house with my graduate assistant. It was a frightening, really frightening time.

MS. DOUGLAS: Did they shut the school down?

MS. SCHERR: Yes. That morning a guard would not let me in my office. He leveled his bayonet at my stomach. I told him that I had cyanide and sulfur standing next to each other. “If anything happens to this building the acids will combine, and we’ll have to evacuate the city. It will kill everybody.” And he said, “Can’t go in.”

MS. DOUGLAS: So by the time you left Kent, you had a graduate program in metals?

MS. SCHERR: Yes. Graduate program, with 14 graduate students, and around 20 undergraduates. We had opened the enameling program with Mel Someroski, and we both were assisted with graduate technical assistants.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, you were one of the how many schools in the states with a grad program that big in metals? Who were your colleagues or other schools?

MS. SCHERR: Cranbrook Academy in Michigan, with Richard Thomas; Stanley Lechtzin, in Philadelphia at Tyler; University of Washington, John Marshall; Washington University in St. Louis; Arline Fisch at San Diego; Phil Fike in Detroit; John Prip on the West Coast. I’m not sure they all had graduate programs at that time, but they had strong departments.

MS. DOUGLAS: Did the -- did your metal work really take over your artistic life? Did you ever do product design anymore after that?

MS. SCHERR: I still do. Throughout all that time I illustrated books and games for the Saafield Publishing Company in Akron, Ohio. Children’s book illustrations, drawing books, and box-game covers. I had other design accounts with plastics companies, designing clothing accessories, umbrellas, and boots. One of the fabricators asked for designs that could fit over card tables to become houses and cars for a child’s indoor play. Another account called for 3-D greeting cards and wall hangings. We had so many unique accounts that stretched imagination, especially in the rubber toy and balloon design category. I believe we designed in every direction. When I moved to New York, I continued fashion illustration for major accounts, drawing directly from the showroom, walking, and models. These sketches were used for newspaper and magazine promotions. For the computer industry, I designed full-page clip art drawings that were sold to the graphics and computer industries.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was that freelance work? Or were you working for a firm? So you started doing that when you moved to New York, the fashion drawings?

MS. SCHERR: I had a fashion account with an upscale boutique in Akron, for which I rendered all their promotional drawings. Their inventory carried major designer labels. When I moved to New York, I was permitted to draw the garments in the designer showrooms. I also drew seasonal images, full 20-inch-by-30-inch pages of concepts related to specific holidays, using purchased art for promotional images. Drawing has threaded though my life like the food needed to live. Over the years I’ve saved thousands of drawings of every object I’ve made.

Our brownstone on 85th Street and York Avenue included the lower-level studio, for which I hired seven artists to assist on an upcoming large exhibition. I loved and love New York, the city where lights and doors never close. Later, we moved to a 5,000-square-foot loft in SoHo on Broadway, where we built a three-bedroom, spatial home with a 100-by-50-foot length studio. We also built another loft home on West Broadway, the center of a New York City carnival atmosphere.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs] Were you in Manhattan?

MS. SCHERR: Our brownstone on 85th and York Avenue was near the East River and the mayor’s mansion. At that time, the Parsons School of Design had started a craft department. I was invited to teach a second-level course in metals. About six months later, the dean of the school, David Levy, now director of the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC, called saying Parsons was searching for a new chair to direct the craft department.

MS. DOUGLAS: It was called crafts?

MS. SCHERR: It was then called “craft” department -- clay, fiber, and metals. When the position was vacated, I was invited to become chair of the department, which I renamed, from “Crafts” to “Product Design,” because I had several phone calls from reluctant parents who said they didn’t want to pay tuition for their children to learn to make pot holders. That image had to change to insure a successful program.

MS. DOUGLAS: Isn’t that interesting?

MS. SCHERR: I thought about the implication for some time and finally officially changed the name to “Product Design in a Media.” Parsons is a design school, and the emphasis had to reflect both learning how to design and model making. The change gave the department a presence in each of its sections. While chair, I also became the director of clay, fiber, metals, wood, and glass, for the New School for Social Research, the umbrella

university under which Parsons was a division.

MS. DOUGLAS: Those were two separate schools?

MS. SCHERR: Yes. Some of the programs and classes dovetailed. There was yet another department, Parsons Associate Adult Education. Each area required a different credit application, student roll, and separate bookkeeping processes.

MS. DOUGLAS: And how did they differ?

MS. SCHERR: While the courses were promoted separately and students registered with their elected schools, the New School and Parsons associate degree programs used the Parsons design school classroom facilities. My position as chair of all the schools included course determinations, promotional activities, student records, hiring and control of faculty [all adjunct contracts], and most important, control of credit requirements for the Parsons full-time students, a complicated, seven-day week with 13-hour, overwhelming, days. Fortunately, I liked Dean David Levy and the New School President, Jonathan [Fanton]. I developed an international program with the New School. We invited academic and practicing artists from all over the world.

MS. DOUGLAS: What kind of degree would they get at the New School?

MS. SCHERR: They could get a full BA [Bachelor of Arts], an Associate Certificate, or in some areas, a BFA [Bachelor of Fine Arts] degree.

MS. DOUGLAS: A BA?

MS. SCHERR: Bachelor of Arts in all Parsons programs; the Parsons Associate Degree, a certificate; the Parsons BFA was offered in only painting and sculpture. The New School offered a certificate or was called “Adult Education.”

MS. DOUGLAS: I’m real interested that that word “craft” was sort of a flag for people.

MS. SCHERR: In New York it really caused problems. My product design program attracted attention, since the emphasis became the art and business of design or design in a media. A national news release described the effort with a full-page accounting of the Parsons design intention, in the *Craft Report* magazine. Our enrollment numbers showed the growth of interest we had gained with the realistic consideration for professional goals

MS. DOUGLAS: And this was in the late ‘70s?

MS. SCHERR: This was early ‘80s --

MS. DOUGLAS: In New York.

MS. SCHERR: The open philosophy of the New School extended to each department, encouraging social interaction. Wherever possible, we invited outstanding designers or craft artists to visit, lecture, or demonstrate work. Peter Gainsbury, director of development at the Goldsmiths Hall [Assayers of All Metals in London], visited Parsons while attending a jewelry conference in New York City. He told me about titanium and his newly discovered ability to color the metal with light and electricity through anodizing. He was in New York to lecture with the jewelry industry and knew about our desire for gathering information. Edward DeLarge and D. Ward, London, demonstrated the process and lectured at Parsons in 1981.

I was fascinated with the process and purchased the equipment. At that time, I was showing my work at the Robert Lee Morris store in SoHo. He was intrigued with the technique of working with titanium, suggesting that we invite 11 metalsmiths to investigate the process, which would then be introduced with a gallery exhibition. An exhibition of titanium was new to the world, which became a full-scale manufacturing process and business in my loft-studio.

I hadn’t yet really started my job at Parsons as chairman. I designed and fabricated a large collection of titanium jewelry that we decided to exhibit in the International Boutique Festival held annually on Central Park West, New York City. We leased a space. This new metal and color created a storm of buyers. They came to our booth and ordered. We suddenly were deep in business, making 200 pieces each day. The exhibition response was remarkable. We hired five people to start working on production. I worked the chair position at Parsons by day, and designed titanium jewelry at night. We developed a collection that was sold internationally.

MS. DOUGLAS: Sam was at ACC?

MS. SCHERR: He had resigned because the ACC board and he had interpreted his position differently. He was hired as creative director; they felt he should spend full time fundraising. Sam understood the marketing of a

product and became the manager of the business. We had moved to a loft that had the 1,500-foot space to produce jewelry.

MS. DOUGLAS: What kind of products?

MS. SCHERR: Titanium bracelets, necklaces, and earrings. This was 1982, and before titanium became popular. We hired several artisans to fabricate and anodize the metal. In the meantime, I started being the department chair at Parsons. Sam managed our jewelry business producing 200 products each day. We were exporting to Japan, to South America, to everywhere. It was an active business. Around six or seven months after we had begun, I was walking to Parsons one morning, and I saw my earrings being sold by a street vender at a fourth of our price; they were copies of my design. A demeaning knockoff of every design we had made. We quit! Other jewelry producers began to flood the market with colored jewelry.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs] That's terrible.

MS. SCHERR: We were out of business. Within a year, titanium became a household word. It was the introduction of titanium in this country. Meantime, Sydney and I were invited to exhibit a dual show in midtown New York. That was my last real effort and exposure to titanium as an exhibition metal. Beyond the magic of its color and the fun of anodizing, I use it as a teaching tool. Students take real pleasure in creating with the metals titanium and niobium. Locally, I've offered classes in the technique at Meredith College, Duke University, and Penland School of Crafts.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's fascinating, you know?

MS. SCHERR: The Meredith College students find it to be as magical as a computer, with the instant colors.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right. It is amazing. You can pass an electric current through a metal, and the surface changes color.

MS. SCHERR: The metal forms a film related to the voltage and an apparent color forms.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I'm real interested to hear how you reoriented the crafts department at Parsons, a product design rubric.

MS. SCHERR: I had to write course content catalogues for both New School and for Parsons. Convincing administrators moved slowly. I talked with many parents. I talked with the dean to explain that the craft department was never going to grow until we could educate the public with words that proved we were not teaching corn-husk doll design or kitchen pot holders. Product Design in a Media was the start of change. We then began labeling the courses Product Design, and I hired product designers to teach courses in design thought. I hired Tucker Viemeister from Smart Design. His approach made a very real difference in the quality and process of applying design to all products.

MS DOUGLAS: I know him. How did you change the Parsons program?

[END TAPE ONE SIDE B.]

MS. SCHERR: We moved from the one-of-a-kind conceptual project, the self-expression syndrome. I started hiring designers that were doing multiples, designing collections in any media. In clay, we taught slip casting rather than making a single pot. Michael Lucero was teaching sculpture; this study became an elective; Dorothy Hafner, who was producing wonderful, colorful, multiples, taught dinnerware; I hired an artist who was doing only slip-mold production, with design the primary core of the concept. In metals, we offered wax carving and casting, combined with concept rendering and all basic techniques for independent and personal fabrication.

An internship was initiated at Parsons for senior year. The program exchanged a one-semester work instruction for a credit-grade evaluation in any position of choice. Often that student was hired at the completion of the position. The product design program also encompassed clay, fiber, metal, wood, glass, glass painting, surface design, and computer design. While I was there, the head count was 800 students and 70 faculty members. All adjunct instructors.

One of the Parsons intern students is now the director of Ralph Lauren domestics department. Ralph Lauren called my Parsons office wanting to know if I had a student who could tabletop design, two-dimension. The student was interning with Dinner Ware, a well-known dinnerware designer, learning to render the different stages and faces of a design. Lauren hired her.

We worked with many designers in New York at that time. In the design world, it seemed that all designers had a New York office/studio. Finding internships for students was as simple as a phone call. The student was not paid money; they earned a grade. The student was learning to think in terms of multiples, collections, and

production techniques.

Unfortunately, due to current internal problems and narrowed interests, Parsons replaced product design with computer technology. The person who replaced me had refused to continue working with the national and international New School programs, cancelled the visiting artists program, and closed all courses that had been scheduled for non-Parsons degree students, after eight intensive years of building a broad design image. Though I am not there, I do regret the loss of a fine academic potential.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, so what happened before you resigned?

MS. SCHERR: We had converted the program from solo works to production techniques in each of the medias. Promotional planning gained attention, resulting in a strong response to the school and the department. Helen Drutt, Philadelphia, directed the history of crafts, for a first offering in the area. The internship program was proving to be very successful. We were filling classes with students.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right, that was while you were still there?

MS. SCHERR: Yes. That was when the program was beginning to grow and we had changed the name.

MS. DOUGLAS: Before you came in, had the crafts been taught as part of the fine arts department?

MS. SCHERR: It was fine arts. Students were making pots. We had a few looms, and the metals program was being handled by a satellite teaching group that copied enameled pendants from historical references.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it was like part of the sculpture and painting program.

MS. SCHERR: There was very little interaction. Before I assumed the chair position, the craft department had a part-time head, and the classes seemed scattered with the schedules of instructors directed by a fractured management.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it sounds like the changes you made were very successful?

MS. SCHERR: I enjoyed the challenge and was really disappointed when I recently learned that the program had been discontinued.

MS. DOUGLAS: Back to the idea of fine art?

MS. SCHERR: No, it had been dropped. The painting and sculpture department was icing on a cupcake. It was a special consideration to the art ideal and had little to do with being included in a design school like Parsons. The product design department had begun to realize a design-based reputation, representing another of the levels of design training, fashion, interiors, illustration, photography, and product design. The citywide product design areas of the internship courses placed students in areas that live in the real world.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it sounds like it was paralleling FIT’s [Fashion Institute of Technology, New York City] program of putting people in industry.

MS. SCHERR: We always had a comeback phrase for the FIT competition; it was “FIT teaches you how to make, and Parsons teaches you how to design -- and make.” Sam Biezer, chair, died, by the way. Did you know him?

MS. DOUGLAS: No. I didn’t know him. So when you say they eliminated the crafts department, in other words, they just melded it back into a fine art department? Or they quit teaching it altogether?

MS. SCHERR: The department was canceled, totally, and not from lack of students, or interest --

MS. DOUGLAS: That’s happened, you know; so often when a major faculty person leaves, the program cancels --

MS. SCHERR: Institutions survive. Richard Yelle replaced me as chair. He was a glass artist and furthered his interest in glass during this time. When I offered glass, it was a course through the New School course schedule only.

I hired the whole [New York Experimental Glass] workshop. Their courses appeared in the New School catalogue and attracted wide attention

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, as part of Parsons.

MS. SCHERR: Offered through the New School catalogue.

MS. DOUGLAS: As part of the curriculum?

MS. SCHERR: When I moved into the director position and decided to offer glass, I visited the Experimental Glass facility when they were in Little Italy. I was really impressed with the glass artists and the glass program that was then formed for the New School. They were a complement to the breadth of the department and, as well, the department exhibitions.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's wonderful. Well, were you teaching metals at Parsons yourself?

MS. SCHERR: I tried to teach an advanced metals class and found I couldn't leave my office without being recalled for another important emergency or meeting. My staff consisted of a secretary and a studio manager. We had approximately 800 students and approximately 70 instructors, all part-time. My schedule consumed an eight-day-plus week. The commitment extended to the visiting artists, lectures, and school events.

The program included many international artists; Wendy Ramshaw for a workshop [from London], Peter Scubic, Eva Eisler [from Germany]; artists from London, Israel, Japan; Robert Turner, U.S.A., etc., etc. -- to name a few. These artists came through New York, were scheduled to teach courses, some were one-week courses and weekend courses.

Every week there were visiting artists in one of the clay, fiber, metal, and glass departments. I tried to take part in a class, just to sit in, and gave up; I gave up being anything but a chairman.

MS. DOUGLAS: From your experience at Kent for so long, running the metals program there, to Parsons, what was the difference? How would you compare them?

MS. SCHERR: I learned almost immediately that the New York student wanted to know how to make products that would support their life in New York. They wanted to learn how to make two of a kind, not one of a kind, but 30 of a kind. The solo piece is wonderful; it salves the ego's need to be emotionally involved with the piece in the perfect world. The student should learn both -- know how to create a collection; know how to make one piece, one of a kind.

In 1975, I was a participant in the Reed & Barton's, Signature Five national sales promotion [Reed & Barton, Silversmith Company, in Massachusetts]. They commissioned five metalsmiths to design prototypes, which then would be copied and fabricated by their in-house artisans. These copies were then sold in major stores as the "Signature Five Collection." From a series of drawings, the designs were selected and the prototype fabricated by the designer. This is a designer dream world.

At Parsons, when I started to introduce production techniques, casting and assembly, I discovered that my own experience did not include many fundamental multi-production details, nor did I have enough marketing experience to relate the information for a large base of marketing and sales requirements. Knowledge of production; learning about how to cost a finished piece; amortize costs to make a profit, and as important, to support a way of life.

We learned in our experience with marketing titanium jewelry that multiples require either people or special knowledge of equipment to complete the work. To this end, that is, to teach the production of a collection in a technique with which I was familiar, I designed a line of jewelry that could be chemically photoetched in multiples. This is a technique that I had experimented with since the start of my history with metal. I paper-designed a collection of necklaces, bracelets, and earrings that would be finished in black nickel, 24-karat gold, and sterling silver. Each color was electroplated on a base of brass metal. We located a jewelry manufacturer in Providence, Rhode Island, who etched and assembled the line according to our instructions. This collection was then sold in selected major department stores such as Saks, Lord & Taylor, Macy's, and as well through catalogue publications throughout the country.

MS. DOUGLAS: I think New York is so fashion conscious that I'm not surprised that the jewelry students would want to be part of that.

MS. SCHERR: The jewelry industry is another planet. Stores like Details [New York] search for artists to do only limited unique production pieces. They want the work to look different. The little galleries all through New York and areas of SoHo and Greenwich Village and Tribeca are interested in the local, less expensive than gem-quality production pieces. For metals students learning how to do design, fabricating quickly, or simple assembly, is a key for work being successful in terms of commissions, sales, and costs.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was there at Parsons, was there an industrial design department, or -- ?

MS. SCHERR: That was my department. Industrial design in a media, each division --clay, fiber, metal -- taught design and working processes in that media.

MS. DOUGLAS: Outside of the craft areas?

MS. SCHERR: Not really. We included the design of a product in each specific area of study. “Fiber” became “surface design and textile pattern”; “clay” became “cast dinner and hollowware”; “metal” became “designing objects for collections and production.” There were assigned projects that forced students to consider designs that could be made as multiples as well as satisfy personal creative expression.

Each division, clay, fiber, metal subjects, were not given the typical industrial designer’s project, like a pencil sharpener. Our limitations related to the materials being studied. The important element in designing with materials is the material being used and the function of the product. While I was at Parsons, the ceramic department became involved with the European ceramic export industry.

MS. DOUGLAS: So did you introduce prototyping and model making in the department?

MS. SCHERR: In metal, we were starting with drawing the basics of a design to be modeled in wax, to make a casting or fabrications with a step-by-step assembly. In clay, with making the mold, we were starting with the basic concept, starting with drawings of all elevations of the product. From this we proceeded to work with the drawing to complete the model. Sometimes we worked in Styrofoam to make a 3-D model.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I’m curious to know how you think -- what was the difference, say, in -- from your own experiences at Cleveland Art Institute as a student, and then working in the industry in Ohio and in Chicago. What kind of differences did you see happen in the field of product design from when -- that experience till working at Parsons?

MS. SCHERR: What you are asking pre-dates the computer, so at the time I entered, Parsons’s methods for training had not changed that much. We were still using magic markers for color, and some were still airbrushing their renderings. The metals area had begun to work with Seppä’s shell forms, and trendy design is always in fashion. Having had the experience with Sam’s office, the volumes of information needed to design the vacuum sweeper’s basic body demanded that we learn the function of each of the parts related to the whole just to produce a sketch. Without information, a designer stays in that sort of wavy wonderland. It matters that the dimensions are correct. A mental structure of being conscious of function, mechanical needs, and the way things have to be built, all exist before the designer enters the intuitive design moment. The computer was just beginning and has changed and contributed to a whole new beginning with the way a designer is trained to think and respond.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh.

MS. SCHERR: I was fascinated with the possibilities of the computer. One of the Parsons textile instructors had some knowledge of computer-aided weaving and suggested that we purchase the equipment. To understand her position, I enrolled in a computer-weaving course that proved to be the ideal direction for students to be taking. Parsons purchased the equipment with which we could generate “color ways” in a few of the seconds that once required weeks to accomplish.

We also designed pottery forms with the computer that could relay the form to another computer-driven computer that would sculpt a 3-D model, also a process that had required weeks of manual labor. These processes were really in baby stages. Jack Lenor Larsen, world famous for textile design and one of my advisors, advised that computer training was “absolutely essential.” The computer was beginning to change the direction of education, and the design profession.

MS. DOUGLAS: Mm-hm. Very much so, in terms of designing fabrics, you know?

MS. SCHERR: There’s a company here in Raleigh, North Carolina, that weaves automobile and interior fabrics. They hired a graphic designer, who had then to be computer trained before she could handle their design needs. There are many ready-trained, competent, textile-graphic designers, searching for work.

MS. DOUGLAS: Textile designers?

MS. SCHERR: There is a textile division at North Carolina State University and, as well, a weaving instructor in the NC State University design school who is computer savvy. The old problem of coveting departmental control positions within two disparate academic departments, the textile engineers who do not respect the artist, and artists who believe that engineers have no taste. That textile manufacturer is a university graduate who possibly does not know that knowledge of color theory and color combinations requires a smart eye and design training.

MS. DOUGLAS: Very much. Right.

MS. SCHERR: I haven’t answered your question yet, but --

MS. DOUGLAS: No, I think you have. I was just interested, because I know when you were a student, it sounds

like you were very much in the world of design and product design, and having clients, and working in industry was very much a part of --

MS. SCHERR: When I was first an art student, I was unaware of art, music, or real life.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right. That was a given, it sounds like.

MS. SCHERR: I was very naïve. [Laughs] When I was in art school, I believed that all I needed to know was how to do the assignments. For me, designs just happened. At this stage of my teaching career, I believe there is no way to teach design. We can teach design elements and principles and tricks, but design is intuitive. We may refer to basic design organization, but the idea is a spontaneous emotional and mental force. There's no formula that covers a response to a solution. Skill is an extension and connection to the creative response. Skills can be taught, but the mind does the creating. In theory, some people have the reaction, but they do not have the power of inspiration and intuition.

Design for me is a response. Sam and I are open designers. At Sam's prime he had a raw and rare ability to visualize shape. I teach design now at Meredith College, and when I speak of shape to the students, I've discovered they have not experienced the concept of space or shape relationships. I remember my first design class; a "shape" was not in my vocabulary or part of my art experience. I was like most beginning art students, and I believe that in time I will be able to add "form" to my student's language sensibilities; they will have discovered a shape, what a negative shape means, and all the other magical discoveries that occur naturally when they start to feel intuitive response.

MS. DOUGLAS: Take it for granted.

MS. SCHERR: I'm not answering your questions --

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, no, I'm just thinking about how your introduction of product design into a craft program at Parsons would've been a radical thing --

MS. SCHERR: It was an inclusive direction for the craft student who wanted to concentrate on independent and personal comment, a one-of-a-kind expression, the emphasis became a different mind-set and challenge.

MS. DOUGLAS: -- in terms of especially the context of how crafts had been being taught in universities --

MS. SCHERR: And continues to be.

MS. DOUGLAS: -- and still are taught as extensions of fine art departments, where you make art; and it's not tied into industry or a broader design challenge. And so what you did, to me, seems radical. What kind of reactions, or how did you relate to your colleagues in metals in academia?

MS. SCHERR: Very poorly. I attended a SNAG conference. The panel of SNAG participants on stage were teachers from many of the major universities and art schools. My position as head of the department at Parsons was so totally opposite the accepted academic curricula. I said to them, "You're teasing the students to go into the field of teaching, where there are very few available teaching opportunities." They graduate with limited knowledge about many techniques; about production and collection design. The word "production" seems to be an insult, much less systems for making multiple products. They step into their life making a single, wonderful piece that no one can afford or that the maker does not want to ever sell. Ted Muehling, now in New York City, is one of the people who is trained as an industrial designer. One of the best, Muehling has the ability to design with a sensitive, gentle, elegant, touch, using hard metals. He controls his materials and, of course, the shapes. His work is outstanding.

I make a limited number of pieces for galleries -- Boston, Penland, and Florida -- and for my studio. I've had to train most of the people from school programs. None had really studied wax to be cast as multiples, never really studied how to design for wax or multiples or the process, who do you send it to, what do you do with it -- after it returns. These new members of metals enter the field in their new studios and wonder about finding customers. I know what it is to make one piece. You love it, and you spend any length of time making it wonderful. It is an extraordinary, unique, creation and is published in all the books -- and you still own because it required 200 hours to make. Everything matters!

MS. DOUGLAS: Serious problem.

MS.SCHERR: After four years of study, an eager metals student will plead to be hired. They intern for two weeks, during which time their level of experience is evaluated. They are a little slow, but promising, and the teaching begins. A year passes, and then they know that they can handle their own metals studio. They leave -- and the search, for me, begins again. The year of teaching pays for their education. The employer never really has the

leisure, the learning period. Starts with someone new. I have a student who wanted to take lessons from Sydney [Scherr]. On a good productive day her studio makes a comfortable hourly dollar income when she is working on commissions. The student wanted to study enamels with her. Sydney explained that as a private student she would charge much less than commission rates because she could do some small amounts of work while observing and teaching. The student could not afford any amount for private lessons. I know, I've hired interns in my studio. I pay them minimum wage for two weeks, and if they seem to be teachable, I have them sign a contract that somewhat protects my time. I truly believe that talent should move on and up, and there have been some people whom I've encouraged to leave to fulfill their potential. They have remained important in my life as friends.

MS. DOUGLAS: This sounds almost like a form of apprenticeship --

MS. SCHERR: It is apprenticeship.

MS. DOUGLAS: -- only it's not got the commitment tied into it.

MS. SCHERR: Maybe this will change--

MS. DOUGLAS: It's hard to get that though, isn't it?

MS. SCHERR: I know that when boredom with a piece starts, the work becomes unpleasant, along with the attitude toward the job. My own background reads like a telephone book, because once the work became too familiar, I had to move on and on. I feel it is very important for a person who's working for me to like what they do, and like being in my studio. My current aim is to hire someone whom I can train, whose life is local, who has a spouse with a stable job, who is not interested in moving, building a personal studio or reputation. Their primary interest is the job because the process is interesting and skills are improving. I have trained and spawned many artists that have studios all over the nation.

MS. DOUGLAS: Doing their own thing.

MS. SCHERR: They go.

MS. DOUGLAS: But they don't work for you anymore.

MS. SCHERR: No. I have one young man that does freelance for me, and he is remarkable. We stay in touch because we respect each other. He started as a student showing promise within his first assignment, a natural skill. I have just begun to search for the same kind of commitment and to avoid misunderstandings concerning the future, will have contracts that please all, artisans, interns, and apprentices.

MS. DOUGLAS: Not unless you want to start charging tuition.

MS. SCHERR: I don't blame them for wanting to walk away, though.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, have you had people working for you all along, since you started out?

MS. SCHERR: I started to hire people after working with my father for those months with U.S. Steel. For the first of the major department-store individual artist's exhibitions, in New York City 1969, hiring helpers started with the department store Bloomingdale's. An exhibition in Cincinnati, Ohio, resulted in an invitation for a solo exhibition on Madison Avenue, the first single-artist opportunity for art jewelry in a major store. I hired seven students who worked with me for three months in an around-the-clock effort to satisfy a very short deadline. Bloomingdale's was planning a large promotion of artists' works in many of their departments, and I was made the jewelry participant.

MS. DOUGLAS: When you were at Kent, did you have people working for you?

MS. SCHERR: I had four people working for me full time. I had constant commissions. I designed and worked on all projects. I was at Kent State University Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, with the balance of the time in my studio nights and two days a week. I had a manager at that time and an active business.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, let's talk about that a little bit. Were you making jewelry?

MS. SCHERR: Some of that time was with Reed & Barton, Silversmiths. I was one of their consultants. I was also doing private commissions. I had major commissions with Alcoa [Aluminum Company of America] and sculpted four wax mythological figures that were published as their promotional theme in all magazines for one year. This also was the period that the U.S. Steel collection was in exhibition at Bloomingdale's in New York. We fabricated additional work ordered by Bloomingdale's. I was commissioned then to make the religious piece that was exhibited in Philadelphia and was shipped to the Vatican in Rome for an international seminar on religions, the

Vatican's museum of contemporary art [Vatican Museums, Collection of Modern Religious Art], to replace it for the original commission, the *Torah and Pointer*, for their permanent collection. I made a duplicate of that piece for the original commission. My studio had four artisans working full time. I also traveled with workshops, and we were managing the foreign programs with the other countries.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were you doing workshops stateside?

MS. SCHERR: Yes, and at that time, 1969, the body monitors became a passionate force. The mayor of Akron, Ohio, commissioned me to design the Miss Ohio representative for the Miss Universe Competition. A student of Kent State University became Miss Ohio in the local competition. The first astronauts in space were from Ohio, so we used the spacesuit as the theme for her representative state costume.

[END TAPE TWO SIDE A.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, you were designing her costume.

MS. SCHERR: Much as I disagreed with beauty competitions, I agreed to design and make her costume. I had enormous cooperation from every industry related to the space program. NASA gave me parachute material; Goodyear Aircraft gave me standard space headgear, and any other product needed. During one of those all-night working sessions, three in the morning, I watched the awesome, still chilling, moon landing. I was making a stainless-steel belt for the costume. It simulated the devices that might measure the astronaut's heartbeat and other vital areas of the body. I was watching humans land on the moon! The TV screen showed a chart and recorded the beep-sounds that registered the results of the monitoring of the astronaut's heart, pulse, and breathing actions. Amazing!
Hours later, as I reconsidered the moon landing and the coincidence of making that belt, it occurred to me that we could measure the body in a similar way on our own planet. The following Monday, I went to the KSU [Kent State University] biology department, chemistry department, the Liquid Crystals Institute. I went wherever on campus, talking to the different department people, asking questions about possibilities. I wanted to make a pendant that measured the air, so that in bad air, something could alert the wearer. I was advised that I was looking at an 11-by-15-foot wall that measured air quality. This was 1969. The wall was filled with massive mechanical and electronic devices measuring air. The professor smiled when I commented that I wanted a device small enough to wear as jewelry.

And then I talked with an electronic engineer, Harry Hosterman, a consultant with Sam's office who was creating a motherboard for basic computer equipment. I talked with him and discovered that he was one of the unusual persons with an imagination. He became curious about my concept and agreed to work with me. In a month or so, he had reduced that huge wall of electronic equipment to an electronic field that measured 1.5 by three inches. I have the duplicate of the pendant that is now in the American Craft Museum's permanent collection. Hosterman reduced the mechanics and the circuitry, to a 7-by- 3-inch area. In the current level of technology that pendant would be no larger than the size of a facemask.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow.

MS. SCHERR: That was one of the body monitors. The first was a medical "cosmetic cover-up," a "trach" worn into the neck, into the throat, that covers a really ugly, standard hospital issue, equipment for problems of the throat and esophagus. The body monitor devices were alerts, not the trendy biofeedback items that displayed attitude and emotion, although I had used the liquid crystals in some of the monitors and called a jewelry manufacturer in New York with the thought to design jewelry using the material to show the different color range of human temperature ranges. They informed me that no one would or could be interested in knowing body heat changes. I dropped the subject. A few months later, the manufacturer called to tell me his error in not paying attention to my suggestion to use liquid crystals, and really disappointed because the mood-ring craze flooded the country.

The monitor work depended upon the knowledge of engineers. I created the concepts, and depended on electronic engineers with their abilities to bring life and sound to each concept. After the related size and function of the electronics was established, I would then design the appropriate-sized housings.

The second monitor developed was a bracelet that indicated the pre-set pulse rate of the wearer. A light emitting diode [LED] displayed the ongoing pulse beat. A radical change in heart rhythms triggered a beep, which alerted the wearer to call the medics. I have a U.S.A. Patent on the system used in this bracelet.

Other body monitors began to evolve, because new technologies such as liquid crystals, electronics, fiber optics, and the computer made measuring body functions possible. The monitors are directly connected to health concerns, not as emotional biofeedback, but as serious alert systems. By 1972, I had designed several pieces that were attracting an amazing amount of international public recognition.

In 1979, Dr. George [Malindzak], director of a hospital and nursing school in Rootstown, Ohio -- currently he is with the National Institutes of Health -- contacted me in New York City. He was researching body and station monitors and had read about my work with body monitors. He was preparing a paper for an upcoming conference of world scientists on personal monitors, to be held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Would I demonstrate the working monitors? The conference proved that my monitors were the only working concepts in the world. I demonstrated the collection to a truly stunned audience of learned scientists. Dr. Malindzak read his paper, and I demonstrated all of my 11 working pieces. One that measured air, a portable EKG, a smoke detector, battery-operated devices that measured body and air temperatures, measured heart action and pulse alerts. We demonstrated these sounds and lighted works that were masked in jewelry

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, these were technology housed as jewelry.

MS. SCHERR: I was a guest on many of the popular television talk shows. I was on the “Today Show,” “Good Morning America,” “Johnny Carson,” “That’s Incredible,” and others in both Canada and the U.S. Dan Rather taped a 10-minute documentary using Charlie Osgood, “Sunday Morning,” as the narrator. He wore all the beeping and lighted pieces, demonstrating the monitors on the evening news program that showed the first landing of the space shuttle. The American Medical Association filmed a documentary of the portable EKG monitor, a three-minute documentary that was shown on the American Airlines in-flight aircraft channels. Renewed interest with the news media circled the world probably 15 times over 10 years, with full newspaper and magazine articles. The letters started to arrive wanting to purchase the monitors.

MS. DOUGLAS: Manufacturers?

MS. SCHERR: People wishing for the monitor alerts for their individual problems. I got into another area of monitors just before we moved to Raleigh. I was working on infant crib death syndrome [Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, SIDS]. I had to stop for several reasons. The bioengineer that was doing research in a nursery in Boston had to leave for a project with the Texas Instruments for six months. At the time we were getting the patent ready for implementation. Steve Kaner, biomechanical engineer, devised a system for reading the baby’s skin tension. Our patent attorney felt that our research did not fully cover the baby-weight possibilities and advised further research on the baby-weight issue. I would wait the six months to have the proper control, and move to Raleigh, NC, so time was called.

MS. DOUGLAS: You had produced these body monitors as unique works, but you had --

MS. SCHERR: Prototypes. They’re all prototypes.

MS. DOUGLAS: But you had all along planned to put them into production.

MS. SCHERR: My research was only for the concept; production and marketing became a really powerful block in the process.

MS. DOUGLAS: Had you thought about it?

MS. SCHERR: Manufacturers were interested, but nervous about being sued should any of the devices fail. The real cost of research and development and production was still necessary, and manufacturers believed that the U.S. government should share in the responsibility. This was when Jimmy Carter was President. After much discussion, the government allocated 14 million dollars to the University of Akron, with me as the design consultant, with the engineering department to develop the products. The contract removed it from the hands of individuals and placed the development in pure research.

MS. DOUGLAS: Behind the R&D [Research and Development].

MS. SCHERR: Working with individual companies is a problem, because of copying. Pulsar Watch interviewed me and decided to step out because at the time their digital watch design development was copied by all other manufacturers overnight. “We have millions of dollars into that watch development ideal, and our patents were overrun. The profit vanished overnight.”

MS. DOUGLAS: Was it --

MS. SCHERR: [President Jimmy] Carter allocated the money through EPA.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I remember, you know, as a metals student, hearing about your body monitors, just thinking they were really fantastic concepts for jewelry.

MS. SCHERR: Well, they -- they were fine; they continue to have possibilities.

MS. DOUGLAS: What’s interesting to me is this was developed before the computer technology --

MS. SCHERR: We made full, tiny motherboards that held transistors and other components --

MS. DOUGLAS: -- had microchips and –

MS. SCHERR: This was 1969; not much was known about micro-miniaturization, or the electronics that music would need for the smoke-detector music box. After the size was established, the bioengineers had to make the motherboard, the microchip, and reduce each component. The same requirement area in the year 2002 would be less than millimeter, less than a pinhead. The most important was the portable EKG.

When I discussed the concept, I was referred to Dr. Bruce Taylor, a research bioengineer who was working in heart research in the Akron, Ohio, City Hospital. I asked him if it was possible to read the heart any other way than sound or graph. I had the ability to measure with color and temperature, with liquid crystals, and wondered if this system might react to heart changes with color. A few weeks later he called with a plan. We worked together for the next six months designing the necklace, the electronics, the connecting electrodes, batteries, and switches.

The trial day was the most remarkable event in my creative life. We hired a fine-looking model, strapped her into the electrodes, and covered her body with her clothes, and switched on the monitor. A full-color bull's-eye pattern that radiated a helical pattern with orange, yellow, blue, purple, and a tiny blast of magenta. It flashed with her constant heartbeat, a fantastic moment, like the birth of a baby. We danced and clapped with the success of that work. I believe I told you that the American Medical Association was impressed enough to film the process in a three-minute documentary that was shown in many places, including national TV, and aircraft in-flight channels.

MS. DOUGLAS: Describe the *Portable EKG Necklace*.

MS. SCHERR: The necklace is made of sterling silver, moonstones, and transparent, plastic-rod electronics, liquid crystals, and batteries. The center panel is a small polarized screen of encapsulated liquid crystals. One enclosed side panel holds the batteries; the other side panel holds the electronics. The necklace masks the connecting electrodes through tubing that falls from a necklace to the inside of the clothes covering the body. When switched on the small screen displays, the wearer's heart beat in a helical, color pattern. I was on the "Today Show," when the TV camera zoomed in on the small-screen area. My heart literally jumped, and for a heartbeat, and the TV screen was a massive single magenta color.

MS. DOUGLAS: What's fascinating to me is that the technology and the function is housed in a piece of jewelry, an ornamental piece, as opposed to, like say, a piece of benign plastic that would be strapped to your wrist.

MS. SCHERR: That is the same reaction we had with the world scientists.

MS. DOUGLAS: It has an aesthetic function to it as well.

MS. SCHERR: Vanity was the least of the persuasions; feeling comfortable became a purpose. Physical conditions in themselves are difficult to manage, and adding visual discomfort to the mix can worsen a problem. The woman at Penland School of Crafts walked toward me and her scarf fell away from her throat, exposing an ugly piece of equipment. I was troubled with the image of her embarrassment as she moved her head allowing the trach to roll around inside her neck. I felt like coughing for her. I asked her about the device. Her reaction to the staring from others caused her to wear scarves to mask the device.

I made her a decorative trach cover. The Smithsonian Institution placed a sample of the concept in their medical sciences division exhibition *Triumph over Disability*. They had seen the trach in the American Craft Museum, New York City. Paul Smith, the curator, exhibited all of the monitors in the exhibition *Portable World*.

The program grant that President Carter had awarded was canceled because of the hostages in Iran. The body monitor information is now recorded in the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

MS. DOUGLAS: Where are the prototypes? Do you have them?

MS. SCHERR: Some of them. Some of them have been stolen.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, that's awful.

MS. SCHERR: I continue to make the trachs. Three of the original monitors were stolen. I believe that people steal them for fun, because they beep and blink, little lights.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were they stolen out of an exhibition?

MS. SCHERR: The EKG monitor was stolen out of my loft in New York, while I was managing the Parsons summer

sessions at Lake Placid, New York. I usually kept them in the safe, but it was in a showcase at the time. Another was stolen out of Brentano's book store, under guard, in New York, and another one was stolen from a showcase exhibition.

I was very upset, because each monitor required volumes of time, with the electronic requirement, research, materials, and labor. None could be reproduced simply. These prototypes are now 20 years old.

MS. DOUGLAS: You were doing that work, the body monitor series, in the --

MS. SCHERR: 1969 through 1986 for all but the trachs. I continue to make the trach covers and just finished a full necklace with a trach, cosmetic, cover-up for a woman in North Carolina.

MS. DOUGLAS: Just now?

MS. SCHERR: I hear from people all over the country.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you're still doing that.

MS. SCHERR: I'm still doing it. The other prototypes, with the special requirements of individual research, medical information, materials, etc -- is cost intensive. To achieve a pre-set heart rate, the wearer would need to be close. To design the electronic components, the wearer would need to spend time with the bioengineer. Making a body monitor is an endeavor, not simply a jewelry fabrication.

MS. DOUGLAS: The technology has changed a lot since your first prototype.

MS. SCHERR: What was the size of a wall is now less than a pinhead.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, my goodness.

MS. SCHERR: I've proven the existence of the conceptual possibility; there is no need to reillustrate the function by simply making a smaller example because of current, reduced sizes of the electronic technology. One of the pieces is a *Waist Watcher*, a belt that beeps when human posture slips. This is the product Bloomingdale's wanted to sell. They offered me a space if I would supply a few thousand belts. Unless sales warranted, they would not promise beyond the number ordered, which was not enough production to cover the setting-up costs for the manufacturing. We cancelled. The patent rights concluded, and I saw the knockoff advertised on TV a few months ago. I saw another of my concepts that are copies. One is a small device that fits on glasses or a headband that buzzes loudly if the head drops in sleep. The loud buzz causes the wearer to wake up. The other is if your stomach sags, it'll buzz and wake you up.

MS. DOUGLAS: Your stomach sags?

MS. SCHERR: Your posture. It's a posture monitor.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's amazing -- and if you're listening to a bad lecture. [They laugh.]

MS. DOUGLAS: To back up a minute, when did you first begin exhibiting your metal work? Or did you exhibit it? Was it --

MS. SCHERR: My metal? You mean just general metals?

MS. DOUGLAS: Your jewelry and metal work.

MS. SCHERR: The first pieces, 1951, were the earrings that received a first award, much to the consternation of all the other metalsmiths.

MS. DOUGLAS: Really? [Laughs] Because you weren't --

MS. SCHERR: At the time, I didn't know what a metal gauge was.

MS. DOUGLAS: You weren't classically trained in metal work?

MS. SCHERR: No, two nights in a class, and then years of trials.

MS. DOUGLAS: What kind of exhibition was it?

MS. SCHERR: It was an [annual] general art exhibition at the Akron Art Institute. We had just started the design studio during that time.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that must have been very rewarding for you to have an exhibition and win an award.

MS. SCHERR: That was the first time I ever entered an exhibition in any category. My child was just barely two months old, and to have any kind of personal attention to my art was a nice surprise. I was busy being a wife, a mother, and a part-time designer. After having been an art professional for so many years, and suddenly feeling lost in a new homebound environment, being recognized in a field wherein I knew nothing was fun. It was just fun.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it seems like your career, and especially at that time, has been bridging three different worlds -- industrial design, studio artist, and homemaker with three kids.

MS. SCHERR: I was lucky to have married a man like Sam. He encouraged and supported me as a contributing artist, especially at a time when many men wanted home comforts.

MS. DOUGLAS: So have exhibitions then played a part in your professional career?

MS. SCHERR: Gaining a reputation was difficult. Competing in exhibitions was a way that attracts attention.

MS. DOUGLAS: In addition to commissions.

MS. SCHERR: Exhibiting carries two realities, recognition and accomplishment, two rewards for a personal effort. I've never designed a piece in order to appeal to a jury. Inspiration happens. I may prepare work for an upcoming exhibition, but the jury is not the incentive.

With individual commissions, the design direction is determined with customer input. We discuss the project, with much of the interview concentrated on the image, character, and desires of that person. My studio has made thousands of unique pieces of jewelry and small objects. I demonstrate and work with artisan employees until their skills are perfected to my own level of quality [or more]. In my studio, I am the designer. If a piece is a poor design, it was my determination, and if it is good – it is to my credit. I no longer feel compelled to work every element of a project.

I would rather use my time designing. As long as I know each technique, I know how to evaluate each artisan's effort in the fabrication and if they're doing it as perfectly as I would, I am comfortable with someone else being the metalworker.

MS. DOUGLAS: What commissions have been your most important ones, do you think?

MS. SCHERR: Do you mean important pieces or important people? Most of the glamorous commissions stem from references, such as the body monitors or Duke of Windsor.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, what did you make for him?

MS. SCHERR: I made him a ring with an abstracted "David"; John L. Knight, Sylvia Porter, Alice Gund, all are important names. These are names dropped. In a rough estimate, I know I've designed and made at least 10,000 pieces for individual commissions. In my 49 years of teaching, I have probably added another several thousand design concepts and solutions with students. I've also consistently been teaching at Penland for 34 years.

MS. DOUGLAS: What do you teach there?

MS. SCHERR: Metal -- and of course, design.

MS. DOUGLAS: What kind of techniques?

MS. SCHERR: I teach almost any metals technique. When I am assigned a commission, I make a decision about the techniques to be incorporated. Each technique adds to a metals vocabulary. Adding to this, there are the bench tricks that get passed along like old tales and refine the storage of special information.

MS. DOUGLAS: Which ones have really pushed you forward, do you think, in terms of the problems that you had to solve?

MS. SCHERR: Probably every time I've soldered, every design I make, pushes another urge to simplify or alter a known direction. I learned to take risks with gold, make major trial attempts with the hydraulic press. I've developed information for etching and have added dimension to many other techniques by simply learning simpler ways to manage the tools. More than adding yet another necklace to my collection, designing a trach for a client requires a different set of physical and visual rules. With the monitors, each disability requires a unique solution. If a product has social significance, it becomes important to the ceremony. If the product enhances a

life, it is important to an individual. For me, a piece starts its life with the thought, the drawing, and then becomes important because it exists.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh -- what are the trachs, exactly? Describe that.

MS. SCHERR: When there is a throat injury or a problem, a surgical procedure called tracheotomy is performed to open a small area in the throat, which allows air to enter into the esophagus and lungs. The trach is standard, hospital-issue equipment that is inserted into the neck opening. It is clinical and ugly and usually made of sterling silver to accommodate the technical requirements for soldering additional parts to the basic stem. I design trach covers or full necklaces that mask the need, the problem, and the embarrassment.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it disguises the --

MS. SCHERR: It covers the equipment. Added to the physical insult, the equipment is connected to a gauze ribbon and tied at the back of the neck. Most patients hide the trach with a scarf. A Penland artist was walking toward me when her scarf fell away, exposing the metal sticking in her throat. The American Craft Museum exhibited the trachs in their exhibition *Portable World*. The Smithsonian Institution saw the show and invited this and another heart monitor to be on exhibition in the *Triumph Over Disability* exhibition. I still have areas of the heart piece to complete, and the trach is now in their medical science collection.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, wow.

MS. SCHERR: The Smithsonian wanted to continue showing the work, so I donated both monitors.

MS. DOUGLAS: That’s great; let’s look at your studio.

MS. SCHERR: I’ve been working with small sculptures.

MS. DOUGLAS: About this netsuke [small and often intricately carved toggle of wood, ivory, or metal, used to fasten a small container to a kimono sash] work.

MS. SCHERR: I found some of the Japanese miniature netsuke carvings in Japan. I was directing a six-week Parsons student study tour, 1986. I have several that I will eventually use. The *Cat and Kitten* netsuke, of carved ivory, is an 18-karat, 14-karat gold-and-sterling-silver stool, seven inches high that has a sterling silver cushion, with 24-karat gold kumboo, on which the cats are sitting. There are 40 small rubies mounted on the cushion.

This sculpture is the *Primate Sanctuary*. It is seven inches high, 14-karat gold and sterling silver and an opal stone -- with a netsuke, a monkey, carved in wood. It was just shipped to the *Art of Gold*, three-year tour.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you fabricated the --

MS. SCHERR: The house. The housing.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, what inspired you to make these pieces?

MS. SCHERR: The themes of the carved netsuke. On many of the other pieces of jewelry I’ve used netsukes and Noh masks. Other works use ancient Japanese steel carvings, like this sword piece from a samurai antique sword, gold inlays on steel. The netsuke legend and the shapes of the sword furniture inspire the designs.

MS. DOUGLAS: Is that a brooch?

MS. SCHERR: Yes, this is an all-18-karat-gold brooch with a netsuke. This piece is jade and tourmaline, granite stone, netsuke, and opals. The inspiration comes from the netsuke, and the Oriental style.

MS. DOUGLAS: When did you make that piece --

MS. SCHERR: The *Waterfall* series? The Renwick Gallery, Washington, DC, purchased it for the permanent gallery of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American Art. I’ve made *Waterfall* bracelets, earrings, and rings with the tiny tubes of liquid-silver tubing and 14-karat gold beads.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, what do you mean, liquid silver?

MS. SCHERR: These little one-millimeter beads are tubing. I’ve strung them on fish line. And these are 14-karat gold and sterling silver beads.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, would you put these into production?

MS. SCHERR: No, they are labor intensive.

MS. DOUGLAS: These are one of a kind.

MS. SCHERR: Everything in this showcase is in the one-of-a-kind category. When a piece is placed in a museum's permanent collection, I make a duplicate that will remain in my personal collection. This is a meteorite necklace, with 14-karat gold and stainless steel. I treated the stainless so that it would match in color, that dull, dark color of meteor gray. This is a pyrite necklace and earrings. I've collected all sizes of the natural pyrite cube, a marvel of nature.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's made in nature like that.

MS. SCHERR: These are some of the different sizes of cubes from an inch to the full square-inch cube. The *Hishi* necklace is made with a sliced walrus tusk, black coral, and 14-karat gold, sterling, and jade stone. I had the tusk before the prevention of animal broaching, especially with ivory.

MS. DOUGLAS: The work in this case goes from what time period to what time period?

MS. SCHERR: My personal collection started around 1951. These pieces were made from about 1951 to 2002. Well, this piece was made in 1975. This is one of the Reed & Barton pieces. This is 1975-76.

MS. DOUGLAS: And when was the Reed & Barton piece done?

MS. SCHERR: 1975. This is the one of the smoke detectors, 1975-76.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's one of the body monitors.

MS. SCHERR: [Winding sounds] This is the smoke detector I showed at the body monitor conference. [Music box sounds]

MS. DOUGLAS: The body monitor conference?

MS. SCHERR: We blew cigarette smoke into these small holes, and the music box started to play the tune "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes."

MS. DOUGLAS: "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes."

MS. SCHERR: The scientists were amazed.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's a bracelet.

MS. SCHERR: And this necklace texture was applied with a hammer on a concrete walkway.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, that's a wonderful texture. Is there a production piece here?

MS. SCHERR: None of these are.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, what -- I'm curious to know if your ideas for this unique work are -- if your inspiration is different than for pieces you want to do in production, or -- ?

MS. SCHERR: Not really, although the process of production requires different considerations, such as, each step in the assembly adds to the cost. If the piece is to be cast in multiples with a rubber mold, the wax must be made to accommodate the making of the mold, the weight of the metal, assembly, and finishing.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MS. SCHERR: These four aluminum figures were commissioned by the Aluminum Company of America [ALCOA]. They are the only copies of the four original mythological figures that were first made in wax and shell-cast individually for ALCOA's permanent collection. The theme "Rediscover Aluminum," was published in a full year of full-color national magazines for the promotion for aluminum.

MS. DOUGLAS: What do they symbolize?

MS. SCHERR: Each 14-inch figure represents a separate subject related to Earth and Mankind. The *Phoenix Bird* sculpture, rising out of the face in the rocks below is about life and renewal; the god of the sun with his musical lyre and with the white geese that flew across the sky representing the sun; *Dianne* is the goddess of ecology and is escorted by a satyr; *Vulcan*, god of fire and metal, holding a bolt of lightning. They are mythological interpretations of the god figures. We cast them all in aluminum.

MS. DOUGLAS: What did ALCOA do with them?

MS. SCHERR: The sculptures are in the ALCOA permanent collection and are housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art in Pennsylvania. These were made after I completed the U.S. Steel Corporation commission. I continue to work with stainless steel, but I have none of the U.S. Steel collection. I made several body monitors in stainless steel.

MS. DOUGLAS: The body monitor belt?

MS. SCHERR: I used stainless steel with liquid crystal elements that were formulated to read ultraviolet radiation; carbon monoxide; oxides of nitrogen; air and body temperatures. Another monitor [buzzing noise] will buzz if my posture sags [buzzing noise]. The tiny circuitry alerts a wearer of bad posture. “Tuck it in.” [Buzzing noise] And this piece is the *No-Nod* headpiece.

MS. DOUGLAS: I see; it’s to let you know if you’re falling asleep.

MS. SCHERR: Here’s my first piece. Very first piece.

MS. DOUGLAS: The first piece of jewelry you ever made?

MS. SCHERR: Other than the earrings that won the award. I went on to a more complicated piece. This is sterling, etched, carved, and soldered bracelet.

MS. DOUGLAS: And you’ve got metal fringes in the edges.

[END TAPE TWO SIDE B.]

MS. SCHERR: The large buckle has the name Ralph Lauren abstracted over the surface.

MS. DOUGLAS: When you say “duplicated,” what do you mean?

MS. SCHERR: Well, I made this, and then I made a copy of it. We were living in New York, and Sam was managing our jewelry business. He met Lauren’s brother, who ordered the buckle for his brother.

MS. DOUGLAS: So that was a commission for him?

MS. SCHERR: I’ve made many “message” pieces. This one says, “Love is knowing you.” This one says, “All is possible.” I’ve made thousands of message rings, bracelets, key ornaments, and many necklaces, all with personal messages appliquéd to the metal. Ralph Lauren is a belt message. A bracelet with the date and a “Raleigh” symbol buried in the North Carolina State’s 100-year capsule in a cornerstone of the North Carolina Museum of History.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, were those a production item?

MS. SCHERR: Some with the same message are cast in silver and gold and are called “limited production.” I cast some of the messages in gold because in several U.S. regions gold is the popular metal. I had the show in Florida, because I was advised that in Florida only gold sells.

MS. DOUGLAS: Which show was that in Florida?

MS. SCHERR: In the Jaffe Gallery, a painting and sculpture gallery in Boca. The sword guards are production pieces that sell as museum replicas. I cast Japanese sword disks in sterling and bronze. They are called “fuchi.”

MS. DOUGLAS: Right, the hilts.

MS. SCHERR: When we were directing in the demonstration center in Seoul, Korea, I visited a small storefront that had a four-foot-deep collection of antique coins, charms, and amulets filling a three-by-three-foot show window. We returned to the U.S., and I designed the Korean collection of jewelry using the antiques. Sam had steel molds made of each of the charms, shipped the molds back to Korea, and our center hired a small brass company to produce multiples. In 1961, we then showed the jewelry collection to the museum shop organization, which then promoted and sold the collection to museums shops. The effort became known as “Museum Replicas,” the first in the United States.

MS. DOUGLAS: What -- do you have current -- anything in here that’s in current production?

MS. SCHERR: These are a few designs that are considered limited production. I make five of a single design.

MS. DOUGLAS: Those are earrings. An edition of five.

MS. SCHERR: These rings are also part of production; a two-finger ring and these are the anodized titanium

pieces.

MS. DOUGLAS: I see what you're talking about.

MS. SCHERR: Titanium. Do you know that when I did *Handmade in America: Conversations with Fourteen Craftmasters*, Barbaralee Diamonstein interviewed with me for several days, and I edited the transcript. It required several weeks. These are samples of the instant-etch process, the etching system that replaces the photoetch technique.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, yes.

MS. SCHERR: You may know the complicated problems with the original photoetch process. Extremely toxic chemicals combined with specific equipment and isolation. An image photographed and enhanced with a photographic dot-and-line pattern; the toxic emulsions; a light-type box; metal preparation; and then the etching. Two days later, the image is finally transferred to metal and then etched.

In 1991-92 I watched Rio Grande Suppliers demonstrate at the SNAG conference in San Antonio. The Japanese full-color graphics printer would silk-screen print any design that could be xeroxed. The printer could print sales cards and graphics as a promotion for jewelry.

I experimented with the possibility of printing on metal for about the next four years and finally found a formula for a resist that would permit the resist to pass through the screen and maintain the integrity of the design image. As a result, instead of days required for photoetching, the instant etch needs about an hour from the start to a finished etch.

MS. DOUGLAS: Instant etch? Now, is that --?

MS. SCHERR: I represent the Japanese company with the Gucco Printer. Rio Grande Suppliers is using a manual I prepared, and they sell the Rio Master Printer with all the accessories pictured in their Rio Grande catalogue. Have you seen the promotion?

MS. DOUGLAS: No, not lately.

MS. SCHERR: They've given the Rio Etch Press a full page including my history of the development of the process with photos and instructions. It is also promoted on the Internet. Gucco sends me a few kits, which I demo and sell to students. However Rio Grande supplies both kits, and I recommend purchasing the screens and flash bulbs from Rio Grande catalogue.

MS. DOUGLAS: Etching is one of the processes you became known for early on.

MS. SCHERR: Years before the development of the instant etch process, Oppi Untracht's first book [*Enameling on Metal* (New York: Greenberg, 1957)], was followed by *Metal Techniques for Craftsmen* [New York: Doubleday, 1968] and includes a full chapter about etching. The publishers used a photo and credit of my necklace that was pictured with his book whenever advertised.

His third book, *Jewelry Concepts and Technology* [Doubleday, 1982], used photos of my hands illustrating a complete etch technique. When I realized I could print a complex optical pattern, I bought a computer and started to design patterns that were both mechanical and disciplined, along with free-flow images. I began designing for precise computer patterns instead of drawing directly on the metal. I revert to free-drawing, though, because I love to draw.

MS. DOUGLAS: What about the pierced pieces? Are those etched through?

MS. SCHERR: Yes, by a careful registration of opposite sides of a single pattern, the image can be chemically pierced. This was one of the designs for the Reed & Barton promotion. A cuff bracelet that has the imagery registered on both sides, and then etched in nitric acid eating through from two sides to make it pierced.

MS. DOUGLAS: And it's an open network. Very delicate. Is that 18-karat gold?

MS. SCHERR: It is a 22-karat gold plating over sterling silver called "vermeil." This is a NuGold bracelet.

MS. DOUGLAS: What is NuGold?

MS. SCHERR: NuGold is a bronze alloy of copper and tin, used if a gold color is desired.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's a beautiful --

MS. SCHERR: It is a gold-and-silver cuff with a quartz-crystal stone shaped as a pyramid. I used the kumboo technique to create an optical pattern beneath the clear crystal.

MS. DOUGLAS: Kumboo is a Korean technique?

MS. SCHERR: Yes, a technique of burnishing gold over a temperature-controlled fine silver surface. The gold then becomes a permanent surface on the fine silver.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's beautiful.

MS. SCHERR: These are fish lures that I purchased in Japan. Parsons School of Design offered a six-week, hands-on session in Japan 1982. The U.S. teachers were selected, and 50 U.S. students studied metal, clay, and fiber with Japanese counterparts assisting in the study. We toured the larger cities.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow. Well, the pieces you did for Reed & Barton, how long did they stay in production?

MS. SCHERR: Two years.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's good for jewelry, isn't it? Jewelry changes pretty frequently, doesn't it?

MS. SCHERR: Fashion's demand for a three-month turnaround of publishing deadlines, keeping current with the magazine deadline is an endless invasion of time and energy. I worked with popular fashion magazines while living in New York. Their editor called for new work and available production and sales of the available jewelry. This meant new designs, new work, and a ready supply of finished pieces every two months, a nightmare for independent designers and makers.

Reed & Barton decided that the waning interest in flat- and hollowware might improve if the programs in jewelry would attract customers into their stores. Sterling silver hollowware was becoming too expensive to produce in the slow market.

MS. DOUGLAS: So they diversified into jewelry? This etched pattern looks like pop art. Or op art.

MS. SCHERR: The design is a Vasarely print. Op art painting. He gave printing rights to the Dover Publishing Company. That print really illustrates the line quality of printing the instant etch printing process. I started working on the computer because I wanted to make designs that would be as precise as possible, geometric patterns. The computer is the perfect tool even with the more free-drawn patterns.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you're using, what, a CAD [Computer Assisted Drawing] program?

MS. SCHERR: Almost any art program has a drawing capability. I've also started portrait rendering with the Tablet and Pen. I like Canvas with its variety of wash-type soft stroke possibilities. These are cat portraits.

MS. DOUGLAS: I know this sounds like a corny question, but where do you get inspiration for your work, or where do your ideas come from?

MS. SCHERR: Anywhere. Anything. I've been both complimented and criticized for having a nonpersonal style. My work has an eclectic character because I respond to any stimulation: a row of perspective lines; a shadow formed by a series of overlapping shapes; a flower or a building corner. I never know when the flash of concept will occur and register as an idea.

MS. DOUGLAS: But if you didn't point out to me there were letters in this, I wouldn't see them.

MS. SCHERR: I hope not. The message word-shapes become abstract forms. The Cat series are images of all breeds, painted as portraits on a casting. Most cats have a similar body structure. Except for the tail, fur colors, and eye structure, they look generally alike. The cats are sterling silver castings. The portraits are painted with autoenamel colors.

MS. DOUGLAS: That must take quite a bit of effort?

MS. SCHERR: They're just fun to do. These are samples from the designer Perry Ellis's spring and summer collections. While I was in New York, I became an accessory consultant for his company. We designed around the egg theme, large and small porcelain eggs made by the Parsons ceramic department. We had pewter egg shapes cast in Providence, Rhode Island. The runway models wore egg bracelets and earrings and necklaces that picked up the egg print from the clothes being shown.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, my gosh.

MS. SCHERR: Here's an ostrich egg.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, my God. What is that made of?

MS. SCHERR: Porcelain.

MS. DOUGLAS: You're holding a cuff bracelet of sorts, or an armband.

MS. SCHERR: It's an ostrich egg.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's an ostrich egg with a hole through the middle of it.

MS. SCHERR: Yes, to put your hand through and wear as a bracelet. Let me show you. All the different glazed colored eggs the fashion models wore. The little earrings are quail and robins' eggs. These are hens' eggs. I made necklaces out of them. We glazed each type egg in the Perry Ellis fabric's colors. The press covered that presentation with many curious-type comments.

MS. DOUGLAS: So in other words, this was a fashion show, and you --

MS. SCHERR: It was Perry Ellis's spring collection. We did all the accessories.
And that season's theme was the egg. Another theme was the opera *Faust*. I designed jewelry that complemented the color and design of the garment.

MS. DOUGLAS: That looks like it was a lot of fun to do.

MS. SCHERR: It was. I had a lot of students helping me; we made the eggs with slip-cast molds.

MS. DOUGLAS: The necklace is porcelain eggs, chain, and pewter; it's a chain necklace, essentially. Well, did any of these end up being jewelry that you ended up making?

MS. SCHERR: We made many sizes for all the models. When they have a fashion show, there are many models, and enough jewelry for each.

MS. DOUGLAS: Mary Ann, I would like you to again talk about what the similarities or differences are between your early work and your recent work. And I think you had started talking about your process, about designing and working.

MS. SCHERR: I believe, if anything, each experience is different, so what is real for me now may cause a new experience reaction, or I may be more sensitive to the elements of design in a different context. I'm not sure that I'm different, though. I think that whatever inspired me continues to cause an intuitive response. If I find a piece of meteor, that triggers a mental image; if I find a netsuke, that causes a visual scenario to exist. I listen carefully to the mental image. I remember way back, driving from my home 18 miles away to the university; with that quiet time, I knew the road, and I didn't have to think so hard about the expressway, I designed all phases of a single project. I quietly solved most of the levels of possible problems, from beginning to end.

The piece was practically a finished design before I would record it with a pencil. My design tools are silence and a free mind. A pencil would later refine the rougher places. In my studio with other interruptions and basic invasions, I wait for evening and night hours to concentrate in the silence. Even soft classic music interrupts, and my mind is fractured.

So I know the difference between now, with health concerns -- and before, when my mind was clearer. I know I am able to respond to the inspiration that stems from something I observed. I have no idea when an inspiration springs from what seems to just happen. And I think I mentioned before Buckminster Fuller, who says, "Intuition is a core of design -- of thought."

I used his quotation on a section of the James A. Michener sculpture commission for Kent State University. The money was payment to the selected artists from proceeds from his book about the 1970 Kent State University four-student killing during the U.S./Vietnam War [*Kent State: What Happened and Why* (New York: Random House, 1971)].

MS. DOUGLAS: What do you tell your students about that?

MS. SCHERR: I tell them not to design with their hand and pencil. As an example of an assignment: Go somewhere alone and think about the assigned work, a mobile, or a stabile. After discussing the work of Alexander Calder, they went off alone to think about an illusion of shapes that would hang or stand, bent and/or pierced. This quiet time provided them the time to deeply visualize unique shapes that were then made with cardboard mock-ups that would become metal. For them, this was a creative breakthrough. For me, a successful

teaching tool.

MS. DOUGLAS: We're sitting here in your studio and gallery; would you describe what your working environment is like in your studio -- the layout?

MS. SCHERR: The studio physical space covers about 1300 square feet of separate room areas. There are the individual bench spaces for five artisans. My office is a computer and design place, where I can hide from all sounds. The gallery area shows exhibition pieces, personal collection, and work that is for sale. The gallery also shows samples of limited production. There is a larger work space that houses the larger equipment, a rolling mill, band saw, a floor-style drill press, and a manual roller, a wall of stakes and tools. This room also has a wide metal shear,
a large work table, and anodizing equipment. Another room is vented for a horizontal sander, grinding and finishing equipment. This area also includes a hydraulic press, etching space, and photography. There are cabinets throughout each area that hold tools and supplies. My office has a space for a safe and files that cover the business, the history, and copies of nearly every design I've made from 1960 to 2002.

A private guest room and full bathroom are also in this space. The studio entrance opens to a full Japanese formal garden that spans a 100-by-50-foot area that Sam designed, landscaped, and nourished. Sam also helped the construction crew to build the Japanese style wall that secludes the area. The gravel ground is raked as imaginary water whirls. The studio is isolated from the living area, which is the street-level frontage. A walk to the studio and garden drops to another level, allowing windows in each of the rooms.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, earlier you had talked about when you took a metals class. And I'm curious to know who over the years you've taken other metals classes from -- like who has -- who has helped you along in your understanding of metals?

MS. SCHERR: My dad is the first person who comes to mind. He worked with me on the U.S. Steel project. He worked at the adjacent bench with his amazing knowledge of tools. In the daily encounter with metal problems, he knew the tricks that were simple solutions to working with metals. My mother, the tailor and seamstress, taught me to make human patterns, draping materials, and form finishing that I now use as a system for designing. Fred Miller, Cleveland Institute of Art. I enrolled in a one-semester class to learn silversmithing with him. I learned about controlling metal and the kind of tools necessary to work with through the workshops with Brent Kington, Heikki Seppä, Mary Lee Hu, Arline Fisch, Von Neumann, and many others. My position with Kent State University permitted many visiting artist's workshops, and observing techniques and demonstrations was as valuable as participating. I've learned much of what I know from working in metals and workshops.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh.

MS. SCHERR: Many of the workshop metalsmiths are the best qualified to teach their known techniques, usually the reason for the workshop invitation. They are intimately connected to their knowledge. Heikki Seppä influenced me to reconsider silversmithing. I really didn't like hammering for hours to make a form. The effort was not in my vocabulary. After the semester at CIA, I was convinced that I was not a silversmith. Heikki made it possible for me to create form with a faster motion. Lee Marshall [hydraulic press] is bringing me to another level of form with an even faster process as well as another catalogue of tools, materials, and vocabulary [laughs].

MS. DOUGLAS: Stakes and hammers.

MS. SCHERR: And presses. The hydraulic press. Lee Marshall conducted a Meredith workshop in 2002 spring semester. I was his student in a Florida workshop in 2001, and I returned with a head full of attitude and a frustrated desire to know more. I started ordering the equipment for Meredith College. Many hours of development of the many press systems makes the process important to me.

MS. DOUGLAS: Is the press a way for you to get a basic form and then work from that?

MS. SCHERR: The round gold-clad necklace form is hammered into that shape. It required hours and hours and hours and hours to form and finish. With appropriate dies the press can do it in seconds. [Laughs] If you have the right tools. Where and when are we a better metalsmith if the tool is right?

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, the press sounds like it's more a tool for industry and production.

MS. SCHERR: The hydraulic press is the current tool of interest because the process rapidly, with proper dies, creates a desired form, a form that once required hours of hammering to create. The field of metalsmithing will change, and innovation will be the operative word. The educated smiths will move metal yet again -- with newer means. The link to the past is always apparent, and older methods continue to test the integrity of the technique as well as the mindset for change. Seppä told the students to, "use his techniques freely and add discovery for

the next generation of smiths." I've quoted his advice often.

The Meredith College students have begun to pass along information they are learning as students. As a teacher, my responsibility begins with a student's mind.

MS. DOUGLAS: Have most of your pieces been functional?

MS. SCHERR: The body monitors are functional. Sometimes it's fun to build in action. The *Birdcage* ring is a bird sitting on a tiny, swinging swing within a cage. The Metropolitan Museum bracelet has moving parts.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, kinetic parts, look at that.

MS. SCHERR: The *Carousel* ring has a spring-triggered rotating center. Snap the small lever to activate the merry-go-round.

MS. DOUGLAS: Is this a ring?

MS. SCHERR: It's a ceremonial ring influenced by Judaic ceremonial rings.

MS. DOUGLAS: And is all of that fabricated?

MS. SCHERR: There are little fused figures, a lion, a horse, and a chariot.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's wonderful. When -- when did you make that piece?

MS. SCHERR: Around 1961, I made some of that period's pieces on a hot plate to generate more heat with a B-tank torch, before the Smith torch. I was still using hard solder and made a three-by-seven-inch bracelet with appliquéd two levels of 16-gauge sterling silver, which became an eight-gauge metal shape.

With a hot plate, cotter pins, and torch heat, I was unable to make the hard solder flow consistently, but it finally held together.

[END TAPE THREE SIDE A.]

MS. DOUGLAS: It's a cuff bracelet. You were sweat-soldering that together?

MS. SCHERR: I later bought the Smith torch, which is about a thousand degrees hotter than the inefficient popular torch that was recommended for teaching metals.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's a wonderful piece, though; it's got all this delicate piercing, and then you've got another graphic element of -- you said was etched.

MS. SCHERR: Etch and appliqué techniques I've used throughout all the years, as well as the first techniques taught in any of my basic metals courses.

MS. DOUGLAS: What is it that has attracted you to metals as an artistic medium?

MS. SCHERR: I backed into metals as a study. While at art school, metals was an elective for upperclassmen, not available in the foundation courses.

My first night class was such a revelation; I was suddenly hooked on a medium. I knew I was comfortable with the hard, potential feel of metal. I love almost every metal. When I worked with U.S. Steel, on stainless steel, I found a remarkable, stubborn material that had a perfect, cold-and-hot sensation. Stainless steel, like gold, once finished is like the perfection of gold; it never loses its soft, bright-gray, luster. The time needed to work the metal is equivalent to the material cost of gold.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, what kind of steel are you talking about? Stainless. I guess it's like 24-karat gold.

MS. SCHERR: It doesn't scratch; the different grades of the alloys are comparable to the weight of gold; and it is available in many finishes. When I completed the U.S. Steel commission, the American Craft Museum gave me a solo exhibition of the U.S. Steel collection. The publicity caused interest. I wrote a technical handout and sent it to everyone who inquired about processes.

MS. DOUGLAS: What did U.S. Steel commission you to do?

MS. SCHERR: At the time of the Kennedy Administration, 1963-64, Kennedy invited the metal industry to look at the U.S.A. coinage, because coins were wearing out. There was a need for a new, more durable alloy.

U.S. Steel responded to the challenge. U.S. Steel contacted me to create stainless-steel jewelry to illustrate the beauty of the metal. Stainless already had a reputation of strength, since military tanks, tools, and domestic equipment used this metal. I presented a proposal for the jewelry collection and showcases that would tour with a Brancusi sculpture as incentive for using steel in beautiful objects.

The deadline date was very close, so I called my dad for assistance. Neither of us knew anything about stainless steel. After establishing several designs I bought a band saw, drill press, and other heavy equipment not usually used to fabricate jewelry. Five months later I presented 19 unique pieces of jewelry to the public relations executives at U.S. Steel. They were impressed.

MS. DOUGLAS: What year was that?

MS. SCHERR: That was ‘63. The showcases toured all large U.S.A. cities. The news interview was on wire and printed in hundreds of newspapers throughout the U.S. They then invited me to make and submit a gift to Mrs. President, Jackie Kennedy. When the stainless-steel brooch was finished, I was prepared to go to Washington to give Jackie Kennedy the stainless-steel piece with a beautiful pearl, and her baby died. We waited, for a long period of time. And then President Kennedy was killed -- as was the project, a very sad time.

MS. DOUGLAS: But it launched your interest in working with stainless?

MS. SCHERR: I still work with stainless steel. I love the metal. It is really a wonderful experience.

MS. DOUGLAS: But isn’t it extremely hard to form?

MS. SCHERR: When I became familiar with its character, I respected and worked with it. I learned a few new, choice words as well -- along with all new finishing compounds. I located a dental laboratory that consented to allow me to work with their casting technician for demonstrating that technique. I researched local fabricators regarding methods for forming patinas, caused days of experimentation to affect a contrasting color -- cold connections required a serious investigation of methods other then structural welding -- and learned about ways to actually appliqué surfaces.

I also learned that stainless is just another metal to care about. There’s something gentle about pewter; there’s instant magic with titanium; something precious about gold; silver is endless; iron is a proud, handsome, metal; and aluminum is quixotic, understanding its performance is essential.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it has to be mechanically worked.

MS. SCHERR: Aluminum can be treated like any other metal until it is attached to itself. It must be ark-welded, which is a problem with small-scale objects. Marcia Lewis was awarded an NEA grant for metal masters to learn aluminum TIG welding in a welding shop in Long Beach, California, 1976. Ten of us were awarded transportation and housing for two weeks; ALCOA provided the aluminum. Do you know Marcia Lewis’s work?

MS. DOUGLAS: She chases -- does a lot of chasing?

MS. SCHERR: Marcia is a fine artist; she works with the techniques, repousse and chasing, mostly in aluminum. With this interest in the metal, I advised her to contact Robert Eganhouse, director of design at ALCOA, for materials. She submitted a proposal for an NEA grant to learn TIG welding. ALCOA shipped a TIG welder for her school.

Marvin Jenson, Penland, North Carolina, seriously investigated aluminum anodizing and became a designer and fabricator of aluminum lighting and furniture. Aluminum, other than casting, became a popular medium for study with many schools that invested in the anodizing equipment. Parsons installed the system, and many students designed aluminum jewelry for the marketplace. One student was commissioned by a popular movie star to make all of her aluminum jewelry. I do not have the equipment and have several jewelry pieces that Marvin Jenson anodized. Beyond these I have mostly worked only with aluminum castings.

MS. DOUGLAS: What about these pieces on the wall that look like reticulation? I’m real interested in that.

MS. SCHERR: Heikki Seppä researched and reactivated an ancient technique called reticulation. When he demonstrated this technique, he said, “Discover something about it.” Without reciting the process, and by accident of an instant need, I discovered a modification while reticulating the metal. At one of the workshops I was giving in Georgia, the metal was at the final stage ready to reticulate. The gas torch cut off for lack of fuel while I was in the middle of the demo, with no ability to find another fuel source on this weekend workshop. I had a one-time emergency, and so added to the heat source with a hot plate. We rigged a hot plate with kiln-floss protection and used the oxyacetylene torch because it was available. An iron screen protected the hot plate surface. The metal started to flow into the screen pattern, perfectly simulating the screen. I realized that

any object under flowing metal would reflect the object. We found large nails, bolts, nuts, and other steel objects that reproduced remarkable hills and valleys. Since then, I've taught the technique in this manner.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs] Oh, you're kidding; they're like topographies.

MS. SCHERR: I made a piece for the Haystack Mountain School auction with their logo, because the textures look like mountains. I'm not using the hot plate anymore. I now go directly with the oxyacetylene heat source. Depending upon the number of participants, I now often use kilns as annealing equipment because of time constraints. I was in Caracas, Venezuela, on a month long workshop with two groups of 20 students, and learned to shortcut the time.

MS. DOUGLAS: And just for the layperson's benefit, reticulation is what?

MS. SCHERR: In a simple description, reticulation is a process that creates a controlled wrinkled surface. This metal is especially alloyed to be 82 percent fine silver with 18 percent copper. Sterling silver is 92 percent fine silver and eight percent copper. As annealing takes place, the copper is brushed off the silver surface. In subsequent anneals the copper becomes less accessible, and a thin layer is being sandwiched between the outside levels of the fine, pure silver surface. The metal surfaces are fine silver. There is the eutectic condition, wherein two metals heated together cause the melt-and-flow temperature to be less than either metal, causing the thin copper middle layer to collapse, wrinkle, and the fine silver collapses into it.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you -- you're heating the sheet of silver to the point where it's almost melting, but not really?

MS. SCHERR: Training the torch on the silver surface requires time and patience. The silver on the outer edges is staying cooler than the copper in between the sandwich. The thicker outside silver surface of the metal allows the heat to melt the copper, which collapses. The fine silver collapses into the boiling copper reticules. Care must be taken to apply the heat slowly because the surface will show a burned, "orange peel" surface.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's not molten, it has a firm, wrinkled texture.

MS. SCHERR: Well, some craftspeople really flow the surface, and often it will appear burned.

MS. DOUGLAS: I see the valleys and the hills. That's wonderful.

MS. SCHERR: I enjoy teaching this because the students are challenged by the effect of being careful and controlled. I also enjoy teaching niello; both are very old techniques. With niello, I tried almost every formula available, and I could not get it to work. Phillip Fike came to Kent State University to conduct a workshop, and a preclass discussion about all my niello failures resulted in an immediate demonstration in our driveway. He picked up common materials like tree branches, a cup, and a torch, and with the metals and sulfur, and in about five minutes, he made the most beautiful black brilliant niello.

MS. DOUGLAS: Niello is a combination of -- ?

MS. SCHERR: It's an alloy of silver, copper, lead, and sulfur. Ancient alchemists believed that gold could be made with the use of the yellow sulfur powder. The metals were available in their natural state and adding the sulfur may turn the metal to gold.

MS. DOUGLAS: And it's black.

MS. SCHERR: And it turns black.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's something you have to be very careful working with.

MS. SCHERR: We wear the chemical and poison masks. Sulfur is a mean, powerful, choking stench that is intolerable, a rotten-egg smell. The odor penetrates everywhere and can evacuate an area. Care must be taken when alloying it with the lead and the sulfur. The jewelry was popular in the '60s. You remember the niello of the Siamese version, Siamese dancers on the black background?

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, I see. Remember? These samples are imported from Siam.

MS. SCHERR: Siam. Bangkok. What is it called now?

MS. DOUGLAS: Thailand?

MS. SCHERR: Thailand. And it was called "Siamese Jewelry." In the 1970s a Siamese jewelry manufacturer asked me to design a new collection, a different, contemporary collection of the jewelry using niello. I asked to know the technique to create images that could be produced in multiples. They refused to divulge their formula, and

the negotiating stopped. Then Phil Fike became interested, researched the formulas, and developed an alloy that is a perfect blue/black niello. Many early metal artists like Cellini [1500-71, author of *Treatises of Benvenuto Cellini on Goldsmithing and Sculpture*] tried to imitate the process.

The World Book Publishing Company sent me a list of over 70 formulas when I first became curious about the color in the late 1950s. I tried at least 10, and none flowed or had the correct color. Phillip Fike has recreated the perfect niello.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, the property of niello is that you can pack it into a recessed space, or sculpt with it, in a way?

MS. SCHERR: It is a surface or an inlay metal that only adheres to high-karat gold or fine silver. It attaches to the parent metal under low-temperature heat, with a very soft wash of flame. It flows over and into the metal surface or lines. Any excess may be removed with tools or abrasive power wheels, then buffed and finished.

MS. DOUGLAS: So that would work real nicely with an etched surface. Now, have you taught that as a workshop?

MS. SCHERR: I teach it probably every year that I am at Penland, if it doesn't rain. The technique must be taught in open air, and a raindrop would explode in the molten metal. I have taught it at Meredith College.

Early armor was made with niello and can be seen in the armor exhibition divisions in most major museums. Early artisans had to tin with silver and gold to make the niello alloy stick to the armor metal they used.

MS. DOUGLAS: And the armor was made out of steel, so it wouldn't hold.

Well, speaking of Penland, what other craft education programs have you been involved with?

MS. SCHERR: Haystack, Arrowmont [Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, Tennessee], Wildacres [North Carolina], Brookfield Craft Center [Brookfield, Connecticut], Seattle Craft Association, dozens of university workshops, Korea, Japan, Venezuela. I've taught at Penland each summer for the past 33 years; my kids were raised in Penland's summers. Sydney has taught enamels there as well. Randy is a glass blower; Scott did photography; and Sydney learned to be an enamellist and a fine metalsmith and goldsmith. They were all very young when I started teaching, and we were encouraged to bring our families. Randy is still blowing glass. Sydney is an internationally recognized jeweler. Randy would like to retire as an active glass artist there someday.

MS. DOUGLAS: To Penland. I take it your experiences at these schools have been good. What's it been like teaching at Penland?

MS. SCHERR: Penland changed my life.

MS. DOUGLAS: Really?

MS. SCHERR: 1968. My first time there, I really didn't know about many of the national crafts people. I was teaching in a somewhat remote area, Kent, Ohio. At Penland I learned to know, meet, and watch woodworkers, ceramics people, book artists, textile designers, photographers, and metalsmiths. I enjoyed learning about each area from the finest people in their fields. Penland encourages interaction within the studios and within the medias.

The experience opened my eyes and my life. In succeeding years I assisted in the recruiting and hiring of teachers for all medias at Parsons, Lake Placid, Penland, and independent, international programs. I recognized the names and the abilities of the leading artists in the world. I had the advantage of growing up in the beginning of the craft movement, when knowing the names of the artists was possible because I was a part of them. Our New York loft, with a guest room and bath, was open to the long list of artists who visited the city; we were a part of a growing concentration of good friends.

MS. DOUGLAS: So that leads to other craft organizations, guilds, and conferences. So your involvement at Penland led to --

MS. SCHERR: I was aware of the media groups. Through Sam, who was a charter member and life member of the IDSA [Industrial Designers Society of America], I was a very much part of that group as an active, contributing spouse and designer. Other media groups honored my position at Parsons with participating memberships.

MS. DOUGLAS: IDSA?

MS. SCHERR: Sam and I together had been awarded recognition through events in the industrial design field. A year ago Sam was recognized as the father of industrial design in Seoul, Korea, for his tireless effort developing

their design industry in the 1950s and ‘60s. They honored him with the invitation to be the key speaker at their design conference, inviting both of us to be with them. Unfortunately, the invitation came while he was too ill to accept their first annual Design Achievement Award. Our son, Scott, who is sound director at PBS-TV, taped a short interview with Sam thanking the Korean government for the honor.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were very much a part of industrial design.

MS. SCHERR: I attended all the Industrial Design [ISDA] conferences with Sam; I presented slide lectures and an exhibition for the conferees and spouses. My commission with U.S. Steel was a direct result of this organization. During those beginning years of our office [1952], the American Craft Council sponsored their first conference at Lake Geneva. It was my first meeting with the organization. I met Paul Smith [director of American Craft Museum, New York City], who was responsible for many invitations to exhibit. When Sam’s studio searched for artists for the craft program in Korea, we attended many of the media conferences 1955 and ‘56 in search of instructors.

MS. DOUGLAS: Late ‘50s. What was that like, meeting all those people?

MS. SCHERR: I was so completely naïve; this was a new experience for me, and I didn’t know that a world of committed artists existed.

I met Robert Von Neumann at the ACC conference. He was a jeweler I had heard about. He was very kind. He showed some of his work. Sam invited him to be a participant in the Japanese program, for which we were contracted. He agreed to conduct a metals workshop at Kent State. At this session I learned photochemical etching, a technique I would use with the Reed & Barton collection and later on, the process I applied to the instant etch development and information manual for the Rio Grande catalogue. He had to discontinue working with metal because his eyesight was changing.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, no. I used his textbook in my jewelry class [*Design and Creation of Jewelry* (Philadelphia: Chilton Co., 1961)]. The ACC at that time, what was it like?

MS. SCHERR: Mrs. Cornelius Webb was the director and driving spirit of the American Craft Council and Museum at the time. At one of the first ACC conferences, there was no drinking or smoking on the conference campus. And we had -- I can’t remember his name, but he was a sculptor and a truly fun-filled person. Most of the conferees had gone to bed, but he was wandering all over campus, quite drunk, singing and talking to lampposts. Since drinking was prohibited, he was alone, searching for action, and came to our lighted cottage. He came into our room with his bottle. [Ms. Douglas laughs.] And we all had a drink. We were a bit noisy, and were joined by several less sleepy people. These are really memories --

MS. DOUGLAS: It’s oral history.

MS. SCHERR: We were so innocent -- and the craft scene was young.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, the ACC at that time, were there other craft organizations at that time, other than ACC?

MS. SCHERR: I was living in Ohio during that time, and was not that interested in the activities of areas other than the metals groups that were in touch with me for exhibitions or workshops. I recall a body monitor lecture with the Michigan craft organization, the Ohio Designer Craftsmen, and the Society of North American Craftsman, a Florida group, an active group in Wisconsin. I had a large stainless invitational in America House in Birmingham, Michigan, in 1966, and another in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, featuring the steel and sponsored by the state’s craft organizations. Following the ACC solo exhibition in New York City, I had many requests for workshops. Paul Smith, ACC’s museum director, was interested in U.S. Steel as a possible fund source. They agreed and sponsored a reception for my exhibition. I became a member of ACC and Ohio Designer Craftsmen and SNAG.

MS. DOUGLAS: The Ohio group was very active?

MS. SCHERR: Ohio Designer Craftsmen. ODC was becoming really active. Sam was very involved with all of the craft areas. He was a consultant with the Appalachian program; he had the U.S.A. crafts contracts in the Orient and South America and knew the leading crafts people. He understood the marketing directions and problems that the crafts people were facing. His design office had several employees who worked in enameling, clay, and wood, and many had hobbies painting, sculpture, and other creative activities.

MS. DOUGLAS: There was a Midwest Designer Craftsmen, wasn’t there?

MS. SCHERR: The Midwest, the Southeast, and probably each section of the U.S. developed a media organization. When Sam was the ACC director, we attended the national conference in Winston Salem, North

Carolina. The registration was probably close to 600 members. I now belong to Florida Society of Goldsmiths, ACC, SNAG, and a new organization CAM [Contemporary Art Museum]. These past two years, with Sam so ill, has curtailed activities, and I have had to cancel many workshops. I decided not to become involved until I could be more dependable. Last moment replacements cause too much confused frustration, students cancel, faculty replacements. I decided this was just not the time. In the last two years, I've been to Penland, to Florida, with the Florida Designer-Craftsmen. I'm going to Florida in January and of course will continue with the full metals program that I share with Sydney at Meredith College and Duke University

MS. DOUGLAS: You're teaching at Duke?

MS. SCHERR: I teach special courses at Duke University. There are few art courses at Duke, and I am able to schedule special courses whenever I choose the time. These courses involve both student and staff communities.

MS. DOUGLAS: And what about when you were first getting aware of these other crafts people through ACC? What were the museums like? Were they supportive of crafts? Like the Toledo Museum or Akron Art Institute?

MS. SCHERR: The craft movement was becoming powerful at that time. In 1966, I was given an uncommon retrospective exhibition at the Akron Art Institute. The NEA director toured the Kent State campus to talk about the role of government with the arts. Being invited and selected for special exhibitions seemed to be natural events as an extension of making art. Sydney and I were honored again, just recently in 1998, in the same Akron Art Museum with an exhibition called *Relative Visions*. Many museums are becoming more tolerant about the subjects of sculpture and painting and the decorative arts. [Ms. Douglas laughs.] Excuse me. I don't know, the little potholders. I mean, everybody thinks -- handicrafts, kitchen arts?

MS. DOUGLAS: Handicrafts?

MS. SCHERR: Handicrafts. While chairing the product design department at Parsons, I did become resentful of the word "crafts," because the implication, with parents and of students, was that of hobby and leisure arts. With the national fairs and broad exposure of remarkable handmade products, crafts have again gained the deserved respect. Especially in New York, where everyone seems hip to the titles that flood the world. I continue to love New York City, but I do understand the old *New Yorker* magazine cover: U.S.A. ends at the Hudson River. My Parsons student enrollment jumped when I changed the name from crafts to product design.

The North Carolina Museum of Art has an attitude about art and decorative Art. I was scheduled to do a metals workshop there with my etching technique. I talked to the education director, and in planning the promotional text mentioned small sculpture and metals. He referred to me a "craftsman" in a way that discounted me as an artist, implied "non-artist." "The work is not 20 feet high, but it is sculpture. To prove this true, I returned with several of my mini-sculptures [eight by three inches] that I had just finished. He was impressed, but persisted with an obvious disregard for the decorative art form. There is a dilemma about historical collections. John Coffey, a curator there, asked me to identify a collection of ancient objects and wanted me to explain the differences between repousse, chasing, and engraving. The contradiction: the North Carolina Museum owns a handsome collection of religious Judaica craft objects.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that's good. He's not a dec arts person?

MS. SCHERR: I was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. The curator of twentieth-century art, Penelope Hunter-Stieble, was leading a tour group through the area of East Indian art. I was standing near a showcase with a display of objects and jewelry, some using the niello technique. She turned to me and asked about the black inlay process, so I described niello to her and her group, a lesson for them in alloying and how it is applied.

[END TAPE THREE SIDE B.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it sounds like some things never change, then, when you were just discussing how craft was not considered relevant to one museum's collecting area. But -- because that's been a long-time complaint amongst the crafts field. But it seems like there are plenty of other museums that have embraced the crafts and shown them as contemporary art. Has that been your experience?

MS. SCHERR: I've not had a problem with attention. My work is owned by many major museums, and I feel honored with all the interest given my efforts. Most major museums will not accept work donated by the artist. Artwork is purchased either by the museum or is invited to be purchased by other individuals and then donated to the museum.

I have art in the American Craft Museum, New York; Ohio Museum of Crafts, Ohio; the Metropolitan Museum, New York; the Yale Museum of Contemporary Crafts, Connecticut; the Vatican Museums, Rome; the Massilon

Museum of Art, Ohio; the Goldsmith's Hall in London; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania; the Akron Art Museum, Ohio; and then there are the major collections that are invited to tour museums, like the Alice Gund Collection, the James A. Michener Collection, the Knapp Collection, and on.

MS. DOUGLAS: Your pieces.

MS. SCHERR: My pieces, the pieces that are in museums that also show their sculptures and paintings in the same spaces. The Yale Museum in New Haven, Connecticut, looked at industry and curated an exhibition they called *Art in Industry*.

They selected one of my Reed & Barton necklaces. Yale is a major museum and, like the Metropolitan, was not necessarily buying craft; they were buying artists from the twentieth century.

MS. DOUGLAS: What about the art community in North Carolina? I mean, outside of the museum in Raleigh, have you -- what do you think about the community here in North Carolina? Is it receptive to craft?

MS. SCHERR: The Research Triangle [Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, NC] has strong art individuals. The three cities have a mixed audience of state government employees, research personnel, three major hospitals, nine universities and colleges, a diversity of businesses, and some of the balance of the population is in the arts. Raleigh, the state capital, is recovering from an administration that was generally disinterested in any art form. I was a member of the Raleigh city council's arts commission when I first moved to this city. I thought it would be a good opportunity to meet other art organizations, other art-oriented people. I learned that most of the commission members were really strong advocates of community art, but were having a difficult time convincing the mayor and the council for a community visual or performing arts agenda. The arts committees eventually became well weighted with attorneys who were savvy and vocal about the desired arts funding that had been supported by the city. While the "triangle" supports the arts in Raleigh, the governing people often view art as a fashionable outlet. Aside from individuals and groups of art organizations, Raleigh is not an art mecca, like Winston-Salem, Chapel Hill, Asheville, and Charlotte.

MS. DOUGLAS: So, who is managing the arts?

MS. SCHERR: For one, Charlotte Brown [Director, Gallery of Art and Design, North Carolina State University, Raleigh] is actively promoting, with exhibitions, local and state artists, and as well, scheduling a variety of national media exhibitions. There is another new museum, now in development, CAM [Contemporary Art Museum]. It is comprised of art-minded individuals who believe that the city of Raleigh must represent its local artists along with the national artists.

MS: DOUGLAS: Art organizations?

MS. SCHERR: I belong to one of the most dedicated advocates in this whole state, the Raleigh Fine Art Society [RFAS]. By selective invitation, members serve on committees that concentrate on developing programs in the arts in several areas. The membership is limited to 200 people. RFAS sponsors programs in music, writing, art, and dance. We also volunteer for special citywide interests like ballet, the Governor's mansion tours, the museum, and the symphony. I've also served on the advisory board of NC State University gallery; the board of trustees, Penland; the Raleigh Arts Commission; the SNAG Board; the Society of Goldsmiths, to name some. In the last two years, I've dropped out of many groups except Raleigh Fine Art Society, and the Meredith College teaching.

MS. DOUGLAS: What about an informal community of other artists?

MS. SCHERR: The Meredith faculty is a very compatible family of artists. There are a few gatherings of independent arts-oriented people and professional artists. I also reluctantly participate in some of the official and unofficial political interactions.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs] Well, probably at different points in your career, you've had more interaction, or less?

MS. SCHERR: During the time I taught at Kent State University, I joined all professional and local artist organizations. My basic studio work was covered by trained people, my family was occupied with college, and Sam was traveling with his work. My time was generally free to permit personal choices. In New York City, and as the wife of a museum director, I was involved with a "social city" beyond imagination. Parsons and the New School connections, with 70 to 80 faculty and department functions, added to an already active social life. When we moved to Raleigh, my social world collapsed. I now relish the early private time living here instead of frantic, wonderful New York City. My work has become more introspective and, of course, less related to popular sales considerations.

I enjoy the symphony. I have not been that interested in the social whirl because I'm not ready for it. I really

would like to travel back to France to find my grandparents' birthplaces. While in search of them, Sam had a stroke one hour after we arrived at the Hotel Lenox in Paris. I've been out of touch.

MS. DOUGLAS: I saw you at the SNAG conference.

MS. SCHERR: That was one of the first in a while; I've missed the last four.

MS. DOUGLAS: Do you consider that group a community of yours?

MS. SCHERR: Yes. It was wonderful to see everybody. I took pictures of old friends and sent them copies. We were all surprised to see each other.

MS. DOUGLAS: How has the field of metalsmithing changed since you've been involved?

MS. SCHERR: Amazing! The talents that are emerging in metalsmithing are astonishing. The investigations with techniques open new paths of research. The new people are innovative and doing artworks with individual risk-taking. Some of it is wonderfully silly, like some of the stuff that came out of England in the '80s, trying to imitate David Watkins, which was a little bit foolish. He was and is an outstanding designer and craftsman. The world, of not jewelry so much as metalsmithing, is changing; trying alternate materials; computer fabricating; different hydraulic forming. There's no historical stone unmoved. Even the traditional life of enameling is becoming a part of current technological updates. Sydney is finishing a seven-foot-high sculpture that includes enamels, purpleheart wood, and metals.

MS. DOUGLAS: Do you think of your metal work as being part of an international tradition, or one that's more particularly American? Or some other kind of tradition?

MS. SCHERR: With communication systems, Internet, magazines, and books all at an instant replay, knowledge of international thought is easily available. Within the past two years my work has been included in three major international publications: *Bijoux International*, France; David Watkins's *Design Source*, London; and a Polish publication I have not seen. Watkins is the only author requesting a photo of recent work. The other publications had access to my work from files. In the current metals genre, being well known is more difficult, considering the massive number of artists working in the medium. The most popular style for so long was George Jenson, Swedish metal work. The designer with the company was Turen.

"Off-the-body" jewelry was an English trendy direction in the early 1980s. Wendy Ramshaw and David Watkins were instrumental in a more elegant, contemporary style at that time, and their disciples advanced the imagery to another level of expression with jewelry that did not make contact with the body.

Since that initial strange impact, British design has calmed a little. The media magazines, the fairs, travel, and exhibition result in a world of natural exchanges. The jewelry industry survives on derivative trends that filter down or start the public popularity. The national fairs, with unique, beautifully crafted metal work, often initiate broad interpretations of similar concepts. The clichés become trends. I have been a part of the worldwide craft movement since it began in the 1940s, and participated in exhibitions in many countries, so staying in that early circle was not unexpected. The ability to capture world attention at this time is much less possible.

Mark Peiser in glass, Robert Turner in ceramics, and I juried the Best of Show entrees at the Baltimore ACC Fair in 1997. There was a jeweler, a man who created a series of delicate, wonderful wheels. I've lost his card, and I've never seen his work again. I thought he was outstanding and that he would surface anywhere again. Robert Lee Morris, somewhat younger than the beginners in that early generation, became the star of the fashion scene and was copied by many others.

Many designers are trendsetters and license their work to more famous names in stores like Cartier and Bergdorf Goodman. Ted Muehling, an industrial designer by training, is one of the finest jewelry designers. He has his personal style, and his work is stunning and popular with its delicate beauty. He is with Bergdorf Goodman and has his own label.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, if you think about metalsmithing, the field of metalsmithing, do you think, from all your travels, that it has a particularly American identity to it?

MS. SCHERR: You had asked me that -- I got off the subject?

MS. DOUGLAS: No, you were asking -- you were answering it in a different way, but --

MS. SCHERR: Do I think my work has an American quality? I love fantasy, the bizarre, the classic, and the kitchy. My work reflects a mode and a mood. Europe follows cool, geometric designers like Peter Skubic, along with the Swedish transplant, Eva Eisler, whose work is disciplined, elegant, clean, and mechanical. The Japanese have their own kind of simplicity and fantasy. The American look, well, I keep thinking that the American image should

be a look, but this is not the tradition in this country. America has individuals who design in personal styles that identify them with their style. The innovation within a concept is not yet the way of the computer-aided thinking, although Tyler School of Art and Stanley [Lechtzin] has opened that door in a positive way.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, maybe it isn't a look; maybe it's just more that people are making this kind of stuff in the first place.

MS. SCHERR: Peruse SNAG's *Exhibitions in Print* to see a curator's bias. The publication caters to persons with the same intentions as the curators. Playing and thinking and working to a style seems to be contrived and an empty goal. Fashion magazines often feature a style of jewelry like ethnic assemblies or turquoise stones that start a trend for that period.

MS. DOUGLAS: But that's a small segment of the working population, I think.

MS. SCHERR: But then, see some of the exhibitions and note the lack of fresh thought, and the same old same old.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, so I think what that says to me is that American metalsmithing is a small community.

MS. SCHERR: The innovators, the persons researching design and technology together.

MS. DOUGLAS: Maybe it's an insular community that's looking inward as opposed to looking outward, and that's why you see people repeating other people's ideas, possibly?

MS. SCHERR: Dan Jocz is being copied by anyone who wants to get attention.

MS: SCHERR: You are now viewing my work so you have a fresh eye; do I have -- am I derivative?

MS. DOUGLAS: No, I think you're one of the originals in the field. One of the interesting things I've always thought about the fashion industry, the jewelry fashion industry, is that -- in terms of companies, is they always knock each other off. That's part of their business.

MS. SCHERR: It's part of their business. With the Bloomingdale's exhibition in 1969, several pieces were copied during the time of the show. I called a manufacturer, who told me that he "owned" the design because he had purchased the piece.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it's always interesting to see that happening in a more -- art side of the jewelry field. I guess from all your travels, are there counterparts in other countries to the American metalsmithing field? Or is that a unique kind of thing?

MS. SCHERR: For a long time, I was very involved with the action all over the world. It was an easy mark to be involved in invitations to show in Japan, Germany, and anywhere invited. When the Parsons chair position invaded all other activities, I realized that I could not succeed at two jobs at the same time, and I looped out. I sent regret letters, and then after a while the invitations and book requests stopped. While in Raleigh, I've become active again in the field --with some limitations.

MS. DOUGLAS: You're talking about getting an international circuit of exhibits.

MS. SCHERR: There are cycles. New names appear for a while and are replaced by the last generation of known artists, followed by a recurrence of new names. A major exhibition, or a publication, or technique will start another cycle. William Harper, Heikki Seppä, and I were invited to exhibit in Goldsmith Hall, London. The international publicity, for me, led to a rush of invitations to exhibit. I'm now a member of the Goldsmith Hall, London. It is a very closed, prestigious institution; there are about three women that were members.

MS. DOUGLAS: Which travels have had an impact on your life and your artwork?

MS. SCHERR: I directed a KSU history tour in Mexico and was offered a partnership with a large jewelry shop in Tasco. My work had a primitive quality at that time. Viewing the magnificent icon collection during the trip to Russia affected my work, once I digested its impact. Japan was the most invasive. Following the trip, inspirations became copies of anything Japanese. I waited about a year to lose their influence, and then started to design with the essence of Japan rather than copying their symbols.

MS. DOUGLAS: I was asking -- well, you were gonna tell me about a trip to Jerusalem that you had.

MS. SCHERR: At one time I was a Catholic, and in a tour of Jerusalem, the source, was the home of a spiritual birth, an emotional shock that affected me for a long time after the exposure. Perhaps not with my art, but I do know that if I could have moved to Jerusalem then, I would have. It was comfort, a kind of home.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was it -- the artifacts, the people?

MS. SCHERR: It was the Old City. I felt spooked, maybe that I had lived there before. It was a troubling experience that has nothing to do with my art. It just has to do with feeling familiar and comfortable. It seemed important.

[TAPE STOPS, RESTARTS.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Today's April 7th, 2001, and this is our second session of recording. Mary Ann, I wanted to ask you about your work environment and your studio; if you could describe how that is laid out and how it works for you.

MS. SCHERR: My studio now covers an area of about 1300 square feet. And aside from two rooms that are devoted to guest accommodations, the full space is studio. My office and isolated design space includes my computer; I have a small gallery area; the work bench area easily handles five people; there is a small galley kitchen; a large working area that holds the larger equipment, forming tools, the cutters, band saws, and drill press; and then another room that is the grinding, buffing, and finishing area, This room also includes etching and photography. I've had classes here for ten students. The studio overlooks a Japanese formal garden. We work outside when the weather permits.

MS. DOUGLAS: And you have a gallery?

MS. SCHERR: A small gallery. A 12-by-12-foot gallery, which carries most of the pieces that are rotating in and out of shows or exhibitions. We bought this house because of the potential studio space that was built after we moved into the house. The living space is separate.

MS. DOUGLAS: And also, before you moved to this house, you had a studio and gallery downtown?

MS. SCHERR: We bought a building when we moved from New York, where I had the huge space, a 100-by-50-foot studio. We moved here to Raleigh and bought a building that kept my sense of space intact. We wanted to be in a building, to be in a public space. I discovered that the casual browsers kept me preoccupied. I had to hire someone to satisfy the people wandering in and out, because they were curious, some not necessarily interested in buying. The interruptions were distracting and a problem. We moved to this home, where I have a full studio and private time, since all appointments are scheduled.

MS. DOUGLAS: How long did you have that space downtown?

MS. SCHERR: Two years. I worked in the location for two years, and kept trying to figure out ways of keeping private hours. Fortunately or otherwise, potential customers are compulsive, impulsive, and curious. The studio was in the path of antique shops, so we were also a target for browsers.

MS. DOUGLAS: Had you always had a gallery space at your home or shop before you moved to Raleigh?

MS. SCHERR: Yes, actually the gallery space displays completed work, exhibition pieces, my own collection, and the artwork that we make for other galleries' inventories. In the New York City loft I had a gallery space that again housed finished works. These studios are and were "appointment only."

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, you were describing earlier to me the -- the issue of -- of having your own display space in your studio and not being able to show in galleries in Raleigh because of that. Would you like to talk about that?

MS. SCHERR: The problem with showing in your own space makes other galleries aware of your competitive posture because they lose customers. When people know they may visit your studio, it often prevents browsing-type, potential sales, then and in the future. Often people believe that the price might be different. Ethically, I charge the same in my studio as is charged in other galleries. I forfeit the markup profit.

The maker receives half the cost when the piece is sold in other places. However, the fear with the shop owner is that the customer will also send others to the maker's studio, rather than to their gallery. That is the risk. The local shops really don't want me to show in their places. I show elsewhere, Boca Raton, Mobilia Gallery in Boston, the Penland Gallery; and one in Wilmington, North Carolina, called Bijou. The work is all on consignment to prevent markdown when the work is in show too long.

[END TAPE FOUR SIDE A.]

MS. DOUGLAS: I wanted to ask you also what you thought -- if you could talk about what role universities have had in the American craft movement.

MS. SCHERR: The predilection of the instructor may determine the direction or misdirection of a student. The

Parsons students were exposed to self-expression, plus the concept and production, a broad scope of the metals field, allowing an educated choice. In most universities the advanced-degree candidates work toward the MFA with the idea and hope of gaining a teaching position. The teaching positions are scarce, and a metals education is intense, since the allotted time required to learn the basic techniques must be covered to qualify. The university and college level may be training students in a one-dimensional pattern that inhibits the opportunity to move toward the goal of self-support within the scope of the degree where the concentration often excludes a total education.

Universities are supporting business administration courses and offer degrees in business because the school of business attracts in an enormous number of students. The fine art departments are remiss in encouraging uniqueness instead of a broad base of law and business education that includes all facets of a subject. The painting students flood the studios with paintings in their hope to develop a life-support system. They are "artists," they have a portfolio loaded with inexperience and little understanding of the costs of living on and on, how to copyright a concept, or the cost of a brush. There's a huge difference in the way they are trained. Knowledge of promoting, budgeting, and evaluating time, materials, and their business direction is a mystery.

The alumni associations in most universities gain their funding through academic- and business-degree students, not the artists. In the minds of university economics, the art department is a dependent school that must have adequate enrollments to support the department since there is small alumna funding.

Metals departments throughout the U.S.A. are closing because the costs are high, and in some schools the metals courses are electives rather than major disciplines so there is no ongoing development of the programs. Many multimedia craft programs are folding because of this situation.

MS. DOUGLAS: So, for example, today you're teaching at Meredith. What's the difference between the students you have at Meredith and the ones you had at Kent State.

MS. SCHERR: Meredith College is the largest women's school in North Carolina. The college offers education and liberal arts degrees with graduate-degree programs in some studies. The art program offers a BA with concentrations in special areas. The school of art has a broad curriculum of foundation courses, and concentrations in painting, sculpture, drawing, computer design, graphics, textiles, photography, ceramics, 3-D design, metals, enamels, and illustration.

Kent State University, a much larger institution, offers a liberal arts program with fine arts degrees [BFA] in some studies. The graduating students with an MFA are anxious to teach art, following their senior year of practice teaching. Parsons School of Design offers degrees in arts with a concentration in specific studies where the selected emphasis determines the four-year program. Teaching is attractive because most teaching schedules include the time for producing personal art.

MS. DOUGLAS: Teaching at college level, or -- ?

MS. SCHERR: At Meredith College, with no master's degree programs in art, the choice is education, elementary, middle school, and high school. Design studios hire some of the graphics majors; arts administration is also a popular goal. Their skills are not yet developed well enough to move into the field as professionals. Although I have hired some students as interns in my studio.

MS. DOUGLAS: Do they take art-ed courses at Meredith?

MS. SCHERR: Art education and teacher training

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay. Well, another question that relates to the crafts movement in general is what kind of role have craft magazines played in your development as an artist? Or has -- has that played a role at all?

MS. SCHERR: I'm a member of the ACC, which publishes *American Craft* magazine and SNAG, with *Metalsmith*, which I've read since first published, and enjoy the articles. I am more curious about the photo coverage than being influenced by the work. I do learn about the art of others and watch the changing trends. I am affected by the articles. Lois Moran, editor of *American Craft*, has been with the publication since she replaced retired Rose Slivka, the original editor, 1977-78.

The American Craft Council decided to support only a museum and a magazine, rather than the active, national, regional, organizations of the council. As editor, Lois opened the image of the publication with unusual vision. The editorial format covers a broad general appeal, and each publication has an elegant beauty. Lois and her associate editor, Pat Dandignac, have produced a consistent, excellent, magazine that illustrates, instead of controlling, the activities of the craft world.

Metalsmith magazine as well, is open to the metalsmiths. The SNAG membership with its early publication,

Goldsmith Journal, 1975, had a 90-person membership. Now with thousands of members reading *Metalsmith*, it is the one serious visual connection to other metals artists. The *Lapidary Journal*, with a newly revised how-to format, and *Ornament* magazine that covers fabrics and ornaments, have become popular with the many facets of adornment. *Ornament* magazine has a large following of bead artists.

MS. DOUGLAS: What -- what about in establishing a sense of community or -- ? Has it been helpful that way, to connect you with other crafts people?

MS. SCHERR: The SNAG publication *Exhibitions in Print* tends to cause verbal interaction between members with its theme images. There is ambivalence and respect among the readership. If there is disagreement with selections such as computer-aided artwork, enamels, hydraulic press, or any directed selection, the reader may feel challenged, and the response becomes interesting. Reaction to the written text often causes critical response. Reviews and evaluations of individuals provide insights into both authors and artists.

MS. DOUGLAS: So there's feedback?

MS. SCHERR: Sometimes. I've had interviews that included photos and broad overviews and have had no personal response. I have had many calls and questions from the Rio Grande catalogue page that describes the etch process. People read the page about the technique and want to know additional information.

MS. DOUGLAS: What system are you talking about? Is that a technique you developed?

MS. SCHERR: The SNAG conferences always invite vendors to show new tools, stones, or processes. The Gucco graphics press was being demonstrated. A tool that could print cards for assembling jewelry, printed invitations, or announcements. I researched the press for another four years and developed a technique that could replace the intense and toxic standard equipment used for photoetching. I was fascinated, if I found formulas for resists that would maintain the integrity of the image, with the possibility that I might be able to print designs on metal for deep- and fine-line etching.

I may have mentioned this; my first serious professional position was a graphic design layout artist with the Burton Browne Advertising Agency, in Chicago. Drawing has always been important, and as I watched the press demonstration in San Antonio, I believed I could perfect this tool for the etch technique. A baby-blue tool that burns a line in a screen and will print full color on paper and fabrics.

Researching all facets required five years of errors and new starts. I finally shipped a sample bracelet to Molly Bell at Rio Grande Suppliers, and in turn, Rio shipped back screens and bulbs to allow continuing the development of a predictable resist. The C. R. Hill Co. in Berkley, Michigan, worked with me to formulate the asphaltum resist. I then wrote the instruction manual for the catalogue sales. Rio Grande offers it as "Rio Master Etch Press," a metals tool. I have a copyright with the concept, and I represent the Japanese company Gucco in the U.S.-Southeast. The Internet offers the press as an art tool with my email address. Rio Grande sells the kit and all accessories.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow, do you use that in your own work, that technique?

MS. SCHERR: I have been etching metals from the first pieces. I developed the process because I knew the dangers inherent in some chemicals, and I felt determined to master geometric drawings to achieve etched, optical affects. I had been searching for a system that wasn't so dangerous as the accepted, photoetch chemicals and equipment.

MS. DOUGLAS: Nitric acid?

MS. SCHERR: Nitric is controllable. It's the xylene and the other chemicals –

MS. DOUGLAS: The resist.

MS. SCHERR: The resist is a refined tar made soluble in paint thinner. The Japanese inventor of this automatic printer is brilliant. The machine has a simple, a minimal action. The preset time and distance between the flash-burned image is calculated to melt the silk screen, plastic film that exposes the art image precisely. A standard copier, carbon art image is placed in a fixed position within the printer. Flash bulbs burn the art image into a laminated, plastic-coated silk screen. All functions of the printer are in relief on the printer surface, and each step is strictly controlled with printed arrows.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what attaches the resist to the metal?

MS. SCHERR: The art image, now burned through the plastic coating, exposes only the silk-screen image. The image is then squeegeed onto the metal and etched.

MS. DOUGLAS: You're silk screening the metal. Are you silk screening ink?

MS. SCHERR: Refined tar. Asphaltum, specially formulated by C. R. Hill, Berkley, Michigan. This formula required several months to develop and locate a willing supplier.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, wow.

MS. SCHERR: I can print a fingerprint, a very fine drawing, or a photograph.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it's very detailed.

MS. SCHERR: Very detailed, and very permanent. Some of the other commercial textured and printed patterns now being sold are lightly embossed surface images that buff off readily. My process can be a shallow- or deep-metal etch. I am also able to use screens to chemically etch and pierce the metal. I've had people call me from far away, China, Germany, Venezuela, Switzerland, Canada, and of course the U.S., looking for the resist, asphaltum. Asphaltum is the key.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, so you've gotten a lot of feedback, then, with this process?

MS. SCHERR: Mostly, the responses occur when the etch process is seen in the Rio Grande catalogue or some of the publications that show techniques. Tim McCreight included the full process in his book [*Metals Technic: A Collection of Techniques for Metalsmiths* (Cape Elizabeth, Maine: Brynmorgen Press, 1992)]. The bracelets were also featured in *American Craft* and other publications. The Rio Grande catalogue printed a full-page description, my photo and bio, and photos of the technique.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, who do you think are some important writers working in the crafts field today ?

MS. SCHERR: Bruce Metcalf is an important writer and investigator who challenges some of the theories posed by both writers and artists. Frank Lewis, former editor of *Metalsmith* magazine. Toni Greenbaum is a very popular freelance writer.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, how is their writing meaningful for you?

MS. SCHERR: There is a saying: "I can't wait for the writers interpretation of my work because I learn about what I made." When a writer interviews a person, reading about the person and their work reveals the often meaningful details about their lives that reflect the soul of their creativity. In others, it often clarifies the artist's intention. There are emerging artists who are given written spaces introducing their careers with the published words. The publication *Exhibitions in Print*, while often not my taste in selections, describes art, trend, author, and a healthy view of another area of the profession.

I've been interviewed many times; Blue Greenberg, art historian, wrote about my work for *Metalsmith* magazine. She described the work and some highlights of my career. Another writer, Cynthia Wolfson, covered a dual exhibition, *Relative Visions*, with my daughter, Sydney Scherr. Wolfson wrote about the emotional qualities of Sydney's creative concepts and my work, dwelling on forms. Both writers used different directions. Both are accurate writers. Other writers describe the work, and many have written about the body monitors.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, when you've been in -- when you've been teaching, were there craft history texts?

MS. SCHERR: 1982, there were books that covered specific periods of the history of clay, textiles, and metal, and while at Parsons with my responsibility to offer a general craft history, for each media. There were few publications that provided a meaningful, general overview. Most of the time, I had to assemble slide shows that described a period, or a trend. I hired Helen Drutt [Helen Drutt Gallery in Philadelphia] for the craft history courses because she knew the history of the field and the artists, and she was and is aware of the craft world. The complexity of the many subjects required that she locate persons in each of the craft fields to represent their knowledge of each category. In a way, with the Smithsonian Archives, that's what you're doing?

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I don't know. In bits and pieces. I mean, it's a continuing problem. What do you think would be a solution to that problem? Do you think there needs to be a basic text written, or -- ?

MS. SCHERR: A general history of crafts would be similar to a world history text. To incorporate each craft and period development, each would need to be divided into movements of people and cultures. I was attempting to have Helen Drutt put together a text, starting with the cave people, or a presentation like the current book *Women Designers in the USA, 1900 to 2000* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000]. This book, edited by Pat Kirkham, with each of the fashion categories written by other writers, covers fiber, clay, glass, metal, as well as the history of fashion trends. I believe that no single book could cover the origins and histories of each craft category.

MS. DOUGLAS: So in your teaching experience, what kind of -- what did you do in lieu of that? Were there people teaching bits of it in the art history department?

MS. SCHERR: No. Art history educators seem only to concentrate on their interests in the histories of painting and sculpture and related individuals. Most decorative arts teachers have slide collections that illustrate periods and products within their teaching subjects.

MS. DOUGLAS: No crafts?

MS. SCHERR: Not the crafts. Art historians base their teachings on periods of interest, painters and sculptors who have contributed to the subjective periods. The crafts, and the technical orientation is an add-on when the products, like weaving or pottery, depict a related interest. My experience with the Metropolitan Museum curator [niello incident] describes her limited knowledge in the field of expertise; her education did not include the decorative objects of her major study. The alloy is an important contribution to the art of early Asia. It's such an important part of the history of metals, and continues to be a serious application.

MS. DOUGLAS: I think what I've learned, I've learned through sort of an oral history method in the studio -- my teachers telling it to me.

MS. SCHERR: Oppi Untracht invested 13 years to write his metals books. He had the assistance of his wife, Saara, with her enamels and illustrations throughout each book. Combined time of both involved in a single book [26 years]. I was invited to author a publication about stainless steel. I knew, not being a writer, that gathering the research, even with a ghostwriter, would require writing about all the problems inherent in the material and techniques I had uncovered; the applied techniques, sources, and materials information would require the next several years of research and writing..

MS. DOUGLAS: It's a huge commitment.

MS. SCHERR: Tremendous. A full-time, all-consuming occupation! I think I opted out with the decision to be a metalsmith rather than a writer.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, getting back to this idea of an oral history being taught the studios, is that what you did in your metals courses?

MS. SCHERR: Early alchemists learned about the behavior of metals through experimenting with metal properties. Heikki Seppä investigated basic techniques based on Paul Revere's hollow forms and Faberge's processes. I'm not a trained metalsmith; I backed into metals, and until designing automobile accessories I had concentrated on illustration and product design as a career. Working with metal happened; my training was as experimental as every art student's exposure to all phases of the field, without an instructor input.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, you struck on something that I think is important, the fact that you backed into metalsmithing and were not classically trained in it like, say, a European smith doing an apprenticeship. How many of your colleagues do you think ended up that way, learning metals like that?

MS. SCHERR: The time that I started, '47, '48, '49, there were just a few scattered metals artists; a few books, an enameling book, tin can art; and Maryon's book about metal [being revived again]. There was another one, a high school mechanical drawing book that showed ways of working sheet metal. I remember meeting Brent Kington for the first time and believe he had no actual metal training. Like most metalsmiths, he simply liked metal. We were all working hard towards something in an unfamiliar material.

The 12-by-12-inch beautiful sheet of sterling silver was a loaded canvas of possibilities. It was a source of innovation and excitement. Brent made all those whimsical, wonderful little cast creatures.

MS. DOUGLAS: I think he studied at Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Who was the metals teacher?

MS. SCHERR: Richard Thomas. It seems like metalsmiths came out of the woodwork in the mid-1950s. SNAG was very young, and in the 1970s I was invited to be a board member, before I moved to New York. This was in '75-76.

MS. DOUGLAS: That was several years later, '77.

MS. SCHERR: The board suggested that I become the SNAG president. I had learned as a SNAG board member, that everything matters, and if I were to be president of SNAG, it would be at the time we would be moving to New York City -- packing boxes, new house, moving a hardware-store-style studio, unpacking, and to complicate matters, having to manage the duties of the SNAG office seemed to be a larger challenge than I was capable of handling properly.

I was leaving Ohio for a new city, new surroundings, and a commanding social structure. Mary Lee Hu became the president and carried the office beautifully. I had co-chaired the SNAG conference in Cleveland, Ohio, with Austin Chaney while at Kent State University, 1974-75, and had begun to realize the volume of time that was required. That was a long time ago. Back to your question, which I've forgotten.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, it was that -- no, you've answered it. I was asking about the idea of people being self-taught.

MS. SCHERR: I know many of us were self-taught.

MS. DOUGLAS: Self-invention.

MS. SCHERR: The active small core of dedicated metalsmiths were from many regions of the U.S. and as many different directions of metals techniques. Mary Lee Hu worked with tiny multiple wires because her husband traveled and she spent much of her time away from a bench, with pliers as her travel tool. She was studying with Brent Kington, who guided her with a masterful compliment of wire-working techniques.

[END TAPE FOUR SIDE B.]

MS. DOUGLAS: When was the first SNAG conference? 1968?

MS. SCHERR: I didn't go to the first conference. I didn't know I was a metalsmith. I didn't know I was a goldsmith. I thought I was a silversmith because I worked mostly in silver. An uneducated misnomer.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs] That's alright. I think the first one was in '68.

MS. SCHERR: I missed that first conference and then I learned the definitions of the metals divisions in the field. I really misread the invitation that read "goldsmith." I believe I've said this before; silversmith makes hollowware; a blacksmith works with iron and steel; a whitesmith works with pewter; a goldsmith is a jeweler.

MS. DOUGLAS: So this conference in Montreal was well attended, or -- ?

MS. SCHERR: It wasn't a conference; it was a board meeting, now that I remember the meetings. When we finished, we drove all over that city having a great time. Hero and his wife, Heikki Seppä, and John Marshall. I was on the board a long time; it was an important time for SNAG, because there were so few members. SNAG was a tiny organization, and we were trying to attract new members. My thrust was the business, has always been the business, of metalsmithing. No one wanted to talk about business ideas.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what was it like? What did you do at these conferences?

MS. SCHERR: We were concerned with some of the same subjects that are presented now. New techniques are presented; the hydraulic press is a current interest; solo artwork and special jewelry themes are popular. I am on the committee to select an honorary member for 2003.

This photo shows my metals class, Kent State University, 1976-77, at the National ACC conference in Winston-Salem, NC -- when Sam was introduced as president of the American Crafts Council. My students assisted in my presentation of *Metals: U.S.A*. Their costume theme, Influence, was a black leotard body with black mask and no hair and the full body interpretation of any subject, made of gold or silver posterboard. They looked like human-scale chess figures. The KSU administration was impressed and provided free transportation and housing costs. Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt-Webb was the conference chair.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were --when you offered the business panel, did you have discussions?

MS. SCHERR: We had discussions about when and why teaching students the many ways to have choices in a metals career. What is important to some, an education to some, solo art to some. They should learn all areas to know the choices to be prepared for a career in any material of choice.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you also would talk about --

MS. SCHERR: We talked about the fact that the universities were not giving the student a full education. And that it was important to teach them how to make collections; multiples; how to make a living; how do they know how to structure a copyright; how can they get a patent if they need to; how do they keep books? They were not being educated in their field. They were just learning technical skills and making their precious object.

MS. DOUGLAS: So this has been an ongoing discussion --

MS. SCHERR: Forever, it seems.

MS. DOUGLAS: -- at SNAG.

MS. SCHERR: The conflict has been part of every conference.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, what about -- did you have demonstrations at these early conferences?

MS. SCHERR: Four or five years ago, I demonstrated the instant etch in Cincinnati, Ohio; David Pimenthal in Washington, DC; Tempe, Arizona, with hollow forms, among many others. I am not sure about the current SNAG conference format, since many demos occur in the vendor's concessions.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it's been a subject?

MS. SCHERR: It's been an ongoing concern with me. At the St. Louis conference, Sydney and I both were on the roster to talk as a part of the panel. I had invited Angela Cummings, Tiffany's, New York, among three other designers and an industry director. While at Parsons with a broad metals program I invited a controversial character from the jewelry industry who, in his paper presented to a wide, interested audience, commented that he never hires prima-donna types from a jewelry-design school because their ambition is too personal. The audience of students flared. He again said he wouldn't hire an artist out of school, because they are loaded with self-importance; they really weren't capable of a desire to learn the work. Students didn't know the first thing about creating a piece that would be produced. These people are from the industry. This was the jewelry industry experience.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I'm sure they want more basic knowledge of production preparation.

MS. SCHERR: Broader exposure to design as well. Understanding the concept of a collection, as in, more investigation related to related works in a series.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it's interesting that, you know, when you're describing your generation of metalsmiths as having to be self-invented. It's almost like you have had to create your own identity as artists, as well

MS. SCHERR: I think I said this once before; I am criticized for not following a personal image direction. Mary Lee Hu has her imagery; Tom Markusen's stayed with his forming theme; Brent Kington is working with iron sculptures; Bruce Metcalf, with alternative materials; Bill Harper, with his amazing enameled and painted images. I -- My work has a range of subjects and processes. There is a graphics base that recurs. My interest in all metals and all subjects results in disparate directions. I get really bored with the second cuff link or second earring.

People look for the familiar, look for the consistent imagery that defines the artist. Angela Cummings always uses a theme from her garden. Ted Muehling uses soft, simple shapes and gentle, modified colors that identifies his forms. J. Fred Woell incorporates memorabilia. When I invited the panel group to discuss industry designers, for the St. Louis conference, the subject was personal art versus production art; the industry pros were really negative about one-of-a-kind designers, implying that well-trained students should be able to function both as independent artists and production designers. I know there are fine designers and smiths like John Cogswell or Lisa Gralnik. Lisa was a KSU student. She designs and makes handsome, one-of-a-kind pieces. She also directed her Parsons students into that unique area of doing very beautiful pieces. She also then had them learn casting processes.

John Cogswell is a superb craftsman and designer, and is capable of teaching any level; J. Fred Woell as well. These people started from imagery that became their identifying expression. Many craftsmen have imitated Woell. Kurt Matzdorf has that independent style with his religious works; Fred Fenster restored the use of pewter. These artists have become significant image-makers.

The unique fly in all this, is Stanley [Lechtzin], who is a research master. I agree with him. I believe in the magic of the computer and the computer's ability to create form. It is another tool to work with, now and in the future. It is just beginning to be a really important metal's tool. There will always be the person who will be an art source, an iconoclast. Artificial intelligence will not replace the designer's intuition, although it may compete with the hands-on skills. John Marshall changes the way for trip-hammering silver 1/4-inch gauge or Heikki Seppä. The computer can carve out a shape.

MS. DOUGLAS: Seppä -- how so?

MS. SCHERR: Many silversmiths were unimpressed with Seppä's first slide presentation, with his colossal vocabulary that few of us had ever heard prior to that day. He was treating metal in a different way, with different-looking stakes and hammers that he had designed to conform to his new methods. He was really a heretic [laughs]. He was teaching us to re-look and re-think metal techniques. I didn't like silversmithing as a process, labor intensive, a large inventory of tools, and a large amount of time for each hollow form. And now we

are exposed to yet another way to create form, the hydraulic press. The hydraulic press is invading the hand-forming process with valuable time, made more available.

Lechtzin is now a computer designer and maker and, with his disciples, is changing the definitions of some metalworking processes, since a machine carves the metal.

1951, with the only book I found when I first worked with metal, I was learning to stay one step ahead of the students, with tin can art. [Laughs] I didn't know how to etch; I didn't know the types of solder, or other metallurgical information. I located chemists to help me learn the chemical that might remove fire-scale, or learning if there was an acid that would etch metal. I was a primitive. The computer, smart as it is, is also in a primitive stage [laughs].

MS. DOUGLAS: It certainly helps to have a textbook.

MS. SCHERR: With Oppi Untracht's second book, *Jewelry Concepts and Techniques*, I was honored that he asked me about my etching methods. "Write everything you know about etching." Phil Fike's research with his niello process is nearly lost, since he passed away. The process is prohibitive because the sulfur fumes could evacuate a city.

I saved my mother's Siamese dancers [niello inlaid] jewelry because I was fascinated with the black color. In the late 1970s I was approached by the Siamese and niello manufacturers to assist them in the redesign of their jewelry dancer images.

To understand their inlay process, I requested the niello formula, in order to design images that would satisfy the demands of their inlay production process. They refused to expose their methods. Negotiations stopped. Phillip Fike's niello research restored the technique to the successful crafting of the technique. Fike's treatise has become a published, invaluable contribution to our metal's history. This happened around the same time that I was being encouraged, and refused, to write a book about stainless steel. I'm somewhat sorry about that.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it's certainly amazing how far the field of metalsmithing has come. Fifty years.

MS. SCHERR: Fifty years. Intriguing! Watching all of it grow into this massive mushroom. There are really beautiful talents emerging. Those of us who learned through lifetime investigations, research, errors, and mistakes are able to save the students years of restarts and technical confusion. The students now have directional choices. I've had many grad assistants and students who have become professional metalsmiths: Mark Stanitz, Jac Davidson, Hiroko Swornick, Rochelle Thiews, to name some.

Mark Stanitz is co-chair of the metals department at RISD [Rhode Island School of Design]. He knew the way things work. After the Lechtzin workshop he came back with a mayonnaise jar and a nine-volt battery. He created a mini-electroformer. He said he had formed metal all night. Mark worked with me on some of my electronic body monitor jewelry. He was 18 years old. I remember his dad coming into class one day to ask me how to order gold. I called my source in Cleveland. In the 1950s, gold cost $36 per ounce, compared to the 1980s when gold was sold at $800. Mark's dad bought it at $80. Shocking and amazing leaps. Today gold sells at $300 to $400 an ounce.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what did his dad want to do with the gold?

MS. SCHERR: He wanted to give it to Mark. Mark then moved to Penland to teach. He replaced me in the Penland metals publication because I had injured my hand and could not fabricate the scheduled photography. I wrote the book's introduction instead. I was assisting in developing the teachers for the summer metals program and invited Mark to teach a session. He moved then to Penland with his family.

In 1970, with Stanley Lechtzin's workshop at KSU on electroforming, the infamous 1970 national student revolt against the Vietnamese /U.S. war forced the art department to close the metals studio because the electroforming baths of sulfuric acid and cyanide were just feet apart. The students revolting had threatened to bomb the metals studio because each bench in the studio was equipped with live gas jets that could torch the school as a bomb. A chilling time for each, students and faculty. The faculty was sympathetic, ambivalent, frightened -- along with the students.

Those days were very unique; students were strong, independent, power-filled with a different mind-set for personal expression. They responded to the violence of the war through a single voice, which penetrated their ability to possess a personal opinion about their art and their lives. After the four killings, and a re-opened school, they changed back to the timidity that once ruled their worlds. That wonderful free expression seemed lost in the fear of losing their academic future and their dollar support.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's really amazing.

MS. SCHERR: Another surprising result of the 1970s flower-children years was the change in the Penland School of Craft's flower-child-type student. Those were the early days.

The years that followed these revolts, the Penland students became serious minded, career oriented, and directed. Penland has grown in leaps since then -- "Nothing has changed, yet everything is different."

MS. DOUGLAS: It's just interesting to hear you describe, you know, how the field has become so full of artists and amazing things, and then some of the age-old problems are still there about how do you make a living?

MS. SCHERR: How do you make a living? You and I attended the 2001 SNAG conference. They're still covering the same discussions, although Thomas Mann offers workshops about marketing and others may discuss law and business, but there is little accent on the business of self-support. There are few academic positions open to MFA candidates, and the craft fairs are only open to the few selected by jurors who agree with the artists. For support, commissions are possible. The dilemma occurs in the inconsistent pattern of clients who cover the rent. I am fortunate to always have teaching positions that support some of my time. My soul is in the artwork, and I often overwhelm estimated commissions cost guesses and make pennies with the effort.

This has been true for me forever, and since much of my effort is really different, the more it changes, it is just a higher degree of chaos. Now -- it's the magic of computers added to the mix.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was there anything you'd like to add to this tape recording that we haven't covered, or -- ?

MS. SCHERR: You are a good interviewer.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, thank you.

MS. SCHERR: The only thought I wish to add; I feel that I am moving from a three-year-long fog. I've been semi-halted by circumstances, and am anxious to return to the metals world. I've always lived by the code of producing something every day and to revive that spirit, I am ready to be back

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that's great. Well, thank you very much for all this interview.

MS. SCHERR: Thank you and I've enjoyed you!

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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