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Oral history interview with Bob Stocksdale, 2001 February 16-March 21

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Bob Stocksdale on February 16 and 21, and March 8 and 21, 2001. The interview took place in Berkeley, California, and was conducted by Signe Mayfield 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.

Bob Stocksdale and Signe Mayfield have reviewed the transcript and have made substantial corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Kay Sekimachi, Bob Stocksdale's wife, also wrote an to provide a context for the interview sessions.

Interview

MS. SIGNE MAYFIELD: This is Signe Mayfield interviewing Bob Stocksdale for the Archives of American Art at his home in Berkeley, California, on February 8, 2001.

We celebrate Bob Stocksdale's 88th birthday this year in May. I once asked you, Bob, as a pioneer in lathe-turned bowls, what you would advise someone who wants to be a good wood turner. You said that they should be "mechanical"-they should have a good understanding of mechanics. When you were growing up in a family of five on a farm in rural Indiana, you were considered the only one who was mechanical. Did someone teach you to be mechanical?

MR. BOB STOCKSDALE: No, I just learned by whatever I could do. There were a lot of different chores. We had to get water to the cows. I had to get the gas engine started to pump the water. It was a beaten down, Fairbanks-Morse one-cylinder engine. I got it started every time, even in the winter. It was a tank to cool the water, and then the overflow went into the cow's trough.

MS. MAYFIELD: So how did you know how to keep it going? I mean, did you used to read *Barn Mechanic* or something like that?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I just figured it out.

MS. MAYFIELD: The farm where you grew up was quite rural, even though it was located 120 miles from Chicago. Please talk about your early education.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Early education. Well, the first year was in a one-room schoolhouse. It was a brick schoolhouse with two privies on the property. And when we first moved on the farm, I used to watch the kids go to school at that one-room school. Then the next year I got to go with 'em. [They laugh.] So I thought that was great. Well, in the second year, why, they consolidated the school. We all went on a "kid hack," or regular buses, up to the big school, the high school. It had all eight grades. That took care of my education.

MS. MAYFIELD: You told me once that you had a corner in your father's outbuilding that you used for a shop.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, it was kind of a shed for all the tools, gardening tools and that sort of thing. And it had a kind of workbench. So I managed to get a work-workbench.

MS. MAYFIELD: At what age did you have a workbench? How early?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, I was eight or 10 years old.

MS. MAYFIELD: What did you used to make?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Worked sometimes sharpening the farm implements, like the mowers and that sort of thing, you know. I finally got a lathe for that workbench. I don't know where I ever got the motor. It was a gasoline motor from a Maytag. And so that ran the lathe.

MS. MAYFIELD: So were you the one that jerry-rigged the thing to make it work?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No. No, my uncle repaired it. He was general manager of a farm implement company down a hundred miles or so from us.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh. How many uncles did you have?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, quite a few.

MS. MAYFIELD: Quite a few. [Laughs.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: And all of 'em were mechanical.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh.

MR. STOCKSDALE: So I learned a lot from various uncles. One uncle was a tinsmith. My grandfather was a hardware merchant. He had a wonderful hardware store. And so he used to keep me supplied in pocketknives.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, how wonderful for a young boy.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: What'd you do with these pocketknives?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I'd lose 'em, mostly.

MS. MAYFIELD: Lose 'em. Well, you had to do something with them to lose them.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, I whittled.

MS. MAYFIELD: You know that great Mark Twain story in which the townspeople come and watch Tom Sawyer whittling away? They all start speculating on what he's making. Then finally someone asked him what he was making and he said, "I'm making shavings." [They laugh.] Can you relate to that?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: It's a great story. So you liked to whittle.

MR. STOCKSDALE: I whittled a lot.

MS. MAYFIELD: Making shavings, or making things?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Usually making things. Birdhouses.

MS. MAYFIELD: You whittled out a birdhouse?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, I used to whittle the hole.

MS. MAYFIELD: So what'd they look like?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Pretty crude.

MS. MAYFIELD: Pretty crude. [They laugh.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: But people must have liked them.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, in fact, we put a shelf up on the windmill for one of my birdhouses.

MS. MAYFIELD: Tell me about your uncle who was a tinsmith. Did he make things that you thought, as a boy, were really good?

MR. STOCKSDALE: He was in the upstairs part of the hardware store. And so I used to go up there and watch him do-make things out of tin, you know. He was a real tinsmith.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you like the shapes? Or were you intrigued by how they were constructed?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, they had all kinds of hand tools on this big round table. One here and one there and so on. All had to do with making things out of tin. But they all had a crank on them. And you'd stick a piece of tin in there and crank it through. And it came out crimped. Maybe you could make a stovepipe or a special galvanized iron bucket.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was this your favorite uncle?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, not necessarily. He took a liking to my brother that was younger than I. But-that fellow

didn't do much mechanical. [Laughs.] Not until later in life.

MS. MAYFIELD: I understand that after you made your lathe, you started to repair furniture? When did that happen?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, that was, let's see, somewhere along the line. I don't remember where.

MS. MAYFIELD: But you turned spindles and things?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, after I got the lathe. I installed it in that shed and started making things on the lathe. It was run by the little Maytag washing machine engine.

MS. MAYFIELD: It took a while before your family had electricity. Do you want to talk about that?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, that was kind of a bitter thing, because the power line ran in front of our house for a number of years, and we didn't get electricity.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was your dad against electricity?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, he just didn't have money enough to wire up the buildings and to pay for the wiring of the house and the barn, all the required wiring. So finally, I teamed up with another fella and went around, and I learned how to do house wiring, too.

MS. MAYFIELD: House wiring.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, that's something I haven't heard.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Turning people on, huh?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's great. So you really were an all-purpose handyman.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. So he and I would go around and wire other people's houses and so on. Did that for about a year. Enough to learn how it was done [laughs].

MS. MAYFIELD: How much did you pay for your lathe?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] How much does a lathe cost today?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, probably they wouldn't make it today. [They laugh.] But it'd be over a hundred dollars.

MS. MAYFIELD: What did you turn on the lathe when you started? You were a young boy. Did you turn baseball bats?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Baseball bats and, oh, quite a few little small things, you know.

MS. MAYFIELD: Any other toys?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Some toys. Tops and Pakistani sheep bells.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, now that's a story.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. And they were pretty simple ones to make, but you make most of it on the lathe.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] Did people think they were Pakistani?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes [laughs].

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you sell a lot?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I didn't sell 'em.

MS. MAYFIELD: What'd you do with 'em?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Gave 'em away. [Laughs.] The one that we got here, it needs tuning up, because it's not balanced very well.

MS. MAYFIELD: With that primitive kind of lathe, were you able to turn forms that were fairly thin, or were they still pretty thick?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, they were just round things. And there was a hole bored in the bell.

MS. MAYFIELD: So what other kind of work did you do when you left high school?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I worked as much as I could in the shop, you know, but my older brother corralled me into going out with the horses and working the fields. So I did that sometimes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did your family know how much you loved working in the shop?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, yes [laughs].

MS. MAYFIELD: Did they reinforce it?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, my mother did more than my dad. [Laughs.] So anyway. I managed to get some time in there.

MS. MAYFIELD: I remember you saying that you worked in a furniture factory. Is that right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, yes. One day the manager of the Caswell Runyan Factory came out and could see that I could work a little wood, and so he hired me.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you work with a lathe in this factory?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I didn't work with a lathe. They put me on as a builder of cedar chests. I thought that was kind of funny.

MS. MAYFIELD: Why do you say that?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I was given the box already made up for the cedar chest. My job was to put on those little moldings. And there was holes in various places for legs and maybe the handles and-and so on. And there was hardware, various pieces of hardware, that went into these places. And ended up, they got the whole cedar chest made by the builder. So I was one of the builders.

MS. MAYFIELD: Mm-hmm. Must've smelled good, all that cedar.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. It was Tennessee red cedar.

MS. MAYFIELD: So did you like working with cedar as a wood?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, I liked it, and that was a job I really loved. I worked about a year there. And of course, when I went there, I didn't have any tools. The factory had a bunch of new tools, so I got new tools at cost that I paid for as I worked.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you get to take those home, or did they stay at work?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, they stayed at work. I just shoved 'em in my corner and that was all. So I did it for about a year. I got so I could keep up with the rest of the guys. The good guys would get 50 cents an hour, but I only got 35.

MS. MAYFIELD: Thirty-five cents an hour!

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. [They laugh.] Oh, God, I thought that was *wonderful*, to have all that money. [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: I love that. What were you doing around the Depression? Do you remember?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, that was during the Depression, and see, that was the main reason we-we couldn't wire our house, barn, and everything for electricity, so that we could use an electric motor to start the pump and so on.

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you think that living through those times during the Depression contributed to your frugal way of holding onto your tools? Don't you have a childhood knife that you still use?

MR. STOCKSDALE: My uncle gave me one. I think my grandpa was dead. The last knife I got from him was when I was in the CO camp. I lost it not too many years ago.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, okay. [They laugh.] What year where you drafted for the CO camp? Conscientious objector camp?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Let's see, that was-right after Pearl Harbor in '42. What book have you got there?

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, I'm looking at the notes for a chronology. Nineteen forty-two, drafted into conscientious objector's camp. Were you drafted?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No.

MS. MAYFIELD: You registered as a conscientious objector?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, and there was a provision at that time for "conscies" [shorthand term for those with CO status]. And if you appeared honest and so on, you didn't have to go to the army. My older brother was the chief pacifist. He pushed the idea of being a conscientious objector. He never was drafted, because he was running the farm. But he saw to it that his two other brothers went to the CO camps. And there was, I think, 11 conscientious objectors from that one draft board,

MS. MAYFIELD: Really?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I think-more than in the whole county.

MS. MAYFIELD: 11 out of your whole community. That is a high percentage, because it represents such a small area.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And did you talk about the values behind taking that stance at that time?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, we had what was called a cell of reconciliation. We'd meet in the Brethren Church in Huntington once a week, even before we were drafted.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was that your family's church? Did you go there most Sundays?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No. We went to the First Christian Church, but there wasn't any pacifism talk in that church. [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you feel that your sense of religion or spirituality has come through in your work?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No.

MS. MAYFIELD: No.

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, because I never was very religious. And I got quite a bit of religion talked into me at the CO camps, but mostly-anti-religion.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] Now, what was the first camp that you went to in 1942?

MR. STOCKSDALE: In Valhalla, Michigan.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was this an important time, because you began to work on a lathe there?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, eventually, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: How did that happen?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I explained to the camp director and a few other of the forest service people that I could run any woodworking tools. And so they picked me up --

MS. MAYFIELD: As the resident woodworker?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. It was for the forest service headquarters, which was close to the CO camp, the former

quarters for the CCC people. You know them? The Civilian [Citizen's] Conservation Corps. They were in the abandoned buildings. So they needed a lot of work done on them, and so they sent a crew in to fix them up a little.

MS. MAYFIELD: What were the tools that you used? And how did you get them?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I told the director of the camp that I had a bunch of tools down home, which was 120 miles or so from where we were located. And that way, I got to go down and get my car, load it up with tools, and brought it back to camp.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] Sounds good.

MR. STOCKSDALE: One of the buildings-had a wood shop, and we had all kinds of tools.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you bring your lathe?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I brought my lathe, and I had a band saw at that time. And so we set up the band saw and that was a big help.

[Tape Change.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: We had various guys in the camp had electric motors, and they brought them to camp, too. And so we had a pretty good power source for everything.

MS. MAYFIELD: What is the story behind you turning your first bowl there?

MR. STOCKSDALE: They had a real nice lathe there, with a motor and everything. So the forest service guy said, "Let's try making a bowl on this lathe."

MS. MAYFIELD: Who was that guy?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, he was in charge of me, sort of, supposed to find work I could do in the shop.

MS. MAYFIELD: The first bowl that you turned-do you remember what kind of wood it was?

MR. STOCKSDALE: It was kinda thick and it was cherry. That's about all I remember of it.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was it a great thrill, in terms of making it?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I guess it was, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did anyone else turn bowls?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, as a matter of fact, a lot of the fellows' wives moved close by, you know, because there was a little village, named Belden, California. A railroad went through there. And so they rehabilitated the hotel and rented out a few rooms. I taught a bunch of the wives how to turn bowls there [and earlier in Michigan]. And they started making pies. Oh, man! [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Sounds good.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, the best pies in the world came outta that kitchen.

MS. MAYFIELD: It sounds as if it was a good community of people.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, you could find pretty good guys in there.

MS. MAYFIELD: Have you kept up with this group of people?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. In fact, just two or three days ago, I saw one fella that was in the camp with me, and two other friends, who all live about 120 miles from here. And they had made a plan to come down to visit me, you know, and interviewed me and so on. I'd made a table for one of the fellas. It was eight feet one way, and about-a little over four feet across and two inches thick. So-that table's still in use. They talked about that table. They even have a picture of it someplace.

MS. MAYFIELD: When you were in the camp and you started turning bowls, were people buying them from you?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Not very much.

MS. MAYFIELD: Not very much.

MR. STOCKSDALE: We didn't try to sell very much. The wives would come into the workshop, too, and well, they'd sometimes turn various and sundry things.

MS. MAYFIELD: When did you meet Helen Winnemore?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I think maybe that ought to be in the next tape.

MS. MAYFIELD: What were you saying about the CO camp?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I was working in the wood shop. They already had a-a man in there who had ran the wood shop for 'em, you know. But-somehow or other-he was an old Swede, and had used woodworking tools all of his life, you know? And one day he cut his thumb.

MS. MAYFIELD: Cut off the tip of his thumb?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, yeah, way down.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh!

MR. STOCKSDALE: And-I looked in the shavings, and there were little cross sections of the thumb

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh!

MR.STOCKSDALE: -the bone [laughs], and the skin-everything, you know? And little slices [laughs].

MS. MAYFIELD: That was a good lesson.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. [Laughs.] So it took him a long time to get over that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you learn some things from him? Other than not to saw your thumb off?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I didn't learn much from him. He-he wasn't very friendly, you see.

MS. MAYFIELD: Weren't there some writers in the camp, too?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, yes, Adrian Wilson.

MS. MAYFIELD: He printed beautiful fine press books in the Bay Area.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, he was in this CO camp up in Waldport.

MS. MAYFIELD: Are you in Wilson's book that you're holding, *Two Against the Tide: A Conscientious Objector in World War Two* [1990]?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I don't think so. The letters in the book started when he was in college and covered all the war years. Anyway, I have a friend who's reading that book to me. I know almost everyone listed in the book, as well as the "two against the tide."

MS. MAYFIELD: Were people primarily Quakers in the camp?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No. There were more Methodists than any other denomination. Of course, the Methodist Church was not a pacifist church. The Quakers and the Mennonites and the-and the Church of the Brethren were the three churches that went together and set up the camps.

MS. MAYFIELD: At night, did you all get together and just talk about things, and talk about the war?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Sometimes. There were various people who'd get together in some of the camps; why, they'd have sort of a program of satire. Several of the guys were just fantastic, you know, in copying the way the forest service guys [laughs] ordered people around [laughs]. They would mimic, just to perfection.

MS. MAYFIELD: Were there any other writers in the camp that you knew?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. There was a fellow named Bill, who still visits me once in a while. He used to go through the woods reciting poems. There were a lot of projects, like reforestation, which I did. There was a small crew that did the washing for the men. And another crew worked year-round getting wood for heating the wood burning furnaces.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you ever stop them from burning some good wood?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, they had enough wood that they could, you know, provide. They conserved pretty well. You know the JWs? Jehovah's Witness. You never think of them as pacifists. Well, they weren't. Their draft boards didn't know what to do with them. They sent them off to CO camps. So there were some pretty heated arguments once in a while.

[Tape Change.]

MS. MAYFIELD: This is Signe Mayfield, interviewing Bob Stocksdale at his home on February 21, 2001.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Is it?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Last time, we were talking about conscientious objector camp, and about your turning your first bowls there. And you said you'd save one story for me. That story was about the time, I think, in 1942, when Helen Winnemore came to the camp.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Helen Winnemore was the owner and director of Helen Winnemore's Arts and Crafts in Columbus, Ohio. She was sort of visiting various conscientious objector camps, because she was a Quaker. And so she wanted to make some contacts in the camps, you see. I got acquainted with her right then. And so she said, "Well, I-if you can make anything in the camp, send it to me and I'll sell it." [Laughs,]

And so I got together a few things and sent them to her, and she liked the bowls and plates and trays the best of everything. So I made up a few and sent them to her and so on. And she was very pleased. We continued corresponding, and whenever I had time, I would grind out a few. [They laugh.] So that was the beginning of quite a long friendship, all the way through the CO camp. And I would be selling to her now if she hadn't died, but she was in her 40s [laughs] when I first got acquainted with her.

MS. MAYFIELD: Why was she such a good dealer and such a good friend?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, mostly because she was Quaker and could understand most everything that I was up against.

MS. MAYFIELD: You means in terms of working in the camp.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, working in the camp. I wasn't just able to go out and buy wood, you know, and that sort of thing. But I did wrangle a few sources of supply for wood. And especially when we moved camp to the West Coast, and the-I got acquainted with all the sources of supply in Los Angeles, later on in San Francisco.

MS. MAYFIELD: So how did you wrangle wood in this CO camp? Did you cut down your own trees, or-

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I went to the dealers. They understood what I needed, so they helped me out a little, because at that time, they didn't have very many sources of-I mean buyers, because everybody was in the war effort. So I had kind of the run of the mill. And I could pick out one board, and they'd tear up the pile and dig it out, and sell it to me, at no increase in price.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you start working with rare woods at that time, or start learning about them?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I got acquainted right away when we moved the camp.

MS. MAYFIELD: We should backtrack. You once told me a wonderful thing about Helen Winnemore. Not only did she sell your work, which is great, but she told you that the most important thing was for you to "keep up the quality. I don't care about the cost. I want the quality."

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. She told me to keep up the quality-that's sort of my motto.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, I'm wondering, how did you know what the quality was, when you were self-taught. Had you seen pieces in museums?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I knew what a good bowl was and what was not, pretty much, by looking in museums and places like that.

MS. MAYFIELD: When did you start going to museums?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, whenever I'd get into a city, I would have a little free time, because I'd go in with the

supply truck from the CO camp. They had a whole list of stuff they had to get. And so I would go around to various lumber dealers and that sort of thing, and had pretty much the whole day to rummage around. I used my own money, I think. Or a bit of it. And then I just sold it.

MS. MAYFIELD: In the camp?

MR. STOCKSDALE: In the camp.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, so you were a dealer [laughs].

MR. STOCKSDALE: I was-I was a wheeler-dealer.

MS. MAYFIELD: You were!

MR. STOCKSDALE: [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Horse trader is the word I've heard sometimes said about you. So you basically bought wood one place and sold it to your friends to get the remaining log? I bet they were happy.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. They were happy to get nice wood. So then everybody was happy.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs] That's great.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you ever go see Helen Winnemore's shop in Columbus, Ohio?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, yes. I did. Not just right away. But, I went there, saw her shop-very nice. She had a very good reputation in Columbus, and it was a long time that I was with her.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's good. What other kinds of things did she tell you about your work? Sometimes it helps when another person sees your work and you get that reflection back.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. Well, I pretty much understood what she was after, and-and I tried to do it. And it worked out pretty well for both of us.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you used to sign your bowls back then, the way you do now?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. That was one of the things I always did. I signed my name, the type of wood, and where it was from.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you add a date?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, that was quite a long time afterwards. I didn't add the date until I'd got out of CO camp, really. It seems to me that Forrest Merrill was one of the people who insisted on the date. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: He wanted to collect bowls turned in different years.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: By your signing your bowls and noting their woods, you started a trend with a lot of wood turners. Is that right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, it did.

MS. MAYFIELD: That is a good thing. All wood is endangered and there may be some time when we might not be able to identify the wood. Right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. And I soon became a member of the International Wood Collector's Society. And that was a small organization when I joined. But now it probably has three or four thousand members. They wanted me to become a member right away, as soon as they found out what I was doing. So it was a very good source of supply for me. Not only for wood, but for learning and knowing about rare woods-where to get them and so on.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did they have a magazine or newsletter or-

MR. STOCKSDALE: They had a monthly newsletter. I still have a bunch of them.

MS. MAYFIELD: Those are important to keep. Do they still publish?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, they still publish.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you ever write anything for the newsletter?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I don't think I did, no. But they have written on my work.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you say that this group, the International-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Wood Collector's Society.

MS. MAYFIELD: This group provided an important community for you.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, they were mostly interested in samples of wood. Their standard sample was three by five inches, and a half-inch thick. Just a little block, you know. But I never went in for that, you see. A lot of the members would buy pieces of wood. Some of them would buy pretty good-sized pieces and cut them up for samples. And that was a shame. [Laughs.]

Some of them would buy and sell wood, you know, big pieces or timbers or anything. Every half of a year they had a gathering of members someplace in the country, and everybody brought wood to the party to buy and sell wood from each other. And they had an auction. So you could always get a lot of good wood from them. So I got acquainted with most of the big shots.

When I settled here in Berkeley, one of my friends who helped me get wood was Burnett Greene, who was a big shot in the forestry service.

MS. MAYFIELD: What did he do, exactly?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, he wrote books, and I got a book or two of his that was written for people who wanted rare and fancy woods.

MS. MAYFIELD: So this publication is called *Fine Hardwood Selectorama: A Guide to the Selection and Use of the World's Popular Species* [Fine Hardwoods Association].

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: It has a map of the world, with all of the woods on it.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. Not all of the wood, just some.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's true. There are only about a hundred or more pictured here.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. I used to go down to Los Angeles after I settled here to see a buyer and seller of all kinds of woods, rare woods, some of 'em just little sticks. And that was a place called Tropical Hardwoods. So I got pretty well acquainted with them, too. And eventually, they would save wood for me. See, it explains there the characteristics of woods.

MS. MAYFIELD: It's very useful.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: But I can see it doesn't have your Ceylon ebony. Oh, no, here-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, it's got ebonies.

MS. MAYFIELD: Most are dense and dark, but very rare.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you find this inspiring?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, what did the collectors do with their small samples of the wood?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, they kept them for show, and they'd have cases of them. Hundreds and hundreds of samples. Several people had up in the thousands of different woods.

MS. MAYFIELD: This book is published by Fine Hardwoods Association. What was that?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, that was Burnett Greene's group.

[Tape Change.]

MS. MAYFIELD: This is for the Archives of American Art, Signe Mayfield interviewing Bob Stocksdale, February 21, 2001, in Berkeley. At your home.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Two thousand and one.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you ever think it would be 2001 [laughs]?

MR. STOCKSDALE: [Laughs.] Okay.

MS. MAYFIELD: Let's talk about your workshop downstairs.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: It's a bit of a cave. [They laugh.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: You've been down to look at it?

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, I've been down to look at it. It's a great place. [They laugh.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: I wondered why you're so quiet. [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: So, you have a lot of tools that you've had a long time.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, I've had some-the oldest is the band saw that you see.

MS. MAYFIELD: The band saw's the oldest?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, it's got two wheels this big around. And the band that's over here, you cut logs.

MS. MAYFIELD: So how old is it? Does it go back to the '40s?

MR. STOCKSDALE: [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs] What's that mean?

MR. STOCKSDALE: It was old when I was born.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] I guess all these new technological advancements don't really apply to you in your work.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Not all, no.

MS. MAYFIELD: But you did develop some tools with Jerry Glaser, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: How did that happen?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, Jerry was a top dog machinist for Garrett Air Research in Los Angeles.

MS. MAYFIELD: Garrett Research?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Garrett.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

MR. STOCKSDALE: And they're-they're not only in Los Angeles, but they're spread all over the world. They got, I think, 10 or 12 factories in other parts of the world.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, how did you meet Jerry?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Jerry's always loved wood. And so he dabbled with wood, the same as I did, and we met in the wood dealer's place in Los Angeles. Jerry was a very friendly sort of a fellow. He would solve any mechanical or, you know, metalwork that I wanted. You know, he made me the wood-turning gouge that I use for most of my work. He was head of the machinists at Garrett in Redondo Beach. He had 30, 40 engineers working for him.

When he kept talking to his bosses about retiring, well, they'd had this job and this job comin' up and they couldn't terminate his work until those were taken care of, you know. So they said, "We'll just add to your overtime pay for your spare time, you know. When he left, he had 17 months vacation pay. [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you talk to Jerry when you were trying to get a gouge that you wouldn't have to sharpen so much?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Right. A special steel for the gouge. It was so expensive, of course, that most people couldn't afford it, or couldn't buy it. But of course, he got it from them by the ton. He knew all of the various steel production places in Los Angeles. If you wanted a certain type of steel, he'd go there.

MS. MAYFIELD: When that tool was developed, did other woodworkers start hearing about it?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: Looks like another trend that you set, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: And old Jerry then sort of set up a business selling the special steel tools.

MS. MAYFIELD: To woodworkers?

MR. STOCKSDALE: It was better than any of the toolmakers' tools, because of the special steel that only Jerry could get. He's making them by the hundreds.

Did you see the poster on the wall, beside the outside door? 'Cause that was Jerry's first publicity on his tools.

MS. MAYFIELD: You first lived here in Berkeley after the war, and you married Nan Beatty in 1949.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And then Joy, your daughter Joy, was born the next year.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And your son was born the next year.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Right. Year and a half and a month between the two kids.

MS. MAYFIELD: So you were able to support your family entirely by making bowls?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I had a little borrowed money from my parents. But they weren't rich or anything like that. They were just dirt farmers, you know. So anyway, we-we got that taken care of.

MS. MAYFIELD: During those early times in Berkeley, late '40s and early '50s, you had started to show work at Gump's in San Francisco, a practice you started in CO camp.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. I sold them a few things in CO camp. They said, "Well, we'll take anything you make."

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, that must've felt good.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. [Laughs.] I couldn't make very much.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, Gump's had a good-

MR. STOCKSDALE: They had a good reputation, yeah. I knew all the buyers.

MS. MAYFIELD: At what point did you move from, kind of, functional ware-like salad bowls, to the decorative bowls, which are really an artistic expression?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, it was sort of a growing up thing. Gump's always bought large platters and trays and salad bowls. That's all they bought. Fraser's-you know, you've heard of Fraser's.

MS. MAYFIELD: It was a wonderful gallery/furniture shop.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: In Berkeley.

MR. STOCKSDALE: They would take everything I made, too.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did they favor the decorative bowls?

MR. STOCKSDALE: They wouldn't take the salad bowls, because I wouldn't show them to them. [Ms. Mayfield laughs.] I'd sell them to Gump's and sell the good stuff to Fraser's.

MS. MAYFIELD: I find that interesting. Gump's had a larger reputation, didn't they?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, they did.

MS. MAYFIELD: Why did Fraser's get the decorative bowls?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Because of their buyer, Fran McKinnon, who's still living in the Berkeley Hills on Panoramic Way.

MS. MAYFIELD: She really reinforced those beautiful decorative works.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. And she introduced me to various other buyers who were in New York and other places. I was selling a little to Georg Jensen and Bonniers and a whole raft of prestigious New York people.

MS. MAYFIELD: Fraser's had a wonderful, Scandinavian aesthetic. Is that right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. And-so they had one little section with my things in it. [Laughs.] And-and they cleared out other stuff and put my things there. They developed a string of collectors-Forrest Merrill and Bob-Bob Anderson, who is a legend in himself, and a lot of other people.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did these collectors, Bob Anderson and Forrest Merrill, did they compete?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Not a whole lot, no. They would buy whatever was around, you know. They sort of knew what the other guy wanted.

MS. MAYFIELD: A lot of collectors don't just buy one Stocksdale bowl.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, they have to have companion pieces [laughs].

MS. MAYFIELD: Different woods, different shapes.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. So that was the way it was then.

MS. MAYFIELD: Around 1952, you demonstrated lathe turning in the window of Fraser's, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was this the first time that you ever tried to teach people about-

MR. STOCKSDALE: I didn't teach 'em.

MS. MAYFIELD: Correction, let them see the process of wood turning.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. And that was during the sidewalk art show, and Kay was doing the same thing.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, really?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Kay Sekimachi was weaving?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Weaving. But there in the *Berkeley Gazette* in 1955, on the back page, there was a picture of Kay and me on the same page.

MS. MAYFIELD: Wow.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, we knew each other, and that's about all. But we've still got that page, I think.

MS. MAYFIELD: In 1957, you went to the first American Craft Council Conference at Asilomar.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And that's in Pacific Grove, California. Can you tell us about its importance and what happened there?

MR. STOCKSDALE: That was-that was important because it brought together all the craftsmen into one organization called the American Crafts-

MS. MAYFIELD: About how many people were there?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, probably 150, 200.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's quite a lot.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Were they all good craftsmen?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Not necessarily, but most of them were. There were a few dealers. I think Fraser's had a representative there just to make contacts. Other dealers in merchandise that would be used in manufacturing of other things were there.

MS. MAYFIELD: So how-how was this publicized? How did you hear about the conference at Asilomar?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, there was an organization called American Craft Council. They had a correspondence, you know, mailing list and so on that you'd join. Then gradually grew into a magazine. By word of mouth it developed into a growing organization.

MS. MAYFIELD: At the conference, who were some of the people that you met?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, there were a lot of craftsmen and former craftsmen there. Walker Weed was there from Dartmouth. He was in charge of the wood shop at Dartmouth. I forget what-it had a special name, because it was a very special wood shop. They had a very wonderful wood shop there. They didn't teach anybody just how to do things. They had help; they had a lot of help designing. And for the students to kind of make whatever they wanted to make. They didn't have any set classes or anything, but Walker did help students work out some of the design problems and so on. And so there wasn't any set program in this wood shop. The wood shop was a big, big operation, but it was only to help the students develop their own ideas and to see what they could make in the wood, if it had anything --

MS. MAYFIELD: Had you heard about it before this conference?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Not a whole lot. No. But then they invited me out there to Dartmouth and I went out. They put me up on the stage with a film project, you know. So I still have that film.

MS. MAYFIELD: Wow. That's something that should be made available. So 1958 was a pretty big year for you.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: You went to another American Craft Council conference at Lake George, New York.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: What-what was that-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Couple'a years later. Maybe one or two years. But I went to that one.

MS. MAYFIELD: And then that's the year of your first one-person exhibition, at Long Beach Museum of Art?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And how did that come to take place? Did you know the museum director or curator or-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I think they might've contacted me at the L.A. County Fair.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, the-the one in '52 when you demonstrated for 17 days? That's a lot of wood shavings, a lot of bowls. It must've gotten a lot of people started in the field.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you remember how many pieces you had on exhibition at Long Beach?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Not too many.

MS. MAYFIELD: But that same year, you were in the Brussels World's Fair, right? That must've been quite an honor.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Who else was represented?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I don't know. I just sent one piece. It wasn't a significant piece. But it was good enough for the World's Fair.

MS. MAYFIELD: By that time, you were in your stride and able to support yourself by making bowls.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. Always working an eight-hour day. Nine to five.

MS. MAYFIELD: Break for lunch.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Break for lunch, and never on Saturdays and Sundays.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] That's great. Didn't get up as early as you did when you had to be working on that farm in your childhood, did you?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: Were there any other craft organizations that were very helpful to you in your career early on?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Not really. No.

MS. MAYFIELD: Were you aware of some of the wood turners in other parts of the world in, let's say, the early '60s and the late '50s? I mean-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: I think *Woodturning Magazine* started about 1972?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Maybe. But in 1968, I think it was 1968 and '69, I went to England. And just quit woodworking altogether and devoted my time to exploring the woodwork in the pubs of England. [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, how did you get the time off to do that?

MR. STOCKSDALE: In 1968, Nan, my wife at that time, participated in a classroom exchange program. She was a second year school teacher in this country. You know, second grade. In this country. And they called it the Infant School over there in England.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you see any wood turners in England? I know that you have two wonderful pieces by-what's his name, Pye?

MR. STOCKSDALE: David Pye. He was a friend of Jerry Glaser, too. Jerry established connections there, in England. When Jerry came to England to visit us, he took us out to David Pye's place. I took him to a few wood places there in England, too. Wood, you know, wholesale wood places. And we had fun buying a little wood over there.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did Pye have any ideas that you adapted to your own work?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No. He was a teacher at the Royal College of Art.

MS. MAYFIELD: What'd you think about his work?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, I thought it was fantastic. It wasn't anything you could do commercially. But you could get a lot of publicity by doing it. I have one piece by him.

[Tape Change.]

It was made of kingwood, which is even rarer than Brazilian rosewood. And it had an inset lid that you have to open by putting your hand on it and spinning it around. The threads in this are chased. They're not done with a tap and die, by which most threads are made. They're chased. He just got the tool to-he slid it around along, and it cut a little groove, and he'd keep doing it till it got bigger. And then he could do the same with the-the die. It was just unbelievable. Couldn't begin to do that. But he did it, in a little box that high and that big around.

MS. MAYFIELD: In 1965 the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York, the current American Craft Museum, presented a one-person exhibition of your work.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did that exhibition give your work national and international attention?

MR. STOCKSDALE: A little, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Were there any articles on it, or was there a publication?

MR. STOCKSDALE: In *American Craft* magazine, there was a write up.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did collectors try to collect your work more intensely at that point? It was an impressive exhibition space.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, I suppose they did.

MS. MAYFIELD: In 1973, you had a one-person exhibition at the Renwick Gallery [of the National Museum of American Art]. There were a lot of major exhibitions in those years.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And in '70, at the St. Louis Craft Alliance.

MR. STOCKSDALE: That was no big exhibition.

MS. MAYFIELD: No big exhibition, okay [laughs].

MR. STOCKSDALE: That was in St. Louis. I went there in 1995 with the "Marriage in Form" exhibition. That's where we met Emily Pulitzer, who showed us her art collection.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you continue to go to museums at this time?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Sam Maloof once said that when you two went into a museum and saw Asian ceramics, you said that they'd been copying your work for centuries.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Thousands of years.

MS. MAYFIELD: Copying your shapes, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Copying your shapes for thousands of years.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: What was the origin of that?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I guess I-I started it.

MS. MAYFIELD: You started that. [They laugh.] Did you travel to openings for your exhibitions?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. A bit more. I don't know when I found-found time to work in the shop.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] That's true, because you were also conducting wood symposiums and doing demonstrations. When you were a speaker at a wood symposium, were you were really demonstrating?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you said you went to England more than three times.

MR. STOCKSDALE: I did some sightseeing, I guess, and I went with Kay two times to Parnham House, Beaminster Dorset, for wood symposiums.

MS. MAYFIELD: You like that English beer, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. And in 1968 we had a wonderful place in London to live. It was right on the Thames, on the third floor. And we could look half a mile in each direction on-up the river and down the river. And right in front of us was an islet, a little island. And that was inhabited by a couple of swans. And so they came by and the street that ran along there, down underneath our house, sort of was a pretty small street, only about one car wide. And in high water, when there was a lot of rain or something, the river would come up; flood that area on our street. And our garage was below the waterline. So we had to move the car. And occasionally, we missed. And that was an expense, too, that we weren't counting on.

MS. MAYFIELD: Were your children with you then?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, both of them. And they were in the-what's called secondary modern school for the ordinary kids. Not the place where you had to pay tuition, you know, and get into and all that stuff. And they loved it. And we loved it. Because it didn't cost anything.

MS. MAYFIELD: Who was the primary caretaker of your children?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well-I was. I had to do the shopping because my wife at that time couldn't do any shopping and teach school, too. So I drove a little automobile. It was a little bigger than that coffee table. And I had to buy the groceries. I joined a British co-op. And they had a fairly good store there in Hammersmith. And so I'd buy everything I could from them. Then I'd, of course, walk down the river to a pub. If I could get around to doing my daily rounds. And the pub keeper would-took a liking to me, and so quite often, maybe once a week or so, why, he'd say, "Stick around Bob." He said, "We'll have a party." You know, they had a crazy ruling to-that-three o' clock closing. Three o'clock in the afternoon. And then they would close until six. So I'd stick around. And he'd bar the windows, he'd lock up everything, you know.

[Tape Change.]

MS. MAYFIELD:-Berkeley, California, on March 8, 2001, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Okay, Bob, tell us about James Prestini. [Mr. Stocksdale ;aughs.] And, well, I know you visited him. You ended up in the same town, didn't you?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, we ended up in Berkeley. He lived about five or so blocks from me.

MS. MAYFIELD: Pretend that I don't know who he is. Can you tell me a little about who this person is and why we're talking about him?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, he was a-college prof, you know. And he taught design and-and a lot of stuff for the university [University of California, Berkeley]. I don't know just how many classes he had, but he was a professor of design. And he accumulated an enormous library, too, on design and different aspects of that sort of thing.

MS. MAYFIELD: And he turned bowls, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: He turned bowls, but they were only a means to an end.

MS. MAYFIELD: He really liked the concept of design. But you told me once he didn't love wood.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: His interests were design and form.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. He never came to see me, even though he lived in town.

MS. MAYFIELD: When did you first see him?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I went the first time in-when he was in Chicago.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was there a lot of publicity about his bowls, or how did you hear about him?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, everybody knew Prestini. He wasn't a very good man to talk with.

MS. MAYFIELD: So he was a good teacher, but not a good talker?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I don't think he was a very good teacher, either.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

MR. STOCKSDALE: He would develop various aspects of design. But he'd never follow on through with them.

MS. MAYFIELD: By limiting his vision just to pure form, pure design, and not understanding the richness of woods, there were a lot of things he missed, like the wealth of the grain.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. He just used wood as a means to an end. He would develop a shape, you know, without regard to the wood that was used.

MS. MAYFIELD: I think I understand what you mean. Sometimes I see prints that really should have remained drawings. Their artists have not used the printmaking medium to its full potential, and their prints lack the medium's visually rich line or tone.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, I think it's quite true of Prestini. He could just as well be working in some other medium that was just-would be just as effective in presenting his ideas. He heard that I had a Library of Congress number; because a fellow was photographing my work and was gonna write a life story. Well, the more we worked on it, the less I wanted him to do it.

MS. MAYFIELD: What did James Prestini say?

MR. STOCKSDALE: He said, "Why do you have a Library of Congress number?" [They laugh.] But he never came here to visit me. Not the least bit interested. So I sort of-I stayed away from him, too. In fact, I'd see him walking down the street, you know, here. And so I'd say, "Hey, Pres, come on over. You can see what I've been doing." So, he would say, "I'm on my way." [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: And I bet that in your lifetime, there were a lot of other people who wanted to turn bowls who came to see you.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: How did you relay your feeling about the way the quality of wood can enrich a form? Did you talk about that with people?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I-I didn't do any teaching. I just tried to work.

MS. MAYFIELD: Tried to work. Well, your pieces are the best teachers, don't you think?

MR. STOCKSDALE: [Laughs.] I think so.

MS. MAYFIELD: Let's talk a little about how you view education. I mean, you're self-taught. Can you comment on any differences between someone who's a university trained person in your field, as opposed to someone who just learned his craft outside academic circles?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I think it's pretty hard to get an institution like Cal [University of California, Berkeley] to make a wood turner.

MS. MAYFIELD: Mm-hmm.

MR. STOCKSDALE: You have to be a wood turner, and go to Cal for a few items of inspiration as far as design goes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, how do you-if you're young, how do you know you're a wood turner? I mean, the stork doesn't come with a tag saying, "This one's a wood turner."

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well-I don't know. [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: I guess you must follow your heart to what you love.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. And you have to dig into your work day by day.

MS. MAYFIELD: After all this time, as one who revitalized the field of wood turning and as one who has seen developments in wood turning, what was it like to receive that award in '95 from American Woodturning Association? There were 6,000 people that voted to give you that award, which was pretty amazing. How do you see the whole field of lathe-turned bowls? I mean, how do the Americans do in relationship to international artists? Do you think they're kind of like the forerunners?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Gee.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's like a big academic test, isn't it? [They laugh.] Think of personalities that you know-there is Rude Osolnik in the States. Who are some of the others who've done some pretty wonderful things?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, of course, there are quite a few people who have a much better view of their work than I do. They-

MS. MAYFIELD: They're working in all different ways, aren't they? We've got the Moulthrops.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And I know-

MR. STOCKSDALE: I think he's better.

MS. MAYFIELD: Think he's better. [They laugh.] And you've got artists now who are laminating woods together and turning.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: What do you think about that, as someone that-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, that's an entirely different field.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

MR. STOCKSDALE: And it's not taking a piece of wood and seeing what you can do with it. It's taking a lot of wood and seeing what you can do by putting it together, you know?

MS. MAYFIELD: Imposing your own idea, instead of letting the wood come-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: -out. Are you thinking of those paper-thin bowls by Shuler?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Mike Shuler.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Pretty amazing things.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, he does some pretty amazing things, but I think that's entirely different than wood turning. It's more-

MS. MAYFIELD: You have to have a level of obsession to do that kind of work.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you ever get any kind of ideas from other wood turners? Or did your ideas just always kind of develop on their own?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, they developed on their own.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, let me ask you a simple question. How on earth do you ever establish a price for your bowls? [Mr. Stocksdale laughs.] I've heard different things.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. Yeah, well, I hardly ever have a set price. And so I miss a lot of times; I should charge more than I do. And then I decide it would be simple to make a bowl like that. Then I lower the price. Instead of raising the price, if it sells right-sells right away.

MS. MAYFIELD: The director of the Wood Turning Center, Albert Le Coff, said you set your prices low. But when you get at the end of a log, and you know you're about out of that precious wood, and you know that it's not available anymore, then you raise your price a little. Is that right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: That occasionally is true. I get some woods that are much more rare than I realize.

MS. MAYFIELD: Uh-huh.

MR. STOCKSDALE: And I start adding to the price. [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, that sounds like a smart thing to do.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: But you must have seen a huge change in the market for American craft in your lifetime.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, that's true, I-

MS. MAYFIELD: What do you think about that?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, it's a thing that I don't have much to do with.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay. Who are the most significant writers are in the field of American craft, or specifically your field, lathe-turned bowls?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, I don't know, probably Osolnik and Dale Nish.

MS. MAYFIELD: Uh-huh.

MR. STOCKSDALE: And once in a while, Ellsworth. People that-talk a good speech.

MS. MAYFIELD: Talk a good speech, and write, and turn.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's a rare combination.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. And now Ellsworth, for instance, has a phobia for trying to design a wood bowl like that ceramic bowl there.

MS. MAYFIELD: A phobia against it?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, a phobia for making one.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, say, like a-

MR. STOCKSDALE: In wood.

MS. MAYFIELD: -like a Toshiko Takeazu in wood.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. He tries to get the bowl, you know, working with a tiny hole. Which is kind of crazy. You know, the beauty of the bowl is not just the shape on the outside; it's the shape of the inside, too. And so if you put a little hole in there for showing the inside, why then you don't have much.

MS. MAYFIELD: Might as well do it in ceramic.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's pretty interesting. Now, what's Ellsworth's first name?

MR. STOCKSDALE: David.

MS. MAYFIELD: David Ellsworth. I don't think I've ever read anything by Rude Osolnik, or Ellsworth. Do they write to the wood turning magazines?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, he's written quite a bit.

MS. MAYFIELD: So in terms of the kind of writing which may have affected you, it would've more-am I right about this?-it would've been more about the kinds of woods, rare woods, rather than, say, criticism of pieces?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I don't get that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Let me ask you a different way. If you had your chance to read something, would you want to read about theories of American craft? Or would you rather read about a rare wood and where you can find it and what it was like, its grain pattern?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I-I'd like to know-the sources of style, that sort of thing.

MS. MAYFIELD: Where would you find that kind of information? *Fine Woodworking* magazine? Or are there others?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, there's a lot of magazines that go into just the supply for rare woods and so on. There are periodicals that have good information; I lose out on all those now.

MS. MAYFIELD: Maybe you should get someone to read you some of those magazines, too.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, it's-a chore to find somebody.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you ever get a commission to do a piece that you were really quite proud of?

MR. STOCKSDALE: This is kind of a story. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay. We like stories.

MR. STOCKSDALE: A guy named Sherman Fairchild bought one of my bowls. It was pretty big. So he called me up, and said, "I want another one about the same size." And I said, "I can't just make a bowl out of a big piece of wood and get what you want." You know? I said, "What do you do for a living?" He said, "Oh, I-I make airplanes." [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: The Fairchild. Fairchild-Hiller.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. Sherman Fairchild. And so I made a couple of bowls for him. And they were a struggle, because they were bigger than any that I had made before.

MS. MAYFIELD: What kind of wood did you finally use?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I used black walnut. I got two or three bowls that looked pretty good. But, he couldn't decide on a price that was right for me.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's the difficult thing about commissions, having to barter about prices.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: So you didn't do too many other commissions, did you?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No.

MS. MAYFIELD: No commissions from the Vatican?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No. [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: You met the furniture artist Sam Maloof at the Los Angeles County Fair.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, he was doing demonstrations and-and it was at one area where he was making a chair or something like that. And so I was standing there, looking at his display. He wasn't on the stage then. And so his wife was there, too, and she said, "A shoemaker's children."

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, what does that mean?

MR. STOCKSDALE: You've heard the story of-a shoemaker's children always goes barefooted. They make a lot of shoes, but never get time to make their own kids' shoes.

MS. MAYFIELD: So it sounds like, Bob, that the conferences and fairs and other places where you met craft people helped form a community.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. Well, I turned around and I said, "You must Sam Maloof." [They laugh.] And he said, "Yeah, I am." And he said, "Who are you?" I said, "Bob Stocksdale." And I guess he had heard of me, but had never met me. [Laughs.] So we became friends right then. And then later on, he invited me over to his house, which was close by. And he had charge of getting craftsmen, the boys working for him, to do their stuff there, you know. To make chairs and various things.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's great.

MR. STOCKSDALE: And so the next year, I stayed with Maloof and, oh, I did demonstrations right along with making bowls.

MS. MAYFIELD: What kind of woods was Sam Maloof working with at the time you first met him?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Black walnut!

MS. MAYFIELD: Talk about the time you first began turning pieces of ebony for the plugs in Sam Maloof's furniture.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I decided to do it for Sam in the '70s. He didn't have the time, or the ebony, to do it. It was quite a bit of work to extract plugs from the inside of the bowls, and sometimes Sam complained that they were not jet black. African blackwood was too hard-it left bumps. I found sources of scrap ebony, all black, that were leftover pieces from the wood for the fingerboards of musical instruments. Had a special plug cutter made for me with an oak carbide blade. Ebony is somewhat abrasive. But I could make plugs, pretty efficiently.

MS. MAYFIELD: The plugs at the joints in Sam's furniture add a striking and subtle aspect to his designs. Let's go back to your demonstrations. I have seen a slide of your wood turning demo at Fraser's in Berkeley. It had many strata of colored shavings that were as high as your knees. What kind of woods did you use?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, they were more common woods, like walnut and maple, and any woods that had contrasting color. I worked inside of Fraser's close to the window. I knew when there was a layer of shavings. So then I would change the colors of the wood I was turning to get striations. And everybody took pictures of that.

MS. MAYFIELD: I remember. I remember in Palo Alto, during your exhibition "Marriage in Form," you did a demonstration on stage.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And there was a great arc, a big spray of pink ivory shavings.

MR. STOCKSDALE: {Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: That was so beautiful. Except to the people in the front row, they probably got it in their hair. There was a little bit of theater in your demonstrations. You were well aware of the fact that those sprays were pretty wonderful to look at.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Making shavings, just like Tom Sawyer. Pretty wonderful.

You did demonstrations around the country. Rhode Island School of Design in '80, Brigham Young University in Utah. You actually were demonstrating turning bowls on a lathe.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. And there was a group of wood shop teachers that I demonstrated for. And so they wanted me to teach the teachers.

MS. MAYFIELD: Teach the teachers.

MR. STOCKSDALE: So I bowed out of that.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Bob, could you discuss your views on the importance of wood as a means for expression?

MR. STOCKSDALE: [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, think of your decorative bowls and how you like to-to make those. That is what is meant by "means of expression."

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, oh. Well, I endeavored to acquire a lot of beautiful grained woods. And so I was able to buy a couple of the wood collectors-buy their whole collection of wood. And they collected not only just the small collection, but they would collect boards of various rare woods. And they would store them away and then they would [inaudible] negotiate to get the whole collection, you know, that they had. And I did that with three or four wood collectors. I bought out their whole collection. And most of them practically gave their wood to me, that I kept in my collection. And then work them up into various bowls.

MS. MAYFIELD: How on earth do you ever get the inside of a bowl to speak to the shape of the outside of the bowl?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, you always design from the outside. And you-you pretty much determine what the bowl is gonna look like as you're shaping the outside of it. And so you want to turn off most of the flaws and develop a pleasing shape and-

MS. MAYFIELD: You don't have much chance to change once you start cutting away.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, you can pretty well look the thing over, the shape of the bowl, as you're shaping up the outside. And you stop and look at it, and you can come up with a good shape.

MS. MAYFIELD: When you were in the CO camp, and you took those times to go to different museums, what kind of-what kind of collections did you look for?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I didn't visit many museums until I took a year off and lived in England.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, really?

MR. STOCKSDALE: And just bummed around.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you go to the British Museum?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Went to all of the museums there in London. And so I-

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you remember around what year that was?

MR. STOCKSDALE: It was between 1968 and '69, I think.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

MR. STOCKSDALE: My first wife and I lived in Hammersmith. I didn't have a lathe, so-but I showed my bowls around England, until I sold them.

MS. MAYFIELD: In Hammersmith, or just different areas in England?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Mostly in the pubs. [They laugh.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: The pub keeper really liked my work. He wanted to buy a bowl right then and there. [Ms. Mayfield laughs.] But-anyway, he bought most of them.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, it sounds pretty good.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: I notice that in 1970 you went to a World Craft Conference in Dublin, Ireland.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was that a good experience?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, that was pretty good. And I got to meet, oh, all of the great people in wood.

MS. MAYFIELD: Who were those people? You mean great people from abroad, or from the States?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, from different areas.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did they pay your transport?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, that was on my own. And my wife was teaching school over in England. Second grade was her specialty. [Laughs.] I did things for everyday living. You know, groceries, that sort of thing.

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you want to talk about your second wife, Kay? Kay Sekimachi.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. Love to talk about that. [Laughs.] Well, my first wife decided she wanted more freedom. And so we drifted apart. And she loved England, too. And so she left for England, because she wanted to visit some of her old teachers there.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you stayed in Berkeley?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And where were Joy and Kim? Were they with you?

MR. STOCKSDALE: They stayed here, because they were going to their own school here, you know.

MS. MAYFIELD: Can you talk about your first date with Kay? Wasn't really a date, but-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Wasn't really a date. [Laughs.] Well, yeah. We were both exhibiting in this gallery in Palo Alto. And it was-they had kind of high falutin' ideas. And they bought quite a few things. And so we were supposed to go to a meeting, you know, down in Palo Alto. And so-

[Tape Change.]

MS. MAYFIELD: And then that was it?

MR. STOCKSDALE: That was it.

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you think your marriage to Kay has affected your work?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. Definitely.

MS. MAYFIELD: Is she one of your biggest influences?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Why do you think that is?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, at the time I was interested in getting married to her, why, I could see that she liked to do experimental things with her weaving. All kinds of things, which I encouraged her to do.

MS. MAYFIELD: What things?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Monofilament hangings, and tubular card woven pieces. Took forever to make those, you know? And I said, "Just don't try to make any money from them, because I can make enough money for the two of us."

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, well good. [Laughs.] That's like a grant in itself, those words. How did she affect your work?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I would get her opinion on shapes and so on.

MS. MAYFIELD: So she reinforced the really beautiful work.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did she give you any other good advice?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, sure.

MS. MAYFIELD: After you got married in '72, your work just kept getting better.

MR. STOCKSDALE: I guess so.

MS. MAYFIELD: Can you talk about any other differences between your early and your later work? Let me put it another way. How do your bowls differ in the times before and after you married Kay?

MR. STOCKSDALE: That's a hard one.

MS. MAYFIELD: You've made over 10,000 bowls in your lifetime, by working nine to five every day. And about how many decorative bowls a year?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I'd have to go down and count them.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] That's right. You put notches in your studio to count them? Is that right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I burned a mark on the wall with a piece of Nichrome wire that got red hot.

MS. MAYFIELD: It's a good thing you didn't burn the building down, with all those bowls. [They laugh.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, that's Griff Okie. You know Griff?

MS. MAYFIELD: No, who's Griff Okie?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Griff Oakey is a furniture designer and so on. And he recently had to write on Art Carpenter. He wanted a story on Art Carpenter. So I said, "Well-Art was very clever at hitching electrical stuff up to do some

of his work. And so he got the idea of taking a side of a piece of wood and burning it out ."

MS. MAYFIELD: Art Carpenter tried burning out the inside of wood?

MR. STOCKSDALE: He was burning the inside of the bowl. So I said, "Art, what happened to the arrangement you had, where you burned the inside of the bowl with Nichrome wire. It was very complicated." "Oh," he said, "Well, that worked out alright, until the contraption set my shop on fire." [They laugh.]

MS. MAYFIELD: When did you start marking the wall to indicate a new bowl?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, Forrest was the --

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, Forrest told you to do it?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: The collector who wants to check how many pieces you've done looks on your wall?

MR. STOCKSDALE: He wants me to date them.

MS. MAYFIELD: Date them, okay.

MR. STOCKSDALE: I didn't think much of the idea of putting a date on them, the bowls, but I finally started putting a date on the bowls.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, it seems to be a trend that other people followed, so I guess we thank Forrest for that.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Would you like to talk about receiving your gold medal from the American Craft Council? You really had a good relation with that organization, having gone to those early meetings. What did it mean to you when you got the gold medal?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, it meant another step.

MS. MAYFIELD: Another step [laughs].

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: You've known different curators through time, haven't you? Were any particularly helpful? What about Rudy Turk at the University of Arizona at Tempe? Was he supportive?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No. I knew him, but I didn't get any special support.

MS. MAYFIELD: You didn't. He collected your work early on, though, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: If someone wanted to go see good collections of lathe-turned bowls in museums, where would you tell them to go?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, University of Arizona. [They laugh.] Bud Jacobson was one of the first collectors of the lathe-turned bowls. He donated part of his collection to Arizona.

MS. MAYFIELD: Any others that you can think of? What about the Deep South?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, the museum down in Mobile.

MS. MAYFIELD: Mobile, Alabama.

MS. MAYFIELD: Birmingham?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No. Atlanta.

MS. MAYFIELD: Atlanta. The High Museum.

MR. STOCKSDALE: High Museum. Yes, because my dealer, Martha Connell, always promoted my work.

MS. MAYFIELD: You've had a number of dealers, beginning with Helen Winnemore [Contemporary Craft Gallery,

Columbus, OH]. Martha Connell [Connell Gallery, Atlanta, GA] and Brown/Grotta [Gallery, Wilton, CT] are others. Are there some others that I'm missing that were helpful to your career?

MR. STOCKSDALE: In the East there were buyers who sold to Neiman Marcus.

MS. MAYFIELD: We'll take a break.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Would you say that the diversity of woods inspires you the most?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. Not only diversity of the woods, but the same log will have a lot of different pattern in its grain.

MS. MAYFIELD: Is it a challenge to you to do to different shapes out of that same log? I remember your seven ivory bowls that came from one log; each had a different shape, and all they nested together.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes [laughs].

MS. MAYFIELD: Was that difficult to achieve?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, that was pretty hard to do.

MS. MAYFIELD: Have there been other artists that are known for their work in exotic woods? Or are you the main figure?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I guess it is mostly me.

MS. MAYFIELD: Ed Moulthrop worked in exotic woods, but then just stayed with the woods that were around his backyard.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Have you made any conscious changes in the shapes of woods-I mean in your bowls through time? You did, didn't you?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Uh-

MS. MAYFIELD: Let's think of one. Think of those lignum vitae bowls that you turned for your retrospective "Marriage In Form." They changed, in terms of the way they dipped down in that kind of bird's mouth shape. They were thick at the top and thin at the lower area.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Whatever got you to do that change in shape, rather than just to turn a bowl where all the sides were the same?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well-turning a bowl, I found that if I evened it up on both sides, I had a better shape.

MS. MAYFIELD: Albert Le Coff mentioned a fellow named Liam-

MR. STOCKSDALE: O'Neal?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes. Can you talk about him?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, he's from Ireland. He was a pretty good wood turner. But I don't know what Albert said about him.

MS. MAYFIELD: He said Liam O'Neal traveled around a lot, about a quarter of his time-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: -and had these products. He realized when he put the chips in a bowl that the lip disappeared. So Liam started to make the shape of the lip of the bowl thick. And several turners were affected by that idea, where the rim was thicker, but the vessel still thinner. And I guess he was curious to know if that was something you remembered.

MR. STOCKSDALE: No.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Didn't know he did that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Didn't know he did that. Well, let's see what else I can ask you then. What impact has technology had on your work?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, the main thing is the kind of finish that I put on my bowls.

MS. MAYFIELD: I'm not certain I understand what you mean.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, I put a lacquer finish on the decorative bowls. And I put two coats of gloss, and the final coat is a satin finish. And it has been very easy to put on with the newly developed products. And then it's also very easy to refinish.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MS. MAYFIELD: What other improvements in technology affected your work?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I had that enormous lathe that I could turn a 30-inch plate with it. And so that was pretty-pretty big. Didn't want to make any bigger pieces than that.

MS. MAYFIELD: But rather than go out and buy a new machine, you've had to change your lathe so you could turn something that big?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I had one lathe that I could turn 30 inches between centers. And so that took care of the diameter pretty well.

MS. MAYFIELD: But how did you make the top of this circular table? Did you do this?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, I did that.

MS. MAYFIELD: How big is this?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Five feet.

MS. MAYFIELD: How did you turn this?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I didn't turn it. I got it perfectly round first. And then I ground a cutter a quarter of the round.

MS. MAYFIELD: To bevel the-the round edge?

MR. STOCKSDALE: And then turned it over and did the other side. So I got it all the way around.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, that's good. That's good.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: What is the biggest piece that you've turned?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, 30-30 inch, I'd say.

MS. MAYFIELD: A platter?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

[Tape change.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you think your ebony bowls are some of your most striking pieces?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, not always, no.

MS. MAYFIELD: It's a dramatic wood. You know, rich in color.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, it-it's usually outstanding in color.

MS. MAYFIELD: Isn't the bowl in the collection of the MET [Metropolitan Museum of Art], unusual because of its

size? Do you remember how large it is?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, it's four by 12 inches.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's sizeable.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. And it's pretty unusual. It's the largest piece of ebony I've ever turned. I think it came from Los Angeles. A dealer down Los Angeles, he imported it. And my friend, who checks them out every so often, happened at the right time, and-

MS. MAYFIELD: This is one of your great wood scouts that you have all across the country?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. And so he got-got a hold of it right away.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MS. MAYFIELD: You said that you've retained two outstanding bowls.

MR. STOCKSDALE: The ones behind the sofa. They are exceptional grain. One is lignum vitae, and the other is African blackwood, or mpingo.

MS. MAYFIELD: Mpingo, is from the "music tree"? Is that right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, that's the "music tree." It's blackwood used primarily for clarinets. Wood dealers try to get as much as they can get from the natives in Africa. [Laughs.] The African natives love it, too, because they like to make sculptures out of it. And it's extremely hard. Every time they find a tree, they proceed to cut it down and chop it up. It was from Zambezi, or something like that.

MS. MAYFIELD: It certainly must be an endangered wood by now, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: It is. And it was known all over Africa. But not any more. Just one country in Africa still has some.

MS. MAYFIELD: It must have unusual properties. The sound of a clarinet is distinct.

MR. STOCKSDALE: It's some unusual thing. It-no other wood will do as well.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, that's pretty interesting.

MR. STOCKSDALE: There are very few real hardwoods, outside of lignum vitae and the African blackwood. Sometimes ebony is rated as pretty hard, but there's lots of other woods that are just as hard.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you learn about it from the Wood Collector's Society?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. And all the wood collectors loved to get African blackwood as one of their collections, although it-it doesn't have much grain. It's, you know --

MS. MAYFIELD: Has a dense luster.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really rich.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Mm-hmm.

MS. MAYFIELD: The bowl in which you have a wonderful dip in the middle, is that the "bird's mouth rim"?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. Its rim is sapwood that is cream colored.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh! This is a beautiful bowl, this blackwood bowl.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: It has such a great sheen to it.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was it really difficult to turn?

MR. STOCKSDALE: It's not too difficult to turn. And this was fortunate. I could get even dips on each side. You see? It wasn't lopsided or anything like that. So I was able to make a good shape out of it.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, you often talk about designing the bowl while it is turning on the lathe. But you still have to put that chunk of wood on the lathe one way or another to determine a shape.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you have some preconceived idea of its shape?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, you look at the piece of wood and you see that it's pretty even. You can measure, you know, from here down and here down. And so that's the low part. And then you can mark the high-high spots. And so the center of the bowl is here.

MS. MAYFIELD: So the way you thought about this bowl initially was that you saw this kind of rim, dark rim-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: And then you knew you wanted to keep that, and that helped dictate the way the shape of the bowl went?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you ever put things on the lathe and then think: Oh, I did it all wrong, [laughs] and then you began again?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, sometimes I can-I can change it, you know?

MS. MAYFIELD: That seems impossible to me. I mean, I can see how you could do a drawing and erase, but I can't see how you have a chunk of wood on a lathe and you start turning it and then you switch it.

MR. STOCKSDALE: I take it off the lathe.

MS. MAYFIELD: Take it off the lathe.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, it's that easy [laughs].

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, this is one beautiful bowl. Beautiful. So is this really one of your best bowls you've ever made?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah, these two. This lignum vitae, because of its grain. Everything is pretty well centered. And another unusual thing about both of these bowls is that there's no finish at all. It's just polished wood, that's all.

MS. MAYFIELD: With very hard wood, you don't need to add any lacquer finishes? Is that what you mean?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: But can you really see the patterns of grain when you have just a block of wood? I mean, do you ever find out afterwards that you've found all this grain that you didn't know was there?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I-I saw most of it, because I could look at the end grain, which is here. And so I just centered it. That's all. Most unusual thing about this bowl is that it sits there behind the sofa and is exposed to sunlight almost every day for a period of time. There's nothing to protect it at all, and there have been no changes to its color.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, where did the lignum vitae come from?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Guatemala. It grows all through Central America. Even a little bit in Florida. It was used for centuries-or not centuries, but long periods of time when they had inboard motors on boats and ships. And the bearing where the shaft goes through the ship was always lignum vitae.

MS. MAYFIELD: It was not hurt when weathered by the water?

MR. STOCKSDALE: It withstands the action of the salt water and everything else.

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you know anything about the trees, in terms of how long they live, or-

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I don't, because I've never seen one growing.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, for the exhibition at the Palo Alto Art Center. You had two lignum vitae bowls. The grain forms an eye right at the point where the bowl protrudes, and it also has a bird's nest rim. Now, why do you prefer one bowl over the other?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, one thing, it hasn't changed shape or warped or anything like that, or developed any cracks. A lot of the lignum vitae will change its shape. Now, this one is thicker here than it is over here.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. It's thicker at the higher part of the rim than in the dip of the rim.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. I do that intentionally.

MS. MAYFIELD: Which is just amazing to me, because it means -am I right about this?-it means that when it's turning fast on a lathe, you actually have to let up your hand to let this area stay wide?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well-well, the bowl is spinning like this, you see. And-and it's already shaped this way. So I just undercut it, you see, down in here, to this thickness here.

MS. MAYFIELD: But at some point in time, you're turning air, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, you do that all the time with a bowl this shape. See, you're turning air here.

MS. MAYFIELD: Takes an amazing, steady hand. So this piece was done in 1993, this lignum vitae. And your earlier one-let's see.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Nineteen eighty-four.

MS. MAYFIELD: And this lignum vitae is from Nicaragua and is dated 1993.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: They're a pretty interesting comparison, Bob, because they really show how much you experiment. This is more of a classic shape. But no one has made a shape like the other?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I guess not.

MS. MAYFIELD: No. [They laugh.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: I never look around.

MS. MAYFIELD: You never look around. [Laughs.] No mirrors looking behind you.

MR. STOCKSDALE: I made several of them like this, because the log was long enough to make several bowls.

MS. MAYFIELD: It is important to you that you didn't waste the wood, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: New tools have helped you extract a number of bowls from one log, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. Sometimes you can take one bowl out after another. But I didn't try to do that with those. Now, this one, I think I took a bowl out of here.

MS. MAYFIELD: Out of the '84 piece, there was another bowl?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: You purposely never turn the same kind of bowl straight in a row, do you?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I usually do a different wood or something like that to get a different-I don't try to make one after another of the same shape.

MS. MAYFIELD: One of my favorite bowls is this little bowl from wild persimmon from Texas. Did you really see this shape that looks like a persimmon, that was formed after you turned it?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. I could see it on the end-end grain, you see. This was here, with the log coming this way.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's a pretty amazing bowl.

MR. STOCKSDALE: It is.

MS. MAYFIELD: You often use the foot of the bowl to lift and lighten the piece. But in some bowls, you leave this nice rounded bottom, so that it feels like that bowl's almost floating, as well as sitting.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: And that just has to do with the kind of shape that you detect is best?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. Now, see, that's persimmon.

MS. MAYFIELD: The 1983 bowl is made from wild persimmon from Texas.

MR. STOCKSDALE: And that's closely related to ebony. It was a trash tree in Texas. So the ranchers don't like to have it, 'cause the animals won't get around very much. Think it's got spines or something on it. So they like to have it chopped up. And so it's not very plentiful anyplace.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, really? And a wood scout found that wild persimmon for you, right? One of your friends?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: How many wood scouts did you have across the country?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, I had five or six.

MS. MAYFIELD: Didn't you buy a huge stash of rare woods one time?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, yeah. But that was from a wood collector.

MS. MAYFIELD: Tell me that story.

MR. STOCKSDALE: In fact, it was two different wood collectors that decided they were too old to collect anymore. And they could see the end. So they contacted me and asked me if I was interested in buying their collection, and I said sure. And so they had both collected usable pieces of wood, not just samples. And some of the boards were suitable for bowls and plates and things like that. Which was a real find for me. That way, I got bowls like this.

MS. MAYFIELD: Uh-huh. It's marvelous.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. Now, that one I had-

MS. MAYFIELD: The lignum vitae?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. When Jerry Glaser went to London, there was a company in London that just sold lignum vitae logs. And they would sell it mostly to boat companies, you know, for the bearings in ships. So he was very fortunate to see the end grain of all-every log in the place. And he spotted that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, good eyes. [They laugh.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: So he bought it and brought it home to me.

MS. MAYFIELD: Because this lignum vitae looks like it has an eye and a circle around it and another circle.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: And it's truly beautiful. And there also seems to be some other kind of grain lines that almost have a green cast.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: Everything else is warm.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Is that unusual?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Very unusual, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, it sounds like you've got a good community of friends that kind of helped you along there. Bob, did it mean a lot to you, when the Oakland Museum and the Metropolitan started to acquire your work?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, they didn't have much choice. I just gave them a choice of whatever bowl they were ready to get at any given time. The Oakland Museum collected bowls from collectors in the area, and Norman Anderson donated a number of bowls.

MS. MAYFIELD: What about pieces in Forrest Merrill's collection? You're about to open that exhibition, "Bob Stocksdale: Eighty-Eight Turnings" [Museum of Craft and Folk Art, San Francisco, CA, 2001]. And there are some really fine pieces. What are your favorites out of this collection?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, two African blackwood bowls are outstanding.

MS. MAYFIELD: Two 1993 mpingo bowls. One's only three and a half by four inches, and the other's two and a half by three. They are really extraordinary pieces that look quite large in reproduction.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Tell me why you think these are some of your favorite works.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, they're kind of matching bowls. I got them both out of the same small log.

MS. MAYFIELD: But they're very different. One has, kind of, that lower rim and higher rim; and the other you have, like, of a straight, long rim. And in the shorter one, you've made the foot proportionately much shorter.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. I didn't intentionally make them matching bowls. But the photographer, in going through this collection, chose to photograph them side by each.

MS. MAYFIELD: [M.] Lee Fatherree [photographer] has a wonderful eye.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: And they do seem to converse like two people.

[Tape change.]

MS. MAYFIELD: -March 21, 2001. We're looking at Bob Stocksdale's recent catalogue, "Eighty-Eight Turnings" from Forrest L. Merrill's collection [Mingei International Museum, San Diego, CA, June 17-November 25, 2001].

MS. MAYFIELD: What are your favorite bowls within this catalogue?

MR. STOCKSDALE: The zebrawood from Africa, which is fairly well in the front.

MS. MAYFIELD: Is there a reason that the African woods seem to have such extraordinary grain? Does it relate to climate and lack of water?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, I don't think so; it's just climate, lack of water, and the fact that they've never been a developed country.

MS. MAYFIELD: Here's your zebrawood bowl. There are two views in the catalogue-the interior and exterior. The amazing grain repeats the rim shape.

MR. STOCKSDALE: These two are both the same, I think. The same. And they were from the largest log I ever bought.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really?

MR. STOCKSDALE: That log was eleven feet long. And it was three foot in diameter at both ends. You couldn't tell from one end to the other, which was up and which was. [Ms. Mayfield laughs.] I got it from New York, from Monteith [?], big log dealer. He went out of business.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you see it first, or did you just-did they just tell you about it?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I think they just told me about it, 'cause I didn't have much time to-they were selling everything at a very low price. And so they said, "Eleven cents a pound." And it weighed-well, I forget now. I cut it into three pieces and each piece rolled real nice into the back yard. It was a zebrawood log. But it turned out it wasn't a bright zebra color.

MS. MAYFIELD: Like the platter?

MR. STOCKSDALE: That platter has outstanding grain. Looked like it had been struck by lightning. It is so asymmetric.

MS. MAYFIELD: In 1950 you turned a number of zebrawood bowls.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: That was a good year for zebrawood?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. [They laugh.] Actually, I got tired of making those bowls in zebrawood, because it wasn't really good zebrawood. It was very even in the-in the growth rings.

MS. MAYFIELD: Not like the magnolia from California. Here is a platter about one by 14 ½ inches in diameter. It's interesting to think about this piece next to the tranquil piece that June Schwarz owns that's a wormy-wood walnut platter. Most people would look at worm-eaten woods and not realize that they could make a beautiful bowl.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: This is a great piece. Magnolia, Texas, from '93. And it's only four and a half by six inches. But that's marvelous, with all those little-little pits in it.

MR. STOCKSDALE: It came from a log almost eight feet long.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really?

MR. STOCKSDALE: And wormy from end to end. No live worms in the thing. But it had all the worm holes. For June Schwarz's platter, I filled in the holes with a black epoxy, which was the wrong thing to do.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] Why is that?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Well, it has holes in it; leave them.

MS. MAYFIELD: When you filled the holes with black epoxy, weren't you trying to build up the drama of contrast?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Maybe so. But I have since found that leaving them open was best.

MS. MAYFIELD: What was the first kind of wormy wood that you ever turned, do you remember? Has that always been something that's kind of a challenge, to pick up a burl or a wormy-wood thing that seems sort of irregular?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No. Magnolia may have been the first. There weren't very many woods that I had that were wormy like that.

MS. MAYFIELD: This has beautiful markings from the grain as well.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: It's a wonderful piece. Forrest only has, I think, one piece where there is a bark edge rim, *Bowl with Natural Ridge, from Chichen, Mexico*.

MR. STOCKSDALE: It's from Yucatan in Mexico. And I only got enough to make three or four bowls, so-so I didn't get a very big selection of it. But I didn't try to specialize in that --

MS. MAYFIELD: In that combination of the rough rim and smooth bowl?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did other wood turners claim that terrain?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, my wood sources didn't have any appropriate woods.

MS. MAYFIELD: I remember the Cambodian boxwood bowl that you turned that had a delicate bark edge. I think it was in a show at Brown/Grotta. And you told me then that sometimes those bark edges would fly off the lathe. Did that happen a couple of times?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Pretty interesting. What else can we say about say about pieces in this exhibition, "Eighty-Eight Turnings"?

MR. STOCKSDALE: The koa wood bowl flew off the lathe and broke into about 16 pieces. It just broke out-all over. And I managed to find all the pieces. My dentist friend glued them back together.

MS. MAYFIELD: That should be a collaborative work, then. [Laughs.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: I think that one thing that's not in this collection are any of those bowls that had a bird's mouth shape. I'm thinking of some of the paraking wood bowls that you had in "Marriage in Form" that were so extraordinary.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: Those were great pieces.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes, usually they were kingwood. And I just don't know why.

MS. MAYFIELD: I think you've got one here.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: This bowl is really exceptional, to my eye. And this is ebony and Ceylon from-

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: But, you know, this was in the "Marriage in Form" exhibition, and this was done before you dated any bowls. So when would that be?

MR. STOCKSDALE: I don't know.

MS. MAYFIELD: Forrest might know.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: This ebony bowl, like the paraking wood bowls, has this wonderful opening up and offering this picture of the grain.

MR. STOCKSDALE: You see, this ebony is Ceylon ebony. And ordinarily, Ceylon ebony is black all the way through, so this log was thrown out of the collection and not sold as Ceylon ebony because it was not black enough. Jerry Glaser found out. He found it in Lyons, France, as they were sorting it at the dock. And [laughs] he caught them. So he bought all the logs that were like this, and this one, I called it *Pregnant Mouse*.

MS. MAYFIELD: Because of the shape, the black in the center?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's something I never would've seen.

MR. STOCKSDALE: See that mouse runnin' across?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yeah. [They laugh.]

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: It's a beauty.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: And I love the outside, too.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really wonderful.

MR. STOCKSDALE: So I kept that one.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's good. Now, when you keep them, do you pick the ones to be kept? Or was that Kay?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Both of us.

MS. MAYFIELD: Both of you.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: So in recent years, you've turned wood that you've never turned before. I'm thinking of that poisonous tambootie wood from South Africa.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: Can you talk about that? Forrest has a bowl that's tambootie.

MR. STOCKSDALE: After I turned the bowls, they started to change color, even though they were dry all the way through. And I never thought the wood would change color. But as I kept it for a while, it gradually changed to sort of a blue. Then, I got the *Wood Collector's Bulletin*, and they mentioned Tambootie. It was poisonous when it was green. You know? Fresh out of the tree. The sapwood was very poisonous. And the natives would collect the sapwood from the tree and put a little bit on the arrowheads. They would kill birds with it. They would put it on the arrow, and then they would shoot the arrow into the water at a fish. And the fish would float right up to the top. Just paralyzed. Didn't kill them. And so then they'd catch the fish, you see.

MS. MAYFIELD: I think the photo in the *Eighty-Eight Turnings* catalogue is less blue than the actual bowl.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: You told me once that you were one of the few to turn macadamia, saying, "Who else would want to spend that much time curing it out?"

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. [Laughs.] It was a chore to cure it out, because it cracked so badly in the drying process.

MS. MAYFIELD: The whole drying process for wood is pretty lengthy for all of your bowls, right?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Not all of them. Some are very easy to dry.

MS. MAYFIELD: And at what stage do you do that?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Right after you get the wood. The bowls are roughed out in shapes.

MS. MAYFIELD: For the macadamia nut bowl you tended to make a protrusion to highlight the medellary rays.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. And you did the same kind of things with mazur birch.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yes. But mazur birch was much easier to do. No problem to get it to cure out or anything. And it didn't crack open.

MS. MAYFIELD: What is it you like about the macadamia?

MR. STOCKSDALE: In the macadamia the medellary rays go from the center of the tree straight to the outside. It's not the grain pattern, but it's those medellary rays that are very pronounced. And in some woods, you can't see it at all. The sycamore is another one that has the medellary rays that go from the heart to the outside. But the "macnut" trees, or macadamia, are noted for having medellary rays.

MS. MAYFIELD: Is it a pretty hard wood?

MR. STOCKSDALE: No, it's a little on the order of an oak. But they don't let the trees get very big. Big trees don't produce enough nuts. They tear out the orchard and replant small trees. That's it.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Is the ripple grain common for koa?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Yeah. It's quite common to have a ripple all the way through. And I got that wood from Griff Okie.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MS. MAYFIELD: What's the wildest wood story you have? Wood collecting story.

MR. STOCKSDALE: Oh, yeah, I got one. You know, with the old story of the bowl that flew off the lathe and broke into pieces.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

[Tape stops.]

The following is an addendum created on December 16, 2001, by Signe Mayfield and Bob Stocksdale, and was not taped.

MS. MAYFIELD: This is Signe Mayfield, wrapping up an interview with Bob Stocksdale for the Archives of American Art at his home in Berkeley, California, on December 16, 2001.

Bob, would you like to say anything further about "Marriage in Form," your dual retrospective exhibition with Kay Sekimachi?

MR. STOCKSDALE: That was where Kay was the star. It made us famous. It was a highlight of our careers, and it was fun to go from city to city when it traveled. Them were the days. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Patricia Kane, curator of decorative arts at Yale, cited some reasons that she would like to acquire your *Harewood Plate* for the museum's collection: "its beauty; the expertise and imagination with which you exploited the color and figure of the material; its representation of an early work when, following World War II, you began your key role in the development of American wood turning; and its rich provenance in its inclusion in the landmark exhibition in American craft, "Designer Craftsmen USA 1953." Will you let them acquire the piece?

MR. STOCKSDALE: If the pay enough money.

MS. MAYFIELD: If I were writing a "Day in the Life of Bob Stocksdale," what would you say were the highlights of life and career?

MR. STOCKSDALE: Kay!

MS. MAYFIELD: What else would you mention?

MR. STOCKSDALE: That's all.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Afterword by Kay Sekimachi, May 2002

During the time that Bob Stocksdale was interviewed for the Laitman oral history project, he was experiencing a lot of pain because of a T12 fracture of the vertebrae. Additionally, the prescribed medication often made him drowsy. While the interview spanned a number of visits, the oral interview, at this time of his life, could not fully reflect the spirited enthusiasm nor the clarity of detail of the wonderful stories he told with a mischievous smile in the previous years.

One of his happiest memories was as a young boy spending time in his Grandpa Kriegbaum's hardware store. He loved going through the nails, nuts and bolts, and everything else that would fascinate a fellow of his age. Grandpa supplied Bob and his brothers with pocketknives. He lost the knife given him by his Uncle Ralph not too many years ago, probably in the shavings in his shop.

Bob attended a few World Crafts Council meetings, including the first one in 1964 at Columbia University in New York City. Bob used to laugh when telling a story about Tapio Wirkkala, with whom he was staying in a dormitory on the campus. Tapio came home late one night and got locked out and had to spend the night on a street bench.

Bob attended the one in Montreux, Switzerland, in 1966. At the one in Dublin, Ireland [1970], Bob found himself in the back seat of a car with Janet Leach. Bernard and the driver were in the front. Bob and Janet found themselves necking all the way to wherever they were going.

Bob's earliest dealer was Helen Winnemore. The next, Gump's in San Francisco. I think. He started selling bowls to them while still in the Feather River CO camp. Among his dealers, he had a very good relationship with

Fraser's (shop in Berkeley)-the whole staff. He still thinks of them warmly, and I think it is mutual. We went to a memorial gathering a couple of years ago for the office manager and were greeted with open arms by many. His relationship with Gump's didn't last as long, but I know he was friendly with the buyer and still remembers many of the people that worked there. He kept up with Helen Winnemore until she died at age 95 a number of years ago.

Bob was published early in his career. An article appeared in *Science Illustrated*, February 1949, titled, "Wooden Tableware: A Hobby Becomes Nationwide Business." One of the earliest exhibitions was in February 1952, "Design for Use, USA," selected by the Museum of Modern Art and exhibited at the Grand Palais in Paris, with a catalogue. Bob was also included in the exhibition "Designer Craftsman USA, 1953," organized by the American Craftmen's Educational Council and held at the Brooklyn Museum. The piece in this exhibition, *Harewood Plate*, is now in an exhibition called "Wood Turning in North America since 1930," organized by the Wood Turning Center, Philadelphia, and Yale University, New Haven. It opened at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota, in 2001, traveled to the Renwick Gallery, Washington, D.C., and will open at Yale in September this year. Just very recently the piece was bought by Yale for their permanent collection. The early articles and exhibitions were helpful in launching his career; they certainly encouraged him, gave him confidence.

Bob worked alone in his basement shop and so he did enjoy visitors dropping in. He had a way of discouraging visits from wood turners. He enjoyed woodworkers/furniture makers more. Some of his visitors would end up by coming upstairs. He worried that they would bother me, take up my time. At times he would bluntly say, "Don't bother Kay." He understood how much time my work took.

For the special wood turners that came, he would be generous. He demonstrated turning bowls on a lathe for them and answered questions. For many years, once a year, Keith Nason, who taught woodwork at Laney College [Oakland, CA], would bring his whole class into the basement shop, where Bob would give a demo and answer questions. There was a flurry of activity when he let the guys (occasionally a girl or two) paw through his scrap wood and buy pieces.

He encouraged my own work and was to be more than helpful in making special equipment for me. He made my worktable, two paper storage cabinets, stools to stand on, put weights and extenders on the treadles of my 12-harness loom when I complained how hard it was to treadle. He made molds for me for my paper bowls, including a huge knock-down mold for the largest patched pot that I ever made. He was always interested in what I was doing and trying to do. Actually, he couldn't do enough for me. I couldn't have done some of the things I did without his help.

Bob would invite me down to his shop when he had something special to show me-a new shape or an especially beautiful piece of wood. Sometimes he would ask my opinion on the shape of the piece-the height of the foot or the curvature of the form. I would give my opinion, but I am not sure he took it.

I see changes in his early and late work. The early pieces were heavier, especially in the base. When turned upside down, the base of the bowl was flat and looked clunky. And in many of the bowls, especially the salad bowls, the sides were straight. The changes were subtle. Gradually the forms became more refined; the sides had gentle curves and the walls much thinner. Also the woods became more exotic, and some of the pieces looked almost sensuous. He figured out a way to cut a shallow curve in the base of the bowls to make it lighter and quite elegant. More changes in the way he cut the top edge of the bowl, which made the bowl look almost oval. On some, the top rim of the bowl became thicker. All these variations to enhance the form and grain of the wood. In the late work there were some much smaller bowls, some miniature in size and elegant.

Bob had done a lot of traveling and loved it. He lived in England for a year and traveled through Europe. I don't think travel has made much of an impact on his work. He would go dressed as if he were going around the corner, and he comes home and just carries on where he left off. He used to quit work at five o'clock (later three o'clock) in the afternoon, no matter what he was doing, and pick it up in the morning and carry on.

Also Bob and I have done a lot of traveling together. If it wasn't for a wood-turning symposium, it would be for a weaving workshop for me. We've been to Japan three times, England together three times, Mexico a number of times, and Bob many more times before me with good friends in their private plane-a Bonanza. Actually he has many stories to tell of these trips. He loved his friend Tom Pillsbury and they did have many adventures together, a few hauling wood in Tom's two-ton flatbed truck.

Bob's early collectors were Bob Anderson, Bud Jacobson, Forrest Merrill, and Norman Anderson. Bob Anderson had been collecting before my time. I never knew that such collectors existed. I remember asking Bob Anderson why he collected Bob's work, and he said that he really wanted to do that kind of work himself.

In the 1980s wood turning came into its own. There were more shows, more catalogues, more magazines, more books on turning than ever before. The mid-'80s and the '90s were a time of accelerated activity in all of the crafts. Bob was identified as a pioneer and was featured on the cover of many of the magazines.

In the mid-1980s, many important collectors came on the scene, or maybe it was there were many people out there with disposable incomes who decided they wanted to collect crafts. George and Dorothy Saxe were among the first. George has made a collection of Bob's work, in fact has a roomful, which he calls the Bob Stocksdale Room. Jane and Arthur Mason followed, as well as Alex Cook. Now these collectors are giving their collections to museums-the Saxes to the Toledo Art Museum and the de Young, and the Mason's to the Mint Museum of Craft and Design in Charlotte, North Carolina. Museums formed Collector Groups. One of the first to visit us was the Craft Leaders Alliance of the Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C. They would organize trips around the country visiting craftsmen. Around 40 collectors were in the group-they came in a big bus, marched into the house, looked around, and in 45 minutes bought $17,000 worth of our works. It was quite a day.

The '90s (maybe our best years) were particularly exciting and rewarding for us because of our dual exhibition, "Marriage in Form," three more honors for Bob-the gold medal from the American Crafts Council in 1995; his whole family with all his siblings attended the ceremony in Tampa, Florida, which was very nice. Bob received an honorary lifetime membership for contribution to wood turning, American Association of Wood Turners, 1995, and the first lifetime achievement award, Collectors of Wood Art Forum, 1998.

"Marriage in Form," organized and curated by Signe Mayfield at the Palo Alto Cultural Center (now Art Center) in 1993, was certainly the most important exhibition of our careers. The catalogue was our first. The exhibition traveled to six venues all across the country between 1993 and 1996, two of which were the most prestigious craft museums in the country. It was almost a year of hard work, with many, many trips to Palo Alto for photography and to San Francisco to the catalogue designer, but certainly well worth the effort. The installation designed by Theodore Cohen was so beautiful. Upon entering the gallery, it took my breath away. It was thrilling to see all our work together, spanning 30 years, grouped beautifully together in a spacious, lovely gallery. The opening was wonderful (and exhausting) with the biggest crowd that the Center ever had. We went to every venue-all very exciting and wonderful. We were given the royal treatment at each and the memories of those experiences remain vivid. Signe accompanied us to three of them and most importantly she became a very good and dear friend. Bob says, "she made us famous," and that she is one of his "two loves."

"Marriage in Form" launched another breakthrough for us. At Signe's brilliant request, we made our first "Marriage in Form" set-using a beautiful walnut bowl of Bob's, perfectly shaped to enhance my special hornets' nest paper and, when finished, paired as a set. Mine turned out to be the best hornets' nest bowl I ever made. It was perhaps due to this very special exhibition and its title and concept that I was inspired. This marriage set also produced a wave of orders, which kept us busy the rest of the decade. Many orders came from couples celebrating anniversaries. And somehow as a set the galleries and collectors saw more value when our work was conceptually paired together, and we were able to command a much higher price.

Last year, the San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum (now the Museum of Craft & Folk Art) organized an exhibition of Bob's work, "Eighty-Eight Turnings" to celebrate his 88th birthday. The show was from the collection of his most important collector, Forrest L. Merrill, who is also a dear friend. The opening was wonderful. The huge crowd just poured in. The museum being small, the people had to get in a single file to move around the installation. Bob and I were seated at the door greeting everyone. I got the feeling that here was an adoring crowd, full of admiration for Bob, and I felt proud.

Kay Sekimachi, May 2002

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