



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with J.B. Blunk, 2002
May 16

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with J.B. Blunk, joined by his daughter, Mariah Nielsen, on May 16, 2002. The interview took place at the artist's home and studio in Inverness, California, and was conducted by Glenn Adamson 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.

J.B. Blunk, Mariah Nielsen, and Glenn Adamson have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

[TRANSCRIPTION NOTE: During the interview, Mr. Blunk frequently pauses when having difficulty summoning memories.]

* * *

MR. ADAMSON: This is the oral history interview with J.B. Blunk in Inverness, California, for the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art. I'm sitting here in J.B.'s home with him and with his daughter, Mariah Nielsen, who is going to be helping us with the interview, as well.

It is March 16, 2002, on a nice spring morning, and we're looking down over the valley behind his house. And, can you tell me where you were born?

MR. BLUNK: Kansas.

MR. ADAMSON: And when?

MR. BLUNK: August 28, 1926.

MR. ADAMSON: Good. So you grew up in Kansas, right?

MR. BLUNK: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And can you tell us anything you remember about growing up in Kansas, or about your parents?

MS. NIELSEN: What did your dad do? He was an eye doctor, right?

MR. BLUNK: No, he wasn't an eye doctor.

MS. NIELSEN: An optometrist?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, an optometrist.

MR. ADAMSON: And you went to school in Kansas growing up?

MR. BLUNK: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: So, did you like it there?

MR. BLUNK: Well, I lived with my mother and father, so-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember, when you were a teenager, did you ever do things with your hands at all, working on cars or anything like that?

MR. BLUNK: No.

MR. ADAMSON: No? Were you a good student?

MR. BLUNK: I tried to be, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: You tried to be. And you went to college, right?

MR. BLUNK: Yes, I went to college. I graduated from UCLA.

MR. ADAMSON: So, why did you decide to go to college out in California?

MR. BLUNK: [Pause.]

MS. NIELSEN: Your parents had moved to L.A., right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. My parents had-well, my father had an opportunity to start-well, he was an optometrist. He made the lenses when they used to do that, you know. They were very different than now. [Laughs.] But he had a chance to-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: To move out to California?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I moved with them to California.

MR. ADAMSON: And you were a teenager at the time?

MS. NIELSEN: I think you were around 19 or 20, early 20s, late teens.

MR. BLUNK: [Pause.] He got this job to run this-in Los Angeles through a friend. And since my parents moved, I followed. But I don't know the next step.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. But you wound up at UCLA, anyway.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And if I remember right, you took classes with Laura Andreson?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me about that?

MR. BLUNK: Well, she had a student. [Pause.] Oh, that's right. She had a-Andreas, people call her. And she had a-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: Did she know somebody she knew, or did she have a student you were friends with?

MR. BLUNK: She had a student that was-who was very ardent, and he became her helper, something-

MR. ADAMSON: Her assistant, something like that.

MR. BLUNK: Her assistant, yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: Did you know him?

MR. BLUNK: Well, I met him because he had this little place in Los Angeles where he started making his first pots.

MS. NIELSEN: You met him there?

MR. BLUNK: And then she-I went to his studio that he had, to visit at night because I was interested, too. He was older. And I became, when Laura-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: Did you help also? Were you like an assistant?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I became, when, you know, he-I've forgotten where.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, that's okay. The point is you were working with Laura Andreson in her pottery studio at UCLA.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, and her-and the student.

MR. ADAMSON: So, what was she like? Laura, I mean.

MR. BLUNK: Oh, she was a very interesting woman who's very fond of making ceramics and teaching.

MR. ADAMSON: Was she a good teacher?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yes.

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of things did she have you do? Do you remember? Did you ever throw at the wheel?

MR. BLUNK: [Pause.] I guess I did. The only thing I can get, as far into that, was-okay. Laura took us, the ceramic students, to an exhibit of-[pause]-

MS. NIELSEN: Was it Japanese?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. A group of Japanese potters had an exhibit at this-[pause]-and she wanted to show the-she put this show together of Japanese potters. And she took us, and I got to go to the exhibit. And by that time, I was really fired up.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you actually graduate from UCLA with a degree?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, though I didn't go to the-my parents were upset that I didn't get my diploma.

MR. ADAMSON: At graduation, you mean?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I didn't even want to have anything to do with it.

MR. ADAMSON: Why not?

MR. BLUNK: Well, when I went in the room where all those mingei potters-just seeing their work, seeing what they were doing, something just sort of flashed in my head and I said, "I'm going to go there."

MR. ADAMSON: To Japan?

MR. BLUNK: I don't know how, but I was going to go to Japan.

MR. ADAMSON: And you made it to Japan, right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I made it to Japan, but-it starts to get real fuzzy now. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: I was determined to get there, get there some way, and I'm trying to say how or figure out how-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: Well, you spent some time in the navy, yeah?

MR. BLUNK: Not the navy.

MS. NIELSEN: The army.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, the army.

MR. BLUNK: Must have been the army. Yeah. And it was during the Korean War.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you actually fight in Korea?

MR. BLUNK: I didn't do any-I didn't do any fighting there.

MS. NIELSEN: But you were stationed.

MR. BLUNK: But I was stationed-

MS. NIELSEN: You were stationed in Japan, right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I got stationed in-but before that, I got-what do you call it?

MS. NIELSEN: Recruited?

MR. BLUNK: Yes. Yeah. I got recruited.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, so you were drafted.

MR. BLUNK: I was drafted in the first group from Southern California.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really. So you didn't want to go, particularly.

MR. BLUNK: [Pause.]

MS. NIELSEN: This goes way back, huh?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, this goes REALLY way back, and so I can't keep it in a line.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. NIELSEN: It keeps crossing over.

MR. BLUNK: There are parts-yeah, it crosses over.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, that's okay.

MR. BLUNK: But when I got my first-I went on a ship.

MS. NIELSEN: From San Francisco, right? Weren't you at Fort Mason for a little while?

MR. BLUNK: I was at Fort Mason when I actually, you know, got on the boat and, you know-

MS. NIELSEN: Took off.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. [Pause.] Let's see what else I can drag up here. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Well, let's skip forward to when you were stationed in Japan at the end of the war. Right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I was-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe you could tell the story about how you met Isamu [Noguchi].

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, in a mingei ceramic shop. We got our first-we got our first going on-

MR. ADAMSON: Furlough?

MR. BLUNK: Furlough, yeah. We got our first furlough. And I didn't-you know, we had to be back at a certain time. So the fact that I was just there, was just getting there, and I had been training people in Texas.

MR. ADAMSON: In Texas?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, training people to go to-[pause]-my God. There was a group of soldiers-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: [Showing a photograph.] This is a good picture. Remember that picture?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah. That's me.

MS. NIELSEN: You're still wearing your uniform.

MR. BLUNK: Had to.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: Isamu hated that, hated the uniform.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. This is a photo-this photo of this old man is-how do I get in there?

MR. ADAMSON: Want me to take it out?

MR. BLUNK: Yes, take it out. Then you can really see.

MR. ADAMSON: So this is Isamu Noguchi on the right.

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And you on the left.

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And who's in the middle?

MR. BLUNK: Rosanjin.

MR. ADAMSON: [Kitagi] Rosanjin, the potter.

MR. BLUNK: The potter in this place called Kamakura.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were in the mingei shop, and Isamu Noguchi just happened to be there? Is that right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, but I had to make another-I still have to make some kind of a connection for-[pause]. Isamu's wife, Yoshiko, she liked Americans. And she was very famous as a singer for the GIs.

MR. ADAMSON: Really? So you knew about her?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I knew about her because it was on almost-this woman was so-she made movies, at least four. She liked the GIs, and they liked the way she sang. And Isamu didn't. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: But anyway-let's see. [Pause.]

MR. ADAMSON: Well, I know you started to work with Rosanjin and his pottery.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I did. But there's a step before that. I would have never been able to make a connection with him, with Rosanjin, if it hadn't been for Yoshiko and the fact that she-[pause]-

MR. ADAMSON: The fact that she liked you? [Laughs.]

MS. NIELSEN: Yes, she did.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I got to, I guess, talking to her in that-aghhh! It just comes and goes and runs around. It's-

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. That's okay. That's okay.

MR. BLUNK: And I still had the idea of I was in Japan, I'd made it to Japan, yeah. Because I was in that first group that was sent over. And those people were-if I could just get-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: Weren't you a lieutenant? You had special privileges.

MR. BLUNK: In Korea?

MS. NIELSEN: Yeah, when you were stationed, when you were in the army.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: You could drive off the base on the weekend.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, but that's because I was-that's because I had my own jeep because of my-

MS. NIELSEN: Was it your rank or something?

MR. BLUNK: Yes. Yes. That had something to do with it. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Why did they make you a lieutenant?

MS. NIELSEN: You were good.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: I'd already been in the military before.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see. I see.

MS. NIELSEN: Well-behaved.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BLUNK: But anyway, we've got to get over here another page before we-it's just-

MS. NIELSEN: Dad, who's that? [Referring to photograph.]

MR. BLUNK: That's Sensei. He's a potter that I lived-I lived with him and his family before I went south from Kita Kamakura.

MR. ADAMSON: So that's Rosanjin?

MR. BLUNK: This is not Rosanjin. This is my teacher, Sensei.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, this is Toyo.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. He came here twice, and he brought his wife last time.

MR. ADAMSON: So this is Toyo Kaneshige.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So, do you remember meeting Rosanjin for the first time?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah. He was drunk.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BLUNK: Always drunk.

MR. ADAMSON: Always drunk?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, he was always drunk.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: Anyway, I had talked to Isamu a little bit in the store, but he was-he really didn't want me to even be there. And then she liked me, and she had a lot of GIs who loved the music that they put out over all the-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: Was it actually on the radio?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah, it was on all the radios and everything. Everybody that-yeah, yeah. All the guard and everything was done with the-it made the GIs happy, yeah. And to cool them out.

MR. ADAMSON: And so was it Yoshiko that introduced you to Rosanjin, or was it Isamu?

MR. BLUNK: Yes, in a way it was. Well, I just was looking for a potter, you know, like that. I didn't give a damn which one. And I got to talking to her and then he went to-Isamu, that evening-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: You mean you went over to somebody's house.

MR. BLUNK: Yes. I went over there.

MS. NIELSEN: To Rosanjin's?

MR. BLUNK: To Rosanjin's, yeah, because Rosanjin loved having Yoshiko around.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MR. BLUNK: I mean, he would have had her in bed, if he could. I mean he was known for it.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: Girls and everything, you know, young girls and everything.

But anyway, Yoshiko said to come up the stairs, you know, go up in the mezzanine, in the shop. And she invited me in the shop there.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BLUNK: Because there was another level and it was people-

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BLUNK: And so she invited me to come upstairs and have some tea.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So the next chapter is you actually being a potter's apprentice, basically.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. And the next-that night, Isamu took me over to Rosanjin's house because-the house belonged to Rosanjin, but Yokisho and Isamu lived in-

MS. NIELSEN: Part of it.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, lived in part of it.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BLUNK: It was a fabulous little, small-so anyway, in my-being so naive, I-I'm going to turn this over. [Referring to paper.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Okay.

MR. BLUNK: So anyway, that night after supper, Isamu wanted to introduce me to Rosanjin, and he felt that I- there just happened to be a man who was a businessman of Rosanjin's, so after supper, Isamu took me over to where Rosanjin was having a real party. Whew. Drunk as-you know. And so I got to meet Rosanjin. And I thought he was kind of a fraud.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MR. BLUNK: I mean, I felt then, because I was coming really from a big jump.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. Yeah.

MR. BLUNK: Because, for instance, if-[pause].

So I was introduced to Rosanjin, and there was a businessman there who spoke English. And at that time Isamu didn't speak any better than I did.

MR. ADAMSON: Japanese, you mean.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And you didn't speak very well, correct?

MR. BLUNK: Well, I worked for a while with-they put me to work right away because I was-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: You were willing.

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. NIELSEN: Yeah, very willing.

MR. BLUNK: I was willing.

MR. ADAMSON: But you didn't speak Japanese, particularly.

MR. BLUNK: No, I didn't speak any Japanese until I-really till I was working there. They didn't know what to do with me, because they couldn't talk to me and I couldn't talk to them. [They laugh.] Isamu, who was in a place called Gifu-

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, so he left.

MR. BLUNK: -the next day he had to leave.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BLUNK: And I stayed there. And I just walked in where they were working, and that's the way-

MR. ADAMSON: So, what did they have you do? Were you sweeping the floor?

MR. BLUNK: Well, wedging the clay.

MR. ADAMSON: Wedging the clay?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. They gave me that job. They had it all stacked up and everything.

MR. ADAMSON: And you knew how to do that.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I knew how to do that. They had a little different twist to it, but-

MR. ADAMSON: How do you mean?

MR. BLUNK: Well, they had their own way of wedging and things like that.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. And did they teach you their way?

MR. BLUNK: Well, and also, Isamu went to Gifu to work on his lanterns. And he'd come back there and I'd stay there. Anyway-

MR. ADAMSON: So you became a friend of his while you were living at Rosanjin's?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. You got to know him pretty well?

MR. BLUNK: Well, I didn't get to know-Rosanjin's [error?].

MR. ADAMSON: Right, but I mean Isamu you got to know.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. But how I made the-she got me in the house, in other words, and Yoshiko had her own place to sleep and she did all the cooking. And they lived in this little, tiny building. It was just a jam of a-right.

MR. ADAMSON: So where did you live?

MR. BLUNK: Well, in the beginning, I lived in one part of the little house.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, you lived right in the house with them?

MR. BLUNK: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Not much space, right?

MR. BLUNK: No, there wasn't much space, but it was a tiny place and everything really worked.

But, getting back to the clay, Rosanjin didn't know what to do with me the next morning. So I saw him-they put me to work right away wedging clay. In fact, I thought I knew how to wedge clay until I got hold, you know, with people there. Because he had a whole crew going.

MR. ADAMSON: Like 20 people, 10 people?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah. And then women cleaning up and sweeping all the time all over the place and building little fires.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you ever get to the point with Rosanjin where you were actually making pots?

MR. BLUNK: No. I never got to talk to him.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MR. BLUNK: I mean, I couldn't understand a word he said.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BLUNK: And I only-

MR. ADAMSON: And vice versa.

MR. BLUNK: And vice versa, yeah. But I got into the workshop. I mean, there was some way he-the guy who was there who was the businessman, he was completely fluent. He had gone to school here. So I could talk that way.

MR. ADAMSON: But he wasn't around during the daytime when you were working?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, no, no. He was in Tokyo.

MR. ADAMSON: And so when you-you stayed with Rosanjin for several months?

MR. BLUNK: I can't remember how long, but that was the transition. Rosanjin wanted me to stay at his place and work.

MR. ADAMSON: You mean for good?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. And he was going to have a little-have a building put up for me so I'd have my own place.

MR. ADAMSON: So, why didn't you want that? Or was it that you met Kaneshige?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I met Kaneshige there.

MR. ADAMSON: He had come to visit Rosanjin?

MR. BLUNK: And by then I could get a few words across, because all those peasant women that ran the place and did all the work-[pause]-

MR. ADAMSON: They would teach you Japanese words?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Yeah. They taught me like a child, just exactly like a child.

MR. ADAMSON: So they would point at something and say-

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, or grunt or make some kind of sound or something.

MS. NIELSEN: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: They'd do something.

MR. ADAMSON: And when you met Kaneshige, did you immediately want to go and work with him instead?

MR. BLUNK: Not right at the very-not right at the very beginning. Rosanjin did a lot of things that I wouldn't want to do.

MR. ADAMSON: You mean because the place was-

MR. BLUNK: [Pause.]

MS. NIELSEN: Like what?

MR. BLUNK: Well, I met Francis Har. Do you know that one?

MR. ADAMSON: No. Francis Hart?

MR. BLUNK: Har.

MR. ADAMSON: Har. H-a-r?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Who was that?

MR. BLUNK: He was a photographer. Brilliant, brilliant photographer.

MR. ADAMSON: And this was at Rosanjin's place? I guess the question is how you got to Bizen, right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I decided one day that-I knew all of a sudden. I had kind of a little flash. Or I didn't know what I was going to do, and I really liked Sensei, and I liked-I just decided to go and put myself in his hands. And that was really naive.

MR. ADAMSON: So what did you do?

MR. BLUNK: Got on the train and went to Bizen.

MR. ADAMSON: Did he know you were coming?

MR. BLUNK: No.

MR. ADAMSON: So you just showed up?

MR. BLUNK: That was the first shock.

MS. NIELSEN: Didn't you just show up at his house and knocked on the door?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Knocked on the door. And unfortunately, his wife was outside. She was gone to buy some, whatever, food.

MR. ADAMSON: So he was home alone?

MR. BLUNK: He was home alone, yeah. He was home alone. And I knew better than to-I knew better, which is, like, when you step over the genkan [Japanese word meaning "threshold to a private space], you're in.

MR. ADAMSON: Which is the threshold?

MR. BLUNK: You're in or you're out. I heard Sensei yelling. This woman was in the passage from the front to the back, and when he got-when she got back-and he was just yelling most of the time when I was there. But you don't leave-you know, you just don't leave things like that. You don't leave the door open and the genkan open.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MS. NIELSEN: So the door was open when you got there, when you arrived at his house?

MR. BLUNK: No, the door wasn't open. It was-

MS. NIELSEN: Unlocked?

MR. BLUNK: She had just had to step out, I guess, on one of the side areas where you go up through the house.

MS. NIELSEN: His wife?

MR. BLUNK: Well, she was-I didn't-I was going to wait until he made his move, you know.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were just waiting out front there?

MR. BLUNK: I was just waiting outside.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, how in the world did you ever get in?

MR. BLUNK: I just waited.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. NIELSEN: Camped out?

MR. BLUNK: I just waited, and I was lucky, because she came in.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, and she took you in?

MR. BLUNK: Yes. Yeah. And he was not nasty or anything, he was just-I had done something that-I didn't know about dame [Japanese word for forbidden]. I don't know if you know that word.

MR. ADAMSON: Is that like manners?

MR. BLUNK: I had broken-I mean, you don't pass over, or whatever. But she came in, luckily, and he started berating her, Sensei, for "this guy, somebody is at the door." Later on I got that. So that's-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: So he took you in, too, huh?

MR. BLUNK: No. There's something else now. He didn't take me in. He doesn't-you know, Sensei doesn't get up

and-if he has to yell. You know.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BLUNK: So anyway, he was really upset that I had shown up without letting him know some way. And of course, hell, I didn't know how to-I couldn't use-what could I use, unless I found somebody that was-anyway, it was an impossible situation. So.

MS. NIELSEN: But you stayed.

MR. BLUNK: Well, when I decided to go to Kaneshige-Sensei, I had come on the train.

MR. ADAMSON: So you had no place to stay.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I didn't have any place to stay. And I didn't even know-you know, I didn't even know what I was doing, which was, you know-I should have been waiting longer, even, whatever it took. You know, you just don't-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: You don't just show up at somebody's door.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. So there are holes in this thing.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, that's okay.

MS. NIELSEN: It's coming together. You're doing good.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BLUNK: I've forgotten how long it was before I could use the telephone. I thought it was one of the greatest things I'd ever-you know, in a foreign place.

MS. NIELSEN: Yeah, it's always a big step.

MR. BLUNK: Foreign place. But I can remember even-it was a big deal to be able to use the telephone.

MR. ADAMSON: So you managed to stay there with him eventually.

MR. BLUNK: Eventually, yeah. Eventually I got to stay there. They didn't have enough space for me, so when we decided what we were going to do, he found me a place.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. Right in the village. And I had my own space.

MR. ADAMSON: And you worked at the pottery during the day?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. And I just devoted myself to him, and little by little we-and any time he took a trip or visited a special friend or something-

MR. ADAMSON: You would go with him?

MR. BLUNK: -he'd take me on any of the times-I lived there. He'd take me if I thought I would be interested. So I got to meet a lot of people.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember anybody that you met? Were they other potters?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah, it was all potters.

MR. ADAMSON: All potters.

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah. There wasn't a place in town that wasn't a potter. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: Some of them were better than others.

MR. ADAMSON: And was Kaneshige the most highly regarded potter in the village, do you think?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And he came to be really quite-really big. He got very important.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, you stayed with him for quite a while, as I remember.

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. I stayed with him-he had a house full of children. But he found me a fabulous place he rented.

MS. NIELSEN: How long were you there for?

MR. BLUNK: You mean with him? [Pause.]

MS. NIELSEN: Can't remember?

MR. BLUNK: Not right now. Maybe it will-

MR. ADAMSON: It was a pretty long time, though.

MR. BLUNK: Seems like-seemed like a long time, you know, at times, I guess.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it hard to be there?

MR. BLUNK: No, no. No, no. It was glorious. I mean, it was really-to get something you want.

MR. ADAMSON: So you had wanted this thing for a long time, and then when you got it, you weren't disappointed.

MR. BLUNK: Oh, no. No. [Pause.] My father-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: He wasn't happy about that, was he?

MR. BLUNK: [Sighs.] I don't know how I got around it.

MR. ADAMSON: Your father?

MR. BLUNK: No, no. Not my father, no. No, I found my father in-with Kaneshige-Sensei.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see. He was like your father.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Yeah. And Kaneshige-Sensei came here.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, after you moved back.

MS. NIELSEN: Yeah. He came to visit you.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, he came to visit. I have his picture somewhere.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me why you left?

MR. BLUNK: Uh-huh. I left because I had this idea to build a kiln.

MS. NIELSEN: A workshop?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. No, I couldn't use-well, the shokuba was like a workshop. I mean, I did all the work-I mean, all the heavy work and things that I learned just from being around him.

MR. ADAMSON: And you did learn a lot from him as a potter?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah, yeah. And he was very famous. He had hoped I would stay.

MR. ADAMSON: I'm surprised you didn't stay, for good, I mean.

MR. BLUNK: Well, I had this-then I had another change.

MR. ADAMSON: Another flash?

MR. BLUNK: Another flash, another something to keep thinking-I tried to get things to, you know, to work together some way. But I guess around-yeah, I guess it must have been about three years with them.

MR. ADAMSON: And when you moved back to California, did you move straight here to Inverness?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, no. No, no, no.

MS. NIELSEN: [Inaudible.]

MR. BLUNK: My mother had died. I knew that. And my aunt, my mother's-

MS. NIELSEN: Sister.

MR. BLUNK: -sister, yeah. I had this idea to go back to Japan and be a potter. But by that time, Sensei was really taken care of and he was very well-known, really well-known. He'd had all kinds of things from the government, all kinds of help.

MR. ADAMSON: And awards and things like that?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Living national treasure, that sort of thing?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: I never knew why you left, though. Why did you leave Japan?

MR. BLUNK: Oh. I had this idea to come back here and build a kiln and live in both worlds.

MS. NIELSEN: Ohhhh. You wanted to go back and forth, spend time here and spend time in Japan.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Yeah. I thought I could do it, you see.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BLUNK: I thought there was a job waiting. And I didn't have any money to speak of.

MR. ADAMSON: There was a job waiting for you here?

MR. BLUNK: There was a job waiting for me. I didn't know who it-I mean, I didn't-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: You taught, right? Didn't you teach for a living?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Well, I taught at that school. Yeah, I taught at that school.

MR. ADAMSON: Was this in California?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. NIELSEN: In L.A.

MR. ADAMSON: With your aunt?

MS. NIELSEN: No. I think your aunt wrote to you that your mother had died, right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: She was the one that told him that his mother had died, and that was one of the reasons that he came back.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BLUNK: Well, yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: But the art school was in L.A.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, it was down on the water.

MS. NIELSEN: It was a small school.

MR. BLUNK: Down on the-it's in a place called-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: Was it near Santa Monica?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, it was near Santa Monica, yeah. And there was a-I met some people in the Canyon in-[sighs]. [Pause.]

MS. NIELSEN: Did you teach ceramics there?

MR. BLUNK: There was someone who had built a kiln or got a kiln. I've forgotten exactly how that all happened. That's when I was living up the coast.

MR. ADAMSON: And so you actually taught people pottery for a while there.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, because I had helped build the building and-

MS. NIELSEN: Be a part of that project.

MR. BLUNK: And be a part, have a place to work, and they made a little loft in this building so I could live-I mean, I could sleep there. But the guy ran out of money. It was a great idea.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So it never got off the ground?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, never. Oh, yeah, yes, it did, but the money didn't last long enough.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So the school started up but then it had to close?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, it had to close.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So what did you do then?

MR. BLUNK: I moved north of there in order to-part of that, that's where-

MS. NIELSEN: That's where you met Nancy [Waite].

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, that's where I met Nancy.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you meet her?

MR. BLUNK: At the school.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really? Was she a student?

MR. BLUNK: No, she was-yes, she was a student, and really an ardent student.

MS. NIELSEN: Really talented.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: Very talented musician.

MR. ADAMSON: Did she do pottery with you, too, or was she just doing-

MR. BLUNK: No, she-

MS. NIELSEN: She was music, right?

MR. BLUNK: Yes. Music was her-music and dance. I tried to get her-she got a fellowship in Europe, and I tried to convince her to go there.

MR. ADAMSON: So this was an experimental school, where you could do a lot of different things, huh? It wasn't just a pottery school?

MR. BLUNK: I've forgotten the terminology. This guy who taught there became a very, very important person for me. That's when I started getting connected to Los Angeles, down in the Canyon.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, when you moved up north, did you go with Nancy? Did she come with you?

MR. BLUNK: Oh. Yeah. We worked in the summer at the camp. Fabulous. I mean, it was a wonderful place for children.

MR. ADAMSON: You went to a sheep ranch, didn't you?

MR. BLUNK: Well, I worked on a sheep ranch near there, yeah, and made jewelry.

MR. ADAMSON: You made jewelry then, huh?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Out of metal?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: How did you learn how to do that?

MR. BLUNK: UCLA.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, you had taken an art class there.

MR. BLUNK: I had a wonderful teacher.

MR. ADAMSON: In metals as well as in pottery.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, that was the two things that I sort of focused, I guess, or whatever.

MR. ADAMSON: So, at the same time, you were teaching pottery at the school and also working at the sheep ranch?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: But then the school closed.

MR. BLUNK: The sheep ranch doesn't work-I mean, you know, you don't have to go every morning.

MR. ADAMSON: It was seasonal, right.

MS. NIELSEN: Right. [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: [Laughs.]

MS. NIELSEN: Wasn't a nine-to-five job! [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BLUNK: It was a good place to get poison oak.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: That's a terrible joke. The idea. If you haven't had it, you don't know.

MS. NIELSEN: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: But when the school closed, you decided to move up north?

MR. BLUNK: I was-

MS. NIELSEN: Didn't know what to do.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I didn't know what to do.

MR. ADAMSON: And at this point you had Nancy with you as well?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I don't know how long we worked at the camp. I don't know how long that was.

MR. ADAMSON: But you moved north together.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And where did you go?

MR. BLUNK: I'm trying to think where we actually did go.

MS. NIELSEN: Was it [Willis ?] It was somewhere north of here. Nancy's parents were in Inverness [CA], is that right? Were her parents still living here?

MR. BLUNK: [Pause.]

MS. NIELSEN: Do you remember the connection to Inverness, how you and Nancy came to Inverness? Was it because of Gordon or because of Howard and Cecil [Nancy Waite's mother and father]?

MR. BLUNK: No, it was the use of-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: Use of some land?

MR. BLUNK: I worked on the sheep ranch. [Pause.]

MR. ADAMSON: Do you want to take a little break and we can do more of this later? I don't want to tire you out in the early morning.

[Pause.]

MS. NIELSEN: In the afternoons he's usually more relaxed. Mornings are usually harder.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Well, let's take a break for a minute, okay?

MR. BLUNK: Sure.

[Audio break.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, we've had now had our lunch and we're back recording again, same day.

And J.B., you had just come to America after living in Japan and working in Kaneshige's place. And I thought maybe I could just ask you to tell about how you started this place here, how you came to build it and what you did and why you did it.

MR. BLUNK: Well, in the first place, I'd never built anything. So I just-there was a lot of material available, wood, especially, for the making-I mean the taking, just the taking alone.

MR. ADAMSON: And how did you come to be able to occupy the land? Because the land is owned by the government around here now, right? It's owned by the Nature Conservancy now?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: But at the time, this land was owned by Gordon Onslow-Ford, is that right?

MR. BLUNK: And it still is.

MR. ADAMSON: And still is. What's here.

MR. BLUNK: Still is, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you get to know him?

MR. BLUNK: Well, I had to move from up the coast. I had to move, and we moved down here. And Gordon and Jacqueline had another place on a ridge that belonged to a friend of theirs, and we rented it.

MR. ADAMSON: And that's how you got to know him, or did you know him already, before you rented the place from him?

MR. BLUNK: No, I met-or we-

MR. ADAMSON: You and Nancy?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. We-[pause].

MS. NIELSEN: Rented it?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, we rented it for \$35 a month.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember how you got to know him?

MR. BLUNK: I got to know Gordon and Jacqueline?

MR. ADAMSON: Mm-hmm.

MR. BLUNK: [Pause.] So that got us to have a place up on Leisure Road.

MR. ADAMSON: And then you decided that you were going to build this place here.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I'd never done it. I had never done it or tried it or even much thought of it, I guess. I don't know what I thought, what I was going to do.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you know which-you worked on a roof for Gordon's house, right?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: The architect that designed the house was Warren Callister?

MR. BLUNK: Warren Callister, yes. He was a good friend of-

MR. ADAMSON: But you had already started building this place when you worked on Gordon's house, is that right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. The architect-there was a builder in this community, only one real builder, and that person was the only builder here. And Warren designed it for-he designed it for Gordon and Jacqueline since they were moving to Inverness. So there was an enormous bunch of logs just in the site that they had chosen. And it was a real job just to chain saw, just to cut that all out.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you help them with that?

MR. BLUNK: That's how I learned to use a chain saw.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And how did you come to work on that roof for them? Because Warren Callister had designed a roof for their house, right?

MR. BLUNK: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And they weren't sure how they were going to get it built?

MR. BLUNK: Well, they couldn't find anybody in this place. Nobody wanted to take it on. It was considered some sort of a freak or whatever. So Warren put some-I guess some sort of heavy paper on a fairly smooth place, and then he could draw on it, what the curves were going to be. Because you can see the curves there.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BLUNK: So I got the job of doing it, because nobody else would touch it.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. And you didn't know how you were going to do it when you started, right?

MR. BLUNK: No. But I just started, you know, scrounging wood and whatever I could do to get started. I don't know.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So you were talking about building the roof. That Warren Callister was drawing the roof beams, and then you just scrounged wood and tried to build it however you could, basically?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. And we had to find-the first thing we had to do was-you know, it goes like this.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BLUNK: The first thing we had to do was to get some material that was flexible enough for the curve.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BLUNK: And we found that. I remember I went way down south. Not way down, but it was a huge lumber yard, gigantic lumber yard. We found some material that we'd give it a try. We had to be careful as to-they wouldn't bend very much.

MR. ADAMSON: Because they were big, thick timbers, right?

[No response.]

[Note: The recording on this tape ends with 15 minutes of blank tape remaining on Side B, and not at a natural breaking place in the interview. Some of the interview could be missing.]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A.]

MR. ADAMSON: This is the second disc of the interview with J.B. Blunk for the Smithsonian Institution. Interviewer is Glenn Adamson, and the date is May 16, 2002.

I thought I would start by asking you about a couple of events that happened about 30 years ago, but it's still pretty far back. One was your trip to Mexico and Machu Picchu in 1970.

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me what you remember about that trip? Did you go with Christine [Nielson, Blunk's widow and mother of Mariah]?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. That was a fabulous trip.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think it had any influence on your work?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yes. Machu Picchu did.

MR. ADAMSON: Why is that?

MR. BLUNK: It's an awesome sight, if you ever get close. Just get off the boat and wait. I mean, it's really awesome.

MR. ADAMSON: I've never been there.

MR. BLUNK: I wanted to make-what do you call it when you go to a place?

MR. ADAMSON: Pilgrimage?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, pilgrimage. Yeah. Yes, I wanted to make a pilgrimage there; and Christine, that was okay for her, she'd never been out of California. But that was the starting point.

MR. ADAMSON: It was a pretty long trip, right?

MR. BLUNK: It was a long trip.

MR. ADAMSON: Eight weeks?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, no. It was more than eight weeks. Gosh, that seems-it's only visual.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BLUNK: Unless you get there-we tried to be there when the big festivals were there, which was really-Christine was not feeling very good.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, did she get food poisoning or something?

MR. BLUNK: No.

MR. ADAMSON: She just was ill?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. She was ill in one place in particular, before Machu Picchu.

MR. ADAMSON: You were in Mexico as well as Peru, right?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you see any of the Aztec works when you were in Mexico City or anything like that?

MR. BLUNK: We saw some-one place, we saw some-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe Mayan ruins?

MR. BLUNK: We got acclimated and then we could just go walking around anywhere.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think that there were any pieces you made when you got back that were very direct responses to what you had seen?

MR. BLUNK: Exactly. Yeah, one in particular.

MR. ADAMSON: What's that?

MR. BLUNK: The one-you know, I wanted to go to Machu Picchu, and I had been reading.

MR. ADAMSON: But you were saying there was one piece that was very influenced by what you had seen?

MR. BLUNK: It was something of the sun.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BLUNK: There's a place in-

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, was it City of the Sun, that-was it called Tenochtitlán, something like that?

MR. BLUNK: I don't-it doesn't-

MR. ADAMSON: It's a big ruin in Mexico, right?

MR. BLUNK: No, no. This was farther down.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, this is in Peru.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, this is in Peru, yeah. Almost all the-well, I don't know whether it was a lot of-we went on a bus, or buses. And it was full of young people going to a big celebration. We stopped at Panama. We took the train to-most everybody took the train to Machu Picchu. Then it became little by little-I mean, people come from all over everywhere to it. I mean, it has a-that was before-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: But that was an important trip for you, it sounds like.

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yes. Yeah. We took everything with us that we'd need on the trip, carried them in big bags. That was the only way we could do it. And then I bought those-those stone things? I bought those near-

MR. ADAMSON: Are you talking about these long stone pieces here in the kitchen?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Yeah. That they grind the-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: They use them for cooking?

MR. BLUNK: They break down the-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: When they're mashing vegetables and that sort of thing?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, let me ask you about a new topic.

MR. BLUNK: Okay.

MR. ADAMSON: A couple of exhibitions you were in. One was "Objects: USA" [Smithsonian Institution, 1969].

MR. BLUNK: "Objects: USA."

MR. ADAMSON: Right, in 1969. Do you remember being in that show?

MR. BLUNK: It was in Los Angeles.

MR. ADAMSON: It traveled to a lot of places, including Los Angeles.

MR. BLUNK: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: And you had a big bench in the show, right?

MR. BLUNK: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember how they found you for that show? Or do you remember when they asked you to be in it?

MR. BLUNK: It was a big bench [Seating Sculpture, 1968-1969]. It was high [36 by 120 inches]. And it was this fantastic wood. It was a really exotic piece. It was a big slab that I had earlier bought. Yes. Yeah. I remember the show.

MR. ADAMSON: What did you think of it when you saw it?

MR. BLUNK: Well, I guess the best-I guess impressed with how they put it all together. And I thought the work that I had-

MR. ADAMSON: The work of yours that was included?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, that was included, I felt really good about that.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember another show that you were in called "California Design"? Does that ring a bell? They were down at the Pasadena Art Museum.

MR. BLUNK: I doubt that I went to Pasadena.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: [Laughs] I mean, I can't-don't have any business in Pasadena in general.

MR. ADAMSON: I think you had a bench in it that had this round back that was sort of that shape, and there was another similar shape for the seat, made of redwood. That's in the catalogue for it.

MR. BLUNK: It's low.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, a low bench. You remember that piece?

MR. BLUNK: A low bench and it had a dark wood.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, exactly.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I remember that.

MR. ADAMSON: But you don't remember the show, really, one way or the other?

MR. BLUNK: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Do you remember this show, the Los Angeles Craft and Folk Art Museum? That's the catalogue for it. In 1979.

MR. BLUNK: [Pause.] I've saved a lot of these.

MR. ADAMSON: You have these catalogues?

MR. BLUNK: These catalogues, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And that was the first time that you had a museum show of a bunch of your work together, right?

MR. BLUNK: This was the one that Isamu-

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, he wrote the foreword to it.

MR. BLUNK: Uh-huh. I thought that was, you know, really done well.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were very pleased with that.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I was. Yeah, I was very pleased with that.

MR. ADAMSON: And then just recently you had another exhibition here in Point Reyes, I think you said? Or at the Bolinas Museum?

MR. BLUNK: I had a Bolinas Museum exhibit that was really something. People showed up from God knows where. I've never shaken so many hands. Because I didn't think-I wasn't expecting any big thing, but I was trying to-once I got to the museum, I remembered there's a big arch out there. That show really was something.

MR. ADAMSON: And that was just a couple of years ago, right?

MS. NIELSEN: Four years ago.

MR. BLUNK: Four years ago. Hmm. And a guy showed up who wanted to make a film.

MR. ADAMSON: A documentary?

MR. BLUNK: He showed up at the exhibit. I'd never seen him or heard of him, but they had at the museum. They were very, very pleased. I remember how pleased they were from that show, even though there was a lot of work to just move the things.

MR. ADAMSON: And were most of the pieces in that show from here, taken from your house, things you had held onto?

MR. BLUNK: More so than usual, probably. And then that patio there. I tried to get them to raise a little bit of money to put this piece.

MR. ADAMSON: The arch that's in the house?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, to put the arch there.

MR. ADAMSON: Did the arch actually go to that show?

MS. NIELSEN: [Off mike.]

MR. ADAMSON: It stayed up here. So that arch has never been anywhere but right here?

MS. NIELSEN: No. It was on the label of a wine bottle.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it really?

MS. NIELSEN: Yeah. I don't remember the kind of wine. Remember that, Papa?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, but the wine wasn't any good.

MS. NIELSEN: I know, the wine sucked. [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: The guy was-he was a case, that guy.

MR. ADAMSON: What happened? Somebody came-

MR. BLUNK: They put this on all the bottles of their wine, but the wine didn't last. You couldn't keep it, almost.

MS. NIELSEN: It didn't hold up to the image.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, it didn't-yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: That's too bad.

MR. BLUNK: It was wonderful to meet all these people that I didn't know.

MR. ADAMSON: But they knew about your work.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I had never shaken so many hands in a place like that.

MR. ADAMSON: You're not a big hand shaker, huh?

MR. BLUNK: [Laughs] No.

MS. NIELSEN: I think you are.

MR. BLUNK: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: So can we talk about some of the pieces from the catalogue?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, sure.

MR. ADAMSON: Let's start with the arch. We were talking about this a little bit outside. But this is the first arch

you made ever, right? The one that's out front here.

MR. BLUNK: Yes, that's the first arch. I had this big piece of wood and decided to make an arch. It would be fun for everyone to walk back and forth through it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, a big piece of redwood.

MR. BLUNK: And it was quite high, even after cutting.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's all out of a solid piece.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, it was out of a solid piece.

MR. ADAMSON: And you say there's one piece that's missing from the top now, or it got broken from the top and you had to fix it?

MR. BLUNK: When we were in the barn?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, or just outside the barn.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, that was definitely the first arch. I did nothing but arches for I don't know how many years.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MR. BLUNK: It was a whole thing. It just kept on going, probably four or five arches.

MR. ADAMSON: That was your arch period.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, something like that. And some of them are-there's some left. In fact, one of the-the very best one.

MR. ADAMSON: Is still here?

MR. BLUNK: Well, it has to be patched.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you see arches in Japan that made you think of doing this, or those gates in Japan? Are those related in your mind at all?

MR. BLUNK: No. That's interesting what you just said. As far as I know, I didn't see the two-the play between the two.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BLUNK: Because everybody-you know, it's like you're born to have those shapes.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure. It's like it comes to you naturally.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. You know, it's all of a sudden you've pulled out something that, "My God, what's this for?"

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BLUNK: Somebody called me for some fabulous redwood. I can't remember-I lost his number and whatever. So there was no more of that.

MR. ADAMSON: Let's talk about a different piece.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: This one. Another arch.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah! That's Arch 1, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, it is. It's called Arch 1. It's made of cypress instead of redwood.

MR. BLUNK: Cypress, yeah. I had so much cypress.

MR. ADAMSON: Why is that?

MR. BLUNK: They changed the-in Point Reyes, they had changed an area to be housing.

MS. NIELSEN: [Inaudible.]

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. People came and they asked people to-they wanted to get rid of it.

MR. ADAMSON: Because they had to cut down a lot of cypress trees?

MS. NIELSEN: Development, yeah.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. It just changed Point Reyes completely.

MR. ADAMSON: But you had plenty of wood.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: He was happy.

MR. BLUNK: I still have this piece.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really? Okay.

MR. BLUNK: That's Arch 1.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you do the texture on it?

MR. BLUNK: Chisel.

MR. ADAMSON: Like a gouge?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, a big gouge.

MR. ADAMSON: A big gouge?

MR. BLUNK: I was given a big gouge by an older man who-the first time somebody brought him to the barn, he asked me how could I work if I didn't have any tools.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: You know, he was really big on tools, which is fine. It's just what you do with it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BLUNK: And I met him through-they were a couple and they had adjoining workplaces, a man and his wife. I didn't like his sculpture, but I liked her sculpture. I met them through Noguchi, maybe. I'm not-

MR. ADAMSON: Well, that's okay. But in any event, the fellow that knew them gave you this gouge you used to make the-

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. He said, "How can you do work if you don't have any tools?" So he had an old-he kind of started me on my carving.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BLUNK: Not standing up, but down-because I also liked to work on my knees. I've already paid my dues now.

MR. ADAMSON: Please explain what you mean.

MR. BLUNK: I'm pretty sure that he-

MR. ADAMSON: You like to work on your knees?

MR. BLUNK: I used to work on my knees a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: He taught you how to stand and sculpt, versus kneeling?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: He said that's not good?

MR. BLUNK: I don't even remember his name, but-

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: [Laughs.] What was his name? They had these two back-to-back-[pause]. He gave me my first chisel, this man.

MR. ADAMSON: So before that, you had only worked with chain saws and grinders and that sort of thing?

MR. BLUNK: He gave me-well, I'll be damned.

MR. ADAMSON: Let's look at the piece again now. I notice there's almost the shape of a head in the middle, that circle? It's almost like there's a body inside it?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I guess you could say. Yeah, yeah. But this is the first arch.

MR. ADAMSON: So this is even before this one, probably.

MR. BLUNK: I think so. Yeah, I really do think so, even though I was doing all those.

MR. ADAMSON: Does this have any particular significance to you, this heavy-footed one on one side?

MR. BLUNK: No. People call it a-everybody, it seemed to me then, they wanted to make it look like an elephant.

MR. ADAMSON: But you just did it as an abstract form?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Yeah. And I really like-this wood was still damp and you could really work it.

MR. ADAMSON: It just cut right off?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, just cut with the-whatever, you could hook on to something else.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you like to work wood when it's green like that, often? Because a lot of the wood that you use has been lying on the ground for a long time, too.

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Like the driftwood. Do you prefer to work it when it's green and wet?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, if you're just going to use hand tools, definitely.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BLUNK: Definitely. Otherwise you're going to ruin your arms, plus-or arm. Most of us only have one arm.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: Anyway. So.

MR. ADAMSON: Let's talk about this piece, this cypress chair from 1966, with big ears on it.

MR. BLUNK: And this was made about the same time.

MR. ADAMSON: The bench below it?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, the bench below it. This is in a park in-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: So it's a public seating, piece of public seating.

MR. BLUNK: No, this is the public seating.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. This bench from 1966?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: I notice that you actually have joined two pieces of wood together here at one end-

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: -and then there's another piece-

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I took it there and mounted it. It was redwood.

MR. ADAMSON: Redwood?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: This is one of the earliest pieces that you made that wasn't just cut out of a single block of wood, right? Probably? Like these two pieces are-

MR. BLUNK: I got a commission from a woman who-this is water.

MR. ADAMSON: In the back there?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. And this was a really early piece. A friend.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Let's go on to the next page. Here's Six Stones [1993].

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. That's at Stanford.

MR. ADAMSON: Stanford. Okay.

MR. BLUNK: They gave me the plaza, the little plaza there, and let me do what I wanted to do, because the man who was in charge, who made the decisions for what happens in different parts of the place-

MR. ADAMSON: Like the landscape architect or landscaper?

MR. BLUNK: But this was made-

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, these are two separate things, right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. These are stone.

MR. ADAMSON: Six stones?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, six stones.

MR. ADAMSON: Are the stones actually-

MR. BLUNK: They're still there.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you carve them all, or are some of them-

MR. BLUNK: No, I worked on all of them.

MR. ADAMSON: You did. Okay. Some carving.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: What would you use to carve the stone? You were mentioning carbide grinders before?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, carbide grinders, yes.

MR. ADAMSON: So you can't cut it, but you can sort of shape it, is that right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, you can shape it.

MR. ADAMSON: You would sometimes bring the stones to a shop and have them cut to size for you?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I've done a lot of that for some time.

MR. ADAMSON: When you just need it cut in half or something like that?

MR. BLUNK: Well, then you have to take it to a shop and they cut in. Then you can start doing something with it.

In the last two years, I've done a lot of that.

MR. ADAMSON: Does this relate, in your mind, to rock gardens in Japan?

MR. BLUNK: I mean, it-I think you got a point.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs] Okay.

MR. BLUNK: I mean, you got a point there. I didn't-

MR. ADAMSON: Not consciously.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. See, if we had had water, if they had had enough money to do it with water and some of these hunks of stone-

MR. ADAMSON: Let's talk about this piece here, entitled The 1976. It's sort of like the arch pieces, but it's not an arch, it's a sculpture, correct? I mean, there's not enough room there for someone to walk underneath.

MR. BLUNK: No, there's not.

MR. ADAMSON: Does this relate to the arches, in your mind?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. This is something similar, in a way, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: It's interesting how it seems to have two arms, almost, this smaller, pointed one [on top ?].

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It's very anthropomorphic, you know. It's like a person.

MR. BLUNK: It has that, too, yeah. That was a very early black piece.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really. How do you blacken them? Do you paint them?

MR. BLUNK: No. I use-have used, I'm not using right now-shoe dye.

MR. ADAMSON: Shoe dye. Okay.

MR. BLUNK: But you have to put it outside, away from-

MR. ADAMSON: Because it gives off such a-

MR. BLUNK: Oh, it will kill you, that stuff. Because I bought it in big bottles like that, and then I put it out in the woods.

MR. ADAMSON: And you just let it soak into the wood?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you put any kind of finish on top of it once you're done dyeing it?

MR. BLUNK: Try not to. If you're going to use that material, you've got to really be careful, because that stuff is really deadly. You just, you know, use the tiniest nothing, almost, in shoes.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Do you feel like your pieces have a personality, like people do?

MR. BLUNK: Some of them do, yeah. Some of them do.

MR. ADAMSON: Especially the larger ones. They seem to have this presence to them that's very much-it's kind of like being in the room with a person, you know?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, here's Mr. Peanut.

MR. BLUNK: There's Mr. Peanut, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Some people would say that this piece is sort of phallic.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. That's okay.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: I mean, yeah, that's okay. It's a whimsy, you know? Rufus [Blunk, J.B.'s son] found this piece of wood and knew that I would want it, and he brought it. And then I made it.

MR. ADAMSON: The top is all pine, and the bottom is redwood, is that right?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I think so.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you say anything about the sexual imagery in some of your work? Like, you have the bench upstairs with the little set of genitals on it. You know the one I'm talking about? It's a little bench and it has the genitalia hanging off the front?

MR. BLUNK: Hanging off the front?

MR. ADAMSON: Well, not hanging, but sort of attached to the front. Do you know what I'm talking about?

MR. BLUNK: No. No, but I'm curious.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: I mean, I'm interested in what you think about it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, can you say something about your use of sexual imagery? It seems very bold in a piece like this.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Why not? I know exactly how that was made. I had a piece of wood that Rufus-now which one was it?

That's a bronze.

MR. ADAMSON: These two pieces on the next page, yeah, are entitled-[inaudible]. How would you get these bronzes cast? Would you do a model first?

MR. BLUNK: I hardly-I have made so few bronzes because of the lack of money, or I would have-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: You'd like to make more?

MR. BLUNK: I did like to make more.

MR. ADAMSON: You were saying that Rufus maybe might try to cast the arch out in front of the house in bronze? Is that right? Or Bruno [Blunk, J.B.'s son] maybe.

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yes, that's right. You mean-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: To do the same piece and cast it in bronze.

MR. BLUNK: [Pause.]

MR. ADAMSON: When you were doing a piece like one of these two, would you make it in clay first? Or wood? Because you need to have it in some other material before you can cast it, right?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: But you don't remember what you did it in before you cast it.

MR. BLUNK: I think-I've got to get my glasses.

[Pause.]

MR. ADAMSON: It looks like it's twisted, almost.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. [Looking at photographs.] I've had that one a long time, too.

MR. ADAMSON: These two pictures are of Double Presence [date?].

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: This is the one that's stained black.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. This was the first of the stained-black things.

MR. ADAMSON: It seems like you were interested in the two sides and how the two sides would relate to each other.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Mm-hmm. That was the idea.

MR. ADAMSON: And this is more of the chisel carving. Here's an interesting piece, as it kind of goes through itself.

MR. BLUNK: That's the self-piercing piece.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it difficult to carve?

MR. BLUNK: Well, it's a bit, you know, tricky around here. Yes, that's something that you have to go little by little because of the grain.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. And here's a chair in cypress. It's interesting how your chairs seem to enclose-

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: -the person sitting in them. It's almost like you're being embraced.

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. That's the idea. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: You were saying up in the barn that you like people to be able to have something to touch when they sit on your furniture, too, with their hands.

MR. BLUNK: Sure.

MR. ADAMSON: Is that one of the reasons that often the two arms of the chair will be different from each other?

MR. BLUNK: Gosh, I don't know.

MR. ADAMSON: Like, you know, the chair up in the barn has one side that's like a ball?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Well, I thought it was more comfortable and more interesting to be like this, rather than just like-round.

MR. ADAMSON: Rather than the same-

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, just the same shape. This is the only chair I made that-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: The only chair that-

MR. BLUNK: This is the only chair that has this cut-out-

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, in the back?

MR. BLUNK: -in the back, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. All the others just go down to the ground straight, pretty much?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Here's The Planet [1969]. And this was made from a big redwood root structure, is that right? And it's the only picture of it?

Can you tell the story about how you-didn't you have to finish this piece in a real hurry to get it to the Oakland Museum on time? Isn't there a story about that?

MR. BLUNK: That's when the-yeah. Well, this is-it looks so different.

MR. ADAMSON: The piece does?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, it looks-not different for you, but for me. This is a very favorite piece, and people there, when they go in there, really touch it and have some sort of-something going on with it.

MR. ADAMSON: Like an experience?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Especially kids seem to like-

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, they go under and-yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: I notice you did a lot of different textures.

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Are most of those made with a chain saw? Are some of them chiseled?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, they're chiseled and chain sawed.

MR. ADAMSON: These slots?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, the slots.

MR. ADAMSON: The ones that are more like little divots, was that done with a chisel?

MR. BLUNK: I don't-it could be, you see, because if we could flatten these out-so maybe that's something-it does animate all this other area, and then the inside-ness and all of that.

MR. ADAMSON: It's interesting that you left a lot of the surface totally untouched.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. But it's not abrasive on your hands and arms and whatever.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you have to smooth it out somehow, sandblast it or anything like that?

MR. BLUNK: No, I could have never sand-yeah, maybe I could have sandblasted it. But there was an enormous amount of sanding to do this. I had help with this.

MR. ADAMSON: Is that when Bruce Mitchell worked with you?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Just because there was so much of it?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Trying to get some-

[Audio break.]

[Begin Tape 2, Side B.]

MR. BLUNK: He did a lot of it. And he had the skill to do it.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember how you got it to the museum when you were finished with it? Because it's so big.

MR. BLUNK: Well, it's just money.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: To move it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. And I may be misremembering this, but isn't there a story that you had to get it done very quickly because it was-

MR. BLUNK: Opening the museum.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, that's right.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, that's the truth.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were working long days.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, we were working long days when we were doing the sanding.

MR. ADAMSON: Trying to get it done.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I didn't want it to be abrasive or bother your hands or, you know, whatever.

MR. ADAMSON: Have you seen the piece recently? Have you been down to the museum?

MR. BLUNK: I can't remember when I was there. Because I know I haven't been driving for some time.

MR. ADAMSON: I wonder if it would look any different to you now than when it was first done.

MR. BLUNK: Well, it seems to me that it wasn't too long ago I went to some event there.

MR. ADAMSON: Was that the panel we did together?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah! Maybe.

MR. ADAMSON: So that was about four or five years ago.

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, we must have looked at it together then.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It seems to be holding up pretty well, though.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. But the one in Santa Cruz-

MR. ADAMSON: Right, that's here on the next page.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. We're going to have to do something.

MR. ADAMSON: Is there something wrong with it?

MR. BLUNK: I saw this, let's see-I was there, happened to be there in Santa Cruz. And it's a long piece.

MR. ADAMSON: Is it still outside?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, it's definitely outside.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's really gray and weathered?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, it's weathered, but it's doing-it's holding well.

MR. ADAMSON: And this is also made out of one piece of wood?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So you actually did this one before The Planet, just before?

MR. BLUNK: This is-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: Should we go on further?

MR. BLUNK: If you want to. Okay.

MR. ADAMSON: This piece, I guess it's pronounced Astarte [1974]?

MR. BLUNK: Astarte. Yeah. It came out of a lot of reading I did about-seemed to have some kind of relationship. I don't know how, it just came up. I finished this all at the house, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: Is this one of the pieces that, to you, reflects an African influence, do you think?

MR. BLUNK: I never thought of this in terms of-

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. I know some of the benches upstairs, or the little stools, look almost like African stools, which is interesting. This has this big heart motif in it.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. This was all done with a chisel with this big piece, pretty good-sized piece of-

MR. ADAMSON: Of redwood?

MR. BLUNK: Of redwood, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Is redwood one of your favorite woods to work in, or is it just that it's around here, so much of it?

MR. BLUNK: It's easy to work, especially for some things. And this was wet, or, really, damp, when I chiseled it.

MR. ADAMSON: Like the other piece was.

MR. BLUNK: This is where you [step in the house ?]. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Here's an interesting piece. This is a couple of ceramic pieces. On the top is Water Garden.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It looks like it's put together out of coils.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, it was. It was.

MR. ADAMSON: It seems very different from a lot of your other work.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, this was a jump to something else.

This piece, I would-

MR. ADAMSON: Presence. This is eucalyptus. How is eucalyptus to work?

MR. BLUNK: Hard.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you just say something about this piece first, before you turn the page? This is the one that's on the [postcard ?] in front?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. This one I still have, and this is really heavy.

MR. ADAMSON: Presence, you mean.

MR. BLUNK: Presence, yeah.

And this one I have. It came back home. Somebody who knew my ceramic work.

MR. ADAMSON: This piece from Bizen. So you actually have this somewhere?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I still have this piece.

MR. ADAMSON: Here's Unknown Presence.

MR. BLUNK: Unknown Presence.

MR. ADAMSON: Here's another good example of the two sides.

MR. BLUNK: This is [the rings ?].

MR. ADAMSON: That circular piece continuing.

MR. BLUNK: This was in a garden. It turned. You could turn it.

MR. ADAMSON: I notice in the list of collections, it says you have a piece at Tassajara Zen Center [Carmel Valley, CA]?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. It's in a grouping. When you go there, you see it. I haven't been there for some time.

MR. ADAMSON: [Turning pages.] Let's see if there's-

MR. BLUNK: This is a coffee table I made for a friend who had money. And I was just free to do it, and I made it. This was a whole, kind of, stump, or was very-it happened to be very dense. And I made the coffee table for them, a couple. I haven't seen them for a long time.

MR. ADAMSON: It seems like this piece has a lot of rhythm to it.

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. And she wanted it to be so you could sit on the floor, you could move around and eat from inside.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BLUNK: It was really heavy. He had to get all his buddies who worked out in the gym all the time to handle it, even off the back of a pickup. No, not on the back of a pickup, but on the-to load it and unload it.

MR. ADAMSON: So here's another catalogue from 1984, and this is at the Pickard Art Gallery in Oklahoma [Oklahoma City].

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Boy, that cost me.

MR. ADAMSON: Why is that?

MR. BLUNK: The guy went broke.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MR. BLUNK: He was in a terrible condition of-

MR. ADAMSON: Is this Alan Temco you're talking about?

MR. BLUNK: Alan-

MR. ADAMSON: Is he the one that ran the gallery?

MR. BLUNK: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BLUNK: No, no, no.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me who Alan Temco is? He wrote this foreword here.

MR. BLUNK: [Pause.]

MR. ADAMSON: It's okay. That doesn't matter so much.

MR. BLUNK: This is Metamorphosis, the table.

MR. ADAMSON: I notice it has a little, kind of, bowl set into the top. You can sort of keep your peanuts in there, huh?

Here's Mage. What's interesting about this piece is that you left so much of the top natural.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And then you finished the bottom so you can see the color inside the wood.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: I found some interesting pictures.

MR. ADAMSON: Good.

MS. NIELSEN: These are great.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you want to look at the-

MR. BLUNK: [Inaudible]-Orientation Center for the Blind [Albany, CA]. That was-

MR. ADAMSON: It seems like it's an appropriate commission for you. Is that still there, do you know?

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah. It's still there.

MS. NIELSEN: Hey, Papa, let's look at these old pictures I just found.

MR. BLUNK: Okay. Ah, yes. There is Sensei.

MR. ADAMSON: Sensei's at the wheel throwing?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: And here's you in front of the shop, huh?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. There's the kids.

MR. ADAMSON: Those are-

MS. NIELSEN: Sensei's children?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, they're Sensei's children.

MR. ADAMSON: You said he had a lot of them, right?

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: It's a great picture.

MS. NIELSEN: This goes way back, huh?

MR. BLUNK: Yes, that's way back. It's way back, yeah.

MS. NIELSEN: Who's that? [Looking at photographs.]

MR. BLUNK: That was I. That was in a-[pause].

MR. ADAMSON: A pretty handsome guy, huh?

MS. NIELSEN: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe we could talk about the house that we're sitting in for a minute? Can you talk about that wall there that's made up of all the different pieces of wood? The one back there in the corner? Do you see what I'm talking about?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you know when you would have put that in? Was that something you put in when you were building the house?

MR. BLUNK: That's the way it started. It had so many changes.

MR. ADAMSON: The whole house, you mean, or just that piece?

MR. BLUNK: Just that-

MR. ADAMSON: That piece there?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. Well, I did part of it.

MR. ADAMSON: You didn't do the whole thing?

MR. BLUNK: No, no. No, this is a new floor.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see. You put the top on the house after you had built the rest of it, right? The top story? It used to be only this floor?

MR. BLUNK: [Off mike.]

MR. ADAMSON: But you built this wall out of all these pieces of [wood ?].

MR. BLUNK: Well, I had-[inaudible]-use it some way.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BLUNK: And I thought, "What can I do?" And this floor is-[inaudible].

[Mr. Blunk and Mr. Adamson are away from the tape recorder, moving around the house, and can barely be heard on the tape.]

MR. ADAMSON: What about this chest here?

MR. BLUNK: I got that from Gordon [Onslow-Ford, Blunk received the chest from his wife, Jacqueline Onslow-Ford].

MR. ADAMSON: And this is a Japanese chest?

MR. BLUNK: It's not Japanese, it's Korean.

MR. ADAMSON: Korean? And this piece on top of it, the ceramic piece, is by you?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Why are there these slots in these-[inaudible]?

MR. BLUNK: [Inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: Do you know there are ancient Japanese and Korean-[inaudible]-that have these same slots in them?

MR. BLUNK: Well, then I'm just one step behind.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BLUNK: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: What about this?

MR. BLUNK: And this is a favorite piece of mine-[inaudible]. That's why I have it here. I got this for very little money.

MR. ADAMSON: The big crystal?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, the big crystal. And this is a painting-[inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: Nineteen ninety-two.

MR. BLUNK: Oh, 1992. Okay, now we know.

MR. ADAMSON: And this is by Christine?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. [Inaudible.]

MR. ADAMSON: What about this sculpture here? It's an example of that black dye you were talking about.

MR. BLUNK: Oh, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And was all this texturing done with a chain saw?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

[Two or three minutes of inaudible conversation while they are walking and talking.]

MR. BLUNK: This is all new. It was dropped down about that far. Well, it used to be we called that the pit. We don't call it the pit anymore.

MR. ADAMSON: Because it's not a pit,

MR. BLUNK: It's not a pit anymore.

MS. NIELSEN: It's the elevator pit. [They laugh.]

MR. BLUNK: Well, it will last quite a while.

MR. ADAMSON: Here's another sculpture here.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It's been very highly polished.

MR. BLUNK: This goes with the-I did a bunch of-[inaudible]. I found this piece of wood over in Gordon's yard, and it turned out to be a burl of this. He didn't want it. Nobody wanted it. So I just dug it out of the ground in Gordon's yard.

MR. ADAMSON: Can I ask you a question about the way the house is built? You have these bolts holding it together.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. It holds this together.

MR. ADAMSON: Is that something that you had seen at other architectural projects?

MR. BLUNK: No. I bought these-you see the steel up there?

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MR. BLUNK: That was to hold this end of the house together, and there's a series, I think, over there.

MR. ADAMSON: And there's the big dining table.

MR. BLUNK: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: It's a wonderful space in there to eat and cook and-

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Has that always just been held up on those trestles?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. I got them from somebody. I don't know whether I made them higher or lower.

MR. ADAMSON: So to bring something to the right height?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Another thing we haven't talked about is the fire.

MR. BLUNK: The big fire?

MR. ADAMSON: The big fire.

MR. BLUNK: The big fire. Yeah.

[They return and sit near the tape recorder again.]

MR. ADAMSON: You were both here for the fire, so maybe I can ask you both about it. This was-what year was it?

MS. NIELSEN: Ninety-four. It was six ninety-four [June 1994].

MR. ADAMSON: There was a big forest fire that came up and almost destroyed the house.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me what that was like to live through?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. NIELSEN: It was pretty scary, huh?

MR. BLUNK: Yes, very scary. Very scary because this is it. But the fire people were just-

MS. NIELSEN: Firefighters?

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, they were really on top of it. I didn't believe it. In fact, I didn't believe that there was any way, anywhere, to have a way to save it. All these people walked out with all their equipment and everything, but I-

MS. NIELSEN: What was interesting is that when the fire started, we had-they told us we had about six hours to evacuate, so we called some friends, and I remember standing in this living room with my father and looking around thinking, "What do you take?"

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. NIELSEN: And that was really a powerful moment.

MR. BLUNK: She was just great. She knew the clothes and everything that was Christine's.

MS. NIELSEN: Christine's, because she wasn't here. She was gone.

MR. BLUNK: Christine wasn't here.

MS. NIELSEN: So I took all of Christine's jewelry, a few of the pieces-favorite pieces of J.B.'s and some of the sculptures, little pieces they had brought back from their travels, the Japanese pottery and stuff-[inaudible]. Then my brother and his friends helped take-I don't even remember. There were a few stools. But it was really such a challenge.

MR. BUNKER: Yeah. Rolf [sp] and-

MS. NIELSEN: Yeah, Rolf [sp] was here, Rufus.

MR. BLUNK: Rolf [sp] and Rufus.

MR. ADAMSON: Just trying to get whatever you could.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. But she knew exactly what her mother had.

MR. ADAMSON: What was it that saved the house?

MR. BLUNK: Literally it was a wall of bodies, of men, firefighters, just standing right in front of it just spraying it down.

MR. ADAMSON: Really.

MS. NIELSEN: For a bunch of hours.

MR. BLUNK: Women, too.

MS. NIELSEN: Men and women. And convicts. They recruited all these convicts from the local prison.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. NIELSEN: It was amazing.

MR. BLUNK: I thought-I gave it up. It was all over. There was no way that that relatively small group of people were going to-when the fire came up, you know, came right up to almost the side of the building. And then they had bombers with the-

MS. NIELSEN: Fire retardant.

MR. BLUNK: -with the fire retardant, but that was later.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh. They didn't come in time for-

MR. BLUNK: Well, their schedule didn't coincide with the-

MS. NIELSEN: It was so stupid. After the fire was already put out, they bombed the house with fire retardant. So everything was-

MR. BLUNK: They had to make sure.

MS. NIELSEN: Well, to make sure, but then the house was covered in bright orange. Everything. The garden, the

plants, the house, the windows, orange. And that stuff is impossible to clean off. It's just a matter of time.

MR. BLUNK: But the people were well trained, and it's just amazing how they worked.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me about the past few years since you haven't been able to work anymore? We were looking up in the barn at the last stone piece you did, the Flying Stone [year?]. It is really an amazing piece.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah. As far as the stonework goes, it's-I hope it finds a good home.

MR. ADAMSON: It must be nice to be able to look back and see everything you've accomplished all around you.

MR. BLUNK: Yeah, I'm quite-I've had a good life. I did do a lot of things I wanted to do and a lot of things that I don't-that doesn't mean much.

MR. ADAMSON: No regrets?

MR. BLUNK: That's a hard one to answer. [Pause.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Can I ask you one last question?

MR. ADAMSON: What does the J.B. stand for?

MR. BLUNK: James Blaine [sp] Blunk. My father's name.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, thanks very much. I'm sure people will really enjoy listening to this.

MR. BLUNK: [Laughs.]

MS. NIELSEN: Yeah. It was great.

MR. ADAMSON: Anything else you want to say?

MR. BLUNK: No, I'm talked out. Thank you for all you've said. And it's been a good ride.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...May 5, 2006