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Oral history interview with Garry Knox
Bennett, 2002 February 1-2

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Garry Knox Bennett on February 1 and 2, 2002. The interview took place in Oakland, 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.

Garry Knox Bennett 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

MR. ADAMSON: This is the oral interview for the Laitman Smithsonian oral interview project about American craftspeople, conducted by Glenn Adamson. That's me. And the interviewee is Garry Knox Bennett. We're in his studio here in Oakland, and it's the first of February 2002.

I guess we'll start, Garry, by just talking a little bit about your upbringing before you became an artist proper. And I'll just ask you about your parents a little bit.

MR. BENNETT: Okay.

MR. ADAMSON: Where you were born? You know, some of your experiences growing up, particularly anything that might have had a later influence on you becoming an artist.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Well, I went to school under three names when I was a child. My mother was married a lot. So I went to school under "Bennett," "von Tagen," "Freeman." And I guess I should have picked "von Tagen." It's a great name.

MR. ADAMSON: It is.

MR. BENNETT: But I picked Bennett, my father's name. And I was born in Alameda, 1934.

MR. ADAMSON: What does your father do for a living?

MR. BENNETT: He was in the Merchant Marine. Yeah, you should ask me questions, because it's kind of hard to -- you know, you're thinking way ahead.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: But he was Merchant Marine. My mother was a very bright woman, liked to have a good time. I was raised basically by my grandparents on my mother's side and went to school. I recall going into high school. My first year as a freshman in high school, I got straight As, but in my senior year I had straight Fs. I had to go to summer school to graduate. I found school just so boring, just so incredibly boring. I took History-A four times. And you know, this is -- Christ, when I was in high school, that would be '50 to '52. I got out in '52. No, wait, '48 to '52. And our history book ended just before the Second World War; [David Saville] Muzzey's history of the United States [*History of Our Country*]. I mean come on, you know? Goddamn, the Pilgrims and --

MR. ADAMSON: Incredibly boring, huh?

MR. BENNETT: Ah, boy.

MR. ADAMSON: Were there shop or art classes in school?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, and that's where I ended up. Alameda High School was set up with X, Y, Z, and I forget the ranking. I think Z, you were a real Dumbo, and the Z, they had three-hour wood shops and metal shops and auto shops in high school. This was a high school that had survived intact from the Depression. I personally had four teachers that had doctorates, and they had been there since the '20s, and they were all fuckups. You know, in the '30s and '40s and '50s, if you had a doctorate, you were hot shit, and these people were teaching high school. And they really were all goofy, man. But, you know, Frank Cummings, Dr. Cummings, was a pretty neat guy. He taught history.

MR. ADAMSON: No relation to the Frank Cummings the woodworker?

MR. BENNETT: No. No, no, no, no. He used to love to recite "Horatio at the Bridge."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And there was Dr. Vigness. I threw Muzzey's history of the United States at him. Fortunately, he ducked. It would have decapitated him. That was probably one of the reasons I didn't get to get out of high school at the right time.

And there was Dr. Ryan, the chemistry teacher. She'd be talking to us, and she'd look out the window -- you know, this big, old, I don't know what, kind of Roman, you know, that colonnade shit and all that, and big windows, three stories high. She'd start looking out the window, and that was it. You know, 15, 20 minutes her mind would wander, and we'd do whatever we wanted, make explosions and stuff.

So yeah, and I guess I got out of high school and --

MR. ADAMSON: Well, before you leave high school, tell me more about the art classes that you did there. Were you painting?

MR. BENNETT: I had a funny thing happen to me in grammar school. I had a substitute teacher in an English class, and I don't think she put the seed in my head, but I remember it to this day. She was just trying to be nice and one of those supportive people, and she said "Garry, you have such nice penmanship. You're going to be an artist someday." I remember that, you know. But I always wanted to be an artist. I didn't want to be a cop or fireman, you know. And high school art classes were really dumb. I mean really dumb. They were useless.

I suppose the academics, you know, the English and math and all that was pretty good, and then they had the "Z" guys. And I was just bounced back and forth, between the Xs and the Zs. I'd go into the Zs and I'd be happy as hell, but I'd have one X class, like English or something, and I'd do really good at it, so then, "Oh, no, you can't do the three-hour shops, you've got to go into" -- and, I don't know, I probably purposely failed that shit so I could get back into the --

MR. ADAMSON: Back in the shop.

MR. BENNETT: -- shops, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were doing a lot of woodworking in high school, then.

MR. BENNETT: Not a lot. And it was never -- Jesus, it was just three hours you could get away.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And we'd sneak out. There was a place across the street -- it's in the book, I think [Garry Knox Bennett, et al. *Made in Oakland: The Furniture of Garry Knox Bennett*. New York: American Craft Museum, 2001.] -- Brocks, and we'd just hang out there and smoke and bullshit and stuff like that. I must have gotten something out of the woodshops. I can't look back on anything that I ever made that was any good or creative or anything, but maybe I got the fundamentals of, you know, machinery. I don't know. I really don't know. I took a metal shop; you made watering cans, you know? You rolled stuff and rolled a wire in the lip and all that. And I remember all that.

MR. ADAMSON: Was that the first time you felt like you were actually aware of craft processes?

MR. BENNETT: No. Not at all. No.

MR. ADAMSON: You had gotten that already?

MR. BENNETT: Before high school and during high school, but never associated with school, I'd always painted, watercolors or whatever. You know?

MR. ADAMSON: Mm-hmm.

MR. BENNETT: I mean, I'd, you know, as a fuckin' young kid, go sit down at the estuary and paint a picture of a boat or something. So I always did that. And then when I got out of high school, I went right to work. And a couple years after that -- I spent a lot of time drinking and sailboating, lots of time. I mean, California in those days was pretty good. Unemployment was \$26 a week, and Eisenhower came along and gave us another 13 weeks. Shit, boy, I was in pig heaven.

And then the beatnik thing happened, and I would go over to Frisco and paint on the streets. I actually did some pretty good paintings. I don't have any of them, but I can remember them. They're not bad. I did actually kind of

Thiebaud things, looking down these Frisco streets, the telephone poles, and real, you know, like, "Whoa, that's a steep street." Manhole covers being lifted.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. You'd actually be sitting out on the sidewalk?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I didn't wear a beret, but, I mean, you know --

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughing.] Everything else.

MR. BENNETT: You do that, boy, and people come by and talk to you.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: It was fun. It was cool.

MR. ADAMSON: And I know from the book that you were doing some work down on the wharf, too, hauling barrels around and that kind of thing?

MR. BENNETT: No, that was working at Foster Chemical, probably.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: And that's when I decided, man, you know, I'm generally the biggest guy in any factory, and they're going to give me all the hard work. And I said, "I think I'll go to art school." So I went to Arts and Crafts. And it was the best thing I ever did.

MR. ADAMSON: This is California College of Arts and Crafts [CCAC]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Best thing I ever did. I had to work. I went to school during the day, and then I worked nights. I worked swing and graveyard shifts at night.

MR. ADAMSON: Doing what?

MR. BENNETT: Worked at Transit Tanks, a place that stored chemicals. And it was a real easy job. You know, I'd get three or four trucks a night to fill, gasoline or different chemicals, so it was an easy job. Got a lot of free gas. I never bought gas for a long time. Yeah. So that's about it.

MR. ADAMSON: So when you got to CCAC, were you focused on painting exclusively?

MR. BENNETT: No, I went in -- yeah, yeah. Right. I thought I was a painter.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: But I very quickly discovered sculpture, you know, three-dimensional stuff. They had some good teachers there at the time. Nothing really groundbreaking or earth-shattering, but they had really good academic teachers left over from a long time ago, Louis Miljarak and Harry Krell and a guy named -- did these hyper-realistic paintings -- Ralph Borge. And they were really strong in design.

And I remember Louis Miljarak [1901-1968] classes, where there was all these busts left over from the '20s, these plaster busts, real kind of Art Deco women and guys, you know, Mercury and shit like that. They'd put them on the floor, and it would be a fairly big class, 15 or 20 people, and you drew on newsprint with charcoal. There's nothing worse than that. The charcoal just slides across that slick surface. But you kept doing that, and then finally the day came he said, well, you could go up and get some paper, good paper, and pencil. But he made you really look at this stuff, you know? And I haven't drawn in 40 years, but I can draw really good.

MR. ADAMSON: Because of that.

MR. BENNETT: And he made you save one of your drawings per week for a semester. You had to save one. And then at the end of that semester, we took turns and we put our drawings up. And, you know, about the fourth week, "Hey, man, I'm fuckin' Michelangelo," you know? You're thinking it's really good. Next week. And you put those up, and you see that progression, and you really saw you learned something.

That's one of the things I find wrong with the few institutions that I go to for slide shows or whatever, is there's no criticism. We got it, man. We got criticized. Especially Harry Krell. It was a portrait painting class, you know? And you paint. His trick was warm-cool. He had this little system, and it does work. It works very well. Light-dark. You can do a portrait with the cool on the light side, but then you've got to go warm on the back side. Or warm-cool. And that gives you a nice three-dimensional quality. And it worked really well. And every once in a while

you come across an old Diebenkorn or Bischoff or something, and although they use the big, fat brush strokes, big, globby drips and all that, that's still there, man. You can see warm-cool. You know?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And even on apparently a very flat-looking portrait, it has volume to it.

MR. ADAMSON: I was just going to ask when you became aware of those painters, Bischoff, Diebenkorn, Park, that crowd.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, not until quite a while after. Shit, they were famous when I was in school. I was in art school, I think, from '58 to '61. And, shit, they're moving out. I was aware of them, but --

MR. ADAMSON: Just through art school circles.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Just, you know, you heard about them. But I did one time, probably before I went to art school, yeah, for sure it was before I went to art school, I was down at the old Oakland Museum at Tenth and Fallon, and it was just this kind of dopey place, you know. And I thought, what the hell, I think I'll go to the Oakland Museum. I used to like to go to the Snow Museum [Oakland, California], a natural history museum nearby; they had stuffed birds and all that. I went to the Oakland Museum and I walked in on a Diebenkorn show, man, one of his first shows, a whole show.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BENNETT: I can't describe it really good, but it was like Sacramento River stuff, kids playing in the water. And the light! Man, the light was incredible! And he got it with just the barest palette, you know, like yellow, orange, umber, ocher, white. That was it. And black, for gray. Man, they were beautiful! And, Jesus, you know, there's about 30 of them. And that really knocked me out. But it didn't affect me immediately, you know. It took me years before I thought the Beatles were any good. I had to wait.

[Telephone rings.]

MR. ADAMSON: Well, were you aware of what was going on on the East Coast in painting at the time?

MR. BENNETT: No, I don't know, it was -- Jesus. No, not at all. I don't know; it was a funny time. I wanted to be an artist, and this is way before craft. I really wanted to be an artist. But I wasn't very interested in other people's stuff. And to this day I'm not. You know, I didn't go see Wayne's show, his retrospective. I should have.

MR. ADAMSON: Wayne Thiebaud?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I don't know. I don't know what it is. It's funny. I know there's people that go to every museum show there is, man, or every movie that comes out. I'm just not like that. I've always thought it's kind of I don't want to be influenced. You know? I've seen enough Japanese stuff that I've got enough stuff imprinted for life. Not that I -- I love it. I love that stuff, but I don't want to see any more or I'll be come a Jap.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know? I mean, I've just got to take some essential parts of it and attempt to use it. Chinese. Korean. So I'm not a scholar and I really don't seek things out. I seek technical information out if I need to do something. So I don't have many influences, because I don't read or look that much. I mean, Brancusi and Noguchi, I'm sure they've influenced me, but those are the two guys that I would say I would like to do what they've done.

You know, it's really difficult. I think I'm an odd duck. I just don't look around that much. I look at friends' stuff and all that, but I mean, I go to these shows, you know, Furniture Society puts on and stuff like that, and I just don't see much I like. When we did the last thing we did in Arizona there, the one thing of the invited stuff, there wasn't much in there that I liked. I bought the two pieces out of that show that I liked, Po Shun's chairs. They're down there in the back. They were prototypes.

MR. ADAMSON: These are chairs by Po Shun Leong?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And we have a fairly extensive chair collection. Oh, obviously, you know, there was things there that were really good, but it just doesn't turn me on that much.

MR. ADAMSON: To get back to CCAC before we leave that topic, you said that you started getting into sculpture while you were there as well.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Was that in wood? Metal?

MR. BENNETT: Metal. There's a piece that I did --

MR. ADAMSON: The early one that's in the catalogue?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It's back around the corner there.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. I saw it when we were coming in.

MR. BENNETT: That's a good piece of sculpture, but Jesus, where the fuck was my head? You know, there was a war and famine and crap. You know, The Jewish Museum [San Francisco, California] still owns a piece of mine to this day that they're just -- I've never seen it "in situ." Is that how you say that?

MR. ADAMSON: "In situ," right.

MR. BENNETT: But I guess they've built a whole thing around it. It's a piece of steel.

[Audio break.]

And what they never realized is, what motivated the piece was I saw a TV documentary -- this is just ironic as hell. I saw a TV documentary on the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

MR. ADAMSON: You're talking about the piece in The Jewish Museum?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And it was, you know, Palestinians. And a guy named Seymour Fromer, hell of a nice guy, was in the studio, and he saw that, and he said, "Oh my God, that explains our plight." So they bought it. But it's universal, okay? The image is universal. It could be Biafrans or Somalis or whatever. But the inspiration for it was the Palestinians' plight. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Terrible. But, you know, it doesn't take away from the piece. And the other one in here is watching the Germans retreat from Stalingrad. You know, their own dogs are eating them, which is pretty far out.

Anyway, Arts and Crafts blah, blah, blah.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, you must have had an instructor for your metal sculpture.

MR. BENNETT: Kind of, yeah. Elah Hays [1896-1986]. Marvelous. I got more out of her -- I mean, she was buddies with Archipenko and people like that, you know. But she was a real '20s sort. And she was quite old even when I was there. She was a little lady, very quiet. But she'd just say -- I remember one piece. I was working in clay, which I've never done any clay, and she says, "Oh, Garry, that's quite nice, but, you know, you ought to look at that curve." And I'm talking into a microphone here and I'm describing to you a curve, though. It was just like this. [Gesturing.] It had nothing to it.

She says, "You know, if that curve just came up and took another little hook, it wouldn't look like it's dying and drooping."

"Oh, okay. Oh, far out!" And I remember that. She didn't teach me welding. They had oxyacetylene there and a bunch of scrap steel, and I just, "Boy, that's it." That's quick, man. That's real immediate stuff, welding. But this is gas welding, which is different now. But I learned to gas weld pretty good.

MR. ADAMSON: At school?

MR. BENNETT: At school, yeah. Just self-taught. Basically, I'm totally self-taught. Everything that I do I've noodled out.

MR. ADAMSON: Were there other artists working with welding when you were there?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Jon Sagan, a couple other people. A guy from Hawaii. I can't remember his name right now. But, yeah, it was good, man. I mean, it was a good environment. They didn't have any goddamn English classes. When I left, the rumor was they were starting an art history class. I said, "I'm outta here. I'm outta Dodge."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: There was no fuckin' -- there was no, like, reading and pencil and paper, or pen and paper, and turn in something. Turned in drawings, copious drawings. "Okay, go out, I want you to come back Monday with -- you know, go around your neighborhood, draw, whatever." I had some great teachers. Charlie Gill. I wonder if it's not so much thinking, but looking. I'm sure it's the same thing, but they didn't put a lot in your head. Not a lot of theory and all that sort of crap. It's like, look at something, look at it and do what your gut tells you to do.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Again, it was academic, you know? That's the best word I've got for it. It was pretty much an academic sort of art education. Now it's totally different. Aw, Christ, man. I go over to see what these people are doing, and they're lazy. They're basically lazy. And you know my attitude towards [James] Krenov, it's well-known.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And his towards me. But there have been a few people come by -- I get a lot of people by, you know -- but a few people have come by, and I've recommended that they take his class, that they go up to his school, and not to tell him that I sent them -- or even mention my name, or they won't get in.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: But there's people that need to know how to use hand tools. In painting, you know, the craft is not taught. "Oh, well, I'm going to make some Rauschenbergs or some Jackson Pollocks" or whatever. And the same for a long time in furniture. "Well, here's the button, turn the switch on, this is the saw, saw your wood, put it together." I know Gail and Wendy were really heavy on that.

MR. ADAMSON: That's Gail Fredell and Wendy Maruyama.

MR. BENNETT: And I know Rosanne [Somerson] is, too. So that's good. You need to know that. But you know, you get some rich kid in there that's paying the dues, paying the tuition, he don't want to spend two years sharpening chisels.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: You know? And the same as painting. They don't want to spend a couple years learning how to draw, how to look. I spent a year with black paper. And you could have three colors. The first couple weeks was red, yellow, and blue on black paper. And you could use triangles, circles, or squares. And you cut those out and arranged them, any size, any way, you know, and put them down. What a great lesson that was! And I got into it, I mean, you know, as dumb as it sounds. I could see people in the class going, "Oh, gee, this is really dumb shit." I got into it because I started really getting challenged by it. And then Fran Moyer says, "Okay, you can use all the colors you want."

"Oh, boy!" You know, still doing 8-1/2-by-11 piece of black paper with all these cutouts on it, but "Oh, geez, thanks, Fran!"

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And so that was the design class. You know, probably if I'm criticizing this, I probably should go over and see how they're doing it. Maybe they're doing it back to the old way, but I doubt it.

MR. ADAMSON: I don't think so.

MR. BENNETT: I doubt it, man. I see some of the work that these kids are turning out. An institution, I've realized in the last couple years -- well, last 10, 15 years -- an institution wants bodies, and bodies equal money. But, you know, some institutions don't care what level the bodies are turning out when they're all through. They've got their money, these people have got their MFA or whatever you call those things, you know? "Hey, I'm an artist." And they don't know shit! They don't know color theory; they don't really know -- they don't understand design or anything like that.

And it would be very hard to start a school. You've got to be dead serious as a student and as a teacher, say, in our area, the woodworking, to say, "Okay, you've got a year now. You're probably not going to make a Philadelphia highboy in the first year. You're going to learn to sharpen tools, this and that, and maybe we'll get to a stool." And I believe that's the way it should be.

MR. ADAMSON: It's funny, because I think most people imagine you as having a very intuitive sense of design, but it's interesting because you're saying really you learned it at a young age.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, but it's intuitive like two times two is four. Pretty soon, you know, I mean, you don't have to think.

MR. ADAMSON: You don't have to think about it, yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I gave somebody an example the other night of -- I'm trying to think of what I said, but it was to the effect -- and I'm not calling myself Michelangelo, but apparently Michelangelo was so good at carving marble, just intuitively, that he was better than families that had done it for hundreds of years in Carrara. I mean, he could do it. And somebody explained to me one time, you know, we see these Victorian marbles; they're all white and they look kind of nice, but that's because all the crystals have been smashed. They've been improperly carved. The good marbles look like stone; they're carved; they're not rudely smashed off or chiseled off. And marble will carve if you know what you're doing, and that's the difference.

MR. ADAMSON: The fundamentals.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. So I think, you know, I probably have had it as a kid. I'm trying to think back what I -- I can't think of anything I made.

MR. ADAMSON: But you always had the knack.

MR. BENNETT: I guess so. I could make the best slingshot in the neighborhood or rubber gun in the neighborhood. I could certainly make some good bongos. Ooh.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Speaking of which --

MR. BENNETT: No, no.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: What?

MR. ADAMSON: After CCAC.

MR. BENNETT: Oh. Yeah, okay.

MR. ADAMSON: Unless there's anything else you want to say on that topic.

MR. BENNETT: No. CCAC, man, it wasn't even work. It was a lot of work, but it was fun. I mean, I was into it. And again, it might be different than it is now. We'd sit in that cafeteria, man, the painters and the sculptors, and we'd argue. We'd argue about religion and art and everything under the sun passionately, you know? And that was one of the best parts of school, was, you know, feedback. And I think it was a good school.

And some of the instructors would sit in, and they were just people sitting in. You know, if they wanted to talk, it wasn't, "Ooh, Charlie's talking." They had to muscle their way into the conversation. Now everybody gathers their books and their laptop, and they head for their Miata. You know, they go down and have a cappuccino.

I don't know. I can't blanket this thing, but I don't know, the seriousness is not there. But also, the world can't take all the art students that are pooped out.

MR. ADAMSON: That's for sure.

MR. BENNETT: They're going to be selling shoes or --

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: -- cars or working in an office someday. But God bless 'em, they'll appreciate what the other guys are doing out there.

MR. ADAMSON: That's true.

MR. BENNETT: And that's a good thing about an art education, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: So on that note: You get out of art school, you have an art training, and then what do you do?

MR. BENNETT: Well, I didn't get out. I didn't get a piece of paper or anything. I decided to move up to the country.

MR. ADAMSON: So you didn't actually graduate from CCAC with a master's?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, no. No, no, no, no. But I got good grades. I think I got straight As.

MR. ADAMSON: You just decided to stop?

MR. BENNETT: But that was easy. I mean in those days, again, that was a school that they needed your money.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: You know? It was a failing school. Good spirit, failing school. And since these new guys have taken over now, it's become a very successful school -- and I'm very happy for that -- and, I'm sure, a good school.

No, so Sylvia and I -- I guess I got married. Yeah, I got married and we moved up to the country and I built a house.

MR. ADAMSON: You had met Sylvia a few years earlier but --

MR. BENNETT: Oh, I'd known Sylvia in high school.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: But God bless her, man. One day I'm sitting in the living room of my grandparents' house -- it had Dutch doors with a window in it -- and I'm sitting there. I don't know what I was doing, probably drinking. God, I'm sure I was all of 21 or 22. There was a knock at the door, and I looked in the glass window, and there was Sylvia. I got up. "Hi."

"Hi. Thought I'd come by and see you." And that was it.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: That was it.

MR. ADAMSON: Off to the races.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. God bless her for that. Jesus. You wonder, all the time you wonder what you would be without, you know, something. You know, without diving off the diving board and breaking your neck and being a paraplegic in 1953. Or, if I hadn't met Sylvia. It's too complicated, even, for me to comprehend. I mean, it doesn't equate. I wouldn't be what I am, that's for sure. And that's not being patronizing or anything. I just wouldn't be.

You know, tremendously supportive. Living up in the country, we were poor! We were poor. And, you know, it's just like, "God, Hon, I'm sorry, you know?"

"No, that's all right. I know someday you'll do really good. Everything will be really good." You know, one of her birthday presents was eight pounds of butter. I had \$8, and butter was a dollar a pound. And I went into town and got some wrapping paper and wrapped it up, and that was her birthday present. Greatest birthday present she ever got.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Because we were living on margarine. I mean, we were really poor. I built this house for an ex-stepfather, and I got to live in it.

MR. ADAMSON: I'm sorry? For Annette's [sic] stepfather?

MR. BENNETT: An ex-stepfather.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, for an ex-stepfather [A former husband of Garry's mother].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Good guy. Homer Freeman, a guy I admire a lot. I admire him more than my own father. My own father was a really nice guy, but Homer was a real man, real strong. He taught me a lot about working. You know? I'm sure he gave me my work ethics.

MR. ADAMSON: Tell me more about him. What did he do for a living?

MR. BENNETT: He was a farmer, a rice farmer in the Sacramento Valley, in Lincoln. And his childhood was, you know, the Depression. Not childhood, his young manhood was the Depression. Joined the Navy. Got out of the Navy. I think he trained as an electrician in the Navy and then worked at Judson Pacific-Murphy as a chief electrician there, met my mother and got married, and they spent a couple raucous years together. But he was

from Kansas, a real down-to-earth guy, you know? Good guy. Good guy. Hardworking. I used to go up -- well, he started --

[Pause for incoming telephone call.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. We were just talking about some other stuff here, but I wanted to put this in here. I think we wear out. And I think I'm wearing out, you know? I mean, you know, I'm just not -- I'm not willing to make some of those moves. Like I said, "Aw, fuck it, no big deal," you know, "I'm just going to go for it."

And so I'm getting pretty goddamn conservative. You know? I know I am. And I've got some ideas. And I want to ask you about something later about somebody that carves chair backs, so kind of keep that in the back of your head. I'll remember it because I need some help.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: But, you know, I go to a show now and I look at stuff and I say, "Boy, that's really good." Some of it's really good, you know? But I know, back in the '80s when I'd enter a show, I know people were saying about my stuff, "Man, that's really good." And I could go into a show and walk around and say, "Yep, I got the best piece in here." Now, not necessarily so. So, I don't know, I've got to get my shit together.

And my problem is my studio, because I've had to move all my wood inside; long, complicated story, and I just feel so constricted in there. I can't make anything big. I don't have the room. And I don't have the strength anymore; I really want to work alone. I can't -- this hand, the right hand is just screwed. Arthritis, you know. And I try to pick something up, and I'm worried about it. So, yeah, I think we wear out, you know? I mean, all creative -- except for -- you know, musicians don't wear, but they get less good. But, like, you talk about blues guys; they still got that.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: But I think writers wear out, and artists wear out. I mean, look at -- well, how can we possibly criticize de Kooning, but, he's wearing out. And I'm realizing that. So I've got to start thinking a little more. And I want to do a whole chair series. There's one, there. I want to do a series of chairs, and I got some cat's-ass ideas for chairs. But the problem is, I can't put them in Scotty's gallery [Leo Kaplan Modern, New York, New York] or a craft gallery; I don't think they'll be appreciated.

MR. ADAMSON: Scotty's gallery?

MR. BENNETT: Leo Kaplan.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, Leo Kaplan.

MR. BENNETT: You know? So I'm toying with the idea of inventing another name and seeing if I can approach a gallery in, like, Chicago. I really like Chicago. I think it's a neat town. I don't spend much time there at all. But see if I can get an art gallery to --

MR. ADAMSON: You mean anonymously? Not telling them who you are?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, no, I'd tell them who -- I would have to use my "bona fides," so to speak, so that they realize I'm not some sort of nut. And when you do that, if you have them, then people -- we're all impressed with certain -- so they look at it a little differently, you know? I'd like to do that. I still haven't signed any of these turnings, and I'm trying to think of a name. Everybody will know who did 'em, but just -- you know, "Earl Turner" or something like that.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, we should probably return back to the history part of it.

MR. BENNETT: Yes, let's go for it. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Otherwise our listeners will get confused.

You were talking about building the house up in Lincoln. So you built your own house as well as Sylvia's stepfather's house.

MR. BENNETT: No, no. My ex-stepfather.

MR. ADAMSON: Your stepfather's house.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. He let me build a house because we moved up there, and then I was -- I think he had plans for me too, because I used to work up there in the summer, and I was a good worker. You know, I was strong. And I think he had plans -- I could have been a farmer in Lincoln. I would have gotten the whole thing, many millions of dollars. You know, a lot of land and all that.

And so we went up there. I built this house on his property. He paid for it. It was his. But after a couple years, he realized that I had other fish to fry. I worked in the spring planting and the fall harvest, and the rest of the time was just, you know, drudgery work, and he had guys on the farm that could do that. But I ran the rice dryer for him, which he never had anybody that could do that because, you know, he was paying a dollar an hour. And finally one day I said, "Homer, lookit, you're paying Smitty a dollar and a quarter an hour to drive a truck, and that guy's got about a 65 I.Q. I'm running this thing for you; I'd at least like a dollar and a half an hour.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: "Well, okay, Garry." Dollar and a half an hour. Geez, I got 25 cents an hour more than Smitty.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: So, yeah. It was all fun. I mean, you know, we lived off the land. I mean, I've eaten enough jackrabbit in my life now in just four years that I don't ever need to eat any more jackrabbits.

MR. ADAMSON: And there's a story about you eating the rice and getting sick?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. It's the absolute truth, man. You know, we dried rice, and we had a little tester there that you could hull rice with. So, shit, while I'm sitting around waiting for one batch to change and all that, I'd just hull up four or five pounds of rice, you know, polish four or five pounds. And I was polishing off all the vitamin B, the brown. You know, I polished it really good.

[Pause for incoming phone call.]

Anyway, you know, Sylvia was pregnant at the time, so our doctor had given her vitamin pills, but I mean we were really eating pretty poorly. We'd have people save bacon grease for us, the people in the neighborhood. Well, it's a farming community. But I just got really ill. Geez, I'd stand up and fall down. I said, "Ooh, fuck, man, something's really wrong."

And we had a quack in town, Dubin, and he just had this whole community buffaloed, you know. So finally I went in to him and he tested me and all that, and he says, "Well," he says, "Geez, Garry, I think you have" -- this is a doctor! -- "I think you have rheumatic fever or an allergy."

I says, "Oh."

He says, "Here, lookit. Take this prescription and go down to the pharmacy; go down to Bert's and fill this prescription and call me back in a week."

So I says, "Okay." So I remember going down to the pharmacy, man. The prescription was for 12 pills, one a day, and they were some sort of allergy pill or whatever it was. And I went in. Dr. Dubin owned part of the pharmacy, which is really questionable, and Bert, the pharmacist, was a pretty good guy. He had a fairly good soul. And I gave him the prescription and he gave me the bottle, and he says, "That will be \$24." And he could see the look on my face. I didn't have 24 fuckin' dollars.

He says, "Oh, geez, Garry, I know they're kind of expensive, but this is what Dr. Dubin said you need."

I said, "Okay. Well, can I pay on time?"

He says, "Yeah, sure." So I went back home and took one of those pills and nothing happened. The next day I took one and just got violently ill.

So I said, "Sylvia, I'm going back down [to the Bay Area]. I'm going down to my doctor down there," Riggall, a doctor I'd had a long time. It's a funny story. So I fuckin' hitchhiked down here [to Oakland], phoned Riggall up, said I'm coming in. "Yeah, okay." I've got a friend of mine, John. I'd phoned John, and he would drive me back up. So I hitchhiked down, John drove me back up.

But I went to Riggall and he gave me all the tests and everything. And he said -- you know, after he stuck his finger up my ass and all that, he says, "Okay, well, put your clothes on." Well, he gave me a full physical. He says, "Put your clothes on and come into my office."

I says, "Okay."

So I put my clothes on, you know, went into his office, and he motioned me to sit down on the other side of the desk. And he had a real stern look on his face. We both smoked at the time, and he shoved a pack of cigarettes over to me. He says, "You better have one of these."

And I'm thinking, "Oh, God!" My brain is just imploding. "What?!" And I'm trying to light this cigarette, and he starts laughing. My own doctor, he starts laughing. And I says, "What are you laughing at, you sonofabitch. I'm dying."

And he says, "No, you aren't." And he opens a drawer and he pulls out a bottle of vitamin pills, and he says, "Take one of these a day, you'll be fine in about a week."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: I had beri-beri [vitamin B1 deficiency]. And I had him over a while back, about a month ago, for dinner. And he's so proud of that. It's the only diagnosed case of beri-beri he ever had.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughing.] Still to this day.

MR. BENNETT: And he nailed it, man! I mean, I told him what was wrong and all that. You know, but he's a doctor's doctor. I don't have him anymore, he retired, but I ended up with one of the great doctors. He was a pulmonary guy. So, yeah, I had beri-beri.

MR. ADAMSON: That's crazy.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it's just absolutely crazy.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, did you have a sense that you were participating in something when you moved out into the countryside and sort of --

MR. BENNETT: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Not at all.

MR. BENNETT: I thought an artist could get out in the country and be an artist.

MR. ADAMSON: And you thought it was your idea.

MR. BENNETT: What? To be an artist?

MR. ADAMSON: Out in the countryside.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Shit, I thought, yeah, you know, an artist needs urban, not suburban or rural. He needs urban, goddamnit. Man, you need this shit.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know, we had a sculpture society group over here, real nice people. We had about 35, 40 people here the other night. And we were out in the back, and I realized the people just loved this place. You know, but it was night. There's the freeway. You can see the freeway there. And people were just, "Oh, God, this is" -- and I realized why I like this place so much. It's kind of like New York. Sirens, brakes, you know? I like the urban way. It's a pain in the ass. I mean, I've got people that shit and piss in my doorway, and cars take my parking places, but, you know, that's what you gotta put up with.

MR. ADAMSON: One more question about Lincoln. The house you built, it's a weird house.

MR. BENNETT: It's an A-frame, yes, a dumb thing to build where it never snows.

MR. ADAMSON: But really it's a triangle.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Right.

MR. ADAMSON: All the way to the ground.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So where did you get the idea for that? Did you just say this is what an A-frame looks like?

MR. BENNETT: Well, I think it's like you ask the guy that's built a cement boat where he got the idea.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Well, he got the idea from somebody that doesn't know what they're talking about, and that's the same place I got the idea for an A-frame. Because you only build those where you have a hundred feet of snow a year or something. But now, engineering, shit, you can put a flat roof on a building in all the snow you want. You know, it seemed cheap. And it kind of was. With a footprint of 30 by 60, what's that, 3,600 square feet. Hey, pretty big house, huh? No way, man. Those walls come in on ya.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: So you're really dealing with maybe 2,000 square feet.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: You know?

MR. ADAMSON: And it was one story?

MR. BENNETT: No, I had two lofts. I had two lofts in it. One we never used, and the other one we had our bedroom up there. And it had a bedroom down below and a kitchen and bathroom. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So it was actually a pretty ambitious building, since you had never built one before.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, it was very ambitious. I'd never built a thing in my life. Somebody's going to take that apart someday, and they're going to --

MR. ADAMSON: It's still standing?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yes. Oh, it will be standing for a long time. They're going to take it apart, and they're going to look at the end walls. And all the studs are let-in to the plate. I mortised the studs in. I didn't know you just toenailed a goddamn two-by-four to the plate! I cut 'em all in with a backsaw, chiseled 'em out, dropped 'em in. I mean, it's embarrassing. It's absolutely embarrassing. And the sub-floor -- and at the time it wasn't terribly expensive -- the sub-floor is two-by-six vertical-grain fir. Perfect fucking wood. Tongue and groove. Perfect wood.

And Homer, I couldn't understand why he was asking me, "Well, why do you want that kind of wood?"

"Oh, it's got to be a good floor," you know.

"Okay."

MR. ADAMSON: This is the sub-floor, not --

MR. BENNETT: The sub-floor, yeah. And then I had three-quarters of an inch of oak tongue-and-groove flooring over that.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: But the crime is that fuckin' vertical-grain fir in that floor as a sub-floor. It's a crime!

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] It really is.

MR. BENNETT: And I remember what it cost. It cost \$260 per hundred board-feet at the time.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Regular-grade two-by-six at that time would have probably been about 30 or 40 cents a board-foot.

MR. ADAMSON: But you wanted it to be good.

MR. BENNETT: Boy, it is good. Crazy. Absolute. But that's not knowing, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: And the whole house was like that? It was all built --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it's very, very strong. Very strong. It will take a lot of snow right out in the middle of Lincoln in the Sacramento Valley.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Right. Right.

MR. BENNETT: If it ever snows a lot out there --

MR. ADAMSON: No problem.

MR. BENNETT: -- no problem with that bugger.

MR. ADAMSON: So who owns it now? People you know?

MR. BENNETT: Well, Homer died a number of years ago, and then Donna --

MR. ADAMSON: Donna's his wife?

MR. BENNETT: That was his wife, who -- you know, I can't remember if she just died -- but somebody told me -- we got some cryptic message from somebody -- yeah, I think Donna died. But she had some relatives in Chico, and we got some cryptic message from somebody that knew them, that said Homer had asked her to make sure Garry's taken care of; whatever that means, you know? But that did not come to pass. Donna would not do that, nor would her relatives. And Homer had no family. So there's some relatives up in Chico that are pretty fuckin' wealthy now. We're talking a lot of land, a lot of valuable land.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. And that all left the --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I know the last time I saw Donna, I stopped in and saw her, Sylvia and I stopped in, and we were sitting around talking. We're talking about this and that, and Donna just, after about 10 minutes, just turns to Sylvia and says, "Who are you?" You know, so she obviously was going. The synapses weren't getting together.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And I had to explain, and she says, "Oh, yeah." She was a pretty cold fish, I mean, but not bad. But goddamn, man, she was one of these people who couldn't throw anything away. They'd go fishing. They used to like to go salmon fishing. They'd get a bunch of salmon. Do you think they'd give us a fresh salmon? No. But when she cleaned out her freezer, "Oh, you want some salmon?"

"Oh, yeah, great." Oh, boy, you'd love some. You'd get this fuckin' "King Tut" salmon, man, this fuckin' mummy. You know?

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: You know, just all the juice is gone from it. It had been in the freezer for a year or two, not properly packaged. We just used to have to throw it out. We gave it to the chickens.

MR. ADAMSON: You had chickens?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I had White Fang. I had White Fang, man. I was driving down the road coming home one day, and there was a white fuckin' chicken in the road, whatever they are, leghorns or -- no, the white ones, whatever they are. I walked out there and grabbed that fucker and put him in the car, took him home, put him in the chicken coop. But we just locked them up at night. They just ran all over the place.

Well, this was a goddamn tough chicken. He grew real long spurs, and dogs wouldn't get near him. He'd go -- [making noises like an aggressive chicken] -- right after a dog, man, and jump up! Big dogs, and they'd split. And finally he got Josh [son] on the ground one time when Josh was just a little kid, out in the backyard. So White Fang ended up in the fricassee.

Actually, he didn't. I always accused Sylvia of killing him. That's right, I found him really fucked up one day out in the back.

And I said, "Did you mess with White Fang?"

And she said, "No." And Sylvia couldn't kill anything like that. So an animal got him. The end of White Fang.

MR. ADAMSON: That's tragic.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Great chicken [Note from Sylvia Bennett: We buried him under our apricot tree and the next year the tree died!].

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: All right. So you basically get sick of living out in the country.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It wasn't an event that caused you to want to leave?

MR. BENNETT: There was an event that caused me to leave.

MR. ADAMSON: There was an event.

MR. BENNETT: Because I was getting sick of living in the country, but every morning -- you know, this is like 4:00 in the morning -- I'd get up to go in and run the dryer, and instead of getting Sylvia up at that horrid hour -- this is in the fall -- I'd go down to Homer's and we'd have breakfast every morning.

Funny little sidebar is -- they ate margarine, so I thought. So every morning we'd have this weak coffee, a cup of weak coffee, black, and Homer would make -- we each had two buckwheat hot cakes with margarine and syrup. And one time I said to Sylvia, I says, "God, they can afford butter!" Butter was a big thing to us, you know.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Apparently.

MR. BENNETT: "They can afford it."

"Oh," she says, "oh, they eat butter all the time."

I said, "No, they don't. They eat margarine."

She says, "No, no, no. When they have company over, they put the margarine out." Just the reverse of what any civilized person would do.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: You have company over, you bring the butter out, you know? So anyway, we'd have this breakfast, kind of talk about the day and how much rice was coming into the dryer and that. And we got into an argument about something. I don't remember what it was. But Homer said the magic words to me. He said, "Well, if you don't like it here, you can leave."

And I says, "I'm out. I'll be gone after your New Year's party."

He says, "Now, wait a minute; don't be too serious, now."

I said, "Nope, I'm outta here." I just needed -- I couldn't --

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: Because when I grew up with my grandparents, when I'd piss my grandmother off, she'd say, "Well, if you don't like it here, you can leave." Well, my mother's in Guam; my father's drunk somewhere, you know? Where am I going to go?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: What, pack a little valise, 11 years old, walk down the street, get a hotel room?

So, you know, that's what precipitated that. "Well, if you don't like it here, you can leave." And he regretted that till the day he died.

MR. ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. Because you took off.

MR. BENNETT: Because I took off, but because I was kind of running [the operation] -- you know, I took a great load off of him.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: I mean, he had good workers, but they weren't thinkers.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. You could help him run things.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And so then I had to borrow \$500 from my cousin to get a truck to move back to the Bay Area, and we moved in with Sylvia's mother [Mildred Mangum] in the smallest -- a three-bedroom house that's 860 square feet.

MR. ADAMSON: Was this here in Alameda?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And, I mean, I could touch the bedroom walls if I stretched my hands out. So we had Sylvia and I and Aaron and Josh.

MR. ADAMSON: So you already had the two sons.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, I had two kids. Yeah, two boys.

MR. ADAMSON: So they were born up in Lincoln?

MR. BENNETT: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: Sacramento, actually.

MR. ADAMSON: But when you were living in Lincoln?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And so we moved back here, and I did all sorts of stuff, man. I had started making roach clips up in Lincoln. I had some friends -- this was a milestone in my life, in a way. I had some friends, Jon Sagan and Jerry Hoff, and they were in the record business, and they would come up and visit, because they liked to go to the country. They'd leave stacks of records, you know, sample records. I had no idea what they were. Rolling Stones. Beatles. You know? All this stuff. Well, we found out we could get baby-sitting; when we had the money to go somewhere, to a movie or something, we could get a teenager to baby-sit the kids for a week for one unreleased Beatles or Stones record, which is, you know, talking big shit here.

So Jon phoned me up one time. He says, "Hey, I got a friend. I got a friend, Alan. He's a junky and he's having a hard time. We want to try to clean him up. Can we leave him -- can we bring him up to your place for a week or so and see if he'll straighten out?"

I says, "Yeah, sure, no big deal." So they came up and they brought Alan, and you know, he had a bad jones, the real jones. I'd never smoked marijuana, you know? I'd been around it, but I'd never smoked it. They brought a big bag of weed with them for Alan. Well, fuckin' marijuana won't help a junky out one bit.

MR. ADAMSON: What did they think, it would help him come down or something?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. Would just give him some sort of narcotic.

MR. ADAMSON: But he's not going to care.

MR. BENNETT: No, it's nothing.

So they left that night. We put Alan on the couch. I took his shoes and his shirt so he would stay, and we got up in the morning and he was gone. You know, he had gone out, barefoot, five miles from town, probably hitchhiked back to the Bay Area. We had nothing to steal; there was nothing he could take with him that would be worth anything. But what I ended up with was the bag of marijuana, and I started smoking that shit.

And it was classic, you know. "Okay, Sylvia, write this down." She wasn't smoking, "Write this down." You know, at night.

She says, "Really?"

"Yeah, write it down." I'd say something. The next morning I'd be drinking my coffee, and she'd put this thing in front of me. I said, "What's that?"

"That's what you wanted me to write down."

"That?! That's really stupid!"

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: She said, "Yes." But in smoking that marijuana, I truly, truly independently invented the roach clip. Now, they'd been made well before I'd made my first one. The slide, you know, the little slide thing.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Because I didn't have any alligator clamps to use. So I made a bunch of them, and then Jon and Jerry, these record guys, they came up and they saw it. "Oh, geez, far out, man! Can you make some more?"

I said, "Yeah, sure."

"Hey, we'll be back up next week. Make a bunch."

I said, "Okay."

MR. ADAMSON: What were you making them out of?

MR. BENNETT: Brass. Braising rod, you know.

MR. ADAMSON: That you could get locally somehow?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I was doing some braising down at Bob McDonald's [the next farm]. He lent me the milk shed. It was half the size of this -- fuckin' guy. So I had braising rod.

MR. ADAMSON: Wait a minute. Why were you doing metalwork in the milk shed?

MR. BENNETT: Because it's the only studio I had. Bob lent me this room, you know, and it was really small. I mean, it was probably eight feet by 10 feet. But I had oxyacetylene, and I was welding.

MR. ADAMSON: Just because you wanted to keep with the metalwork?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah, I wanted to keep working, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So the whole time you were in Lincoln, you were making stuff.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I was reading and making stuff. I did some painting, had some shows in Sacramento, read for three years. I read everything. I mean, I've read it all.

MR. ADAMSON: You mean like --

MR. BENNETT: Nietzsche --

MR. ADAMSON: -- philosophy.

MR. BENNETT: -- fuckin' the Bible, you know. I started out, you know, "Oh, well, you gotta read" -- and I still like Dostoyevsky -- but you gotta read this stuff. Because I had never read, you know? And I read and I read, and I read and read and read, read everything. God, I read everything. All the philosophers. Didn't understand much of it. And when I got all through with it -- I had always read Steinbeck, even as a kid, and Jack London. And when I got all through with all this reading, I realized, hmm, Ian Fleming is just about as good as Nietzsche.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And it is, for my mind. And that's why more people have read James Bond than Nietzsche, because, you know, you get something. And Steinbeck is marvelous. And Jack London's a marvelous writer. You know, there was some poet here the other night, and his wife said, "Oh, Morton's a poet and a playwright" and all that.

I said, "Ah, poetry. I don't know much about poetry." I looked up at him and I says: "Din! Din! Din! Though they beat you and flay you, By the very Gawd that made you, You're a better man than I, Gunga Din." And he looked at me like I'd fuckin' punched him in the nuts.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And I said, "Rudyard Kipling."

He says, "I know." And he walked away.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: So that kind of tells you where I'm at. Okay?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Because I think Kipling's a great -- it's great stuff. It's great, romantic stuff, you know. Anyway.

MR. ADAMSON: So anyway, you're doing --

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah, roach clips.

MR. ADAMSON: You're doing roach clips in the milk shed.

MR. BENNETT: So a couple of weeks later, Jon and Jerry come up, and I'd made a bunch of roach clips, every one different.

They said, "Oh, man! Oh, those are great!" You know, because they'd give them to all their buddies and stuff.

"How much you want for 'em?"

I said, "Geez, I don't know." And I had, like, 20 or 30 roach clips.

"I'll give you 200 bucks for 'em."

I said, "Really?!" That's more money than I'd seen in years. "Want any more?"

"Oh, yeah, keep making 'em."

So, they'd come up, and, you know, that was our income, because I was being paid \$50 a month to work for Homer. We figured out I made, like, \$1,200 a year. So I said, "Well, \$50 a month until November, and then give me, however it figures up, for Thanksgiving and Christmas \$200 each time," so I had some money. So, shit.

And then I used to go in town and play poker, you know? And, poker's a difficult game when you don't have any money. But nobody else did either. So I'd go in. I can honestly say -- I lost sometimes, but if I lost five bucks, I was a goner; I was out of there. I would win 10, 15 bucks every night. I remember one night I came home, and Sylvia always used to wait up for me, Saturday night. She always waited up for me. And I walked in and I'd won \$60.

So I walked in, and just before I got in the door, I put a big, long face on, walked in, and she says, "How'd you do?"

I says -- [pretending to be discouraged] -- "Oh, Jesus, oh, God, I really got" -- [then exclaiming jubilantly] -- "I won \$60!!" And I pulled this money out of my pockets and threw it in the air. And we were counting it, you know, and had piles on the table, a lot of dollar bills and stuff.

I appreciate the poverty I went through, but I also know how lucky I am, a smart white guy. Okay? You could take the smartest poor black motherfucker, and he can't get out. I always knew I could get out. I'm not making a racial thing; I'm being very empathetic to certain people. A guy with one leg or blind or something, you're fucked.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And I wasn't fucked. I chose it, you know, in a way. But when Homer said, "Well, if you don't like it here, you can always leave," I was out of there. And I could go. I mean, nothing depended on it, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: Well, let's go back down to Alameda then. You're living with Sylvia's folks, right?

MR. BENNETT: Mother.

MR. ADAMSON: Just her mother?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And is that when you started going into the full-time metal plating business?

MR. BENNETT: No. At that point I was trying to find some kind of studio -- a friend of mine gave me a -- what would you call it? -- at Tenth Avenue [Oakland, California], a whole building to use, like 20 by 30 feet, that was full of toilets and urinals. What would you call that?

MR. ADAMSON: A lavatory?

MR. BENNETT: A lavatory. It was for the shipyard that had closed down. He said, "Hey, it's a studio for you." So goddamn it, I had to beat out all the toilets, tear down all the partitions, but I had a studio. I took all the urinals

out except one. That's where I pissed, you know. Wasn't thinking about where I'm going to take a shit. And I started making roach clips there and doing a few commissions. I think there's a picture in the book of the dragon.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: I made that down there. And it was just, you know, I mean, it was tough. Times were really tough, and I believe Sylvia went back to work on the catering truck. Her mother's house was so small, as soon as we could, we rented a house on Eagle Avenue, \$125 a month. Nice house, you know? And I was making more and more roach clips. I was going to craft fairs, local ones, selling jewelry and roach clips.

MR. ADAMSON: When did you start making the jewelry, when you were living in Alameda at the lavatory/studio in Oakland?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. Because what I was doing with the roach clips really lent itself for wire jewelry anyway.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: And then Squirkenworks just happened. You know? I just started selling more and more roach clips. When I was selling them to friends who had a store in Oakland -- in Berkeley -- I couldn't make enough, you know? Well, I could make enough, but I realized that some other people asked for them, so I made a series. I met a guy, Rick Street. No, I did this before I met Rick Street.

But I had 10 different roach clips, and so what I'd do is I would go around and buy all the *Free Presses* [*Berkeley Free Press*, an underground newspaper]. I'd go up to Berkeley and buy the *Free Presses* from Arizona or New York or whatever, and I'd get the names of head shops. So I'd make a packet up of, like, 10 roach clips of, you know, a certain design and send them to them with a bill in there. "If you want these and you sell them and you want to pay me, you owe me \$18." I think that was the wholesale price. "If not, send them back or throw them away or whatever."

And I sent these packets out all over the country. And goddamn, about a week later I started getting these letters with checks in them. And checks for \$100. "Okay, send me 24 number 17s." And checks. Nobody burned me. I mean, a real entrepreneurial -- [interrupting himself to speak to someone else] -- Oh, he got it working. So where did that come from?

MRS. BENNETT: Home.

MR. BENNETT: [Returning to the interview] And so that's how Squirkenworks started.

MR. ADAMSON: Where did the name come from? Did you come up with that?

MR. BENNETT: A friend of mine, Jon Sagan, the little [six-foot-four-inch] record guy --

MR. ADAMSON: He was also at CCAC? Same guy?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. We knew each other in high school and all that. We were very close. We're not now, unfortunately. I hired a friend. When Squirkenworks really started going, he said, "God, I need a job, Garry."

I said, "Jon, I don't want to hire you; you're a friend."

He said, "Oh, no, that won't" -- and it did. It totally affected the relationship.

But he had made a piece of sculpture one time called the *Squirkenwertz*. And when I needed a name for this thing, I said, "What about Squirkenworks?" In itself for the time, that was brilliant. You know, sending the stuff out free, unsolicited; I think that was a great entrepreneurial move. And "Squirkenworks," people didn't forget it. Spell my name right, that's all. You know?

So now we've changed the business. I've changed the name to Gold Seal Plating because, for instance, working with Hewlett-Packard or something: "This is Squirkenworks."

"Who?" You know.

"Gold Seal Plating." It sounds better.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe we should talk about the growth of this company sort of as a separate topic from this point on, because you were starting with the roach clips, and you very swiftly moved into doing the peace

symbols, I know.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. They were a natural. God bless the hippies.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, right.

MR. BENNETT: God bless those ugly buggers.

MR. ADAMSON: But you didn't consider yourself a hippie, really.

MR. BENNETT: No. No, no, no, no.

MR. ADAMSON: Because?

MR. BENNETT: If I'm anything, I'm a beatnik.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, because you --

MR. BENNETT: Hippies, I didn't like their art, you know? I really didn't like -- it was just fun, man, "hippiedom" was fun at the beginning. Now I'm married, so I don't need to go around screwing everything, you know, with a pussy. But they had no aesthetic. Their aesthetic was really fucked. The beats had poetry and they were painting and they were arguing and they were playing chess and drinking. You know?

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: The hippies, it was, "Hey, man; peace, love, brother." You know, they were nothing. And well, you can see the aesthetic of the day was pretty abysmal.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: And there is virtually no hippie art worth talking about. There's a lot of beatnik art in poetry and writing and music and painting that you can talk about. No hippie art.

MR. ADAMSON: So you really didn't respect it on a kind of fundamental level.

MR. BENNETT: No. It was just perfect timing for me because I can't make money with my head, you know? And I've said a couple times I'm probably that last generation that could make a living with these [his hands]. I'm holding up my hands. But it's true. I mean, after the '70s or '80s, you had to be into electronics or something like that. Yeah, it's like the Rust Belt.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So how did that company go from being Squirkenworks, the small, sort of hippie head shop, to --

MR. BENNETT: Well, it actually wasn't small. At one time I had 65 employees making roach clips. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, my God.

MR. BENNETT: [Laughs.] I know.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were selling them all over the country, then.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, God, yes. England. Yeah. No, I was the roach clip mogul of the world for a while. And I could never figure out why everybody tried to make pipes and stuff; nobody really made roach clips. And a pipe is a hard thing to make. A roach clip is a goddamn piece of wire you smack. I had 11 punch presses going at one time. I had one punch press just dedicated -- one little, two-ton punch press just dedicated to -- you put a roach clip, the wire body part of it, you'd put it in there and hit the foot pedal, and it stamped "Squirkenworks" in there. I had the smallest little goddamn thing etched, you know, to put in the punch press. And you set it up just right, and "ba-dink." If you have good eyes or glasses, you can read "Squirkenworks" there. I didn't need to, but I did.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: So yeah. No, I had 65 people there at one time. I counted them.

And then Nixon came in, and I saw the writing on the wall. I mean there were head shops being busted and all that. At that time I had my partner, Gary [Spencer], and we'd put the plating shop in. And I said, "Lookit, Gary, this roach clip thing, this is going to go. They're busting head shops in Arizona, in Texas, in Florida, and we're going to be out of business here pretty quick." So that's why I put the plating shop in.

MR. ADAMSON: This is Gary --

MR. BENNETT: Spencer, my partner. He's still my partner.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, the business end of it.

MR. BENNETT: And we were making jewelry at the time, you know, through-hoops [a type of earring] and necklaces and stuff. But the roach clips were the really big part of the business. And I had put the plating shop in. That's how I got Gary. I'd put the plating shop in, and then in the '70s, you know, I think Nixon -- when did he come in, '72?

MR. ADAMSON: That's when he went out, I think [1974].

MR. BENNETT: Out?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. He came in in '68, 69.

MR. BENNETT: Okay. Well anyway, things started to get clamping down on the drugs and all that.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, sure.

MR. BENNETT: The Vietnam War was winding down, and people were sick and tired of hippies and drugs and shit like that. So we had the plating shop in, and we were plating all our own stuff. I said, "Gary, we've got to stop making roach clips."

He said, "God, we can't do that."

I said, "Yeah, we got to." So I said, "We're pulling the plug. We're phoning the distributors. We'll close out all this shit."

He said, "What are we going to do?"

"Well, we've got some jewelry." And we were doing a few plating jobs for other people. They found out we were plating. I said, "We're just going to bite the bullet, and goddamnit, we're getting out of this paraphernalia business." At that time we had got more efficient. We were probably down to 30 people, you know, just through efficiency. And we went down to bare bones. There was a time where it was Gary plating, me, Gary's brother, and Kam Yee and Kam Ha, two Chinese ladies. And we kept them. And I remember we had no work, and we had them paint, you know, the inside of the building, those Chinese ladies. They were young in those days. They're still there, and they're now old. And then another plating job would come in, another one, and every month it grew. And so, you know, in about two years, that's what we are, platers.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were just plating things and not fabricating them anymore?

MR. BENNETT: No. And I think that's the best move I ever made. We're at the end of the food chain, like a grocery store.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BENNETT: You gotta have us. You know, the guy that's growing the groceries has got to have us to sell it. The guys who were making stuff, they had to have us plate it, and therefore they had to pay us. You know, it's kind of brutal, but it's true. We were it if you wanted plating; we were the only ones that were doing it.

MR. ADAMSON: There wasn't a lot of competition.

MR. BENNETT: And we certainly weren't ripping people off.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: Everybody's always said we're very fair and reasonable and all that sort of stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: And you would do gold plating and silver --

MR. BENNETT: Gold plating. That's what we specialized in.

MR. ADAMSON: Just gold. Okay.

MR. BENNETT: No, we did nickel and copper and stuff like that, but our specialty has always been gold.

MR. ADAMSON: And where is the operation now? Still here in Oakland, right?

MR. BENNETT: Just down the road. Where we did the tape recorder thing, we were just two blocks from it.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: I probably should have taken you over there.

MR. ADAMSON: That's all right. So that's been a source of income for you ever since.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it's all right. There was a couple of years it was a great source of income. It's tougher now. Gary runs the business and runs it a lot better than I could. You know, the daily stuff. We talk about any move we're going to make. I am very fortunate that I have known from day one that if you can possibly afford it, buy the property that you need to make your living in. So I own all that. And I don't make a lot of money anymore, but no big deal; I don't owe a lot of money either.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: That's what's really good.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. So was there a period at which you feel like that business really sustained your ability to make furniture and clocks and that sort of thing?

MR. BENNETT: I have another analogy, and that's the Beatles. The Beatles were good from the get-go, but when they started making tons of money, they got better. They could hire the London Philharmonic. "Okay, you blokes just sit here for a week." You know, \$40,000 a day or \$100,000, they didn't care. Because they were so good, they could use that. They didn't have to put their monies together and, "Okay, let's phone Charlie up and see if we can use them."

And so yes, to answer your question, yeah, that just freed me. It allowed me a lot of arrogance, you know, or arrogance of time to not have to worry. I was very fortunate. I mean, up until the last couple of years, virtually everything I've made has sold or could have been sold. And I think at times I sold it pretty cheap, but I also knew I didn't want a big collection of my work. So, you know, people were saying, "Boy, this is not very much."

I said, "Yeah; it's good, too, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Okay. Well, we'll buy it." You know?

And so the work got out there. And I think that was really important.

I perceived early on it was really important to get my work out. I'd been selling at Gump's and stuff like that in Frisco, and when I was an artist, I was selling in galleries around here, but, I mean, the market is east. And the market for my stuff, man, just, "bong," hit. I mean, they'd never seen metal and paint and wood. You know, Richard Kagan, all perfect, and Tage Frid, and all those guys. You know, walnut. Dark wood. Geez, I'd put my stuff in a show, a group show or something, and: "Oh, what's that?" I loved it. I loved it.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, let's back up to where you started doing the clocks, which were really the first thing that was sort of like furniture that you did. That would have been in the early '70s -- right? -- when you started doing that?

MR. BENNETT: I think the first clock, probably the date on it, the first one -- I didn't realize it was so early -- was the clock that the Mint Museum [Mint Museum of Art/Mint Museum of Craft + Design, Charlotte, North Carolina] has, and that's '73, I think. I'm pretty sure it's '73. I didn't realize I had started making them that early. But we had met Julie Schafler [Julie: Artisans Gallery, New York], I don't know how, probably through Doris Stowens. And Julie came out and, being a New Yorker, couldn't drive, so she would hire some guy to drive her around, and we met. She came over because we were going to introduce her to some people. And we just got along just like two peas in a pod.

So when I started making these clocks, I was showing them at Gump's and that to great success, but fuck, they were really cheap, man. Jesus Christ, I'd like to have some of them back. So one time she [Julie] phoned me, and she knew I was making clocks. She said, "Well, would you make me some clocks for a Valentine show?" ["Garry Bennett: Clocks," Julie: Artisans' Gallery, New York, February 1977.]

And I said, "Yeah, sure." So I made 10 clocks, all heart motif. There's a couple in the book.

MR. ADAMSON: So that's why there are so many heart clocks.

MR. BENNETT: Well, there's a lot more other clocks than heart clocks, but that -- and I never sold a one. Never sold a goddamn one from her gallery in New York. And so I got them back, and then they went. I mean, they went to other venues and stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Here in California?

MR. BENNETT: Probably. I can't really remember. But we kept one. I still have one. But the clocks did really well.

And then, fortunately, I met [Rick] Snyderman. This is for the -- I'm sure some people will listen to this and all that, and there's some people that don't like Rick, you know? I like Rick. Rick's a hustler. He's working hard, keeping everything going, and I think he does pretty well. And he gave me my first couple shows.

MR. ADAMSON: This is Rick Snyderman, the gallerist in Philadelphia?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, in Philadelphia. And geez, man, he did really well for me. It was a fight. The problem with Rick is, he wanted to sell everything cheap.

No, I'll get -- I've got a mouthful of Copenhagen [Mr. Bennett referring to tobacco] here.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: You know, as a merchant, he wants to get it out the door. And I said, "Well, geez, I'd like a little more." And I remember one time I had a beautiful desk. It's in the book too, the green one with the gold-leaf legs and all that.

And he says, "Well, what should this sell for?" I said -- I think it was \$2,400.

He says, "Oh, God, that's too much, Garry."

I said, "Well, I think I have a lot of time in that piece." At that time, I had Dan working for me.

MR. ADAMSON: Dan?

MR. BENNETT: Dan Bennett. No relation, but one of Dunnigan's [John Dunnigan]. When he moved out here, Dunnigan phoned me. He said, "I tried to keep him, but if you can get him, take him. He's that good." And he is.

MR. ADAMSON: So he was a student of John Dunnigan's at RISD [Rhode Island School of Design]?

MR. BENNETT: No, he just worked for John.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: But Dan's the kind of guy, show him once, that's it. You know? And he will do it better than you can do it.

So had the show, came back, and Dan's working, you know. He says, "By the way, what did the green desk sell for, or what did you get for that?" Forty-eight hundred dollars, that's what it retailed for. Snyderman just -- you know, it's the most expensive thing, I think, he had ever had in there. And Dan says, "Did the green desk sell?"

And I said, "Yeah."

He said, "What did it sell for?"

And I says, "Oh, it sold for \$4,800." I was pretty proud of that, you know.

He says, "And you get half?"

I says, "Yeah."

And he says, "Oh, okay." I saw him over there figuring. Finally, after about 10 minutes, he says, "Hey."

I said, "What?"

He says, "You know what you made?"

I said, "No. What?"

He says, "You made \$200."

I says, "Really? That's what I made?" When I got \$2,400, I had made \$200. He figured out I paid \$1,400 -- or \$1,200 to have the legs gold-leafed, and the aluminum and the ColorCore Formica and his wages and that. And he figured it all out, I made \$200.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] So that would have been in the '80s, right?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So again to back up, when you were making the clocks --

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. We -- you're digressing. I'm just rolling.

MR. ADAMSON: [Inaudible.]

MR. BENNETT: No, that's cool. That's cool.

MR. BENNETT: When I was making the clocks, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: But who were you selling through, mostly?

MR. BENNETT: Gump's. Where else would I have sold clocks? There was a gallery in Chicago. I think it was Esther Saks [Esther Saks Gallery, Chicago, Illinois]. There was a woman, Arlene something, in Frisco. And then I was showing at Zara Gallery also, Joe Chowning [Joseph Chowning Gallery, formerly Zara Gallery, San Francisco, California]. And I was showing some of the clocks there. I think I made clocks, with [the exception of that early one at the Mint Museum] that early one, really hot and heavy for probably about two years, and I think I probably made 50 or 60 clocks.

MR. ADAMSON: So why was it clocks?

MR. BENNETT: Because they were small. And I know the first one I made. You know, I know that clock. I wanted to start -- because I was running this business. It used to be here. The roach-clip factory used to be here. And I was working downstairs, and I just wanted to start making something of my own, you know? And clocks, I don't know, I just said, "Oh, clocks." It seemed like a good idea. So that's how I got into clocks.

And then I got some very rudimentary wood tools; a jointer, radial-arm saw, and a small band saw. Didn't have a table saw at the time. And I kind of started making furniture. So clocks led -- you know, after I had done some woodworking on the clocks, I said, "Well, shit, I'm" -- and when I was making furniture, I had no idea that there were other people, like Tage Frid, Wendell Castle, Art Carpenter. I thought, oh, furniture would be neat to make. I had no idea --

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BENNETT: -- no idea that other people were making furniture and showing it in galleries. I had a slight inkling. I had a friend that was down around the corner, Don Braden, and they made furniture, but they did kind of commissions and stuff like that, he and Neal Wehrle. And Don introduced me to Art [Arthur Espenet Carpenter]. He said, "Well, we gotta go over and see Art someday."

And I said, "Art? What's he?"

"He's a furniture maker."

"Oh, really? Makes furniture, does he?" So we went over there, and that's how I met Art.

MR. ADAMSON: Up in Bolinas? But it seems like before you had that contact, you had made a couple pieces, like there are couple of chairs you made for your sons in the book [1964-65].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Oh, yeah. One of them is so uncomfortable.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Oh, yeah. No, I got back here; I had some friends that, you know, wanted me to make some furniture. Well, the tenth Avenue Yard, where the urinal was that I worked in, was also an ex-lumberyard. And they had all this wood out there. No vertical-grain fir in it. But I was welding, you know. I remember this one chair I made, this chair, and I think we finally threw it away. It's kind of too bad. But it's beautiful; it's a beautiful chair. I think there might be a picture of it in the book. We've got pictures of it. But the fuckin' thing weighed 80 pounds and was not something you could sit at the dining-room table very long, you know. I had done, like, a football padded-leather seat, so you're almost getting goosed by the end of the evening. So yeah, I'd made a

couple, but not as a furniture maker.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BENNETT: You know, make your kids a chair.

MR. ADAMSON: Just sort of screwing around.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So do you think that meeting Art Carpenter and getting to know Don Braden, that whole deal, had a big influence on it?

MR. BENNETT: No.

MR. ADAMSON: No.

MR. BENNETT: Because I was off and running anyway.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: And Don would come over and, "Geez, what are you doing there?" I remember one day he came over, and I know the desk -- Foster Goldstrom has the desk. I had just bought this beautiful rosewood, and I had these beautiful rosewood legs on this thing. And I had a bottle of black shoe dye there, and I was dyeing it black. And he says, "What are you doing?!!" I said, "Well, I'm making the legs black."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: He couldn't believe it. And that's what I was talking to you about earlier, you know. In those days I'd do that. I would still do it, I mean, if I had the scrotum, you know. Right now the wood's too precious. At that time it was really cheap. And when you take that dark rosewood and blacken it, and then you buff back through it with steel wool, you get a richness that is unsurpassed.

MR. ADAMSON: And you just sort of figured that out on your own that you could do that?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I mean, I didn't know what ebonizing was. That was my ebonizing. You wanted black wood. And I found out it doesn't work good on fir, it doesn't work good on maple; doesn't work good on oak. It works great on walnut and rosewood. And it gets black, and it gets just really good depth. So, yeah, it was no great epiphany; it's just you wanted black.

MR. ADAMSON: Where did you buy the wood?

MR. BENNETT: I bought it from a guy named Bob Nichols, who now is a pretty big veneer guy. But he brought in this load of rosewood. And I think there's a picture in the book of all the rosewood.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And I just made this deal with Bob; and Leon [Paulos] had the truck, so Leon and I made the deal. We didn't make any money on the wood, but the deal was I got together all these guys, and we laid all the wood out in front of the studio here and numbered each plank, and then Leon and I were to get the first two picks each. So our deal, because we put the deal together and hauled the wood and all that, we got the first four planks. And I still have downstairs number one and number two.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I can't cut into them.

MR. ADAMSON: They're like relics, right?

MR. BENNETT: Christ! It will never be seen again!

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know?! It's terrible. I can't cut 'em. I can't get at 'em, either.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And they're so giant. You know, one is 42 inches by four inches thick by 14 feet long. Perfect

wood. Not a knot, not a check. Nothing wrong with it. Perfect. It's not the highest grade of rosewood, it's Honduras rosewood; but I think it's as beautiful as any of it; because it's almost alizarin crimson. It's really deep red, and very stable and very consistent. I can't see anything around here -- I've probably got some of it at home -- you know, that I used. And then I bought also from the same guy -- Dan and I went in on a unit of mahogany. And Dan didn't want the big ones, so I said, "I'll take the big pieces." So I have some -- two boards.

Let me show you this. Let's turn that off.

[Break]

MR. ADAMSON: This is the second disk of the interview with Garry Bennett. We're just talking about moving from the clocks into the furniture, buying wood and so forth.

You know, one thing that struck me about the photo that's in the book is that a lot of the members of the Baulines Guild are in it -- Grif Okie, Don Braden, Tom D'Onofrio, some other guys.

MR. BENNETT: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: And I was wondering about your involvement with that organization.

MR. BENNETT: Well, you know, they were the only guys, the only furniture guys. I mean, again, I'm over here in Oakland; Don's here, and Neal Wehrle and that, but I'm just -- you know, I really was by myself, because I never went to a damn furniture show. "What's that?" You know? And I'd go to my art friends' shows, painting shows and shit like that. But they got me into it. And a good group of people. I mean, you know, Grif Okie is one of the really neat guys around.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And Bruce McQuilkin and Braden and Art and all that. I'm not a joiner, you know? I mean, these people that were here the other night, they wanted me to join. I said, "No, no. I don't like to join -- I don't like to belong to anything." Kind of Groucho Marx Syndrome or something, you know; if they want me a member, they're questionable. But I have done things with them and that. We've opened our house for them for the guild. Nice people.

I guess this probably is -- I don't know how this is going to be disseminated, but the thing is, a lot of these things are self-serving; you know, "How can we get our membership, the individuals in our guild, more commissions?" and this and that. I'd be really interested in 15, 20 people sitting around drinking and talking about, "What's all this about?" instead of "Who's got the money?" or "How are we going to raise this?" or "Who wants to volunteer to sit in the gallery?" So I've never been a big part of it, although the people in it are good, hardworking, honest.

MR. ADAMSON: And you have been a member since those days pretty continuously?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. I don't know when I -- they gave me honorary membership, but I pay dues.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So what did you think when you first went up to Art's place in Bolinas?

MR. BENNETT: Well, I kind of pooh-poohed it, to be truthful with you.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I said, "Who's this fuckin' old guy out here? A goddamn midget working out in the mushrooms."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And then I met him a couple more times, and then I realized, you know, I'm fortunate, you know? I mean, because I went there kind of cocky. Not cocky, nobody knew who I was, but I knew what I was. Okay? And it wasn't what Art was doing. You know, but Art's infinitely more creative than Sam. And I love them both, and I respect both of them's work.

MR. ADAMSON: Sam Maloof?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. But then, you know, you listen to this guy and you listen to a guy that's really honest about it; he doesn't have a factory making his income for him and shit like that; you know, he's down in the trenches, slugging it out. And I think we're very good friends for quite a while now, because Don took me over there, geez, I don't know, 25 years ago or so. Yeah, at least that. Twenty-five years? Twenty-five would be '75. Yeah, probably right now 25 years.

MR. ADAMSON: But you felt like -- actually, I've always wondered this. Did you feel like you had sort of moved past what he was doing --

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And don't put that in there, but that's all right. You know.

MR. ADAMSON: I mean, because you --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, because I come from a different -- you know, he's one generation before me. And I have a number of pieces of Art's that I admire and I like and I respect. But yeah, I just felt I want to know him not as a mentor but as a friend, because he's got a lot of stuff to say, knows what he's doing, and is brutally honest. So, yeah, I felt that we would never have to worry about being competitors, you know. So. I've never felt with anybody, you know, that I'm competing with them. You know, Wendell or --

MR. ADAMSON: Well, he's the one that springs to mind, right?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, but Wendell and I, we just don't compete. I mean, I think we revel in each other's successes. You know? And I still believe he's probably got as much talent as anybody in the field. But again, we're getting old. He wants to secure his old age, so his stuff is getting -- you know, and Wendell does crank it out, man. I mean, there's no question about it. But I showed you that bowl there, and you said, "Really?" And he's got it. It's just that he's got other fish to fry. But fortunately, I think he's -- "fortunately" -- he might see it unfortunately -- I think fortunately for him, as a friend -- he's back in the studio now.

MR. ADAMSON: When did you first meet him? This is Wendell Castle we're talking about.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, it's a great story, man. It's the greatest story in the world. I first saw him -- at that point in my life, I don't know what year, but I started taking *Fine Woodworking*. I got the first one, you know. Somebody said, I think Braden said, "Hey's there's a new woodworking" --

MR. ADAMSON: The magazine.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, the magazine. I got the first one, with a gray cover, you know, nothing on it. And then I'd wait for those to come, and I'd read them. And then I'd keep seeing this guy Wendell Castle, Scottsville, New York, and his work. And I thought, "Yeah, that's all right. Not what I'm doing." Because he's big swoopy, and I'm rectilinear. You know?

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And so one time we were invited to Joan Mondale's place [the Vice President's house, when Walter Mondale was in office]. There was a show at the American Craft Museum. She borrowed a piece of mine, and Wendell was really famous, and they had to have Wendell. I looked across the room; that must be that Wendell guy; never talked to him there. Never said a word to him, then they brought a cake out. Happy Birthday to Wendell, you know; some Filipino carrying a goddamn cake with 38 candles on it or whatever. And I'm thinking, "Aw, sonofabitch," you know? "Goddamnit." So I never talked to him. And I think I had just met Sam, so we talked a little. Well, Sam talked and I listened, as you know Sam.

[Laughs.] [Speaking to the microphone] Hi, Sam. I still love ya. Even though you are a Christian.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: So I never talked to Wendell. But then Dale Nish had that thing in Provo.

MR. ADAMSON: Provo, Utah.

MR. BENNETT: Another milestone. I don't care what anybody says, that was something very special.

MR. ADAMSON: You're talking about his wood turning symposium in Utah ["State of the Art '80" Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And they invited -- I remember I flew out with Sarah Jaffe and Art Carpenter. We went out in the same plane.

MR. ADAMSON: Who's Sarah Jaffe?

MR. BENNETT: She was a local -- is, now back -- she phoned me a while back and said, "Why don't you come over?" I don't know. I don't think she's done very well. Okay? But they had me to give, you know, a slide show and all that. But I remember, man -- David Elsworth was there. I mean, for wood turners, that was probably a big deal.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: For me it was just, hey, man, I get to go, show my slides. And I knew some of the people. I met Will Maloof, you know, who was a weird guy. Dukhobor. Do you know what Dukhobors are? They're some Russian religious sect. They burn books. They don't believe in books. But he was a big -- anyway.

So I remember they had the opening dinner at, you know, one of the things on campus there, some fairly big hall. You know, roast beef and chicken and iced tea. No booze, obviously. I remember I'm sitting in the back, sitting in the corner, I think with Art, maybe, and somebody else, and I look, and this guy comes in the door. It's Wendell. It's Wendell Castle. And that motherfucker saw me, came over, and he stuck out his hand. And he says, "Garry, it's about time we meet each other." And that was it. We've been solid ever since. That was his initiation. It's not like him to do that, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Because he's not arrogant. People think he's arrogant and uppity. He's shy. He's a real shy guy. And fuck, man, I mean, ever since then we've really hit it off. Yeah. So that's my famous woodworker first meeting. Well, I'd met Sam.

MR. ADAMSON: You met Sam all the way back in the '70s as well, when you met Art?

MR. BENNETT: I can't remember when I first met Sam. And when I first met him, it was probably through Stocksdale; I've known Stocksdale for quite a while.

MR. ADAMSON: Bob Stocksdale?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And I probably didn't really realize who he was when I met him. You know? Again, being totally unsophisticated in this furniture thing.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, what did you think when you met all these people? I mean, you probably didn't even have the phrase "studio furniture" back then.

MR. BENNETT: No. No. Yeah, right.

MR. ADAMSON: So what did you think of this stuff? I mean, did it ring a bell with you?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you think it was bizarre?

MR. BENNETT: God, we made some -- not we, not me -- I think I did, but I mean what was going on out here was, quote, the old -- you know, "California roundover."

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: But, boy, I mean, there were some -- Jesus Christ, Dale Hollub made some good stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Jim Bacigalupi. I tried to buy Dale Hollub's piece from Helena Foster, and she said, "No, no, no." And I tried to buy Bacigalupi's piece from Bacigalupi, and he said, "No, no." They're classic -- these are not big names, but someday, you know, we're talking big-time *Antique Road Show*.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I know.

MR. BENNETT: I mean, this is the quintessential. So all of my orientation was West Coast. There was a couple guys up in Mendocino, and there was one -- I can't remember his name right now -- but did some beautiful kind of art -- very beautiful art deco desks and stuff. Beautiful. Worked in a goddamn windy barn. Man, I mean, the fuckin' sea just, you know -- God, beautiful stuff, man.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you know Michael Cooper up there?

MR. BENNETT: I met Michael Cooper through Sal Pecoraro, who taught with him at De Anza. And before I met Michael, I saw that show he had at the Frisco Museum of Modern Art. Blew me away. To this day. *Gun in Proper Perspective*. It's a big pistol, and it's got big swoop to it, so when you're looking at it -- a big barrel and then it goes down to a little handle. And all the motorcycles and stuff. Yeah.

Well, Michael's a -- I don't know, I mean, I like his work, but he's one of these guys -- and I'm sure this is not

going to come out in any publication, is it?

MR. ADAMSON: No.

MR. BENNETT: Okay. He's one of these guys -- I have great admiration, great respect, love what he does -- but he's one of these guys that when he gets an idea, it's damn good, but I see a lot of people I don't think they have a lot of ideas, so they spend a lot of time on one thing that they're doing. Now, I don't know if that's true or not, but I can't imagine spending more than a week on a piece. These guys spend a month or, you know, two months or three months on a piece. And it's very beautiful, but it's, like, "Okay, I gotta make this a little better because I won't have to dream up the next one." Now, maybe it's self-serving, like, "I don't want to work this hard again, so I'm not going to think of the next one," as they're making it more and more perfect.

Is this making sense?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, it is.

MR. BENNETT: As they get more and more perfect, you know, working harder and harder, then they just, "Okay, well, I gotta do another one," so then they start another big project.

Michael Cooper did this thing; for a while he did these beautiful busts of these female torsos, you know? And what he did is he got a chick and made a body mold. Okay? So then he was going to make a router, a duplicating router, and he could put the plaster up here, and he'd put the fuckin' log over here, and it would go, "Vrum, vrum, vrum, vrum, vrum." Well, the goddamn -- Michael told me the router took him about six months to make. It's a beautiful -- I don't know if he's still got it -- a beautiful machine, I mean, as only he could build it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know, ball bearings and, Jesus Christ, I mean, perfect.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Then when he built it, he realized his studio was too small to do this in, so he built a big part on this studio. So it took him, like -- he said it took him, like, 18 months to get the router up and going. Eighteen months might be exaggeration, but it was a good six or eight months just to go, "Wreemm, wreemm, wreemm, wreemmmg, wreemmmg, wrmmmg, wrmmmg, wrmmmmg, done."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: [Laughing] You know. I mean, done in, like, two hours!

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughing] And he -- was carving -- 20 of them.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah! Jesus Christ! But that's the way he thinks, man. And that's cool. You know, that's cool.

Wendell's been able to lavish a lot of attention to finishes because he's always had a lot of people working for him. The few times that I've had people working for me, I've done the same thing. I've got some guy over there sanding, and you give them sanding paper, you know; you say, "Oh, sand the shit out of this." For me, sanding is maybe one twenty, max. You got somebody working for you, and you don't want to be interrupted, three twenty. You know?

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And that's what it is. So you find yourself giving these people these jobs that are just deadly. You know? But that's what Wendell can do, because, God, I watched him work with Don one time over there at his place, and Wendell could just walk up to this -- he pulled down this roll of kraft paper. I watched him do a chair, and it's that chair -- I have it at the house. It's that one that Silas Kopf did the marquetry on.

And Wendell's got a facility that -- well, I haven't been around a lot, but he pulled this down, clipped it on the bottom, got a pencil out, and says, "Okay, Don, I'd like to do a chair like this." And he starts drawing. "And the legs should come down like this," he draws, and he's got probably a full-size chair in three dimensions, I mean, drawn three -- a quarter view, beautifully rendered, no erasures, and he says, "I'd like to do this." It's like a little Queen Anne chair, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: Mm-hmm.

MR. BENNETT: And then Wendell says, "Okay, what kind of joint do you think we should use here?" And they discuss the type of joint, and off to the side they'd draw the joint up. That was it. "Okay, let's make it." And Don

could do that. So I never had that, you know? Nobody that I've had here has had that ability. Dan is an amazing craftsman but, you know, doesn't like to, you know, go off on a -- but I can say, "Hey, let's do this." I mean, Dan basically built that *Boston Kneehole*.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Oh, yeah. I mean, we worked on it together, but he's the guy that really liked to do everything perfect.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: If I did that alone, it would still be exactly what you see, but those fits and that stuff wouldn't be that good.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, maybe we should back up for a minute, then, because it seems like you're getting at something that was really important to you in the late '70s, which is the issue of technique and how perfect you wanted a piece to be when you were going to make it. And obviously the *Nail Cabinet* is sort of this towering object in that period of time for you, or at least it's been received that way since. I don't know how you looked at it when you made it.

MR. BENNETT: I'm tired of it, but I'm glad I still own it, because somebody will get it -- you know, some institution will get it someday. Sylvia and I have pretty well decided some institution will get it. I'd like somebody to pay the kids something for it.

MR. ADAMSON: Before we even talk about the *Nail Cabinet*, which I think we should do, you know, you were at this point where you were making furniture finally, after going through the clocks and so forth, and it seems like you were taking a really different stance than someone like Sam Maloof, who was making the same chair over and over and over again.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And from the get-go, it was really important for you to make different things each time you sat down.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. And I guess what I'm curious about is how you --

MR. BENNETT: It goes back to how many ideas you have. It's easy for me. I've got more ideas than time.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: So real easy.

MR. ADAMSON: So, not a lot of patience for the technique and fine, finicky details.

MR. BENNETT: No. I think I'm a good craftsman. I mean, I just, if something's not quite right, I don't worry about it. I've done some dovetails, you know. Not hand-cut. Well, yeah, one hand-cut.

MR. ADAMSON: One?

MR. BENNETT: No, no, I mean a table that's got four dovetails hand-cut.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: They're great big dovetails. Shit, man, they're three inches across and an inch and a half deep. You know? I thought it was hot shit. Knocked that sucker together. Anyway --

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: [Pause.] Oh, I lost it. I just lost it.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, we're just talking about, you know, the importance of technique in what you do.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. I don't care about it. Back to the Michelangelo analogy. I mean, I'm not at that level, but I've got enough of it that I can carry my idea. And my use of metal. You know, the way I use metal is not decorative. It ends up decorative, but it's an integral part of the piece. And I get to get away with all sorts of shit by using metal. You know? I mean, strength issues. And easy joining issues. And again, my work, when you

really look at my work, someday somebody will, and they'll say, "He's a two-dimensional guy." I'm drawing. Very seldom do I go around that corner. So everything I do is all line. The curves, you know, the verticals and that.

MR. ADAMSON: You think metal serves your purpose in that respect?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It's also nice material, but it's strong. I'm looking at this piece over here now. You know, that's a three-inch aluminum -- square aluminum tubing. It's really the total structure of that piece that holds it all together, and it's really strong. And it all comes apart. That's the other thing. See, Wendell's chair doesn't come apart. If I made that chair, it would come apart so I could say, "Oops, geez, that's wrong," and take it apart and change something. Very little of my work is all glued together. I can't think of very much at all. This thing comes apart, totally apart. The drawer cases come off. They unscrew. Because I don't do any drawings. So I've got to be really screwing with it as I go along.

MR. ADAMSON: You really design it through the process rather than previous to the process.

MR. BENNETT: Mm-hmm. I couldn't imagine drawing a piece of furniture up and say, "Okay, here are the plans" and make it. It's beyond me.

MR. ADAMSON: Which is what Wendell does, basically.

MR. BENNETT: Mm-hmm. Well, no, I think Wendell will make a very rough drawing. If I'm thinking of Wendell, I'm thinking of fairly big volumetric shapes. So he needs some road map to give to a guy, say, "Okay, glue this up 18 inches, you know, with hollows here and here, and then this thing on the bottom." And he needs that. And Wendell's a great carver. Boy, you see him work, man, you know, he's as good as anybody, get in there, drawknife and chisels and shit.

And an aside: Wendell and I went -- I talked him into going to Penland [Penland School of Crafts, Penland, North Carolina, 1994] one time, which is really hard to talk Wendell into anything.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: But he had a good time. He had a good time because he knew he would meet Phil Hanes through me. [Laughs.] So anyway, he kind of enjoyed it. But we made a collaborative piece.

MR. ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. It's in the book.

MR. BENNETT: It's really good!

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: The only photographs I have of it, the piece is unfinished. But you know, I've looked at that a couple times; I just showed it the other night in the slide show, and our aesthetic is, you know, bang-on. I mean, it's not two different guys doing something. I would have to admit I couldn't have made those legs, but he could have made the top that I made, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: But he wouldn't have, necessarily.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, he might have, but -- yeah. Goddamn, man, I watched him carve those legs. That's a lot of work.

MR. ADAMSON: So you're not a carver.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, no. I might be a carver, or might have been if I ever had anybody working for me that could sharpen a chisel.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: I can sharpen a chisel, but it's just pain and agony, man. You know? I needed a real sharp chisel the other day, so I goddamn sharpened one of my chisels. Got real sharp. But I watched Paul Sasso sharpen his chisels. Ping, ping, ping, ping. Like, two minutes. Razor edge.

MR. ADAMSON: Because he does it all the time.

MR. BENNETT: He does it all the time. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Well, when you look back at your work from the late '70s, like pre-*Nail Cabinet* work,

before we were recording, you were saying that you find some of that -- like the *Lipstick Bench* we were talking about downstairs -- you find it rough.

MR. BENNETT: Well, it's slick rough. Turn that off. We'll walk over. I'll show you.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

[Recording paused.]

MR. ADAMSON: We were just talking about the original *Lipstick Bench*, and Garry was comparing it to basically a commission that he's doing of the same form.

MR. BENNETT: Not a commission. I don't do commissions. [To microphone] I don't do commissions.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: No, it's just that Sylvia sold this bench, and then I realized it has a particular significance that I'll show you also later. It's quite interesting, actually. So I agreed to make another one.

MR. ADAMSON: But comparing what he's doing now with the same form to the original construction.

MR. BENNETT: Right. It's almost identical.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: And I was just telling Glenn that these top pieces are solid wood, one piece of redwood soft. So if anything falls against it, instead of like a car fender, a rock hitting it and you get a little chip of paint, if something falls, you get a dent because there's nothing -- you know, it's very hard paint, lacquer, and a very soft underlayment. The one downstairs, I hope I've taken care of by fiberglassing, and you should be able to drop it off the building and maybe get a dent in it. But that one there wouldn't go very good.

MR. ADAMSON: So you really added to your arsenal of technical expertise in terms of the materials and processes that you're in control of.

MR. BENNETT: In a way. But you know, I have a friend, Steve Akana, he's up on all the new technical stuff. I'm a Luddite. You know, I'll work with what I know and the things that I'm familiar with, but there are materials out there now that are so good, so quick, but that kind of lose that hands-on look. And the fiberglass one, I get to this point -- that's downstairs -- the fiberglass is starting to lose -- once you do that, then you start to make this perfect, slick surface, and there's other ways to do it. I'm not too sure what they are, but there's other ways to do it. So even the one down there, if we're shooting for a "10," that one over there is a "5," and the one downstairs is a "8." And if I wanted to do a "10," there wouldn't be any wood in that sucker at all; it would be all made out of metal, and then licked out and sprayed with emeron paint, catalytic paint. Man, that would go through an atom-bomb attack and it would be perfect.

MR. ADAMSON: But that kind of perfectionism isn't something you're interested in.

MR. BENNETT: I would like to be able to send it off to somebody and say, "Do this," and I'd -- "Hey, look what I made!" -- but I'm working here by myself, and I'm not willing to take the time to paint, plus I'm painting downstairs; it's real cold, would fill the shop up with lacquer fumes. Kind of good, you get a little dizzy; it's kind of like you're high. Well, actually, yeah, sometimes. So, no, it doesn't interest -- making the thing interests me; you know, "Oh, I've got an idea, I'm going to do that!" and then making it. And within the -- ooh, God, this is going to sound corny -- but within the respect of the piece -- you know, what it is -- making it as best I can. And if it's a real quickie, you know, then things don't have to be that perfect. Or if it's, like, just popped into my mind, that *Tangarry Chest*.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know, I never cared for that all that much until I saw it in the museum, and then I realized really what a good goddamn piece that is. That was a lot of work. That was more than my one-week boredom time, I'll tell you. That was a lot of work. And I used to wait for people to come by and visit me, because I can't bend down or squat or anything.

So I'd wait for people to come because I was working by myself and it's a really big thing. And I remember one time I needed to turn it over, and Leon came by.

MR. ADAMSON: Leon who?

MR. BENNETT: Leon Paulos, friend of mine.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: And, you know, I was waiting for somebody to stop by for a visit. We talked a little bit. I said, "Leon, help me turn this thing over, will ya?"

"Oh, yeah, sure, Garry."

Goddamn it, it was up on sawhorses. Picked this thing up. I says, "Okay, let's just go this way and we'll turn it right on over." We picked it up -- [grunting] -- started over, every fuckin' drawer fell out. I'd left the drawers in it. They all hit the floor, man. All that satinwood, and dings. And, oh, we just stood looking at each other like Laurel and Hardy, man. You know: "What a dumb thing to do!" It's my fault, not Leon's. But anyway, when I saw that thing in New York, you know, I appreciated it. It's very different than a lot of things I've done. It's all my stuff, but it's very formal, wouldn't you say?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know? That's the only thing I ever drew out.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BENNETT: It's the only piece of furniture I ever drew out. And I didn't draw it out, but I did -- I did know kind of how big I wanted the carcass. And at that point, then I drew it out, and I think I drew it out full size. I got some kraft paper. And then I wanted to proportion the drawers and the doors. I had to. I couldn't just wing that.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: So that was -- I mean, it's got 27 drawers in it or some God-awful amount. You know, a lot. So that was drawn out, only just proportions for size of drawers and where they went.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, why did you want to make a piece like that, that was so --

MR. BENNETT: I don't know. [Laughs.] I don't know.

MR. ADAMSON: It does seem very aberrant in your --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Probably it's when I was at the height of messing with the gold plating with the electroprints and that. And I'd just been farting around with -- and I wanted to do that again here a while back, and I couldn't remember how I did it. But I had been screwing around with that technique. And basically what started that thing was the doors, the panels. I says, "I want to put this technique in something." And then I said: "Garry?" And Garry answered: "Yes?" I said: "What kind of wood do you want to use?" Well, I had just gotten a whole bunch of Australian satinwood, "silky oak," we call it. And I figured that's a good color with that. You know? And so away we go.

MR. ADAMSON: And it obviously was the culmination of your interest in Japanese furniture design, as well.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. I goddamn admire 'em. I don't like their culture, but I like them. Every Japanese person I've met, I really like. And they're goofy, man. They go and bomb our people in Pearl Harbor. I don't cotton to that shit! [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: You've got a grudge from that, huh?

MR. BENNETT: When was the -- yeah, 60th, you know, it was just a couple of years ago. For a whole year I signed every piece "12741" [as in 12/7/41, but written without the slashes].

MR. ADAMSON: For Pearl Harbor?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. For one year, those pieces are all signed that. There's no slashes, because it's almost like a number, quality-control number. It's stupid of me, but I have some personal experience with a Japanese company, and they're still very arrogant people. The higher-ups, you know, they're really arrogant. They're still "shoguns," "samurais," and that. And we smell like meat. You know? And they still -- you know, they don't like us. No big deal. I don't care. We got 285 million people, goddamn it, and we got a lot of resources. They got about 80 or 120 million and no resources. And they're not very well liked. We shouldn't even be here.

Okay, ask me some more questions.

MR. ADAMSON: It's interesting to, I think, think about the *Tangarry Chest* in relationship to the *Nail Cabinet*, because in a way, the *Tangarry Chest* is everything that -- you know, all the aspects of fine technique --

MR. BENNETT: Bells and whistles.

MR. ADAMSON: -- bells and whistles are in there. And you did it after the *Nail Cabinet*.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And it's interesting because the *Nail Cabinet* seems to be a repudiation of all that in some ways.

MR. BENNETT: Well, there's been a lot written about it.

MR. ADAMSON: I know.

MR. BENNETT: And it's like -- Kelsey knows as much about it as anybody, but he also likes to author it up somewhat, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: This is John Kelsey, who is the editor of *Fine Woodworking*.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Make sure all these people get mentioned.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: But it's been a -- you know, I've thought about it quite a bit. It's witnessed, as you're well aware. Neal Wehrle and Steve Akana witnessed the nail driving. I don't know. Arthur Danto says he took beauty, put her over his knee and spanked her or whatever. I don't know that shit. I don't know why I did it. I probably did it -- I knew it was going to make a point.

And I can pretty honestly say that right at that time I had a reaction to, you know, all the little perfect finishes, East Coast guys, all their walnut and their dovetails. So I've got finger joints, dovetails, compound miters in that thing.

And those were beyond me when I did them. I mean, they vexed my spirit. But with manpower and awkwardness, you can get through anything. Or every pig finds an acorn. You know? So it definitely was a statement.

You know, I'm glad it's getting the ink it gets. Fuck, that thing put me on the map. And that's where it's all at, people remembering your name. And then if you're good and you can keep that going, that's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. There are some people who get a big reputation, you know, and 10 years from now, where are they? You know, Peter Maxx.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: You know, Walter Keane. Kinkade? Jesus Christ, man! Aggh! Did you ever see that *60 Minutes* thing on Kinkade? Just make your fuckin' scrotum shrink up into your throat.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: The guy is -- he just doesn't get it! And LeRoy Neiman never got it. Anyway, I go off. But it's like, I think, if you do something and you're good and people remember your name, it all helps.

MR. ADAMSON: You really felt like when you did the *Nail Cabinet*, it did that for you, for your reputation?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, I didn't do it for that at the time!

MR. ADAMSON: No, I know.

MR. BENNETT: No, I just did it.

MR. ADAMSON: But it had that effect.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, it certainly did. Jesus! *Fine Woodworking*, the back cover, Wendy and my pieces on there? Oh, boy. Yeah! I mean, I'm still known as "the nail guy." I mean, I go to some of these things and some guy says, "Aren't you the guy that put the nail in the cabinet?"

"Yep, I sure am."

“Boy! Why did you do that?” You know?

And after all these years. There’s some guy working in his basement’s got this image in his head of some nail, five feet long, sticking through this cabinet, or whatever it is. Never seen the piece.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: So it’s cool. It’s good. It gets people -- gets their little gray cells working.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you know you were going to drive a nail into it from the moment you started building it?

MR. BENNETT: Pretty close in, because it just got to be such a bitch to do, man. I mean, I was working beyond my abilities, okay? Truly. I mean, I was working with fuckin’ paduk, man, this exotic wood. It looks so beautiful when you mill it. It’s orange. But it all goes gray -- or brown, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And it was a struggle. And what started it was getting the glass. I bought a bunch of glass from some glass shop.

MR. ADAMSON: It was curved already.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I thought, shit, I can make a cabinet. And there’s a mix-up in dating at the museum, and it’s in the book, too, Andy and Ginny’s cabinet. You know, *Exact Replica*. But it’s made in poplar and redwood and cherry.

MR. ADAMSON: The one with the painted surfaces.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I like that much better. A much better piece. Much better piece. And I’m almost positive -- I know I built that after the *Nail Cabinet*. But their piece, the date on it pre-dates the *Nail Cabinet*. And I think I know why. I think when I signed it to them -- because that had never been shown either -- I probably forgot when I made it, because it was later on. It had been hanging around the studio. So I think that’s the mix-up. [Speaking to microphone] And this is for history now, folks. But that’s the only thing I can figure. I’m sure the *Nail Cabinet* came first. But their piece has an earlier date, which I don’t think is correct. But, you know, no big deal.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, that’s good to know, still.

MR. BENNETT: If someday somebody fuckin’ scratches their head and thinks about this shit. I mean, maybe they’ll take little core samples of it and do carbon dating on it. You know.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughing] Yeah, right.

MR. BENNETT: They’ll be within six months. A hundred years from now, they’ll say, “Oh, no, no. This piece was made in” -- you know, September of 70-something or whatever it is.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, I’m going to harp on the *Nail Cabinet*, because I know everyone’s going to want me to, right?

MR. BENNETT: Sure.

MR. ADAMSON: It sounds, from talking to you about it right now, it sounds like you almost drove the nail into it because you almost hated the thing by the time you were done with it, because it had been a bitch to make.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, in a way. No, that’s really, you know, that’s -- but, I mean, God, I lavished more energy and more -- not thought, necessarily, but finish work and all that on that thing, and yeah, I was getting tired of it.

So you know, Glenn, I can’t tell you, man. I don’t know what went through my mind then. I know I didn’t -- I’m almost positive I didn’t do it to get the reaction it got. I did it because I really wanted to do it. Now, Kelsey lays out that I thought about it and did it. I did take the drawer out -- the door out. I took it off the piece because I knew, on that paduk, if I got a 16-penny nail and hit it with a hammer, that door would have just imploded in to the inside, those little knife-hinges. So I took the door out.

MR. ADAMSON: Just so you could do that.

MR. BENNETT: But when I hit that fuckin’ nail, man, I hit it. And that motherfucker that stole that nail in a show in New York, I’ll never forgive him -- you know? -- because I had to then put another nail in and hope.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And when I did hit it, it came out pretty good. And then I think I made a big mistake in wiring the nail down.

MR. ADAMSON: So the original one wasn't wired down like that?

MR. BENNETT: No.

MR. ADAMSON: It was sticking out?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And somebody at some show when nobody was looking -- eee-eee, eee-eee, eee-eee, eee-eee -- took the nail. You know? Damn. Damn!

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. It's frustrating.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. But that might be the beauty of that piece, man. That might be what's so fucking good about that piece, is because one of those drawers down there, as you know, some guy had a show -- and again, to the people that are listening to this 300 years from now -- anyway, had a show. This piece went all over the country, you know? I mean -- [mimicking] -- "Could we borrow the *Nail Cabinet*?"

"Oh, yeah, sure."

[Mimicking] "Far out, Garry Bennett's sending his *Nail Cabinet* again."

Anyway, one of the drawers, one of the narrow drawers down below, one day I pulled it out and looked, and it said, "This nail business is a stupid" -- have you ever read that?

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

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. "This nail business is a stupid idea." And it's signed Jose Sandoval. And it's, like, '83. And below that is "Wrong!" And some other guy signed it. [Laughing.] Like, '83, '87. You know? So one guy pulls it out, you know, he's going to make his little comment, and that's the beauty of the piece. I wouldn't dream of -- I mean, Sam might sand that off -- okay? -- or somebody else: "Hey, this is MY piece, man, you can't write on it," and just sand it off. That validates that fuckin' piece, man. I mean, that makes it so perfect.

MR. ADAMSON: Because it started that dialogue.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, absolutely, man. And then the other guy agreed with me. You know? "Wrong!" You know? He signed it. So in a span of four years, two guys pulled a drawer out in the middle of a show and got their pens out and did shit. Terrific. Terrific. That's -- I don't know what it is. You know, I'm not a big-time thinker from Eastern Europe, but I --

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: That's one of Jack's [writer John Marlowe] lines in the "Artist Statements." Oh, boy. "But then who were just a couple Jewish guys from Eastern Europe." You know? Ah, a beautiful, lovely line. But I know that those two things in there are very special. I mean, to me intellectually they just make the piece glow.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel that way about the rest of your work too, the way that the work generates a discussion adds to its meaning?

MR. BENNETT: Well, I don't think it anymore -- again, we're talking about this getting-old shit and wearing out. I don't know as it does. I think maybe if I can get this chair thing going, I think I can create some of that again. But early on, it was really fun to be, you know, a fuckin' Philistine at this show.

And somebody's looking at you: "Well, what's that metal for?"

"I don't know. Looks pretty good, doesn't it?" So, I mean, you look at what Gord Peteran does and these other people, yee boy, howdy, man, I'm really lucky. I'm lucky I smoked dope when I did and said, "Hey, I'll make a roach clip." I'm lucky when Sylvia said, "I'll marry you." And I'm lucky I decided to make furniture when I did. I could have said, "Oh, I think I'll go back to sculpture." Whoosh. Goner. You know?

I think nowadays you look at this stuff and, "Whoa!" you know? But I got this fuckin' flash, man. It's like everybody's trying to be different and wow everybody else. I don't know how much soul's in this stuff. I could talk like the old man and say, "Well, back in the old days, we had soul." I don't mean that. But Sam's best chair is one of those first ones. Real kind -- just beautiful, man. And Art's stuff. Of course, Art's stuff has still got soul.

But we weren't trying to -- here's what I think. We weren't trying to market ourselves. We were making stuff; and if it sold, terrific. Now it's all, "What's the gallery going to like? What can I sell? What sells best?" You know? And I still never go by that criteria. If it was what sells best, I'd be back down there making clocks. You know? I'd be fuckin' cranking out clocks. And I think what's happening now is things are so expensive, gas and your housing and your tools and your materials. And your employees. Bingo. Your employees, you know? Who needs a fuckin' employee? Art didn't need an employee. Sam didn't for a long time. I didn't, don't. You know? Then things start changing.

[Speaking to someone in the room] Did you catch your leg?

MRS. BENNETT: No, but I'm afraid somebody might.

MR. BENNETT: Well, "somebody" will be you, so just put it back on the table here. Glenn didn't like it, so I put it down there.

MR. ADAMSON: Glenn likes it.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, I know, I was just kidding you.

So anyway, you see what I'm saying? I think commerce has got in here. I look at stuff and I say, "Fuck, man, that's really good," but in a way I'm looking for the soul. You know? Tommy Simpson's still got a lot of soul in his stuff. And I don't mean to run a liturgy of people that I admire and don't admire, but I think Tommy works by himself. I think that's a criteria, man. I mean, you know, people call me an artist once in a while, and I say, "No, no, I'm a furniture maker. And I'll go for 'decorative artist' if you want."

I just lost it. And I had a good one right there, man. I really had something good. Aw, damn. Aw, fuck. Too much Jack Daniels. Too much red wine.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: But I like this state. I like this part of drunkenness, you know. There's a real clarity. Aw, fuck, I lost it.

MR. ADAMSON: Soul?

MR. BENNETT: Soul, yeah. We were talking about soul.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, let me ask you this. This is going to bring up a new topic, I guess. But was there a moment when you felt like there was a challenge to the integrity of what you were doing because of the commercial reception of it?

MR. BENNETT: My commercial reception of it?

MR. ADAMSON: Your work.

MR. BENNETT: No. I just felt, geez, I felt real lucky, man, that people liked it and were buying it. No. Again back to what you were talking about, I do have this income, not very large, but I guess it's most than more make -- more than most make, most than more make -- more than -- And it's not a lot. It's really not a lot. I mean, the people I sell to make hundreds of times as much as I do. But I make more than a teacher. I do all right. I wish I made as much as a bad lawyer.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Shit. Fuck. I'm losing it, man. What did you just ask me?

MR. ADAMSON: Well, I'm particularly thinking about, say, the early '80s. You did a ColorCore show ["Material Evidence: Master Craftsmen Explore ColorCore," 1984-85].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Ooh, good show.

MR. ADAMSON: Great show.

MR. BENNETT: Great show.

MR. ADAMSON: You come out there. You're in there with the heavy hitters, biggest names in the field, and your piece is the primary piece in the show.

MR. BENNETT: Goddamn, boy, I loved it.

MR. ADAMSON: That ColorCore desk.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: By far the “killer piece” in the show. The one that everyone thinks really defines the show.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It’s viewed that way historically, and it was viewed that way at the time. What did that feel like for you?

MR. BENNETT: Real good. Yeah, again back to what I was saying, when I’d go to a show and said, “Hey, I got the best piece in the show.” And I knew that when I went there. I knew that when I went through the show. I knew I was top dog. You know? I’d known Wendell for a couple of years at that point. I was a little worried about him.

MR. ADAMSON: Worried how?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, just, you know, that he’d really -- but he didn’t listen to the guys describing how you have to treat this shit. You have to abrade. He tried to glue a bunch up and it all fell apart, so he made a little, you know, tea cup on a table.

Another piece that I liked in that show was Judy McKie’s piece, just because of the graphic nature of it. I mean, she didn’t -- you know, she realized she could glue two pieces of it together and rout through it and get a two-colored thing. But again, Judy’s graphics are so strong anyway. And I think it was Rick Wrigley’s -- I’m not too sure whose piece it was, maybe [Mitch] Ryerson’s piece, the hall stand. Did he make that, that hall seat with the hooks?

MR. ADAMSON: I think so.

MR. BENNETT: I kind of liked it because it was so wacky, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: It was so goddamn wacky. Mine was, let’s face it, very elegant. I made the most elegant piece in that show. And I know it. And I’m not bragging or anything. I mean, everybody treated that as, “Oh, wow, new material.” And I said, “Well, this is hot shit.” And they don’t make it anymore. I’ve tried to buy it.

MR. ADAMSON: The ColorCore? Really?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It’s not made. I would be using it to this day. I love the material. I mean I love it.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, that came from Bernice Wollman and Judy Coady from Workbench [Gallery at Workbench, New York, New York], right?

MR. BENNETT: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: The idea of working with it?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: They sent you a bunch of it?

MR. BENNETT: Well, I mean, ColorCore was -- who makes it? Not DuPont. Whoever makes it. What do we all have? Formica.

MR. ADAMSON: Formica. Right.

MR. BENNETT: So we went back there. They instigated that show and we went back there. Remind me about the first Workbench show, too.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: We went back there and they -- well, they didn’t fly us back, because Workbench was doing it, but all the other guys -- [laughing] -- were East Coast guys. They could get in their car and drive down. I got in an airplane. Okay? But they had the guys there, the technicians, and they went through this stuff with us, and I realized, boy, this is cat’s-ass shit.

So when we got back, the show started rolling along, and Formica agreed to give each of us seven sheets of this

material. Well, I got really clever. I mean, I got goddamn clever. I wrote them a letter. And I said, "Dear Sir" -- "Dear Mr. Formica" or whatever it was, you know -- because they had given us all this who-to-write-to for technical. I said, "When I was at the meeting in New York, I didn't understand quite were we to get seven sheets or 14 sheets." And I said, "With 14 sheets, I could really get the colors that I needed."

I went over to B. R. Funsten over in Frisco -- they were a distributor -- and I put out this thing, and they looked at it. You know, and they had all the colors. Oh, God, it was, geez, like a yarn shop.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: They had all these sheets of Formica just lined up, from red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, and then the other side is sandalwood and sandy and, you know, then all the tints. So I got 14 sheets of this shit.

MR. ADAMSON: This is expensive stuff.

MR. BENNETT: Ah, God, even then it was expensive. At that time it was -- ah, God, I think it was probably like 130 bucks a sheet. Yeah. And now, when you can find it, it's like damn near \$300 a sheet. And they no longer make it. So, oh! Oh! So I've used it, and now I'm down to just little pieces. It's so sad. I just put some in a piece yesterday; I just let in some of this stuff yesterday. Orange and maroon. Ooh, the maroon is really good.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Goddamn good maroon.

MR. ADAMSON: And is it really nice stuff to work with?

MR. BENNETT: Mm-hmm. But you have to treat it as a synthetic. I mean, it's not like wood or anything like that, but God, it mills, and properly treated, it glues up. And it's stable and it's hard. You glue three or four together, you can't shoot a bullet through it. And those drawers there and the drawer in the ColorCore desk, you can do so much with it. I mean, if you want color, real crisp color. So, anyway.

MR. ADAMSON: So you really arrived with that, in a way.

MR. BENNETT: I think so, yeah. Well, yeah. But I think when I really arrived one time was American Craft Museum. They had a show there, when I had that -- we call it the Mondale piece, that little four-drawer chest up on the steps. And I had another piece in that, big aluminum and stuff. Yeah. Geez. Boy, those were the days.

MR. ADAMSON: Tell me about the first Workbench show [1980].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I mean, the first Workbench show, I had met Warren [Rubin] through Rob Kaufman.

MR. ADAMSON: Warren?

MR. BENNETT: Rubin. He's the guy who started Workbench and owned it.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see. Before Bernice Wollman had it [Bernice Wollman is married to Warren and now goes by the name Bernice Wollman Rubin]? [Pause.]

Okay, we were talking about the first Workbench show?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And I was in it. And I think I was in the last show, too.

MR. ADAMSON: It was a group show, though.

MR. BENNETT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But the first show, I had met Warren through Rob Kaufman, and we were out here and we really liked each other. And I remember we were sitting out in the back, and I knew Warren had -- no, wait, this is after. This is after. I had never met Warren, and he commissioned me to do his office. And I did the office. It's a very interesting tale. He phoned me because of Rob and said, "Yeah, Garry, blah, blah, blah, this and that." He says, "I want to do this office."

I said, "Okay, yeah. Fine." I said, "Send me some plans, the layout of the office, and I'll get back to you."

He said, "Okay." So a couple days later I get the plans and look at them, and I put them aside.

A month later, Warren phones me. He says, "Did you get the plans?"

I says, "Oh, yeah."

He says, "Well?"

"Oh, shit, I don't know. Jesus. Okay, you're serious?"

He says, "Yeah. Fuck yeah, fuckhead." You know, you know how Warren talks. "Yeah, cocksucker, sure I'm serious."

I say, "Okay, I'll get on it." So I looked at 'em and blah, blah, blah, and I figured, okay, do a credenza, a desk, and a conference table. So I phoned him back. I says, "Okay, Warren. I see a credenza against this wall, I see a really nice desk here, and a conference table."

He says, "Okay, good. Well, send me some drawings."

I said, "No, I don't do drawings."

He says, "You don't?"

I said, "No, no."

He says, "Well, how much will it be?" I'm paring all this down, basically.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: "Well, what do you think it will cost us?"

"Geez, I don't know."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: He says, "Okay." Marvelous human being, man. "Okay."

And he's got a great office. And I killed myself on this job. That was six months. My brother-in-law was working for me at the time, and we worked our asses off for six months. Fortunately -- oh, my God -- because this credenza goes between an outcrop, a pillar, you know, support in the building and then the wall. And I had all the architect's drawings; you know, the sizes. And I went back to New York -- maybe it was for this, to see Warren or whatever -- and I took a tape measure. And the architect was off. He was short -- or he was long by five inches. Thank God I checked. And you know, I was so proud. It's beautiful work. It really is beautiful work. And then it went into this very private office that nobody ever sees again.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: But he did show it; he did show my first show there -- we mounted it on the wall -- after I made that. Then we met; we met again. He came out here. And I think I was the guy that suggested, you know, "Jesus, you've got all this money and all that; you ought to have a gallery."

He says, "Well, let me think about it," and then, bop, Workbench. You know? And he said, "Do you know anybody that could run it?"

I said, "Well, yeah. I met this woman, Judy Coady." And I don't know where I met her. I can't remember where. Not right. Not right. I met Judy Coady -- yeah, that's right, that's right. I think I'm right. I met Judy Coady somewhere.

Oh! [Speaking to the microphone] Okay, take it all back, folks, you guys that are writing this down. Here's how it worked out.

I had my first show there, and Warren, they got kids from Cooper Hewitt or from some of the art schools to sit in the gallery. This was going to be an ongoing thing. It was down in the basement. It was a nice space, a big space.

And so I get this goddamn -- I get this letter from the Workbench, and it's a bunch of sales slips. You know? And I sold, I think, four pieces out of that show to this woman, Judy Coady. But it's just like: "Sold, Judy Coady," and they put a red sticker on it. No down payment. They didn't get any money. You know, somebody says, "Oh, I like this, I like this, I like this, put a red sticker on it." And when the show's over, you know, where's the money? "Oh, well, I didn't want it." But anyway, she did. But I phoned them up, and I says, "Shit, man, you got red stickers on stuff and no commitment."

MR. ADAMSON: So you're saying Judy Coady bought the pieces?

MR. BENNETT: That's right. That's right. And she came through. I mean, she came through with flying colors.

And then one time when I was in New York, Bernice was somewhere, and Warren and I got all boozed up and went over to Brooklyn -- Columbia Heights? Is that a place there in New York? Or what's that Heights where you overlook Manhattan? It's the real fancy part of Brooklyn? I think it's Columbia Heights, isn't it?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, it could be.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And they [The Coadys] had this beautiful fuckin' house. And Warren and I went there for dinner, and as we were talking -- and they've got a house full of craft. This was way back when.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: The good stuff, you know? And Warren just said at dinner, "Hey, you want a job?"

Judy says, "Yeah." So Judy's the one that started -- you know, she took over the gallery until it closed.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Right. After it was already underway.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. But it hadn't been underway that long, you know? It was just maybe a couple months.

MR. ADAMSON: I didn't realize you were so crucial in the founding of that gallery.

MR. BENNETT: I hope I'm not lying. I don't think I am. I know I suggested something like that. And Warren, being, you know, the ultimate entrepreneur, said, "Yeah, that's good, I'll get back to you on that."

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: So I think it was my idea for him to do it. And it was a good gallery because they had this tremendous -- oh, shit, I gotta tell Sylvia about Gloria. They had this tremendous PR department built in, a whole office. So any show there got a lot of press. They had gotten a small write-up in the *New York Times* Home Section for my show -- there was me standing there and the *Nail Cabinet* behind me, and there's a big bottle brush superimposed across the front of me, in the Thursday section of the *Times*. I was appalled. I was appalled. You know, "Garry Bennett and his *Nail Cabinet*." And "bottle brush, \$2.98."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Kind of perfect, in a way.

MR. BENNETT: Friday, Warren took Sylvia and I to Sparks, which is still one of my favorite restaurants in New York, took us to Sparks, we walked in, and the maitre d' says, "Oh, I saw you in the paper!" I mean, New Yorkers really look at their paper.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

MR. BENNETT: I mean, "You did? Did you see the bottle brush?" You know?

MR. ADAMSON: Well, that's indicative of a -- there's a line in the book, I think in Ned's essay ["Garry Knox Bennett: The Urban Cowboy as Furniture Maker," by Edward S. Cooke Jr.], where he says that basically your work always sold in East Coast venues --

MR. BENNETT: Absolutely.

MR. ADAMSON: -- much better than here.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, I couldn't sell it here. He's a little wrong; he said my work didn't sell that well. My work always sold.

Right now I'd like to get a plug in for Peter Joseph [Peter Joseph Gallery, New York]. You know? Goddamn, man, geez.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, let's talk about Peter Joseph.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, man. Geez. The best of the best. You know, I certainly -- I don't think I'd like to do business with him, but I mean, as a guy who really said, "Okay, this is a furniture gallery," you know, "and we're going to show furniture; not glass because we need the money; we're going to show furniture." And I remember I got a call one time from Cardell that said -- he phoned all the artists there, you know, Rosanne and everybody: "We would like to bring in" -- who's the jeweler guy in Florida that does the beautiful --

MR. ADAMSON: Hunter? Is that right?

MR. BENNETT: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Harper. William Harper.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, William Harper. And Cardell said, "We'd like to bring William Harper in. How do you feel about that?"

And I says, "That guy, man, is going to make us all look good. I'd go for it." And so that was the only -- but I think Peter had just bought -- they had kind of a big mix-up on a piece of jewelry, but that might be why he was in there at that time. But it was so nice, you know. People would go to New York, "collectors" -- quote -- would go to New York and they'd kind of think, "Oh, well, let's look at furniture." You know?

So, "Where do you go?"

"Oh, you go to Peter Joseph." So that's all they get, is furniture.

My situation now is I'll have a show at Leo Kaplan, and somebody will walk in: "Oh, look at that furniture." "Oh my God, look at that glass!" You know? Gone. I'm a goner. I'm done. I'm cooked.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. What do you think of the argument that has been made that Peter Joseph drove the prices in the field up too high?

MR. BENNETT: Might be true, but what they did, they had a screwy system, man. [Speaking to the microphone] This is for posterity here. I'm looking at the microphone.

They had a screwy goddamn system, and I objected like mad, although I got fairly good money for my work. They would take a piece in. Apparently you can't -- you know, by law, I can't control the retail price. So, "Okay, what do you want?"

"Okay, I want \$4,000 for this."

"Okay." Most galleries go \$8,000, double it. Well, they put 20 percent on that. So they put another 1,600 bucks on that, and so then the piece was \$9,600. And then anybody that walked in the door immediately got a 20 percent discount.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: And it's, "Oh, hey, terrific!" You know? So some guy that could have been a potential -- and this is what I told Peter, and when they did that, I think they stopped.

But some guy from the Midwest, potential collector, you know, and rich. So, "Oh, we got 20 percent off! Terrific! Come on, Love, we'll ship that back there, and we'll eat off it and all that." And then they're somewhere else and they say, "Oh, we got one of them there."

And they start talking about it, and the guy says, you know, "What did you pay?"

He says, "Well, I got 20 percent off."

He says, "Oh, now, geez, we got 30 percent off."

"Huh?" You know, it was bad business because it was some guy that wasn't aware that this was standard. And then the other people would go in there and push a little harder; they get to collect a 10 or 15 percent discount. And that makes bad blood. This guy now, this guy figures, "Hey, I got screwed."

I don't think -- you know, goddamn it, I don't think -- look at that fuckin' glass, the prices these guys are getting for glass, for Christ's sake! You know, Peter never pushed the prices up. Jesus Christ, man. Fuck! Jesus! You know, furniture's still cheap.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: I mean, you know, the master, Wendell Castle, you can still buy a piece of his for \$15,000 or \$20,000. Not a great big giant thing. No, it's not cheap. I don't think he drove the prices up, personally. I could be wrong, but I personally don't believe that he had anything -- if anything, he got -- you know, I used to fight with Rick for prices, especially after the \$200 profit on a major desk. Christ, Rick, this is -- you know. And that's why probably I've done all right, because mostly I made it myself. I don't have employees and all that. But when Alphonse and Rosanne were making stuff, they had one or two or three employees if they had a show. By the time they get through, they ain't getting' dick shit.

MR. ADAMSON: They've already spent it all, yeah.

MR. BENNETT: It's all gone.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about how you think Peter Joseph and the opportunity to show there and have one-person shows there influenced your work?

MR. BENNETT: It didn't influence my work; it just gave me a great venue. I mean, it's like Scotty. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll do this."

"Okay." And he was the same way. It wasn't, "Hey, well, we sold really good on that stuff last time."

MR. ADAMSON: So there was no pressure.

MR. BENNETT: No, there was none at all. No pressure at all. I'm trying to figure out the first show I had. I think it was clocks and lamps. And then I had one -- the clocks and lamps were only in two parts, I think. I'm not too sure. But then the last two shows I had there, I wanted the whole gallery. And I filled it up. The second one was the sideboards and tables and chairs and clocks and stuff. And then the last one was the "100 Lamps" show ["Garry Knox Bennett, 100 Lamps," Peter Joseph Gallery, New York, December 4, 1996--January 18, 1997].

MR. ADAMSON: I saw that show.

MR. BENNETT: My crowning achievement.

MR. ADAMSON: It was a great show.

MR. BENNETT: It's the one that I went in there and just goddamn smiled. You know? Because it was so easy to do, to make the pieces. I mean, they just flowed. They just -- bong, bong. Oh, boy. I hit a wall at about 60 or 65 and made a bunch of jewelry and then went back and finished it off. But it truly was, Jesus Christ, man, it was --

MR. ADAMSON: So you set yourself a project of making 100?

MR. BENNETT: Well, I started out with 25, and they said, "Oh, great." Then I phoned them up after -- I got 25 made in about a week.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: I phoned 'em up. I said, "Lookit, I'll make 50 clocks."

"Oh, okay. Better yet." And then, God, in a couple more months, I said, "Lookit, I'll do 100 clocks."

MR. ADAMSON: Lamps.

MR. BENNETT: Or lamps, rather. Yeah. And, "Okey-doke."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I really enjoyed that show. I mean, there's no great furniture; there's no lasting images from it, there really isn't. The buffet show was probably the best show I had there; it was big buffets. But the lamp show just was good. I mean, God, sit there and watch people, and they could touch something and it would light up, and, "Oh!" You know? For me it was a joyous show, and I think for the people who saw it.

And I had a hard time with them. I made them put that platform all the way around the gallery, which was the only way to do that.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: I mean, you couldn't do it any other way. You couldn't make enough pedestals, and you'd have cords and shit. It worked out good.

MR. ADAMSON: And it was one of the last shows at Peter Joseph, wasn't it?

MR. BENNETT: I think it was the last show.

MR. ADAMSON: Very last, maybe?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, I start some shows, Workbench. But I think I had the last show at the Workbench, too.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it a one-person show?

MR. BENNETT: Huh?

MR. ADAMSON: A one-person show?

MR. BENNETT: I think so.

MR. ADAMSON: Really.

MR. BENNETT: I'll have to -- Sylvia will know. I have a way of closing them down. Jesus Christ, man, I miss that gallery. But it was basically money. Scotty, he's in business. He's got to show what sells. And Peter could show what he liked. He was really a furniture guy. He had glass in there and stuff like that, but, I mean, basically it was furniture. Had you ever been up to his --

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I mean, geez, you know, Judy McKie, Wendell Castle, Garry Bennett, Tommy Simpson, John Dunnigan, you know? And one of the best rooms I've ever seen in my life was Tom Hucker's bathroom. That black marble bathroom with the water coming out of the wall? I mean, that guy, he's nuts, but boy, when he's on, he is so good. Ah. I had a show with him at Franklin Parrasch one time. And he was into aromas.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Franklin had to do business outside in the hall. The goddamn place smelled like a urinal. People would come in, "Geez, get out of here." I didn't sell shit out of that show.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] That's a bad pairing.

MR. BENNETT: He had those boxes with rocks and holes in them. I don't know, some Italian guy he went and studied with. Jesus Christ.

MR. ADAMSON: So, the galleries you show at these days, since Peter Joseph's closed, are really Leo Kaplan, Franklin Parrasch --

MR. BENNETT: No, no, not Franklin. I won't show at Franklin again, although we're very good friends now. But no, I don't want him to make any money off me.

I show with a guy in Frisco, Tercera Gallery.

MR. ADAMSON: Tercera?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And that's it.

MR. ADAMSON: And that's it, just those two.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I think.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you still deal directly with clients?

MR. BENNETT: No. No. No commissions. No, you know, it's really stupid, but life's too short.

MR. ADAMSON: So the reason you don't like to do commissions is because you feel like it inhibits you creatively? Is that fair to say?

MR. BENNETT: Sure. Somebody says, "I want it in green."

"No, you need orange."

"I want it in green."

"Well, I know a guy that really likes green."

No, my last commission was Warren's office. I think that was '82 or something.

MR. ADAMSON: Let me ask you this. Do you still feel you have an ax to grind with the crafts field, the

woodworking field?

MR. BENNETT: No. No, because everybody's out there trying to keep it together. I have no -- I have an aesthetic ax to grind, but it's not an ax, it's -- you know, it's one of those rubber-tipped spatulas, because, I mean, some people just aren't going to get it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know. And they get all pumped up about this thing that they've made. It's got all these exotic woods and all that. And I told Dennis -- what's his name, this Furniture Society; we met in the airport leaving Tempe. And I said --

MR. ADAMSON: Dennis Fitzgerald?

MR. BENNETT: Fitzgerald, yeah. I says, "Hey, listen, man; what we need to do, what this group needs to do is give these, quote, 'amateur' or these other guys, the woody guys, we need to give them a bigger profile because they're really angry with people like me and Rosanne." The anger, you know, there's two camps in that thing, and it shouldn't be that way. But there is. I mean, in those slide war things, some of the best stuff I saw, these old guys down in their basement making a Chippendale highboy.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: I mean, we're talking good stuff, goddamnit. And I would never pooh-pooh that. You know? I do pooh-pooh the guys that knock off Sam Maloof and then say, "Oh, look what I made." And you look at it, and the line's not there, the joints not that good. I mean, if you're going to do that, I mean, there's a guy that can make a better Sam Maloof than Sam Maloof, but he's got to show me. And when he shows me, I'll say, "Hey, geez, that's terrific."

MR. ADAMSON: So do you feel like the Furniture Society has made any difference to you personally?

MR. BENNETT: No. I like it, though, and I'm supportive of it. No, you know, again, I'm outside all this. I don't go to museums. I only go to art shows of friends of mine.

MR. ADAMSON: But you've been to a couple of the conferences.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, I like them. Oh, I love them. I'll keep going.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you get to see people.

MR. BENNETT: Because I see you; I see Ned; I see Gord Peteran. You know, I mean, it's like school days.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And lately I don't have to do anything. I just pay my way. You know, I mean, if I can give a slide lecture, I'll be happy to do that, but I'm not going to go down there and show people how to make a lamp. You know, I mean, fuck. Fuck that shit.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: So, yeah. No, I like them and I'll keep going. Sylvia and I will go to wherever it is, Wisconsin or someplace there.

MR. ADAMSON: Wisconsin.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And I'll enjoy the hell out of it, you know. I wish it could be set up differently so you don't have to miss anything. That's a big problem with that, man, is you're missing some good shit.

MR. ADAMSON: You know why they do that is to keep people coming back, because if you see everything, then you feel like you don't have to come back again.

MR. BENNETT: Well, but if the next -- everything is new, you come back. You know?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: We went to SOFA ["Sculpture Objects & Functional Art"]. I did. Maybe Sylvia didn't go with me. I don't remember. But Jesus Christ, I went and saw the wood turning guys. You know? Elsworth and those guys.

MR. ADAMSON: Like at Del Mano Gallery?

MR. BENNETT: No, no, but I saw the slide show. And I got a -- it might have been yours, I don't know. It was somebody's. I'm sitting there: "Yeah, that Lindquist guy's all right, what he did initially. I think he's a bunch of bullshit now, but what he did initially, man, I mean, just knocked those guys' socks off."

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know? I'd look: "Whoo, how could you do that then?" And he probably got that. You know, "How could you drive --"

[Speaking to someone else] Dinner? Ten?

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: "How could you drive that nail?"

"Oh, had to do it." You know?

MR. ADAMSON: Let's do a 10-minute exercise. Ready? I'm going to name people, and you tell me your associations with them.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, not what I think about them?

MR. ADAMSON: No.

MR. BENNETT: Okay.

MR. ADAMSON: Just who they are and what they mean to you. Okay?

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

MR. ADAMSON: Howard Hack.

MR. BENNETT: Old friend, 40-years-plus. Great artist. And we just have had our ups and downs, and right now I kicked him out of here four or five months ago and was really pissed at him. And he's still pissed; I'm not.

MR. ADAMSON: Mel Ramos.

MR. BENNETT: Old friend. There's a Mel Ramos right there on the wall. I think he was really a great painter, probably still is, but his early work, I love it so much. And his recent work is -- Germans like it.

MR. ADAMSON: Sam Francis.

MR. BENNETT: Don't know him.

MR. ADAMSON: Don't know him personally?

MR. BENNETT: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Don't you have a work of his?

MR. BENNETT: No. No.

MR. ADAMSON: You don't. Okay.

J.B. Blunk.

MR. BENNETT: One thing, that thing in the museum.

MR. ADAMSON: *The Planet* [1969].

MR. BENNETT: It's a masterpiece. It's an absolute masterpiece. Not only does it look good, when you see kids climbing on that and under it, you know it's eminently successful.

MR. ADAMSON: Have you met him?

MR. BENNETT: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Jack Hopkins?

MR. BENNETT: I like old Jack. I like Jack. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So you know him personally?

MR. BENNETT: I've met him a couple times. I mean, I don't know chronologically, but he and Wendell were doing the same thing at the same time, and Jack was a lot swoopier than Wendell.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Jack made some beautiful things. But I remember one time, one of those shows down in Pasadena, I think one of the first times I saw him in real, he had this big, swoopy thing that was a clock. Beautiful! Beautiful stuff. And it was, you know, like a big Yves Tanguy. I mean, it was really nice. And what does he do? He gets a fuckin' clock movement and sticks it in there with baroque dials and numbers and pineapple weights. Missed the point.

MR. ADAMSON: So he had the control but not the judgment.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Merryll Saylan.

MR. BENNETT: Nice lady. Very serious. I don't -- you know, I mean, I can't -- geez, I hope Merryll doesn't -- you know, a lot of little things I don't care about.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Marvin Lipofsky.

MR. BENNETT: He was just here the other night.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, yeah?

MR. BENNETT: He looks good. And Marvin and I have always really liked each other. And I think Marvin is a very special guy. I think he and Harvey Littleton, and a couple other people who I don't know, really were pioneers in glass. I don't know, the last 10 or 15 years what Marvin's been doing, I've seen it. Kind of the same old thing. Move on.

MR. ADAMSON: Bob Stocksdale.

MR. BENNETT: Jap, he's got that beautiful Jap eye. I mean, his bowls are no big deal, but boy, his curve is better than anybody's. I don't care how thick the bowl is, or I almost don't care what kind of wood. But Bob relies a lot on really having a beautiful piece of exotic wood. He could spray it flat black, man, and it would shine! You know. Because he has such control. Has such control and such beautiful form.

MR. ADAMSON: What about his wife, Kay Sekimachi?

MR. BENNETT: I know Kay and I like her work. And, you know, she's very traditional. Those people don't -- you know, when I say "those people," the weavers or the fiber people --

MR. ADAMSON: Fiber people, yeah.

MR. BENNETT: -- they don't get their dues. They just don't get what they really deserve. And that's her problem.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you know Ed Rossbach and Katherine Westphal at all?

MR. BENNETT: No. No. But I like Rossbach's work. I think maybe in fiber he's the Peter Voulkos of the fiber.

MR. ADAMSON: How about Peter Voulkos?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, he's a great artist.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you identify with him?

MR. BENNETT: Just in stature and drinking and --

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: -- snorting cocaine and not caring about your health, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And I love his work. I love his work.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, I think some would argue that you are for furniture what Voulkos is in --

MR. BENNETT: No. I haven't made -- nobody yet has made that jump. You're talking about Gord Peteran. You know, but he's starting -- well, he's starting out -- I think Gord's starting out as an artist and has dropped down into -- it's like Billy Al Bengston made some great furniture. And Gord's an artist, probably always be, and he gets to drop down and wow us. You know? But we're not growing -- I don't see us -- you know, Wendell would love to think he's -- he's not. Wendell's a furniture maker. He's tried art. He's -- you know. No good. It's not that it's no good, it's just not art. But Peter Voulkos, you know, he started out as a clay guy, and he banged clay into art. That's my feeling.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Okay. James Prestini?

MR. BENNETT: Only met him one time. Only met him one time. Who took me over there? Somebody took me over there. I was very impressed with the man. He was really a decent guy. I don't care for his work that much.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Are you talking about his sculpture or --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, sculpture, for sure.

MR. ADAMSON: What about his wood turnings?

MR. BENNETT: Well, I mean, I don't know wood turnings. You know, apparently he's kind of the father of this stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. BENNETT: But there was some Swede doing it long before that.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: You know, some guy in Eastern Europe, you know, whacking out a bowl too. But, you know, we need American heroes.

MR. ADAMSON: Wendy Maruyama.

MR. BENNETT: Just, you know, tremendous. I think she's having some problems nowadays. I think school beats you down. I really believe -- I think she needed the school. Single woman. She needs to keep body and soul together. I think the school has been great for students and not so good for her. She's made some great stuff; and she's made some turkeys, as we all have.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel like she's a kindred spirit formally, in terms of the way she looks at furniture and makes it?

MR. BENNETT: I think she's past me, in a way. Her color is so much better than mine. She's so much -- you know, I'm a fuckin' barbarian when it comes to color or texture or something. Her understanding's way past mine. I can pull it off once in a while; she can pull it off most of the time, if she'd get rid of the magenta.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Gail Fredell.

MR. BENNETT: Gail's a kindred spirit. I love her. Her work is very formal, extremely formal. You know, I don't get cold standing next to it, but some of it I do. It's just too well thought out. I like a little more abstract expressionism. That's where Wendy's at, within very structured sort of format.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you know Donald Fortescue? Who has succeeded them at CCAC?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Well, I'm starting to appreciate him more. I didn't really care for his work too much. But he's in with Michael Cooper, you know, thinking sort of, you know, "Okay, let's spend a lot of time on something." This last show he had, man, I mean, Jesus, I was over there when he was working on it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah? Me, too.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. The guy's really good. But it's not my cup of tea.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Too methodical?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you know Peter Pierobon when he was working at --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, I like Peter. And I'm waiting -- he's having a show at Seb's pretty quick here, over in Frisco.

MR. ADAMSON: Seb's?

MR. BENNETT: At Tercera Gallery.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh. Okay.

MR. BENNETT: And I want to go see if he's gotten away from carved plates.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Okay.

MR. BENNETT: No, I liked a lot of his early stuff. It's very -- what's the word for it? -- "austere" isn't the right word, but "luscious austere."

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Michael Hosaluk.

MR. BENNETT: What can you say, man? I wish I was a fuckin' Ukrainian.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Michael. You know, I mean, I'd like to be his brother. I mean, he started out with all the bowls and stuff, but there's a guy that's grown so much in the last 10 years; I mean grown, furniture and energy, going to - - helping people out. Yeah. I don't know if I like the imagery that much. It's a little too finicky. But I know it's very sincere and there's a great passion.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Ready? Here it comes. Jim Krenov.

MR. BENNETT: Well, I think Jim Krenov is a very tragic figure, some sort of Greek figure that they've always wanted to write about, you know, the heights to the depths. And, geez, when he came over here, he was it. And he proceeded to fuck it all up. And my opinion of him is -- I really don't like his work. I admire it; it's extremely skillful, but, you know, it's really prissy and fussy. It belongs on Park Avenue up in one of those big fancy places where they have some American antiques and French antiques and shit, and here's our modern stuff.

I think he's blown it. You know? I mean, God, he came over here with all the bona fides, man, the books and all that, and just proceeded to screw it all up. He could have -- he could be Wendell Castle or -- nobody knows about Krenov now. I mean, the people I associate with. Students, I'm sure -- unless they find a book of his -- over at Arts and Crafts or any of the other schools, they don't know him. James Krenov is not somebody you look to for inspiration. If you wanted to build that kind of work, then James Krenov is the guy. But he's worn out too, I think, as we all are.

Yeah, I've had some run-ins with him, and they've been ungood, very ungood, as has Wendell, Art, and Sam. Wendell he wouldn't say "shit" if his mouth was full of it. Sam will really go off. And Art says, "Oh, what do I care?" And that's Art. That's the beauty of Art: "Oh, what do I care?"

MR. ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. And he really doesn't. [Laughs.] He's not just saying it.

MR. BENNETT: And he doesn't.

MR. ADAMSON: What about Tage Frid?

MR. BENNETT: I think Tage Frid, his furniture is no big deal, but I think his influence is monumental, you know. I mean, he was a teacher. He was a good teacher, too. And all his people love him, mourn him that he's -- he's not dead yet, is he? He probably doesn't know it if he is. Even if he's dead, he doesn't know it.

MR. ADAMSON: He's ill.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. I know he's ill. Yeah. His work is, you know, very competent. But you see a slide show of Tage's, carousel slides, and that might be his life's work.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: A teacher can't get a lot done.

MR. ADAMSON: He's a teacher, not a doer.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And, you know, I mean, this is obviously not off the record, but I worry about Rosanne, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: She was my next one, so go ahead.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Rosanne Somerson.

MR. BENNETT: But Rosanne is so good, and Alphonse. But this school, they eat you up. They kill you, man. That's why I've never taught, never even thought of teaching. I mean, if you're good -- and she's good and Tage was good and Alphonse is good -- you ain't gonna get a lot of work done.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You gotta look at students' slides. You have to talk and this and that. Fuckin' sure, you get three months off in the summer, but not if you're department head. You know, somebody's phoning: "Well, what do you think about" -- you know? And I'm writing a letter: "You ought to" -- you know? Yeah. It's too bad. Wendy and Rosanne are great talents, but boy, the school is just going to eat them up.

MR. ADAMSON: And you feel that way about Alphonse too, to some degree?

MR. BENNETT: Well, Alphonse has got a whole different attitude. He's a pretty easy-going guy. And his purgatory -- not "purgatory" -- wrong word, but whatever other metaphor we could use -- is his daughter. You know? He loves his kid[s]. And that's beautiful. That's nice. So, you know, I love my kids, but my work came first. It might be terrible to say, but it's true.

MR. ADAMSON: John Dunnigan?

MR. BENNETT: I love John. I really like him. I can't aesthetically evaluate his work because I don't really understand it. It's stuck somewhere back when, but it's also of now. You know? Some of the things he's done are really good. Some of them, like the piece in the Boston show, the sewing with a scrotum hanging down below?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: I mean yeah, okay. But, you know, he's a master. He's definitely a master.

MR. ADAMSON: Jere Osgood?

MR. BENNETT: Don't know him. I liked his work. If he gets another life, he should try a little metal because he might be awfully good at it. You know, yeah. No, I remember the first one of those --

MR. ADAMSON: The *Shell Desk*.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, *Shell Desk*. I wanted it, but we didn't have the money. And I'd own that and be proud of it. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Tom Hucker.

MR. BENNETT: Well, I already told you. You know, I mean, moments of fuckin' brilliance, I mean absolute brilliance. And I think he's got a real screwed-up life. I don't know, but I've heard. He followed some woman across country. He was going to go to Arts and Crafts and then said, "Nah, I don't want to do it;" went back to New Jersey or someplace. He could be good. But he's kind of the same as Fortescue, in a way, kind of a heady guy. You know, a thinker guy.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you know Timothy Philbrick?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I'm trying to think -- oh, James Schriber. I know [sic] Timothy. Schriber I really like. I don't know Timothy, and I can't even picture a piece of his work. And Schriber's work I can picture because of Warren and Bernice's house in Connecticut.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. And you're a fan of it.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: And I think he did also the *Bird Cage* at Peter Joseph's, which I thought was marvelous, beautiful.

And I can't stand that glass wall that that other guy did on the other side there, but he's big time.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you know Kristina Madsen's work?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I don't know it well. I think she got humped by some Fijian or something and believes all that stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: So it's really, you know, it's kind of -- well, this is only going to be heard a hundred years from now, right?

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] That's right.

MR. BENNETT: It's very competent. And in a way, if I was willing to -- God, if I was younger and knew I was going to live to be 200 years old, I'd like to try some of this stuff out.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Okay, you got a door on a chest. Okay, let's spend a week putting little lines in it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: That ain't for me.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: [Speaking to someone else] Dinner? Excellent.

MR. ADAMSON: One last one. Wendell Castle.

MR. BENNETT: What can I say? I've talked about him all day long here. I think he's the best, if he'll just -- you know, hopefully, he doesn't have any financial worries, big financial worries -- just get one guy in there and make -- and we've sat down and I've told him this. I said, "Wendell, make it yourself, goddamnit, because you can be the best. You have been, and sometimes you are." And people say, "Oh, it's all finicky and all that." Well, it's because, again, back to sanding: "Sand it real good over there." But he could loosen up really good. I don't think I ever cared for his trompe l'oeil pieces that much, until I think about them, and now I care.

The only thing I object to is carving a wooden key. He didn't need the key. The gloves were fine. Or a hat. Because they're not metallic, you know; they're organic. So it works. But a wooden key is --

MR. ADAMSON: [Off mike.]

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. But you know, he can't help it. You've got to do that. You've got to show you can carve a key. The gloves are beautiful. The desk is beautiful. The key chain could have been folded up. You know?

No, I like Wendell. I like his work. And I wish I owned more of it.

[BEGIN TAPE 4 SIDE A.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. We're now back at the studio the following day, the second [February 2, 2002], and now I'm with Sylvia Bennett, Garry Knox Bennett's wife, and I'm just going to talk a little bit with Sylvia about her experiences being married to Garry and also the role that she's played in Garry's career, which has been an important role.

And I so I think maybe the first thing I should do is just ask you, Sylvia, when you met Garry originally.

MRS. BENNETT: High school.

MR. ADAMSON: In high school. Here in Alameda, right?

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And then you dated briefly in high school, is that right?

MRS. BENNETT: No. Actually, we ran with the same group of friends. We were just friends for a long time, and then briefly dated after high school just for a few months kind of thing and then sort of just went our separate ways, and then got back together. I had a very brief marriage, very brief.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I didn't realize that.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. Big mistake. Everyone else is getting married, you know, so you do it too.

MR. ADAMSON: [Off mike.]

MRS. BENNETT: Young and stupid. But when I was back on my own, I was dating a lot, and it was just really an unpleasant environment, and I thought, "Geez, I really just need to see someone I can be comfortable with." Garry started out as a friend and, you know, he was just -- so I just one day out of the blue knocked on his front door, and he happened to be home. It was his grandmother's house. I hadn't seen him in probably three years at that point in time, didn't even know he was still around or if he'd gotten married or whatever. And then we dated briefly and got engaged and got married.

MR. ADAMSON: And then you moved to Lincoln shortly thereafter?

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. What happened was, it was a very good opportunity at the time. His ex-stepfather had a lot of acreage, raised rice, up in Lincoln, California, and he happened to come by. And we went out for dinner, and he and his wife, his present wife -- he was no longer married to Garry's mother -- were talking about sort of semi-retiring and finding a caretaker so that they could do some traveling and, you know, the usual stuff. And Garry said, "Well, what kind of a caretaker?" because we were trying to figure out how we could get a place. He was still at Arts and Crafts, and I was still in school. I was working and going to school.

MR. ADAMSON: What were you going to school for?

MRS. BENNETT: Just art. I was studying art. That was always my interest, art and dance. And so we were trying to figure out a way to live very minimally, you know, cost-wise, so that he could really not have to get a full-time job but could just work on his work. And this caretaker thing sounded intriguing. So he said, "Well, what would you do? Would it be a full-time job or what?" As it turned out, we sort of said we might be interested in doing that. He said if we were willing to do it, he would give us the money to build a house. It would be his house, but we could build what we wanted on his property. And so Garry spent a year building an A-frame house, which is a real hard place to hang art.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MRS. BENNETT: Which is really dumb.

MR. ADAMSON: No vertical walls.

MRS. BENNETT: Right! [Laughs.] It was so funny. We're going, "Where are we going to put the paintings?!"

MR. ADAMSON: Sculpture only.

MRS. BENNETT: Right. So anyway, but it was a great experience, and probably his only second point in time of dealing with saws and timber and lumber and all that good stuff. He helped an uncle build a summer home up at Tahoe when he was a kid. So those were probably his two earliest experiences with working with wood, if you can call it that.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you have any input into the building of the house, or did you just sort --

MRS. BENNETT: Not really.

MR. ADAMSON: -- of stay clear of it as best you could? [Laughs.]

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. Well, I was still down here working, and he went up and spent three months intensely getting the foundation, the engineering, the foundation done, and getting something, and then they rented a little, teeny house in town for us so I could move up. At that point I was expecting our first kid, Josh. So my time at work was limited. So we moved up into town, and then he continued on the house. I didn't physically work on it myself, mainly because I was very pregnant. But tools are not unfamiliar. I've always used tools but not for construction.

So, finished the house. Actually, it would have been an ideal situation, and Garry was very candid with his stepfather from the get-go that he did not want to be a farmer. And he'd worked with Homer -- this was his stepdad, Homer Freeman -- he had worked with him summers as a kid, and Garry could drive tractors, he could plow, he could plant. I mean, he knew how to do that. He was very knowledgeable and pretty good at it. So I think Homer suspected that once he got Garry up there, he could turn the operation over to him. I really suspect that was in their mind. And Garry was very clear with him [that he did not wish to be a farmer], but they started to resent the fact that Garry was obviously not going to change his mind.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MRS. BENNETT: And then things got very tough. We were living on \$50 a month with two kids. I mean, you know, we couldn't even afford the gas to come down to the Bay Area. It was pretty scary at the time. It was fun. I mean, we raised our own food, had a garden, chickens. And then we gave them names and then we couldn't eat them.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.] That was a big mistake. That's why we hunted. I mean, game was really our best source of meat. So, you know, it was five years, and it was quite an experience; finally realized that we just really missed the city. We really are city people. And we did that country thing about five years before it was really the thing to do. You know, about five years later, everyone was leaving the cities to do a rural thing. It was interesting. We just preceded that by a few years, but realized that we're really city people. We really enjoy the dynamics of being in the middle of things.

MR. ADAMSON: It must have been funny when everyone started going out into the countryside afterwards.

MRS. BENNETT: We're going, "Give you three years." [Laughs.] "You'll be back." And most were. Most were. It was really interesting.

And then we came back here, and through friends, Garry immediately found a studio that was free. We had to borrow money to move back here. We were totally broke, lived with my mother in her little 700-plus-square-foot condominium with two kids, a dog, and we were expecting number three. [Laughs.] It was hysterical. I think we all slept on mattresses in one room.

And we got back here, and Garry got his studio going, made a couple of commercial pieces of sculpture -- we made some great friends in Sacramento. Lincoln was about 30 miles north of Sacramento. And that's where Garry met Wayne Thiebaud and Jack Ogden and Mel Ramos and Larry Foster and this whole entourage, interconnected art community up there. And through them, through an architect, Mike Singer, Garry got a couple of jobs with architects here, so he got some commission work and was building stuff, and just kind of got going and then started having shows. And I went back to work part-time for about two years.

MR. ADAMSON: When you say commission work for architectural projects, you mean he was actually doing some of the woodwork in the buildings?

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. He did a room in Sacramento through Jonathan -- John -- I always get Jonathan Bachelor and John Batchelder confused.

MR. BENNETT: Batchelder.

MRS. BENNETT: He did a room, a beautiful room, kind of a Greene and Greene style.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MRS. BENNETT: Wood, and nice --

MR. ADAMSON: So this was the same time as Squirkenworks was getting going?

MRS. BENNETT: Before. This preceded it.

MR. ADAMSON: Even before that? Okay.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. And then at his studio, we were really involved with the whole hippie thing because of friends in the record business, and we would get tickets to stuff, and records, and we sort of picked up with the whole -- it was fun. It was fun to get dressed up on the weekends and go over to Golden Gate Park and listen to music. It was quite a time.

So we were going to these concerts. And I don't know if anyone was selling stuff, particularly, but I made some anklets and some things with beads and bells on them, as I recall, that sort of coincided, and people wanted to buy them. So we started stringing this stuff together, you know, and selling it.

So then Garry -- one of our friends [we were visiting in Oakland], he was smoking marijuana, and he had a little alligator clip on a piece of wire. And Garry said, "What's that?"

He said, "It's a roach clip."

"What's that for?"

"Well, smoking a joint."

"Oh."

MR. BENNETT: I was making those in Lincoln.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah, you were. Yeah, that was earlier. That was up in Lincoln. That started actually very early on. And so Garry said, "Oh, I can make one better than that," and that's when he developed that slide.

And he kept asking for more. Garry sent him a couple, and then he kept asking for more for fans and stuff. And so pretty soon Garry was making one-of-a-kind. I mean, these were very elaborate, really interesting-looking things.

And then we subsequently had friends down here who had probably the prototype of the head shop. It was kind of used clothing and records and funky stuff in Berkeley. And she wanted them. And then she said, "Well, can you make some like jewelry?" So then he was making these earrings with all of this Rococo stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: What was her name?

MRS. BENNETT: Patricia Oberhaus. And Peter Neufeld. They were very Bohemian, artists. I remember them when I was in school. They just would -- I mean, they would do crazy stuff. They would climb in the art department storage room windows to steal paper and stuff, you know. And you'd see them loading up their truck with all this. I mean, they were just hysterical. They were just hysterical.

Good artists. Excellent artists, both of them, but just totally preoccupied with a lifestyle. It was very strange. They went on for years and years, had many little shops. And then they finally separated. Peter's still making hammered-spoon stuff on Telegraph Avenue with a blanket to this day. And Patricia is up somewhere -- she inherited some money from some distant relative and made a record, a horrid record, spent most of it on the record and then bought some property up north somewhere. Ran away. So I don't know what she's doing. But that was another whole thing.

But at that point in time, the *Berkeley Barb* was a local publication, and these head shops were starting to spring up on Haight [in San Francisco] and here and there. And so he just started making these things up. He developed a line, you know, of consistent -- they were produced with a hammer and an anvil. Then mass produced. And he put together little groups and put a price on them, you know, and we'd send them out. We'd just send them to addresses, saying, "If you like them, pay us; if you don't, send them back." And everybody sent money. It was just a real easy time to be creative and make something. So that was the beginning of the company.

He had wanted to do something that would generate money so that we didn't have to wonder where the rent money was coming from each month, you know. And then he took on a partner who really managed the business end of it. And at that point he sort of disappeared. It was here, everything was up here [referring to the studio], and he would disappear down below to work.

So it went that way for quite a while, and then when we got big enough, our partner wanted to retire, which he did, and so we bought him out. And then Garry was kind of back in running it for about another, what, five years?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. And then we found our present partner, who eventually took over all of it, which was really great. So it worked. I mean, a lot of people try to do that. It's very difficult to have two things going on. So we were very lucky. It was the right time, the right place; everything sort of fell into place and it worked for us.

MR. BENNETT: God bless the hippies.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, were you making jewelry for the company at all, or was that something you just sort of did on the side?

MRS. BENNETT: I sort of inherited it. When Garry didn't want to do that anymore, he just said, "You win jewelry." So then I became a jeweler. [Laughs.] Not a lot. I mean, he was the real designer. I did some. We hired people to do designs for the production line. And we were producing in gold and silver, and we were doing semi-fine jewelry finally at one point, cast rings, a whole huge line of rings, and earrings and bracelets and all sorts of stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: And you were fairly involved with that?

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah, off and on over the years. I started actually in the office until he picked up a partner. I did the billing and all of that stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MRS. BENNETT: And then when Rick came in; Rick handled all that, and then we were able to get an accountant. You know how you just grow. As you get to a certain point, you have to hire someone to do the tax stuff and that. So I would just step in in the production. The kids were really little then, and I was spending as much time as I could with them, and then back and forth. So I've been involved with it all along, but not intensely for any great period of time. It's been sort of filling in the gaps.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Now, once Garry's career sort of started taking off, as a clock maker and then furniture maker, what were your thoughts about that, and on what level did you get involved with that?

MRS. BENNETT: I've never been involved with the physical work, you know. It's been more keeping -- you know, getting stuff photographed, doing all of the --

MR. BENNETT: She was invaluable.

MRS. BENNETT: Just keeping the records, you know, sales records, and kind of just tracking stuff, making sure that if slides were requested, that they were sent. You know, letters, all of that little busy work that really, if it were left up to him, it wouldn't get done because he's not --

MR. BENNETT: I have a tendency just to put these things on the desk down there. And somebody will phone: "What happened to" -- and I have to go down dust layers. I says, "Oh, yeah, yours is pretty dusty here." Sylvia really is so great with details. Oh, God.

MR. ADAMSON: And you had the instinct to do that from a fairly early date, in terms of tracking where the pieces are going?

MRS. BENNETT: Well, his work was always very important to him. I mean, I didn't even question it; it was something that had to be done. You know, I mean, and we couldn't afford to hire someone to do it. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So in other words, demands were being placed on you from the outside that made you realize that you had to do that.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it made sense. And if you look at anyone who's successful, you see them represented in shows and exhibitions, and you see them written about. And that information has to come from somewhere; and if no one's giving it, it doesn't get done. I mean, it's just a very logical, you know, observation. And I realized that all this little stuff was pretty important.

And he was dead serious. I mean, this was never a question of "maybe I'll do art." It was never a question. I mean, that was always foremost from the first time I ran into him after school. He was very focused. When he decided to go to art school, from that point on he was absolutely focused. There was nothing else that got in the way.

MR. ADAMSON: When he started selling work through galleries, would the two of you talk together about the moves that you were making and, you know, who you wanted to work with and that sort of thing?

MRS. BENNETT: That was pretty much his decision. We would discuss some of the aspects of it, but --

MR. BENNETT: Pricing was always a --

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. Pricing gets into knock-down-drag-outs. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: With the galleries, you mean.

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.] No, it was --

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, with the two of you?

MRS. BENNETT: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Does one of you have a --

MR. BENNETT: She wants more, and I just want to be loved and sell it.

MRS. BENNETT: He just wants to get rid of it. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MRS. BENNETT: But, no, but different aspects of it. If I feel that someone is -- I'm very outspoken, you know. I just say what I think. So on that level, yeah. But he's always made all the decisions as far as who he wanted to deal with and how and basically all of that. It's not been any decision-making on my part.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. You know, one thing we didn't talk about yesterday, Garry, was collectors and starting to form a relationship with collectors. And I assume that's something that often would happen with both of you, as you get to know these folks socially.

MRS. BENNETT: Yes. It's nice to know who has your work. You know, often you don't. Sometimes galleries won't share. I find that really annoying, in that early on, a lot of the galleries were terrified to let you know who bought your work because they were afraid you'd go -- and understandably. I understand it from both.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, but I'm not a glass artist.

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: That's what those guys do, man. They are not savory, many of them.

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: But the two of you always knew it was important to deal with the galleries, always deal with galleries.

MR. BENNETT: I guess I probably sold, since I've been here, since '68 -- let me just say this, and then go back to Sylvia. I probably sold maybe five pieces out of here. I prefer to have the gallery do the negotiating and whatever. And anybody comes in here, I don't want to, you know, pump them up, try to sell. This is our home, it's not -- you know; it's for looking, but it's not where you get somebody and try to sell them something.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. And that's true of collectors that have large groups of your work? That's true of museums, everything, right?

MR. BENNETT: I don't quite follow.

MRS. BENNETT: As far as what?

MR. ADAMSON: In other words, even if somebody is a long-term collector or a museum, you always go through the gallery, right?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, I always send them to the gallery. If people have bought stuff here, if they've seen it, stored, before it went, I said, "Well, phone Cardell or phone Scott and say you want such and such a piece." It's really stupid of me. You know, on a \$20,000 piece, I'm giving away 10 grand. But you can't find a gallery that says I'm not honorable.

MR. ADAMSON: And in the long term, it's worth it.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I don't know if it's paid off, but I feel better about it.

Go ahead, finish with Sylvia.

MRS. BENNETT: It's the time factor. To entertain people to sell them something takes a lot of time and energy. And they really, if you're in that position with a collector, they really want part of you. I mean, they want a piece of you. That's what they're buying. If they don't go to a gallery, if they come to the studio to buy, they're buying more than just the work. And you know, his time, he would rather spend it making work than, you know, socializing, yes.

MR. BENNETT: Can we do this kind of as a group conversation here?

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

MR. BENNETT: Because most, damn near all, the people, you know, the, quote, "collectors" that have bought major pieces, we are on very good terms friendship-wise. I mean, it's like, you know, we get calls from people, "We're coming in. This is, you know, Jane and Arthur Mason, what are you doing?"

"Come on over." You know? And they're not worried I'm going to try to sell them something, and I'm not

worried. Of course, they'll buy what I do. Actually they have, but through the gallery. But, I mean, all the people that buy my work, collect my work are really good friends, you know, people you enjoy being around. And there's no commerce involved. It's, you know, sit down and have a couple drinks and have dinner and have a good time.

MR. ADAMSON: So the gallery actually helps you do that.

MR. BENNETT: No. No.

MR. ADAMSON: In other words, because the gallery is there, you don't have to deal with the commercial aspects, and --

MR. BENNETT: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: -- so you're free to be friends.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And they know who I am. We're quite gregarious and we enjoy people. I mean, it's not, "Oh, God, someone's coming for dinner, what will we do?" It's, "Oh, boy! Let's get the good wine out and let's have a good dinner."

MR. ADAMSON: That's right.

I know you have to go pretty soon.

MRS. BENNETT: What time is it? I just need to get directions.

MR. ADAMSON: It's 25 of 9:00 or so.

MR. BENNETT: It's 9:30 -- or 8:30.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MRS. BENNETT: Okay.

MR. ADAMSON: So let me sort of fast-forward to the retrospective, because we were talking about this a little bit last night, and I thought it would be a good thing for you to talk about. That obviously represented a big increase in the amount of time you were spending on --

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.] That was the year of finals. Back to back. It was one deadline to the next. Yes, it was a lot --

MR. BENNETT: An amazing amount of work Sylvia did, without ever having done anything like that before. And people --

MRS. BENNETT: I showed him the office. Looks like a bomb went off.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. I know the book is good. But people have said, in all honesty, "It's a good book. I read all of it." You know? I mean, I've got Fletcher's book there, and I don't --

MR. ADAMSON: Fletcher Benton's book?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I don't know if I can read it all because, you know --

MRS. BENNETT: I pick away at it.

MR. BENNETT: -- it's Peter Selz talking, you know, art.

And so it's a great book. And it really is Sylvia's. I mean, she has got to be very proud of it.

I'll shut up. I'm going to make some coffee.

MR. ADAMSON: Were the two of you involved in choosing the work for the show in any way? I mean, did you consult with Ursula [Ursula Ilse-Neuman]?

MRS. BENNETT: Ursula --

MR. BENNETT: Uhhhh. Ohhh. Ha-ha-ha-ha.

MRS. BENNETT: Um --

MR. BENNETT: Let me just interrupt here. We got so much misinformation. Okay? This thing started out as a catalogue. The museum -- I won't go into it.

MRS. BENNETT: No, I --

MR. BENNETT: It probably won't work good here. It won't work good being down on something. It's like I don't write letters, because nobody can say, "Well, you said that."

"I did not."

"Well, here's the letter."

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: So this thing is a little dangerous. But it started out as a catalogue, and so then, you know, Ursula was telling Sylvia that everything in it, the only stuff that could be in it --

MRS. BENNETT: Is what's in the exposition.

MR. BENNETT: -- is what's in the show!

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know? And we had to kind of believe that because we -- we're bumpkins from the West Coast, we didn't know anything. You know? But then when things started getting really goofy in New York, we just said, "Okay fuck it, then; we'll pay for it, and we're going to do this as a book. Blam." So that's why there's other stuff in there. And it got very confusing, especially for Sylvia because she doesn't want to get in any hassle with anybody. And we had somebody on the East Coast trying to tell us how to write a book and not putting any money in it, and a lot of wrong stuff. And a lot of waiting. A lot of missed deadlines.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] That's maybe enough said about that, but --

MRS. BENNETT: It's done. It got done.

MR. ADAMSON: It's always hard putting one of these together.

MRS. BENNETT: It's hard on any level. And had I just had some serious cooperation, it would have been a lot easier. It was a battle every day. I still don't know why. I don't understand it. It mystifies me. I had the feeling that -- I mean, the only thing I could figure out was, did they want this thing to fail? Did they want it to be a total disaster? Because that's what I was getting. And I'm just stubborn enough -- I mean, I should have thrown in the towel halfway through that book. I got pissed. I got really angry. And I said, "Goddamn --"

And then that's when I started to really say, okay, look, this doesn't work. This doesn't work. I read a lot of books, and you know when they flow and you know when there's -- you know. There were some really -- because of so many people involved. Everything had to go by Holly [Hotchner] and by David [McFadden]. And Ursula was working with me on it. I mean, she was there. She was there. But she also couldn't -- you know, if things needed to -- we missed two -- we never got the two final edits done. We ran out of time. There were two more edits scheduled. So it's missing two edits, and I know where all the little glitches are.

And the two edits prior to that, I hired a gal out here I knew of years ago, who worked for the infamous Donna Morgan, who was Garry's manager. Well, her husband, her ex-husband, had North Beach Leather, the manufacturer of all of the rock stars' clothes in the '60s and '70s and '80s. Donna had a gal who would proofread catalogues for her, and she would come in and look at text. Donna would be working on a page of text; Nancy would come in and would be looking at it upside down and say, "There's a mistake here, and there's a mistake." She just had one of those minds for that.

She and I spent a full day from 9 a.m. until 7 p.m. at a Denny's. We met midway. She lived way out in Pinol. We met in a Denny's Restaurant. I said, "Look, here's 20 bucks," to the little waitress. I said, "We're going to find a quiet corner. Just bring us coffee. We'll have lunch, we'll have dinner, and can we pull two tables together and not be disturbed?" And she said, "Absolutely." So we went through it once, and we did a second run same way. They were getting to know us. [Laughs.] These crazy people and these big pages spread all over the place. It was hysterical.

But she saved my life because she was the one who helped me pull -- because it's so hard to get the descriptives consistent throughout the book, you know. And I am not an organized person. I'll say something one

way once, and it will be entirely different the next time. So I had to totally break that awful habit and try to be consistent. And man, that's the hardest part of doing a pictorial, you know, where you're dealing with photo descriptions and measurements and all that good stuff that has to fit together and not look messy.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. So many particulars.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. But the big stuff was easy. I mean, getting the photographs and doing all of that stuff was a piece of cake compared to all that little fine-tuning work. But, you know, it got done. I'm happy that it got done. It would have been a disaster to have had that exhibition and no catalogue.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, yeah.

MRS. BENNETT: What a tragedy.

MR. ADAMSON: Or a thin little catalogue that didn't give much.

MRS. BENNETT: Well really, I mean, with absolutely nothing. They were not going to do anything.

MR. ADAMSON: And you are happy with how it came out in the end, by and large?

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Good.

MRS. BENNETT: As I say, you know, by the time I got through it, there's things I would have done differently. And there were a couple problems, but not with -- I mean, I think Ned's, especially Ned's, just beautifully fit.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. It's a great essay.

MRS. BENNETT: Boy. It's a real asset to the book. It makes it more than just, you know -- because he really got into what was going on, where it was going on. And that was my -- when this thing was first proposed, I said, "You know, I don't just want one of these dumb things with lots of pictures. I want the text to be meaningful. And I really would like to see it pull both sides, the East Coast, West Coast, and give some sort of a little -- place Garry in time and what was going on." And I think it achieved that. I think it really did get there, in its own little way.

MR. ADAMSON: As far as putting the show together physically, not the catalogue, but the show itself, you worked with two different designers, is that right? Exhibition designers, I mean.

MRS. BENNETT: For New York?

MR. ADAMSON: Right. New York and Oakland.

MRS. BENNETT: And Oakland, yeah. Rupert did the design for New York, Rupert Deese, and then Ted Cohen did this one. Actually, Ted had wanted to do New York. He had approached the museum, I understand, to do it, and they felt they wanted something a little harder-edged, which I think was valid. You know, it's a whole different -- they look at things differently on the two coasts. I think that was a valid choice. But I knew Ted's enthusiasm. He likes Garry's work and he would do the best job he could. And he is very talented with his installations. He did a wonderful job on the Oakland one, as well. It was beautifully installed. It was just the space was too confining. But it didn't feel -- I mean, it was okay. It worked out very nicely.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, as far as getting pieces for the show, did you have to do a lot of sort of calling people and --

MRS. BENNETT: Oh, boy, yes. And a few we could not. There was one little bench that we don't know where it is. We thought we did, and it's gone. I'd love to someday know who has it, because it's the *Ribbon Bench* with hollow armrests, cloud shapes. It's in the book. That was the main bench that Ursula wanted for the exhibition and couldn't find it. There were --

MR. BENNETT: Is that coffee the same coffee, just it won't go down? That's all right. Go ahead and finish.

MRS. BENNETT: You may have picked the wrong one.

I lost my train of thought.

MR. ADAMSON: The pieces that you weren't able to find.

MRS. BENNETT: A few, there were a few that were reluctant to lend, where Garry really twisted arms, and a couple of people who would not let the pieces leave New York, which was unfortunate, but at least they were

shown in the New York exhibition.

MR. ADAMSON: And so those pieces had replacements for the show out here?

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. So it varied a little bit, not too much. But there were a few things that did not come out.

MR. ADAMSON: So, now that this is all done, what is your -- I mean, what's the future -- this is a question for both of you -- what does the future look like now that you've had this retrospective, as you're continuing to do work?

MR. BENNETT: I die.

MR. ADAMSON: You're young.

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.] I died.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, die. It's all over.

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughing.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MRS. BENNETT: I think it's kind of freeing, in a way. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Freeing.

MR. BENNETT: Well, she's got, you know, now she's got probably one last big chore, because this thing -- you know, slides are everywhere. There are slides in Anchorage, Alaska. There's slides in Chile. There's slides on the moon.

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.] I'm still returning the borrowed film, you know, for the book to the museums and that.

MR. BENNETT: But she's got to get it all organized, you know. One time what really impressed me was I went to Wendell's -- and Wendell's always been pretty bright; he's always had a fairly good staff, or at least a couple good people. And I wanted to see some slides one time, and he's got this wall thing you just pull out, you know, and they're all there. And that would really be nice. But, you know, I go somewhere and give a slide show. "Oh, I need a slide of this."

"Well, you can't have it because we still" -- Sylvia has red dots and green dots, you know, the master slides.

"Well, I'll put it back," you know. And then it's not lost, but she's got to now find that, not only correlate to find -- "Oh, here's the red dot," figure out which one it is.

MRS. BENNETT: But they get so damaged, you know. That master set should never be touched.

MR. BENNETT: I know it shouldn't be, but we do.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah, a lot of the photographs, there had to be a lot of work done on the photography.

MR. BENNETT: No, I don't --

MRS. BENNETT: Oh, they were a mess. No, they were a mess.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, but the slides, we tried not to use. We tried to use as few slides in the book as possible. I've spent a fair amount of money on photography, so we have a lot of 4-by-5s. And they're not passed out, you know, so they're in fairly good condition.

MRS. BENNETT: And we had a lot of stuff reshot for the book, and those are the things I've got to sit down and number and refile and get into folders. It's probably a good six months worth of work in that room that you saw, plus this little room back here, which looks very similar.

MR. ADAMSON: So, once that's done, though?

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah, that's the last of it. And then I've got to pack up all of the --

MR. BENNETT: Then she can go have fun.

MRS. BENNETT: -- archives, you know, all of the file folders and stuff. I've really got to go through all of that and

just toss 90 percent of it but keep the basic stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel like at some point you want to start making art fulltime?

MRS. BENNETT: I've always kind of -- I've not really been that focused with it. I've done it off and on over the years. I don't know. I think so. I think so. But I was just starting up again just before all of this hit, and I put everything on hold. I tried to sort of divide my week. It doesn't work. So I just said, well, no, I'm just going to put it on hold for a bit and just focus on this. Now you know, probably the better part of this year will be cleaning all of this up, then I'll have some clear space. I would hope to get to work on something myself.

MR. BENNETT: Sylvia's made some really nice jewelry. That's what she wants to do. And she's shown interest in learning this technique that I use with the steel, the galvanized steel. And she could do really good with that.

MRS. BENNETT: But yeah, I do hope to get back to work on something. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Good.

MRS. BENNETT: I'll always do stuff. I just don't know what direction it's going to take. Years ago I did a lot of work with ceramics.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MRS. BENNETT: But the jewelry has been probably -- I spent 10 years working with cast resin, and that was interesting. Health-wise, I didn't want to push it too long, because I was working with cast resin and automotive lacquers. I figured 10 years is about right. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MRS. BENNETT: But I like materials. I like working with different materials and kind of learning techniques. So we'll see where it goes. I don't know. At this point in time, I haven't a clue.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] That's the exciting part, right?

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. No, it is. It actually is. I'm looking forward to just kind of playing around for a year or two and see where it goes. I'm really fascinated with electroforming, and that's some of the stuff that I have access to but have never taken advantage of. So I want to, you know, kind of look into that as well. So it's going to go somewhere.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, one last question for Sylvia. You had mentioned last night that you've been very involved with the Oakland Museum.

MRS. BENNETT: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And I wanted to get your thoughts about the kind of Bay Area craft scene here and how it developed and what your part has been in it. I mean both of you, but particularly yourself.

MRS. BENNETT: Interesting question. I started at the Oakland Museum just volunteering and on various committees, but I originally became involved with the Contemporary Art Committee. That was under George Neubert [Chief Curator of Art in the '70s]. That was quite some time ago. And it was a group of young adults who were interested in collecting, like a small collectors' circle, but what they did was they developed a yearly award for unknown artists working in the Bay Area who hadn't had a major museum exhibition.

And the art department would produce a list, and it would be eight or ten people, and the group would go and visit these studios and vote on one of them as being the most outstanding. It was a lay group, but it was done with very close supervision. The artist chosen each year would have a very small little exhibition at the museum. It was a nice little perk for local artists. The Oakland Museum used to mount some very interesting shows of Bay Area artists. With the big crunch in the last 10 years financially, it has not been done. Several of the curators that replaced Neubert didn't like the idea of non-professionals -- I can understand that -- non-professionals being involved in something that was ultimately curatorial territory exhibited in the museum, sort of. I mean, the referrals came from the staff, but, you know.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MRS. BENNETT: Anyway, there was some conflict there, understandable. But in being on the art committee, and Garry's doing furniture, I said, "You know, we're missing a whole, big, huge segment of the population. There should be a craft committee as well." They weren't interested in looking at functional objects. So I started a Contemporary Craft Committee, which went, I guess, about 10 years maybe, based on the same premise. And I

was on both. You know, it was kind of fun bouncing between the two.

MR. ADAMSON: Was this when Hazel Bray was the curator still?

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah, Hazel was still there when our committee was formed. So that worked out very nicely. And it was a nice connect with people working in the area. There are so many people working in this area. It is phenomenal how many artists there are. They have the Pro Arts now, open studios and various little organizations. I mean, you can't believe, hundreds and hundreds of studios open twice a year. I mean, it's unbelievable how many people are working in the area.

But the museums largely ignore them now. I mean, there isn't a lot of outreach. And there used to be more, which made it more of a community somehow. I don't know why. But now it's just diverse groups, and there's the Bay Area Sculptors group and there's the Metalsmiths Group, and there's the this and the that. You know, there are these little individual groups. But I find something lacking in the overall connection to the community. But that's just my perspective. I mean, I could be dead wrong, too. They may feel very well connected.

But over the years and working on -- you know, we used to do this exhibition and sale which I think benefited the museum. I can't remember all the aspects of it now. But it was very interesting, and the support. Imogene Cunningham would come in with her little photograph, you know. And they were so wonderful about bringing work to exhibit at these things. And Peter Voulkos with his huge cart with all his humongous ceramic stuff piled on it! [Laughs.] I mean, it was quite a community at that time. I'm talking the '70s and early '80s. And mid-'80s on up, things got much more, you know, distant. The museums sort of pulled back away from that outreach for a while, it seemed.

MR. ADAMSON: So the relationships were more formal and less close.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. And more traveling exhibitions, more major exhibitions, fewer group shows. And they were always all juried and everything. I mean, they were very well -- they were dealt with on a very professional level. But it was interesting. And there was conflict from the museum for a while, when it got involved with the craft community. It was interesting.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. They didn't want to have anything to do with it.

MRS. BENNETT: No, it wasn't that so much.

MR. BENNETT: Aw, well --

MRS. BENNETT: No, it wasn't that. What it was was the museum got a lot of flak from a few local craft galleries over competing.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, no.

MRS. BENNETT: No, that's very true. I heard -- I saw some of the letters. And so --

MR. BENNETT: They didn't want to lose any turf. The art department didn't want to lose any turf.

MRS. BENNETT: Well, that was always a struggle.

MR. BENNETT: I had great fights with them about it.

MRS. BENNETT: Ken got involved in that, yeah. I mean, trying to get his piece of the pie.

MR. ADAMSON: Ken Trapp?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: From the other departments in the museum, you mean.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: All he got was -- oh, that's right, he's probably going to hear this.

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughing] No, but I mean I know he shared --

MR. BENNETT: Oh, shit, all that shit I said yesterday; he's going to hear this, isn't he? You get that edit button going, Glenn.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: [Speaking to the microphone] I still love you, Kenny.

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.] No, but he had a real hard time getting his fair share of the exhibition dollars -- and Suzanne [Baizerman], I think, has had a struggle. You know, you just have to fight for what you want, because you're one person, and you've got three or four other art curators in there. And you're one, so you're fighting for your little share, always.

MR. BENNETT: Without going into specifics -- and this is before Ken, this has nothing to do with Ken; or anything like that -- the three biggest attendance shows that they've had there was that first object show, [a great furniture show of California work] you know, up in the small gallery up top. Christ, they couldn't beat the people away, there were so many people. And then the quilting show. They had to, like, close the doors. And then the Boston show. You know? And then subsequently, like some of the -- I think, Warnick's show of turned wood and then glass and stuff like that. The craft shows draw more people than the art shows. And I think that's -- you know: "Geez, we're looking pretty bad here; we don't need any more of these crafts shows." That's my feeling. You know?

MR. ADAMSON: You actually helped organize the California woodworking show that was held back in 19 --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, I think I was instrumental in that.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: With Harvey Jones.

MR. BENNETT: No, that was when Neubert was here.

MRS. BENNETT: Garry was absolutely instrumental, and also raised a good portion of the money for it through the Lewises, Sydney and Frances Lewis.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh. Okay.

MRS. BENNETT: The Lewises had their foundation set up then, and they contributed seed money for that exhibition, because basically George said, "I don't have the money for it." And Garry said, "If I get the money, will you do it?" And he said, "Yeah." [Laughs.] So Garry got the money. That was funny. That was funny.

[Recording paused.]

MR. ADAMSON: Say that again.

MR. BENNETT: Well, I don't know. I still hold art pretty high. And I think what we do is great -- in our area. In our sphere. Art still is stuff. I don't think these museums want to let the barbarians in the gate, so to speak, or the camel's nose in the tent flap, because people like this stuff. And, you know, I mean, how many art shows do you have? And I'm not pumping the ACC [American Craft Council] shows, but there's some beautiful work in those things, and they draw thousands and thousands of people. And craft galleries that show good craft, they're making it. Then the art galleries: "Oh, geez, when will we get the next client in here?" You know? So I think the museums -- because they are, quote, "art museums," they're not craft museums. We have one. You know? And it's apparently going to go by the wayside.

You know, they're going to monkey with that thing, and Aileen Webb is going to be totally disappointed -- if she can be, being dead -- but you know. So, I mean, we don't need a design museum or a European, quote, "craft museum." You know what that stuff is; it's Swedish glass and Czechoslovakian silverware, whatever. So it's going to hurt. I mean, our only venue is going to go away. But none of these museums are willing to give up their art status. You know? You can go to the Oakland Museum, and they've got some cases and a few things out. They've been very generous with me; I've got some work up there and I appreciate it.

But I mean, you know, the art collection's always changing; they're always having art shows, seldom craft shows. There's a lot of craft being made. Like there's a lot of bad art, there's a lot of bad craft, but there's also a lot of good of both. And it's not even. And I've always been upset about that. Still am.

MR. ADAMSON: Are there other museums that have collected your work that aren't -- you know, not the Renwick, the Mint Museum, or the American Craft Museum, and not the Oakland Museum?

MR. BENNETT: Well, Frisco's got a piece of mine. I don't know if it ever gets shown. It's a beautiful chair.

MR. ADAMSON: You mean the Frisco MOMA [Museum of Modern Art]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Good, Glenn; see, now you know how to say "Frisco."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Oh, right.

MR. BENNETT: It comes out easy, doesn't it?

MR. ADAMSON: It sure does, yeah.

MR. BENNETT: [Singing] Frisco, Frisco, Frisco!

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: The Boston Museum. The museum at Mobile, Alabama. They've got a really nice piece, but it's a funny little museum. God, I don't know. I don't think I'm -- no, I'm not widely museum collectible. I don't know why I've got -- apparently the Mint just bought a piece of mine. They sent a letter. I've got to fill out some forms for copyright stuff and that. They have a donated piece. But we don't push. Certainly we don't push, and none of my galleries have really pushed. Scott's got an "in" to the Mint. You know, I mean, he's really good friends with the guy that's the curator there. And that helps. Your gallery's the one that can get you in. You can't. Unless you're just so goddamn good, you know, they're not going to find you. So I can't think of -- I'm sure I'm in some little museum somewhere. Oh!

MRS. BENNETT: Montreal Museum.

MR. BENNETT: Montreal. And I suspect I will be well represented in Virginia because the Lewises have so much of my work. So I suspect I'll be one of the guys there, which will be kind of nice.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know? I don't think they've given any of my work yet. The Magnes Museum, the Jewish Museum [San Francisco, California] has got a major piece of mine, but that's old. It's a piece of sculpture. So, no, I'm not well represented in museums.

MR. ADAMSON: And it hasn't been a particularly high priority over the years?

MR. BENNETT: Well, I wouldn't know how -- sure, I mean, that's really good strokes, you know, but I don't know how to go about it. I wouldn't have the slightest idea. "Hey, you want this piece?" You know, I mean, it comes a point -- I mean, Museum of Modern Art in New York, you know, if they came through here and said, "Hey, we like that piece," I'd say, "Take her on. Want me to pay the shipping?"

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: I mean, really, seriously.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: I've always felt, and I feel to this day, once a piece is built, I care about it as an aesthetic object, but after it's built and people have seen it, the money's not that important. You know, it's nice to sell an old piece because --

MRS. BENNETT: You can't say that because of the tax man.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, but I still -- you know, after it's been made, I can get rid of it pretty easily unless she puts the grab on it, which Sylvia does, and thank God. She says, "Not selling that piece." You know?

MR. ADAMSON: So you've held things back on purpose?

MR. BENNETT: Sylvia has, yeah. And she's got a goddamn good eye, because we still own some of my better work.

MR. ADAMSON: Sylvia, what goes into your thinking when you do that? I mean, what is it about some pieces that make you think, "Man, we should keep that"?

MRS. BENNETT: Just there are certain things I like about it. It's a very personal preference.

MR. BENNETT: I wouldn't have the *Nail Cabinet* if not for her.

MRS. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I really was reluctant to see that go. It went back East. And fortunately -- someone bought it or had expressed interest in it, but they wanted --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, they wanted me to make a new door.

MRS. BENNETT: -- they wanted it with a clean door. And I said, "Terrific. Tell them it's not for sale." And I said, "And tell them not to sell it; it's mine."

MR. ADAMSON: You mean a clean door without a nail?

MRS. BENNETT: Right.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, make a new door, no nail in it.

MRS. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: But I'd have saved that door, see, and I'd still have the original nail.

MRS. BENNETT: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: That's true.

MRS. BENNETT: Oh, God. Maybe someday it will just arrive in the mail.

MR. BENNETT: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, do you want to look through the book and --

MR. BENNETT: Sure. Let's do it in there, though, at the table.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. We're going to pause and look through the catalogue.

[BEGIN TAPE 5 SIDE A.]

MR. ADAMSON: We're back. This is again February second. And we're now going to talk with Garry about the works that are shown in the book, *Made in Oakland: The Furniture of Garry Knox Bennett*, which we were just talking about, produced by the Craft Museum last year, two years ago now. And this is not going to be chronological, because the book is not in chronological order. We're just going to go through the sequence of the book.

The frontispiece is a cabinet with a lamp on top. I thought I'd ask Garry to start talking about that one [*Tall Lamp Cabinet*. 1973].

MR. BENNETT: Okay. This is really an early piece of furniture. I'm pretty sure at the time all I had was a radial arm saw, so this was made with a radial arm saw. I may have had a jointer. I must have had a jointer, because of these drawer fronts. I certainly wouldn't have hand-planed them that smooth. It's just redwood nailed together, hence one of my favorite pieces. And we've managed to keep it, and I'm glad I did. It's, you know, very rudimentary woodwork. But you know, I made another one. A friend of ours saw it, and he wanted one for his knife collection. This is years and years ago. So I made another one out of ash and mahogany and stuff that he's got. But this one's infinitely better, but he wanted basically the same lash-up.

MR. ADAMSON: Was there any source of inspiration for the metalwork?

MR. BENNETT: No. I started right out incorporating metal, you know, metal with the wood. So it's just, "Hey, it will look good there." Or, you know, as we talked about the other day, in some instances I can put structure in. The metalwork is pretty decorative, pretty much ornamental, other than the key escutcheons. You know, they're generally metal. These are big ones. But if you want to get in there, all you've got to do is undo the screws on the outside. [Laughs.] You know, I mean, but the idea is there.

And this little blue desk [*Little Aluminum Desk, Blue*. 1990], I think I had first met Wendell and started really becoming aware of his work, and I said to myself, I'm going to "out-Wendell" Wendell. You know, the guy can make some beautifully delicate things. So that's where that came about. I was working on it and the Lewises came by. I think they came over to the house and had dinner or whatever. But they stopped by the studio, and Sydney saw me working on that. And he said, "Garry, when you're finished with that," he says, "I want that."

I says, "Yeah, okay." So, for whatever reason, I put it away for three or four years. I kind of, I don't know, lost interest in it or whatever. And then one day I was carousing around and I found all these parts. I said, "Geez, you know, I ought to work on that." So I finished it. And when I finished it, I phoned him up. I said, "Sydney, do you remember that desk?"

He said, "Yep. Send her on." There was never any question, "How much is it?" or anything. And they're marvelous people. Well, she is. Sydney's gone, but he's still with us, I think, in some ways.

MR. ADAMSON: This material here is ColorCore.

MR. BENNETT: ColorCore. Yeah. That was a very difficult piece to make. It still racks a little. I saw it during these two shows. It had never been shown before; it went, boomp, right into their place. It's got a little bit of rack to it. You know what "rack" is, when you got something really tall and some weight on the top. But it looks good. Looks goddamn good.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you fabricate this wiggle on the bottom?

MR. BENNETT: Just sawed out and then filed.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Just a billet of aluminum and tapered by hand and filed by hand. A lot of work. A lot of work. And then this attachment where they attach up here, it's mechanically attached. It's bolted on but done really well. You know, it's not going to come apart.

MR. ADAMSON: Arthur Danto makes a point about this piece, which is that there's this kind of perverse inversion of the materials that you usually see, with a very little bit of wood and a lot of metal and the ColorCore.

MR. BENNETT: Right. Yeah. I don't know if I do that purposely. But I think he's talking about another piece, yeah, the *ColorCore Desk*, where, you know, everything you see is all metal and ColorCore and plastic, and then the drawers are made out of rosewood. And I think that's the one he was referring to. Yeah, it's a little perverse, hide the rosewood inside.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Let's move on.

MR. BENNETT: Okay, we're moving on.

MR. ADAMSON: The *Nail Cabinet* again.

MR. BENNETT: Naw, we've talked about that goddamn thing.

MR. ADAMSON: We've talked about that. And I'll skip other people's work in here. Okay, the *Boston Kneehole Desk* [1989], page 12.

MR. BENNETT: Yes?

MR. ADAMSON: Made for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah, one of the great shows; I mean, truly was. I think everybody, even myself, which I think, "Aw, well, Jesus, here we are, can rent a saw, goddamn, get a bunch of guys all fired up; I'll just make something," but I think I realized this was going to be a special show. And I think everybody else in the show realized that. That show, well, it's still talked about to this day. Everything was of the highest order, you know. And so, I don't know, I wanted to make a piece that just was, craft-wise, was just past -- it took it to another level.

And I borrowed a friend's diamond band saw. I built this whole carcass, and basically the whole thing was built, and I never could get it, man. I couldn't figure out what the base was going to be. I was thinking of, you know, some sort of ball and claw, and I was going to use -- I don't know, I was thinking of, like, goat's foot or something. You know? But I had this thing sitting up there, and I'd look at it, and I'd say, "Boy, this thing needs a base." Visually, it's not terribly heavy, but when you see all that metal and all that Corian and stuff, your brain is telling you, "Man, this is a heavy," and it is really heavy because the carcass is 3/4-inch aluminum. I mean, it's a really heavy piece.

And then somewhere in here in this thing, Sylvia saved some pictures. And Dan Bennett, who was no relation, was working with me at the time, and I mean one of the best relationships I've ever had with anybody. Without his skill, that piece would have been half as good as it is. Anyway, well, we'll come to it maybe. But anyway, there's a thing in here. Sylvia for some reason had saved -- had taken some pictures of Dan and I working on the thing -- no, it's not in here -- had saved some pictures of Dan and I working on the thing, and also a sketch I'd done of it. It's not even a sketch; it's just on yellow, you know, lined paper. Aw, shit. Goddamn. I really want to show you this, because it's kind of funny. Well, we may come across it, and that will jog my memory back.

That's a piece that Frisco's got, the Frisco Museum. Nice chair, really. Goddamn good chair.

Anyway, so I was looking at this thing and I was drinking my glass of whiskey. And, you know, Dan had gone, and I was looking at it and looking at it. And I wrote on that yellow piece of paper. It's just some sketches. It's got,

like, the feet I may do. And then I just wrote, in big, black pen, "BRICKS." And that was it. And then I set about making the bricks. So I borrowed a guy's diamond-cutting band saw and sawed the bricks and all that, and that's how it came to be. But the bricks are perfect. I mean, it made also some sort of allusion to Boston. You know, Boston's got a lot of bricks. And it's a good piece. Excellent piece.

MR. ADAMSON: I've heard it said that the bricks are sort of like the furniture you would see in a college dorm.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. Stacked. Board, more bricks, board. Yeah. Well, it's a little more than a college dorm.

MR. ADAMSON: The top is Fountainhead©?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: What is that material like to work?

MR. BENNETT: [To Mrs. Bennett] Bye, Hon.

Fountainhead© is like Corian. It's an acrylic material that has stone chips and stuff like that in it. I love it. I like to work with that, too. I really like it. Very expensive. Very hard to glue, so I fabricated. I joined it mechanically. It's got a lot of trick shit in it, man. There's a lever that the tray lifts out, because if you have a desk and you've got a bunch of stuff stacked on it, a writing desk, well, you've got to move stuff to write. But I've got this tray that comes out. It's totally hidden, but it comes out another probably about 16 inches. And it's aluminum and you can write on it, then when you're through writing, you push it back in, and you don't have to take all your little "tchotchkes" and all your glass stuff off of it.

MR. ADAMSON: The hardware on here you fabricated?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. No, no. I made one, and then had it cast.

MR. ADAMSON: They're in bronze?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, they're cast bronze.

MR. ADAMSON: What did you make the model out of?

MR. BENNETT: Wax. Made it out of wax, then cast that, then finished it up, and then had Piero -- had Art Works -- mold it, and then made the handles. I sent Ken -- I never -- [speaking to microphone] I never got a "thank you," Ken. You know? Geez. But I sent him the original mold, the original prototype and one of the castings, because they wanted some stuff to go along with that. I packaged it up and sent it to them. Geez, I never heard back. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: This is -- the Renwick Gallery owns this piece.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And how did that come about? How did they manage to get that?

MR. BENNETT: Ron Abramson bought it for them. And there's another guy who should be mentioned, too. I mean, Jesus, he's been really good. You know, he's been very supportive. Some of these collectors -- I mean, us furniture guys, we don't have many because we make big stuff, generally.

And you know, another aspect of the show was trying to borrow back pieces because, unlike glass -- you know, somebody says, "Well, we're having a glass show."

"Oh, yeah, what do you want?"

"Oh, we'll take this and this and this."

"Okay." You know, they package it up, and then they go downstairs in the basement and bring up eight more pieces. But a piece of furniture is really used, you know. And I know Warren and Bernice did not want to lend their ColorCore desk out here. *Tangary* stayed back there. The guy said, "No, I use it all the time." You know, "It's my bar." It's difficult to get these pieces. But anyway, Ron Abramson, Ron and Anne, they've been very generous support-wise, you know, to a lot of people. And I appreciate collectors like that.

MR. ADAMSON: And the idea of acquiring a piece for the Renwick came from the museum, or was it --

MR. BENNETT: Well, didn't that show go to the Renwick?

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MR. BENNETT: Well, I know the Boston Museum, they bought Cederquist's piece, and then when this came -- you know, that was probably the star of the show, the Cederquist piece. I mean, it really knocked a lot of people out. So when the show got to the Renwick, then they wanted this. So I guess they twisted Ron's arm, and he came up with the money. I believe it was 27 grand, or something like that.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you say why you picked this New York -- the *Kneehole Desk* as a piece to work off of?

MR. BENNETT: I can't remember. I really can't remember. It might have been because it was case work. Of course, I guess all that shit is case work, isn't it?

MR. ADAMSON: A lot of it.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I knew I didn't want to make a chair, and a bench would be a cop-out. I don't know, I kind of liked the curves. And I may still to this day do one. I've always wanted to do a Bombay chest. You know, I like the curves. So when you look at this -- and the way I work is linearly, so these curves were very easy for me to reinterpret on a two-dimensional level. So, you know, and I like the idea of the little thing in there.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you at the event where a bunch of a furniture makers who were in the show all came to the Boston Museum?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, geez, I spent one whole day in the bowels of the museum looking at old brown stuff, and Ned's going on and on. God bless him, I've nothing bad to say about Ned, but he was in his milieu, man. I mean, telling what kind of nails they used and how they used to have to make their own screws, and "Look at this," and he'd pull drawers out. I mean, Jesus, I just glazed over.

And I remember we were walking through there and walked around the corner, and somebody had donated to the museum some Memphis stuff. And it was, "Geez, what the fuck is this here?" You know? I said, "Ned, what's that?" He said, "Oh, well, somebody gave it to us and we had to take it." And I don't like Memphis either. I think it was very freeing; kind of like maybe Jackson Pollock certainly is a great artist, but Jackson Pollock freed a lot of stuff. And I think Memphis probably had a bigger impact on furniture than a lot of people would suspect, just because, you know, these "woodies" are -- "Oh, Jesus, boy, look at that color, look at that pink and green together." So I think partially my influence and Memphis, that's why there's a lot of color.

MR. ADAMSON: You were there before Memphis, though.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah, yeah, but I mean Memphis solidified it, I think, for a lot of people: "Yeah, I can do this," you know? I certainly wasn't the first guy -- you know, I think back in the '20s -- but I think I kind of resurrected color and metal and that. There was a guy named Ferrari that used to make some pretty wild shit, you know. And the Art Deco guys, Jesus, they weren't afraid of anything. But we got into wood and I think it really stifled, but maybe we weren't ready for it either, because there was nobody practicing until Tage Frid and some of those guys came along and got students, and then furniture got going.

MR. ADAMSON: When you got together with the other makers that were in the show in the Boston Museum, was it the first time that you had met some of them?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, some of them. Yeah. It was the first time I had met some of them. When was that Boston show?

MR. ADAMSON: '89.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, it was that late? Oh, so we were there in probably '86 then, huh?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, probably.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, I think probably by that time I had met most of the people. I don't think I had ever met Jere Osgood, and I really don't know him very well. I see him and we talk, but he's a real quiet guy. And I must have first met Alphonse and Rosanne there, too, and Tommy Simpson. I really love that guy. Jesus Christ, what a neat guy. Yeah, we've been pretty good friends. Yeah, so there were a lot of people. You know, Schriber, James Schriber, and who was the other guy you mentioned?

MR. ADAMSON: Tom Hucker, maybe?

MR. BENNETT: No, no, no. But Tom Hucker, probably the first time, yeah [and Judy McKie].

MR. ADAMSON: Did you feel like the show added to the camaraderie of the field? In other words, that it made

people feel like there was something happening and that it had brought things up a notch?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, definitely the show brought things up a notch, without question. I don't know. I mean East Coast people, they always seem to me like people out in the woods, you know, with a wood fire and some stream running through and a water wheel and doing their stuff. I mean, that's overemphasized, but -- I don't know. I have some very dear friends. I mean Dunnigan and I can sit down and get really fucked-up drunk, but Rosanne and Alphonse, they're pretty straightforward, nose to the grindstone and all that. Yeah, I have camaraderie with them, but they're different people than we are out here.

[Laughs.] I'm saying a lot of this for the microphone, you know.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: I mean, I really love these people.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Here's a lamp, page 14.

MR. BENNETT: *Electric Perk* [1996]. Yeah, I've made a lot of these lamps in coffee cans. And the idea -- this wasn't the first one. The first one was in a Medaglia D'Oro coffee can, which is the Rauschenberg signature, almost. And you know, when I was making these 100 lamps, I said, "You know, one thing every garage has got, it's got a coffee can or a cigar box full of stuff." So that's how these lamps started.

You know, I went around the studio, and I'd pack it in there, and there's a bottom in there, and then I got it all where I wanted it, and then I just poured epoxy in it. You know, this one here, I poured the epoxy through this pipe because I didn't want to get it on -- but everything is connected, so you can't pull anything out. So it's there. So that's kind of how those came about. I like them. I liked them a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you have to teach yourself how to do the wiring and such?

MR. BENNETT: It's very rudimentary. Actually, I use these touch switches almost exclusively now because they're so easy to install. You know? And if you put a dimmer on a lamp, somebody's going to come up there and twist it till it breaks. I mean, I replaced more dimmers. So these, you can't hurt these things. You touch it, it goes on. And they don't fail. I've had a couple fail, and I just send the people another dimmer and just say, "When you take it apart, look how the wires go," and blah, blah, blah. And they get really happy because they've fixed an electrical appliance.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: You know? Ha-ha.

MR. ADAMSON: Here's some early stuff here. Here's the house [*Garry Knox Bennett House*; Lincoln, California, 1962] that you talked about. And on page 21, the *Sperm Oil Lamp* from '77.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. At one point I made a lot of kerosene lamps. And, you know, Jesus, I don't know, I had this sculpture group up here the other night, 35 people, and showed them slides, and they were knocked out. I don't think a lot of them realized that craft guys have fun too. But what I said to them is, I'm really lucky. Unlike you guys -- inherent in art is, like, "Geez, I gotta have a message," and the minute you don't have a message, uh-oh, it's decorative art or whatever. See, I can make puns like that.

And what brought that up is they said, "Do you title your work?"

And I said, "Mostly not, but sometimes you can't help it." You know, like "Mickey Macintosh."

One of the things that really gets me is these goddamn bowl turners. Everything's got to have a title. You know, "Moon in Galaxy IV" or some bullshit. It's a fuckin' piece of wood that's been spun around and around and around, and you've worried it to death. It has nothing to do with Aristotle or Duchamp or anybody, man, it's just a piece of spun wood. So anyway, once in a while you get to title something, and that's obviously got little sperm running. And, you know, sperm oil lamps were big in, what, 18th century. So just a little play on words. Sperm Oil Lamp. It's funny shit.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] These are all hand fabricated, I suppose.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And welded on there?

MR. BENNETT: Silver soldered on, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Soldered on?

MR. BENNETT: That was hard to do because it's two plating jobs, and the only thing that's gold-plated were the sperm heads. So I gold-plated it, then I had to go back and resist all the little heads with a resist, and then go back and silver-plate it. So it's gold-plated underneath. Underneath is all gold.

MR. ADAMSON: So this talent for puns, did that originate from your youth?

MR. BENNETT: No. I suspect English is very -- I don't know if other languages have puns. I'm sure they do, but I'm sure they can't have anywhere near as many as we do. English, we've got 60,000 words in the dictionary, so you can pun to death, pun till the sun rises.

MR. ADAMSON: Here's an interesting piece, this *Drop-Top Table With Lamp* [1976] on page 22. And you still own this.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I made two of these. Judy Coady has one. And hers I made for a guy that had a house boat and he needed a table -- a house boat has limited space, so a table he could pull out from the wall, flop it down, and seat five or six people around, you know, five people, four people real comfortable, or they could put it against the wall and have their breakfast on either side. The lamp removes. And I got the idea from those real old chairs that had the thing. But they just flopped down, and they were either that the round part was set so high it didn't look right, or you had to take it off and put it on there. This is on a dovetail, two dovetails, and so when you tilt it over, you just slide it to center it and put it down. Very functional. But he didn't like it, so I made him another one. I have no pictures of it. I kind of barely remember it in my head. And he liked that. And I liked this so much I made another, and then Judy Coady bought one of them.

MR. ADAMSON: And it obviously relates to the kerosene lamps you were doing at the time.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I figured a kerosene lamp, instead of having an electric cord on it, would be -- you know.

MR. ADAMSON: So this is 1976, so this has to be one of your first uses of a big piece of aluminum in a piece of furniture.

MR. BENNETT: Probably, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And the paint.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. In the sun, that aluminum has got a different coefficient than wood, so it kind of -- you know, it bows a little bit. But it's strong-backed. It's fine. It works out all right.

MR. ADAMSON: On page 26 we have the *Clock with Four Drawer Chest* from '78.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. That was in a show at the American Craft Museum. And somebody mixed something terribly up. I don't know. At that time, I probably had -- geez, I don't know what that would have sold for, maybe 1,800 bucks or so, but they sold it for \$900. And actually it worked out pretty well. Some friends of mine just happened to buy it, so they've still got it. Nice piece. It's one of the first pieces where I was using the etched galvanized technique. I like it. It's a good piece.

MR. ADAMSON: And it has a clock in it. That last piece has one of the kerosene lamps in it.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It's interesting. You're sort of bridging over from the smaller work into the furniture.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. Let's see. Yeah. Well, you know, God, you know my work. I go back and forth. Right now I'm in small mode because of the space downstairs.

MR. ADAMSON: When this show was at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York, did you go to the opening?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it was a real thrill. Geez, I had two pieces in there, the square box one, too. And, oh, yeah, man, geez, "I'm in a New York art show -- or furniture show." I was really proud. Yeah, I went.

MR. ADAMSON: What did you think of the other work?

MR. BENNETT: Well, I was subsequently in other shows where there was much more metal and color, but I looked at my piece and looked at the other ones, and I said, "Geez, it looks like they came from Sweden." You

know, that's where it was in those days. It was walnut and all licked out. Nice. Beautifully made. No doubt about it. I'm sure Jere Osgood was there and Dunnigan and all the East Coast people. I mean, like I feel about museums that don't handle craft, I also feel we get pretty short shrift out here on the West Coast because the power's in the East Coast. I mean, how long has it taken Voulkos to be known out there. And still: "Oh, Peter, yes, he makes those big goopy clay things." Or Arneson. I mean, Thiebaud's just finally breaking in.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you feel like, when you had this piece in New York, do you feel like you got a kind of chilly reception from anybody?

MR. BENNETT: No, no, no.

MR. ADAMSON: [Off mike.]

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, no. Not at all. No, I think some people -- I mean, when you look at the jointery here, man, you know I'm going to get a chilly reception for jointery from those guys, but no, I never got -- no. A lot of times I got, "Well, why did you do that?" But not, "Oh, Jesus, why did you do THAT?" It was like a real question mark. "Why did you put that metal on there?" And that's good. That's positive.

MR. ADAMSON: You know, one person we didn't talk about yesterday was Sterling King. Is he someone you knew personally?

MR. BENNETT: I just barely knew Sterling. I never cared for his work that much. I mean, he really was what the East Coast thought of us. You know, "hippie driftwood furniture maker." And that's where he was. Some of the stuff is quite nice. Here's Jack Hopkins, though, who we talked about, and I mean, boy, that guy, he cut away a lot of wood. Glued a lot of wood up and cut away a lot. But he was awfully good at it. But Sterling, no, I never -- I mean, I don't think he ever pursued it, either. He was a surfer.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Some good stuff.

We talked about this a little bit last night. This is the cabinet [*Painted Cabinet*, 1978] that you made at the same time as the *Nail Cabinet*, roughly.

MR. BENNETT: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: This painted design here, does that have a source or were you just --

MR. BENNETT: No, I developed that when we were up in Lincoln. You know, I made some little -- I made the chairs with really hand tools, and I made some dumb little cabinets. And I developed a technique of incising the wood, because I'd try to paint a design on wood, and it would bleed out. So I just took a sharp knife and incised whatever I wanted; then with a fine brush then I could take watercolor -- or I've always used black shoe dye a lot -- and just go right up, and it just stops at that cut. So you get a real crisp line. So that's how that was done. "A gimcrack cabinet made of humble woods."

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Is that something you do frequently, signing your pieces with these kind of descriptors?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. There was a while I was doing a lot of Nixon stuff. Yeah. Some of it's pretty ugly, but -- no big deal. I mean, you know, he's no worse than any of the rest of these assholes we've got.

MR. ADAMSON: So here's a buffet, page 29 [*Buffet*, 1977].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, that's a good one.

MR. ADAMSON: A good example of your use of an electroprint.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Howard Hack, a friend of mine, his graphics are so good. This photograph isn't really good. You can see this, but I just wanted him to -- so I say, "Hey, Howard, here's the size of the panel," you know, and so he made that. And I printed him up a bunch of them for his efforts.

MR. ADAMSON: And you were doing all the electroprints yourself in your own shop?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: This passage of curved mahogany here --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I had all this big rosewood, and so that's a ribbon. When you open that drawer up, it's about 5/8ths of an inch, you know, real perfect all the way. So it looks like it might be a big, thick piece of wood, but it's real light. So it's just the drawer front. And that's the pull; you can grab that there.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you cut it out?

MR. BENNETT: Band saw.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it difficult to cut that much --

MR. BENNETT: No. I have that big Tannewitz downstairs. That's how this was cut. I can cut 18-1/2 inches under it. So it's not a problem at all.

MR. ADAMSON: This wine rack seems very unusual for your work, to me.

MR. BENNETT: Well, you know, it seemed like a good place to put wine. I mean, if I had this piece, if I had it back -- I was supposed to get it. The guy that owns it had some financial trouble, and he was moving, and he needed to store it. And I said, "Ooh, yeah, bring it along," because if I had it, I'd have wine in it.

MR. ADAMSON: The other thing that seems odd to me about this piece is the handling of the feet, and then this bubble shape here.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it is odd, isn't it. Yeah. I don't know why I did it, the little bitty dovetail up there. Yeah, it's odd. But it seemed to need it, you know? Maybe if you can envision this going right across, maybe it would still be all right, but that doesn't touch the floor. It's kind of like a little tension spot down there.

MR. ADAMSON: And this is an X-O, is that right, on the handles?

MR. BENNETT: On the pulls? X-O wouldn't mean anything. They're tied -- they're just wire. That's how they're put on there. The handles are wired onto a base, and then it's screwed to the back of the drawer. It's just decorative. Just got to do it real easy. It puts the handle on real good and it looks good.

MR. ADAMSON: These two drawers come out separately?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: They looked like they're joined here.

MR. BENNETT: No, they come out separate.

MR. ADAMSON: So there's a break in the pull there?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. It's funny. You know, it seems like they're sort of tied together.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. You wonder -- I mean, I never look at my work like that. You probably look at it differently. It's just, you do stuff. Like this thing down here. You just do stuff and you don't know why. And these are -- the glides are through. And I always liked that. I might have got that from Greene and Greene, I don't know, but I like that idea of the glides coming through and them chamfered off and dyed.

MR. ADAMSON: So Greene and Greene was something you were looking at and aware of back then?

MR. BENNETT: I'm sure I was, because I remember one time going down to The Gamble House, and I was really impressed. I'm not necessarily impressed with cottage or that sort of thing, but I was just impressed with overall just how good it is. You know, it's awfully good stuff; some of the elements I like a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: This bench that's on the same page is a classic, this series, cloud forms [*Bench*, 1982].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, I probably made six or seven of exactly the same shape.

MR. ADAMSON: The cloud form, this cartoonish thing?

MR. BENNETT: Just it's easy to do. You can get a lot of volume in something. You know, it seems like a nice ending for something horizontal; just bloomp, bloomp, end it. It's not like the "Unfinished Symphony," where you don't know -- or a guy died or something; the guy that wrote that died, I guess, just before he didn't finish it. Or those guys -- what's that one? There's one where a musician every once in a while gets up and leaves, and pretty soon all there is is a violinist going, "Eeh-t-eeeh-t-eeeh-t-eeeh." So anyway, that's just a way to end. And, you know, it's arbitrary.

MR. ADAMSON: One thing that people say about your work a lot is that it's cartoony.

MR. BENNETT: I disagree. I really disagree with that. And "whimsical"; boy, do I hate that word. Fuckin' whimsical. No, I'm pretty serious. I had a show at the Egg and Eye years ago, and some woman wrote it up in the L.A. -- you know, their newspaper section there. It was a nice write-up, pictures, and they sent a photographer up and everything. "Time doesn't stand still here." You know, there's a lots of clocks in this thing. And I think she was the first one to use it.

I'm serious. It's just an easy shape to make, that's all. What else, a square block? I've done some kind of modern things, but, you know, like -- oh, I did a buffet, blocks, you know, very modern looking but using wood. But to me that sounds a little too pretentious. And I do like these curves. I like to foil a curve against -- that's probably why that bloop is down there. This drawer and that bloop. Because everything else is rectilinear. So I like, if I make something really curvilinear, I like to put some jab in it, something real hard and straight. And rectilinear, well, I like to throw a curve in it.

MR. ADAMSON: Do these cloud ends actually slide off that --

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: -- if you want to --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, yeah. They have to. Because this is end-grained this way, and this is cross-grained this way, so they have to move.

MR. ADAMSON: This checkerboard motif is something you use a lot. Or did.

MR. BENNETT: I used to use it. Same technique as the incisement. Yeah, I did use it a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: Any particular reason?

MR. BENNETT: No, just easy to do and looks good. Yeah, it's no great epiphany of design, obviously. Guys that couldn't even write were doing it long before we got to it, us Europeans got to it.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Okay.

Here are some good ones. *Trestle Table*, speaking of the checkerboard motif, on page 30 [*Checkerboard Trestle Table*, 1985]. Do you want to talk about your general use of this form, the trestle table?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I probably spent about two years making trestle tables. I really liked how quick they went. I mean, I went to Australia once, and I went to England. And as a demonstration, I could make a table like that all by myself in a day. Not finished; I mean, then the second day, guys got in there and sanded on it and all that. For me, they go real fast. I like the look of them.

I suppose what started me on them was seeing some of these trestle tables with a little bitty trestle in there and a couple little bitty pegs. You know, little itty-bitty -- little, bitty, itty-itty-itty pegs. And so I just said, "Well, I'm going to make me some big pegs." Kind of, you know, really expanding. And then nothing bothers me more than a fairly delicate table with a big, thick top. So I always tried to -- I never used 3/4-inch, I always took it below 3/4, generally to 5/8ths.

And then there's a lot of structure under here. You know, like this. [Demonstrating on a piece of furniture where they're sitting] This is 5/8ths. And this is stable -- you know, it's wiggling because it's not tightened down there, but this is stable, and it moves. It can move. Look at these joints here. I AM good. Look at this. This thing is old, and that hasn't opened up a bit. And that moves that much there. So, yeah. No, I can do it good when I want to.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you describe the system that you use to attach the top to the cleats?

MR. BENNETT: Well, farther on, there's a picture of that. The table the Oakland Museum has, I think there's some details of that. It's just a dovetail. When I did the one in Australia, I buggered both my hands up doing it the way I used to, and now I do it differently.

I cut the -- let me see, I guess the pin -- and it's arbitrary. I can cut any angle I want, and then while the saw is still in that angle, I cross-saw a bunch of wood for the blocks. And then I assemble the pin on its stretchers and all that, turn the whole thing over, then get it centered on the -- the trestle is the first thing that's made. The tabletop is made, turned over, set the trestle on top of it upside down, get it where I want it, then glue these dogs -- wax the pin really good, and then glue these dogs right up to it, and "viola," man! You've got perfect registration; you can put a bunch of these in so you've got a nice long ride on this, and you've got infinite expansion and contraction.

I used to have to cut the 60-degree dovetail, and then I had to run these things through the router table for

these pads. And that's when I got buggered up, so I didn't like that. I didn't like getting buggered up, and this way is much better. Quicker, easier.

MR. ADAMSON: And it was something you invented.

MR. BENNETT: Huh?

MR. ADAMSON: You invented the structure.

MR. BENNETT: I'm pretty sure I did do that, yeah. Yeah, because most guys, they use a real thick table and then cut the slot all the way through the table. But, you know, if you're using 5/8ths of an inch, man, if you cut anything in it, you're really weakening it. So yeah. And that allowed me to float this real thin. You know, that one in there, that's real thin. And I like the look, a lot of mass down here and real thin on top.

MR. ADAMSON: The use of this wedge that goes down in here?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah?

MR. ADAMSON: First of all, how does this go together? What do you do first?

MR. BENNETT: Well, this particular one here, because there's no room to get the wedge up out of the way, the pin -- this round dowel has got a slot in it, so you move it up a little bit, and then the dowel slides out, and then the whole pin comes out.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BENNETT: Real simple. And then it's got a little ledge on here so you can hammer it down. I love to make them, because you put them together and then just a couple little taps, and, man, it just -- donk, it's absolutely rigid.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's not just ornamental; it actually does -- you actually do that --

MR. BENNETT: Oh, no, it's the pin. Yeah, it's the guy.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. These ends, the so-called breadboard ends?

MR. BENNETT: Breadboard, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It's another example of a pun. And I noticed on this one you've actually painted the sides of the base.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it's dyed with skunk hollowauvis [Garry does not recall what he was referring to at this point], and then I dyed the edges.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel like that helps carry across the point about the lines, of the shapes --

MR. BENNETT: Probably, yeah. And sometimes when you paint that edge, you don't have to do quite as much sanding, either. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

Okay. The *ColorCore Desk* [1984] we've discussed some already.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It probably would be helpful for you to talk about how you actually achieved this effect on the door front.

MR. BENNETT: It's just laminating. Just in your mind's eye, just say this one here might have been six inches by 30 inches of a whole bunch of different color ColorCores. And the factory surface you get, you have to abrade. Then I drilled some reference holes in either end out of wherever is going to be finished product, and then on a table I have a wax board, two nails where those reference holes are, and then I just start gluing it up, dropping each piece in these nails. It's epoxy, and epoxy will squirt all over, so you need to contain it. And then just put a block on top, clamp it, you know, go away. And then it's cleaned up.

And I used to do them here with a router with a following thing so I could rout across the 45, but I eventually ended up taking it to -- I think there's a better picture somewhere down the line here -- taking it to a machine shop, and they milled it with a milling machine. Very accurate. And then you saw that, then you come out with a

washboard; you sand them, and then you saw them into strips and just stagger them a half a thing and glue them back together.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. And that's how you get the striped effect.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Boy, you get real jazzy stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: This, again, is -- this thing that sticks off to the side -- [inaudible] -- of the desk?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It's a billet of aluminum. There's one on the other side, too. It's just been filed down.

MR. ADAMSON: This pipe -- [inaudible] -- circular leg?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, tubing.

MR. ADAMSON: That's just un-screwed-around-with tubing.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. On the inside there's probably a plywood disc that just fits inside of this tubing. It's machine-screwed to the bottom of the aluminum, and then inside that plywood disc there will be a T-nut, and it's just got a threaded steel rod that goes up, goes all the way through it, and you just tighten it down. "Donk," it just locks right on there.

MR. ADAMSON: There's an aluminum bench on page 31 [*Ribber Rips Bench*, 1989]. It's one of a couple you made, correct?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: With these so-called alligator bookends.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. They come out of a milling -- not a milling machine, a set of rolls. When they start rolling down to make plate, they start with a big billet of metal. And as that comes out the end, the ends fold over a little bit each time. And I liked them because it's a shape that would never come to you. Even if you were going to cast those shapes, I don't think you'd arrive at those shapes. And they're kind of nice.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you have to go to an aluminum machine shop to get those or --

MR. BENNETT: No, I went to Kaiser. There was a show here in Oakland, and Kaiser Aluminum sponsored it. So they gave us access to their research development out of Pleasantown. So we just got -- you know -- I got lots of aluminum.

MR. ADAMSON: And that's where you saw this happening?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, these things are just thrown out in back. You know, they'd go back in the furnace someday. And so I got a bunch of those. I made three benches. I still have one left down there. I probably should have gotten one more than what I got.

MR. ADAMSON: You like working with aluminum?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah. You use all your wood tools on it. You know.

MR. ADAMSON: Nice and light?

MR. BENNETT: Well, it's not light; it's pretty heavy, but it's certainly lighter than steel. I can work it very easily here. I don't weld it. So everything's fastened; and mechanically put together. You know it's just wood --

[BEGIN TAPE 5 SIDE B.]

MR. ADAMSON: Do you know how that show came about?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I think Norman Petersen was kind of instrumental in getting that together. And it was a good show. It was a good show. I mean, there was some good stuff there. Michael Cooper did some really whacked-out stuff, and Jerry Carniglia. I have one of the -- I bought one of the tables later on, but one of the tables that was in that, I have it at home, that buffet in the dining room. Yeah, it was a good show.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. It's interesting; there was that period where manufacturers seemed to be interested in sponsoring shows. It doesn't happen anymore.

MR. BENNETT: No. I don't know why. Well, museums used to be interested too. And, "Hey, let's have a group

show." No more. They just feel it's too much fuckin' trouble. [Speaking to microphone] Sorry, Renwick. But, you know, God, those are some of the best shows if they're curated properly.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And new talent gets a venue, you know? I mean, it's really tough for these people now to get a show.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Anywhere. And, you know, if they can go into a gallery and say, "Well, I showed at the Oakland Museum one time in a group show," or the Frisco Museum or this and that, you know, "Oh! Oh, geez. Okay, well, let's look at your work." I wish they would do more of that, but I think they feel it's too much trouble. That's my feeling. They'd rather have some show sent to them, you know, all boxed up.

MR. ADAMSON: On page 32, there's this *Metal Desk* [1986] with a red top. Sort of similar to that blue one we were talking about in terms of the top, but it seems like you were drawing on the trestle table design.

MR. BENNETT: Actually, I believe, I am pretty sure -- Abramson [Anne and Ronald] owns this. I'm pretty sure this top is canvas.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, that's been put on with contact cement and then lacquered to death so that it's fairly smooth. You couldn't write on it. You'd need a writing pad on it. But it's such a nice surface. It's just duck canvas glued onto the top and then painted red.

MR. ADAMSON: And were you working off the trestle table design?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah, this is a trestle table. This is a reverse trestle, or, you know, this is a pad that goes against this piece, and then these are wedges. And so they wedge from the inside. There's a thing that goes in here and it's got a taper in it, and you drive the wedge, and it pulls it in instead of pulls it this way.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. Okay.

Over here we have a bronze table [*Bronze Edition Table #1*, 1988] with a Fountainhead ©, I guess, top.

MR. BENNETT: How much of this are we going to do?

MR. ADAMSON: As much as we can.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, okay. Yeah, fine. No, it's all right with me.

MR. ADAMSON: We have another hour or so. It will start to be more repetitive, and we can go faster, I think.

But you did a lot of these tables.

MR. BENNETT: I did 13 of them. And when I was at Judy McKie's one time, I saw -- actually I saw, I guess it was in that book *Art for Every Day* [Patricia Conway. New York: Clarkson, Potter, 1990], one of her snake tables, three-legged tables, and I said, "Goddamn, that's a good idea." So all I needed to do was saw one piece and fabricate one leg, and then I took it to the foundry and they'd make me as many legs as I want. So the idea -- three-legged tables are as old as time, but I mean, that's what clicked me, was seeing Judy's snake table.

MR. ADAMSON: And what would you make the legs out of?

MR. BENNETT: Just wood.

MR. ADAMSON: Wood?

MR. BENNETT: Dowels. There's screws, you know. Just whatever. And they have a funny look to them because they're not highly finished or anything. And the foundry is awfully good. They're a very good foundry, and so everything's reproduced. These are copper nails in the back, just for texture. And so whatever you put into the mold, that's what you get out.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's sort of like an assemblage, but then it turns into one material.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: That's great. Now, these were shown at Gallery NAGA?

MR. BENNETT: They were first shown down at Walter White Gallery in L.A. I had a show of all 13 of them down there and didn't sell any. I don't make them anymore. I don't want to make them. They're kind of a pain in the ass to make. And I've not put them up for sale because I just don't want to -- you know, if I had an assistant here, I would really try to sell them, to get rid of them.

But this particular one, I think I've sold probably eight or nine out of an edition of 12. Some of them haven't been as good as others, but, you know, they'll dribble out. But this way, Sylvia will have -- you know, someday when I hit the big sawdust pile, she'll be able to go to the foundry and finish off the editions, possibly. I would assume if I cack, more people are going to say, "Oh, geez, I don't have a Garry Bennett."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: So, you know: "Hi. My name is Sylvia Bennett." Or [in the quivery voice of a very old woman] "My name is Sylvia Bennett, and I have got some of these tables."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] All right, moving right along.

Here's *Bennett's Bennett* [1991], a sideboard. This motif on the back has been compared to *Hokusai's Wave*, the Japanese print.

MR. BENNETT: That's the one out here. That's titled *Hokusai Right and Left*. In a way, yeah. It just was a nice piece of wood, and I think it was a piece of holly. You know, it's not a piece of lumber, because to get a piece of lumber out of it, there wouldn't be much left, but it looked nice. And the title, *Bennett's Bennett* is from Bennett Bean.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh.

MR. BENNETT: I saw an article on him that he did a bunch of stuff, I think for his own house, outside. And he had a lot of these cantilevered things stacked upon cylinders. I really liked them. So that's why it's called *Bennett's Bennett*. And I like that cantilevered stuff too.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you show it to him?

MR. BENNETT: I don't think so, no. I mean, he may have seen it. If he's got the book, he's seen this. He might see the allusion, or -- is that the right word?

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And is he a friend of yours at all?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, I know him. Not well. You know, he's a fire guy. One of those fire people.

MR. ADAMSON: Potter, you mean?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: No, I like the potters. Potters are -- well, they're all all right. Shit, everybody's all right.

MR. ADAMSON: This is PVC-like.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So that's --

MR. BENNETT: I used to make these round legs out of wood, and Christ, they'd crack, so I'd go get really good artist's canvas, you know, and glue the canvas on them and then have to paint them. And then one day I said, "There's got to be some plastic." And PVC, you know? Four, six, eight, 10, 12 inches. It's marvelous stuff. It's real smooth.

MR. ADAMSON: You paint it up?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. You paint it up. It glues up. Ohh. And it takes lacquers just perfectly, you know. And it's the

hard underlayment, so things won't chip as easy if they get hit.

MR. ADAMSON: It seems to me like PVC is even beyond most of the other materials you use in terms of it being a cheap construction material rather than a material that seems --

MR. BENNETT: Well, the thing is, this pipe is really cheap. If I could find a source for sheet PVC, I'd use a lot more of it. But it's brutally expensive, the sheet material is. It's marvelous stuff. Boy, they've got -- you know, when you put your long pipe in, the glues that they've got for that, oh, Jesus. Man, you put two pieces together, and in about an hour, it's one piece. That's the way it works. It's one fuckin' piece. And it's strong stuff. Not good in a fire, so don't let your house burn down, guy.

MR. ADAMSON: Neither is wood, though.

MR. BENNETT: That's true.

MR. ADAMSON: This *Chair* [1990]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, I think I made -- actually, I made probably about the first four or five, but then I got Dan here. And they were hot. I mean, people really liked them. And so I think one time we counted up, and I'd made 47 of them. They're all identical except the way they're treated. Different woods, you know, different bead arrangements. I made the first ones without arms. I think I made two or three. Judy McKie's got one of the first ones. I think the other one's in Germany.

MR. ADAMSON: One thing that Ned says here is that your sense of scale and other interests didn't translate easily into seating forms.

MR. BENNETT: Well, I really think that's a good chair, and there's a couple coming on. In the last show I had at Leo Kaplan, I made some chairs for desks, and I think they're as good a chair as there are out there, visually. And they're fairly comfortable. And I want them back. I mean, fuck, you can have the desk; I want those chairs back. I mean, there's three of them. I think they're really good. A chair's a hard thing to make.

MR. ADAMSON: Mm-hmm.

MR. BENNETT: You know? And I realized early on, if I'm going to be a chair maker, I'm not going to be able to experience the lifestyle that I have now. You can't make money at making chairs.

MR. ADAMSON: Because?

MR. BENNETT: They're just labor-intensive, man. They're hard to make. I don't know how many pieces of wood is in this chair. It's a crazy way to make a chair. But it's very strong. I think there's, like, 28 or 29 pieces of wood in that, not counting the bead stuff. You know? So Dan basically made it. And I like them. I've only kept -- I mean, we have, I think, four, and I've had opportunities to sell them and I've said no. You know? I like them. They're comfortable chairs. The chair is taken off that thonet round -- you know, the round chair. All the proportions are taken off that except for, whatever you call it, that canted back, you know, which is a couple degrees. The seat's flat in this. But this is a very comfortable chair because your ass can get out the back.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: I mean, you see these guys build these chairs, man; it come down like this and it goes "bloop." I mean, man, you're talking about going to church, for Christ's sake. Those suckers are not comfortable. This is comfortable. And even some of Sam's chairs. I have one of Sam's chairs. It's the little chair. It's very comfortable. But some of his rockers, man, you can't get back in them properly. And the other thing that I find really wrong with them is they're so slick in the seat, you never get in the seat. You're always sliding forward.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know? And if you slide too far, that big goddamn point's going to split you. De-nut you.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: But they're beautiful chairs. And they are comfortable, but they need sandpaper on that seat.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: Or some styrofoam or something.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughing.]

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, so you don't -- you know what I'm talking about?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, I do.

MR. BENNETT: It's like a bean bag chair, man.

MR. ADAMSON: You slide right out.

MR. BENNETT: Pretty soon you're going over, you know. Or a water bed. There's just something inherently wrong with too slick a seat. So these slats run across. And you're sitting flat, so you're not tempted to slip out.

MR. ADAMSON: It's funny, because chairs are so -- they're like the classic furniture form.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: You know? And when you think of a furniture maker, you usually think of their chair.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And it's very much not the case with you.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, no, because I've made very few chairs. No, it's not. Wendell, you think of chairs. Sam, you think of chairs. I can't think of -- there's other guys, you know. A woman told me one time -- boy, she hit it right bang on. We did a slide show together and we were talking. She said, "Well, the two hardest things to make are chairs and shoes."

I said, "What?"

She says, "Yeah. They got to be good-looking, light, strong, functional," and one other thing. And if you think about a chair --

MR. ADAMSON: Ergonomic, too.

MR. BENNETT: Well, yeah. Well, yeah. But "comfortable." I just kind of put comfortable in there. There's one more and I can never remember it. But if you think about a chair, that's what it is too. Maybe inexpensive. I don't know. I mean, you can make a big -- you know, like that chair of Po Shun's out there, that's really comfortable. Did you sit in that?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. That's a comfortable chair. I don't know how good-looking it is, but I like it. And I like the fact that it's a prototype.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: Okay, moving on.

MR. ADAMSON: Let's talk about the *Tangarry Chest* [1991] a little bit more. We talked about it a fair amount last night.

MR. BENNETT: Is there a bigger picture of it?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, there is, but --

MR. BENNETT: Okay. I know what it looks like. Well, it started from the panels. I wanted to do the panels. And let me see, I think I said 27 drawers and I was probably wrong. How many is in there? [Looking at the picture] This fuckin' print is printed backwards. [Laughs.] These are on this side. One, two, three -- nine, ten, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 -- no, no it isn't. It's right.

MR. ADAMSON: Plus ten.

MR. BENNETT: Plus ten.

MR. ADAMSON: That's 26.

MR. BENNETT: Twenty-six. A lot of goddamn drawers! And I talked about how I dumped it over, so that's in there.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. The handles on the sides?

MR. BENNETT: I don't know. I don't know why I put those there. They were kind of like a Tansu --

MR. ADAMSON: Those have handles on the sides sometimes.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, right, but they're generally metal handles. I don't know. Just, you know, put them in there.

MR. ADAMSON: It's funny because there's absolutely no way you could lift it by the handles.

MR. BENNETT: Well, you can. You can grunt it. If you need to move it two inches more into the wall, you can do it. But yeah, oh, it's really heavy. You gotta take the drawers out.

MR. ADAMSON: And isn't the back of it painted?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It's got a great painting on the back. Franklin Parrasch, he showed this. And he wrote about it, and it was a nice little bit of poetry he wrote. You know, he said in the back it's got this painting that will never see the light of day because it will be against a wall. Yeah, it's a nice painting.

MR. ADAMSON: And sometimes you paint the insides of drawers.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. A lot. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: This piece, *Window of Opportunity* [1993], is unusual in that it's paired with a painting.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It's kind of a nasty little painting too, isn't it? Yeah, I don't know, I just wanted to do the painting. When I did that, you know, this looked like a vulva here, and so I just put the painting above it.

MR. ADAMSON: Which came first?

MR. BENNETT: The piece.

MR. ADAMSON: And the painting was an homage to it, in a way?

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

MR. ADAMSON: And then you had the stripes instead of the checkerboard.

MR. BENNETT: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think of your paintings as an area that you can invent new forms and ideas quickly?

MR. BENNETT: No, not really.

MR. ADAMSON: Not really?

MR. BENNETT: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Almost the reverse?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Painting, for me, is so difficult. God, it's painful. You just, you're staring at this white thing, and "God, what do you do with this?" I'm sure it's like a writer staring at that piece of paper.

MR. ADAMSON: Probably.

MR. BENNETT: No, painting is very difficult for me. Painting on something is not, but color is very difficult for me. I really don't know color that well. I manage to hit quite a bit because I work with it; it doesn't come easy. Color doesn't come easy to me. To some people it comes, "boomp," color, okay.

MR. ADAMSON: You're talking about mixing colors?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I can mix materials for color, in a way. You know, ColorCore, wood, metal, no big deal, no problem. But when you go and put color on something, then for me it becomes very problematic, very difficult.

MR. ADAMSON: And there is the *Telephone Table* [1984].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, no big deal.

MR. ADAMSON: The other ColorCore piece. These aren't lathe-turned, are they?

MR. BENNETT: No. This is a type of tubing that has that spiral in it. And these were turned.

MR. ADAMSON: The feet.

MR. BENNETT: The feet were turned, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And otherwise, it's quite similar to the *ColorCore Desk* in terms of the way it's made?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: I remember I got chided, somebody chided me for signing my name right in the top of the *ColorCore* on this little thing. I scratched -- you know, boy, it's in there forever. I got a real sharp awl and scratched my name and date. This shows those things in that table.

MR. ADAMSON: Now I guess maybe what we should do now is I'll just let you page through, and any pieces you want to talk about, you can go ahead.

MR. BENNETT: Okay. [Pause.] [To the microphone] We're turning pages now.

Oh, the *Steel Table* [*Steel Trestle Table*, 1985] is a good table. I made this table out of rosewood and bubinga. Should we say the page?

MR. ADAMSON: Fifty-two.

MR. BENNETT: Page 52. And a friend of mine, Ron [Reynaldo] Terrazas, you know, he was up here. And he said, "Boy, that's a nice table." And he's a steel guy, and I'm sure it was his idea. You know: "Geez, you ought to make that steel." And I says, "Oh, fuck, I don't have the equipment here." So this is made identical to the wood one. It weighs 3,600 pounds. It's a giant -- each one of these wedges weighs 80 pounds. But it's made identical to the wood, dovetails and everything. You know, everything was done with a milling machine. And this bull nose on this plate here, the steel guys have what they call -- I think they call it a lathe. It's not quite the right term. But they can anchor this piece of steel, and then they've got a cutter that runs down, click, click, click, and they can put that bull nose on it. You could grind it, but it would take you forever.

MR. ADAMSON: And the marks were left on?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. When we went and picked this stuff up, the guy -- you know, the job number, he said, "Oh, yeah, it's over here." And so he had a big can of acetone and he was going to clean it up.

And I said, "Oh, no, no, don't do that."

He says, "Why? I was going to clean all these marks off."

"Oh, no, those are beautiful, man. I want those." And he looked at me kind of funny, and I says, "No. You've got good calligraphy." Well, that really blew him away. He didn't know what calligraphy was. But these guys, they write on this stuff with these lacquer ballpoint bottles, and I just perceived that over time, unintentionally and without thinking, they developed a beautiful calligraphy. They get kind of proud of it. You know, it's not like really dumb writing; it gets a particular "flowerliness" to it. It was quite beautiful. So that's the way the table is. It's wearing off now, but that's the way it is.

MR. ADAMSON: This table is interesting. And I'm talking about --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, the woman phoned me. She bought that. That was the first Workbench show I had. A woman bought it, and I remember her name was Neff. And she bought it, and then she moved out here, and she phoned me up. And she says, "My name is" -- I forget her first name.

I said, "Oh, yeah, you got that table."

She says, "Yeah, I've got a small apartment. Would you like to buy it back?" And at the time, I didn't have the money. I should have. No, I should have bought it back. So I don't know where it is now. Garage sale.

MR. ADAMSON: A couple of interesting things about it. One is that it has a glass top, which is something I know you got away from because it's not the most functional thing in the world.

MR. BENNETT: Well, it's just cold. Especially for dining, it's just not a good surface for eating off of. I mean your gravy congeals on your plate and shit like that. And you tip a glass over, and it breaks. But I like it because you

can look through it and you can see what's going on. You know, and it's real cheap. Just get a piece of glass, "bonk," you're done.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Don't even have to anchor it or anything. It's heavy. It stays there.

This one's interesting. This one, I stacked the wood up. This is acacia.

MR. ADAMSON: This is on page 53 [*Painted Trestle Table*, 1982]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And that top -- and it really looks weird, man. It really looks weird because the acacia had a real wide sapwood to it. So I got the end of the band saw and fired it up, man. And then I'd just drawn a line with the sapwood, and mounted one on top of the other, and then just sawed on through it, and then glued it back together to make a plank. So the sapwood's in the center of the board. It really looks weird. Really looks weird.

MR. ADAMSON: And it looks like you had even more than usual going on here under --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, that's a lot. That's kind of my arts-and-crafts interpretation. That's when I was doing all them there trestle tables.

MR. ADAMSON: Those dovetails that were -- you know, the butterflies that are in the top of that table, is that a sort of Nakashima nod?

MR. BENNETT: It's a Nakashima -- well, I think a lot of people have used it. They used it in paneling in old houses. But Nakashima's butterflies are just deadly boring because they were made in a jig. They were all the same. He had, "You know, okay, grab the four-inch butterfly," and then he had a bunch of them cut.

No, I do it differently. I make my butterflies before, and I make them irregular. And then where I want to place them, I have a board down there that I put -- it's got a little point on it -- and put a clamp on it; it holds it real tight to the wood. And then I incise that shape with a knife and take it off and go back and rout, waste it out and then chisel it real square. So you get these asymmetrical butterflies, really good.

Warren Rubin's [*Conference Table*, 1982].

MR. ADAMSON: We were talking about that.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, '82. So that would be the last commission I ever did.

[Turning page.]

This is a great table here. This is really a good table.

MR. ADAMSON: Page 55 [*Table*, 1990].

MR. BENNETT: Just pieces of aluminum. Just, you know, "Okay, let's go." In fact, I was talking, like, how you wear out, you know? When I did this -- well, that's not that long ago, is it. Huh. But anyway, "Aw, fuck, I can do that." You know? And I still -- though I don't worry about what anybody says, but I don't think I'm as experimental, I mean, as I was. I'll try to get back there. I'll probably be doing it more in the head, though.

Yeah, here are the close-ups. These are some snakes. I was looking through a catalogue. It was that Bridgeport tool catalogue, and in the back of it there were these snakes you could buy. And they were like \$2.50 apiece. So I says, "Well, fuck, I can use" -- I like multiples of things, you know? I said, "Shit, I can use them there snakes." So I ordered up, I don't know, about 40 of them or so [*Snake Shit #4, #5, #6*, 1991].

MR. ADAMSON: They just came as unfinished wood?

MR. BENNETT: No, they had -- I redid them, but no, they were finished weird ways and stuff. Actually, this one here -- no, this is right from the factory, and maybe these are, too. But I think I painted these. I'm pretty sure I painted these. I know I painted these. But you know, here you've got three things that are identical, you cant them and tilt them. And this is kind of from Rodin. He's got a sculpture, *Dancers*, little -- I think it's a big one, too, but they're identical dancers. But he's just tilted them and they touch each other in different ways, and you look at them, they all look different. You know, nice trick.

MR. ADAMSON: Those remind me of Judy McKie's snake table.

MR. BENNETT: Well, probably I was thinking of it, but not really. It's a whole different --

MR. ADAMSON: Different structure, yeah.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, different way of going about it.

Is that a walnut or steel one?

MR. ADAMSON: I think that's the bronze one.

MR. BENNETT: Bronze one? No, the bronze one, I would put it green, so it's steel.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, no, this is the walnut.

MR. BENNETT: Is that the walnut? Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It's the walnut one.

MR. BENNETT: And Franklin to this day won't tell me who owns it. Sonofabitch. Yeah, see, that's the Oriental influence, you know. I was in Boston, maybe during the time of that whole thing, and it --

MR. ADAMSON: This is on the *Tall Hall Table* [1990]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. We were in that fancy hotel there in Boston, whatever one that is. What would be a fancy hotel there? Not Beacon Hill. Anyway, some Sheraton or whatever. And in the lobby they just had, you know -- it may have been a reproduction or it may have been an antique Chinese table, and I just fell in love with the way those legs were just canted a little bit, you know? And I made one that I canted them too much. It was totally unsuccessful. It looks like it's carrying a tremendous load. But this one was just perfect. Yeah, I really like that table.

MR. ADAMSON: Those red discs in the sides, are those supposed to be some kind of a Japanese sun or something?

MR. BENNETT: No. If anything, it was taken -- Japanese, I don't think they ever built anything like that. The Chinese did. Yeah, Chinese, they saw the sun too. They get to have sun.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: No, it just needed it. That's a stretcher in there. That's structural. So I just dyed it.

[Turning through pages] These are all the prototypes and things for tables.

This was a nice idea, you know? We were struggling with how to represent all these tables, and this guy Mark Ong came up with this. And he just put it in his computer and we looked at it and we said, "Yeah, that's terrific." I don't need to see these tables real big, but the legs are real interesting. You know, the legs are what these things are actually about.

[Turning pages] I just did one of these.

MR. ADAMSON: That nautilus pattern [*Small Pointy-Leg Table*, 1985]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It's a piece of chamber nautilus shell. I used Steve what's-his-name, the glass guy. He had a real good diamond saw. So I mounted a bunch of these things and then took it over there, and I could saw 16th of an inch in nautilus shell. And you get down in here, man, this stuff is no stronger than a hair, but that saw sawed it. You know? That's a nice little table.

MR. ADAMSON: Can I ask you about this bench?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, the *Bow-Wow, Cluck-Cluck* [*Redneck Son of a Bow-Wow, Cluck-Cluck Bench*, 1984].

MR. ADAMSON: The title?

MR. BENNETT: The *Redneck Son of* -- you know, I don't know. This looks like a dog and that looks like a chicken. And I go, you know, I mean, *Redneck Son of* -- because I made a *Bow-Wow, Cluck-Cluck* [1979] that Judy Coady has. And I liked it. And this is kind of -- pretty cartoony and pretty humorous. So, you know, just titled it. Everybody wants titles, and I get tired of titles.

[Turning pages] Here's Judy's here.

MR. ADAMSON: There's that *Lipstick Bench* [*Dirty Lipstick Bench*, 1981] you're remaking that we were talking

about yesterday.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

This is one of my favorite benches. I own it.

MR. ADAMSON: Figure 15.

MR. BENNETT: I call it the *Football Bench*. Doesn't it say that?

MR. ADAMSON: It just says *Painted Bench* [1981].

MR. BENNETT: *Painted Bench*, yeah. Because I spent like -- the end of some year, whatever year. *Painted Bench*, what year was that?

MR. ADAMSON: '81?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I spent, like, three days laying on my side watching football over the Rose Bowl and all those things, and I fucked up my back and I could hardly work. But I made this. The colors are perfect in this. I mean, goddamn, man, I was never happier with color in my whole life. The silver paint, you know, and there's a beautiful vermillion here, and the pink, and just the right orange, you know, like a yellow, like a gamboge yellow, and then that English racing green.

These, I made these. These are rosewood.

MR. ADAMSON: Those curled-up ends?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And at the time, I had a guy named Robert Hudson working here. And I wasn't smoking marijuana at the time. I figured it wasn't worth doing. But some guy had given me a great big bag of Thai weed, and Robert really liked that shit. So I'd get him stoned and say, "Okay, sand this out." [Laughs.] So these things are all sanded down inside and everything.

This is one of my favorite benches too.

MR. ADAMSON: The black and white?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. [Turning pages.]

MR. ADAMSON: Incidentally, this one, *Painted White Bench With Whistling Drawers* [1992] --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it's in there.

MR. ADAMSON: What does that mean, "whistling drawers"?

MR. BENNETT: Well, you pull the drawers out, and they've got whistles in them. It was in a show, and there was a lot of kids --

MR. ADAMSON: Like slide whistles?

MR. BENNETT: No, they're those disc things. And there was a show down in Los Gatos, and for some reason there were a lot of kids in the gallery. And boy, there was a couple kids just sitting there, man, going -- [whistling] -- and they're totally occupied. You know, Seb asked me, "Is that all right?" I said, "Yeah, sure, fuck, no big deal."

[Turning pages.] This is the bronze one of these.

MR. ADAMSON: This -- I'm sorry, go ahead.

MR. BENNETT: No, no.

MR. ADAMSON: This one with the hollow ends [*Ribbon Bench*, 1982]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Sylvia was talking -- I heard her talking to you about it. Geez, I'd like to find that. Just to know where it's at.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: You know? But it's somewhere.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you make these?

MR. BENNETT: Just I glued up a big block of poplar and then turned it on edge and sawed it out with a band saw. It's not that big a deal. It looks like a big deal, but it's not. You couldn't sit on those; they'd break. It would be disastrous.

[Turning pages.] This is a good piece here, too.

MR. ADAMSON: The *Black Saw-tooth Bench* [*Black Saw-tooth Bench with Drawers*, 1987]? Page 72.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: This Plate 36, this really early one, 1966 [*Trestle Table with Bench*].

MR. BENNETT: That's probably the first piece of furniture I ever made. I made it for a friend of mine. That's when I was down at that harbor -- the Tenth Avenue, that studio down there. And there was all this wood, so I -- "Yeah, okay." I don't even know how I did it. I know I didn't have a plane or a table saw, but I probably had a jigsaw. So that's how I got those curves, maybe. I don't know. But that there is really hand-built, boy. When I got it back, they had broken off a piece up under here. And they didn't have it. "Oh, I don't know where it is," you know? So in repairing it, God, the bottom, man, was just beautiful. They used it every day. And there's kids' cereal milk that's spilled and gone under. And so there's all these white, like, stalagmites or "tites" or whichever "stalag" it is, and they're hard. You know? They got sugar in the milk and they're all down together.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And I left them, man. I mean, that's really cool under there. And a couple pieces of gum. You know?

MR. ADAMSON: So are you blown away when you look at this and see how similar, in some ways, it is to what you did later in terms of --

MR. BENNETT: No, I'm not blown away, but I can see a lot of stuff that follows through, yeah. But here, oh, Garry used little bitty pins there.

MR. ADAMSON: Wouldn't do that.

MR. BENNETT: No, not any more.

MR. ADAMSON: That's an interesting early bench [*Bench*, 1979].

MR. BENNETT: That's a good one.

MR. ADAMSON: The center support.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it's really a good one. Jane and Alvar [Tahti] own that.

MR. ADAMSON: Is that the first one where you used those cloud ends, do you think, with the dovetails?

MR. BENNETT: Could have been. Yeah, could have been early on. When is it, '79, yeah. That's the big, beautiful redwood that I had. I still have a few pieces of it left. I'm not opposed to using redwood or fir in furniture.

[Turning pages.] Here's a bunch of chairs.

MR. ADAMSON: Why is this white one called *Frisco Chair* [1988]?

MR. BENNETT: Probably because Fletcher Benton owns it.

MR. ADAMSON: And he lives in Frisco.

MR. BENNETT: He lives in Frisco, yeah. He owns two of them. There's a pair of them.

[Turning pages.] Funny thing is -- the Renwick phoned me up one time. They have Wendell's *Ghost Clock*.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And they phoned me up, and they said the bleaching just gave up and all the tannin started coming through, you know. And, "What should we do?" I guess they figured they'd talk to me. I don't know why.

But I said, "Well, you could bleach it out again. In 10 years, it's going to go back to mahogany." I said, "You should wash it with a good grade of artist's gouache, you know, make it white, and seal it, and then it will stay white." I don't know what they ever did.

Found-Object Chair [1989].

MR. ADAMSON: Green chair .

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Boy, that was a lot of work building that shit in there. I mean, that was really a lot of work. And you don't see much green in my work because I find -- and I talk to artist friends of mine, and they all say, God, green's just the toughest color to work with. And so I work with green a fair amount, just to see if I can do it, you know.

You keep looking at that thing.

MR. ADAMSON: I just want to make sure it's not going to run out of time.

MR. BENNETT: No, geez, we wouldn't want to miss anything here, would we.

MR. ADAMSON: Is that the only found-object piece you've done?

MR. BENNETT: Oh, God, no. I do a lot of found-object stuff. No, no, I do a lot.

[Turning page] No, no, I do a lot. Here's one here.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, yeah. *The Eames Chair* [1984].

MR. BENNETT: And I'm going to make another one of these with this chair series that I want to do. I really like this piece. I gave it to the guy. You know, he's an architect in Arizona, and we were talking about it, and I said, "Oh, yeah, I know a friend of mine who's got an original Eames chair."

He said, "Ooh, does he? Gee, I'd really like to have that."

I said, "Well, I'll get it for you." So I got it. And it was a big job making this, but sawed it in half and sent it down to him. And he loves it. I mean, he really loved the thing.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me a little bit more about that chair?

MR. BENNETT: I took it apart. I made a big sled for the band saw, and then I would mount these parts.

MR. ADAMSON: You took it apart?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. No, what I did is I took the legs off. And I wanted to keep the integrity of the back. Took the legs off, made a sled, sawed the thing in half. And then I made a Lucite -- piece of Lucite, and then I laid it on half and traced the edge of the chair.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BENNETT: And then I drilled holes in the Lucite, and that's where I put pins in, like, one side of the chair. Then I took that piece of Lucite and moved it over to the other ones and drilled holes. So I glued the pins in this side, and then when I put it together, I put glue in the holes -- there are bronze pins in there -- and then put it together, sandwiching this aluminum and ColorCore.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it was kind of tricky, but I'll do it again. I can do it real easy now.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you feel when you made this that you were going after this modernist icon in some way?

MR. BENNETT: No. No. When I did this, throughout the -- in this book, I've not made any -- I've not called attention to it, but I think so far we've seen the steel chair and this, and they're art attempts. I mean, once in a while -- I mean, you can't sit in this thing. So, once in a great while -- I can't make art all the time, man. You just fail, you know? But once in a while, when I get an idea, I think I can make art. I think this chair is art. I believe it is, and the steel table is art too, conceptually.

MR. ADAMSON: And the *Nail Cabinet*, maybe?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: This chair on the left with the yellow seat [*Yellow Chair*, 1986], was that made specifically for the San Francisco MOMA, or did --

MR. BENNETT: No. A guy named Paolo Polledri, he saw it somewhere, I don't know where, and purchased it for the museum. That's a nice little chair. I mean, it really is. And that's a big billet of aluminum all sawn and filed out, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: It seems very different from your other chairs, much more lightly built.

MR. BENNETT: Well, it's pretty sturdy, but yeah, this is -- visually it's very light. It's extremely comfortable, surprisingly, but it's a three-legged chair. You know, when you lean back, you want to lean straight back. That's the only drawback to it. But they all sit really good. They never wobble. No, I was just kidding.

MR. ADAMSON: It wouldn't, would it?

MR. BENNETT: No. It sure wouldn't. [Turning pages.]

MR. ADAMSON: There's *Tangarry* again.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. There's the painting on the back. That's done on a shellacked panel, a white shellacked panel, gouache, and then oil glazes put over it. This photograph doesn't show it, but it's really quite rich.

What are you -- you've got the museum, right?

MR. ADAMSON: Suzanne's coming in about 20 minutes.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, all right.

MR. ADAMSON: We still have some time.

Okay, this one. *You Can Forget Your Postmodernism, Back-To-Basic Shit* [#2, 1992].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I love that piece. I love it, man. I made two of those. Another funny thing, I seem to make twos. You know, I get two done. This is twos. There's two of these; there's two of these. And I always like them. You know, the steel, the little square-box, four-door cabinet and that other clock one, two of those. I don't know. Unconsciously I -- "Well, you got it, let's move on." You know?

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel different making the second one from the first one, while you're making it?

MR. BENNETT: No, but then when I get the second one -- well, I've made threes and fours and fives, you know, benches; I mean different things. But sometimes I just stop, you know, and I don't know why. Can't tell you why.

MR. ADAMSON: What's "basic" about this, and rather than "postmodern" --

MR. BENNETT: No, no, just a title. Just a dumb title. Just a dumb title. I don't know what postmodernism is. Some guy name Graves or Groove or "Teapot Joe" or whatever it is. I don't know!

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: It's the antithesis of postmodernism, wouldn't you say?

MR. ADAMSON: Well, I don't know. I mean, it's exaggerated, and it has painting on it.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, but when you look at it, it's all, like, handcrafted, you know? It's not real slick. So I think that's where I was coming from. You know, it's more hippie, Jap stuff than Michael Graves.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: [Turning pages.] And there it is here. "I think this nail business is a stupid idea." Jose Perez Sandoval, or something. And the other guy: "Wrong." D.E.R. '87. Yeah, '83, '87.

MR. ADAMSON: That's great.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it's terrific, man.

And this is faded out now. I sign everything with this big felt marker, and goddamn, I was looking at these plates up here, and my signature's all gone away, and I don't know what numbers they are. There's one in pencil. That will be there forever. But I ain't gonna carve my name in there, like Wendell does. Goddamn, man! I don't even

have a chisel. [Turning pages.]

Here's the other one. This is really good [*Postmodern Shit #1*, 1992].

MR. ADAMSON: [Inaudible.]

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. When I saw that in situ, I almost had a goddamn heart attack. Goddamn Peter had a great big television sitting on top of that. Big black eye, man!

MR. ADAMSON: Peter Joseph?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, real big, you know. Aw, Jesus, thanks, Peter. Nice way to -- you know, but God bless him, as I've said earlier on these tapes. It just didn't -- it was inappropriate, you know.

MR. ADAMSON: Is this motif on the back, the painting?

MR. BENNETT: I don't know where that --

MR. ADAMSON: Is it purely abstract?

MR. BENNETT: Maybe inside these drawers, that painting's inside the drawers. But I mean, again, for me this is not trying to say anything. When I was talking about painting, you know, how difficult? Because when I paint, I believe if I'm going to play artist, there should be some message there. You know? But a painting like this is real easy. It's just a design back there. And it takes maybe 20 minutes to do that, so why not? You know, why not put something in a drawer bottom? Takes no time at all to do that. "Foom, foom, foom, okay." Lacquer it up.

And, "Oh, lookit, he's painted the drawer bottoms, even!" You know, it's like Wendell: "Oh, God, he sands the bottoms of the furniture so beautifully!" Bullshit. I mean, I can paint the bottom of a drawer quicker than he can sand the bottom of a cabinet.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

This is a wonderful piece, *Crated Cabinet* [*Crated Cabinet with Clock*, 1992].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it is really a great piece. Marilyn Barrett. You know, I happened to be in the gallery when it arrived, and she was there. This is at Peter Joseph. And she said, "Oh, I just love that cabinet and clock." John is telling me, "She's going to buy it! She's going to buy it!" He's all antsy. She says, "I really want that."

I say, "Oh, that's nice. Thank you, Marilyn."

She says, "Well, I'd like to see it out of the crate."

And I said, "No, no, no, that's the piece."

And she said, "Well, no -- oh, I love it."

I said, "Marilyn, the crate is the piece."

"Oh." And I believe -- very sweet people, man. I believe it's in a house in Georgetown with some antiques and stuff. I don't know. But I mean, yeah, it's a good piece, boy.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it a pre-existing crate from another piece?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It was the crate for the door in the *Nail Cabinet*.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh.

MR. BENNETT: When it went back East at one time, I forget when. But I could never throw that crate away. The proportions -- you know, it always stood up in the back of the shop, and I'd walk by and look at that thing. And I think a lot of the way I work -- I set up tasks, and a lot of times they'll be proportion tasks. You know, get some goddamn piece of wood or a box or something that's just oddly proportioned and then make it work. So that's how this came about.

MR. ADAMSON: The foam was original to the crate, or you added that?

MR. BENNETT: It was in the original crate, but it was different. But when I made this, then I wanted that blue foam in there, you know. Yes, terrific piece.

Turn that off.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: If you ever see it, ask Marilyn to open the drawers.

[Turning pages.] Nice photograph, too.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And this is Warren Rubin's credenza [*Office, Warren Rubin, 1982*]. Oh, this was, geez, this was a lot of work, man, fitting these dovetails into this big aluminum -- I mean, you know, lifting it up and filing a little more, and lifting it up, filing a little more. It's three pieces because it had to be moved into place. I know there's three secret compartments in this piece, and Warren has found two of them, and I can't remember where the other one is. But one of them is so clever.

He got broken into one time, and they pried this whole chest apart to get into these drawers. It locks. And unfortunately, he had a lot of stuff in there that they took. But the hidden compartment, it's so goddamn clever, and if he had put it up there -- they still ruined the goddamn chest, but if he had put it in the secret compartment, he wouldn't have lost, I think, quite a bit of cash. And there's a secret compartment, I don't think I'm at liberty to tell you where it is, but it's really good. You wouldn't find it, goddamnit, you wouldn't find it. And there's another one coming up --

MR. ADAMSON: This curved glass is the same.

MR. BENNETT: Probably the same; I cut it. I had a lot of it. You know.

MR. ADAMSON: And this is all held up off the floor?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, it's bolted to the wall.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MR. BENNETT: And then he, shit, man, I hope he changed it. Goddamn, he put like 9,000 pounds of catalogues in there. And I went one day, and the fuckin' thing, if that comes off the wall, it's going to rip everything. I said, "Warren, you've got to take all those catalogues out of there." So I think he's done that, you know. But oh, man, I mean -- sure, it's pretty good, but I mean -- not 9,000 pounds, but I'll bet you there was 500 pounds or 600 pounds of catalogues. Paper's heavy, man.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: [Discussing another piece] This is a nice piece. We kept this. Sylvia kept this.

MR. ADAMSON: The four-drawer chest [*Four-Drawer Tall Chest, 1976*]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

[Turning pages.] There's this friend of mine, and he and I have traded quite a bit, Bob Rasmussen, a ceramic artist. He calls himself Red X. This was a real early piece, too [*Cabinet with Two Antique Xs and Two New Ones, 1976*]. It was just done with bare, rudimentary tools. And it might be the first kind of Japanese or that -- you know, the corner brackets and stuff -- that I ever used.

Look at that photograph, man. This guy Lee Fatherree -- [speaking to the microphone] Lee Fatherree, good photographer.

MR. ADAMSON: It's a wonderful finish on the clock.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Well, it's unintentional.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It used to be silver. And I bought this clock back -- it's a great story. I got a phone call from a guy: "Are you Garry Bennett?"

I said, "Yeah."

He says, "I'm so-and-so. I have a gallery down here in Carmel. I bought a clock in L.A." He has an antique gallery. He said, "I bought a clock in L.A., and it's wood and it's got a cloud on top and it says on the inside,

'Aaron's belly button for the pull.' [*Aaron's Belly-Button Clock*, 1973]"

I says, "Oh, yeah, geez, that's my clock!"

He says, "Would you like it back?"

I says, "Oh, boy, would I!" So I said, "How much do you want for it?"

He says, "Oh, I paid \$900 for it." Well, I know it sold at Gump's for \$2,200 way back when. When's this -- '73. You know? So I said, "Sure, and I'll make you something."

So he brought it up and I made his wife a nice lamp, you know, and now the Mint Museum has got it. But it originally was bright silver, but I just couldn't bring myself to change it when I got it back. It just got all oxidized being down in L.A., so I just left it. And it is very lush now. Yeah, that's a good one.

[Turning pages.] Actually, this might not be Lee's photograph; this might be theirs. This is their photograph.

MR. ADAMSON: The Mint Museum's?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It's damn good, too.

[Turning pages.] The *ColorCore Desk* [1984] we've talked about. Another one kind of the same thing. Big slab of walnut on top. There's the detail.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, the detail of ColorCore.

MR. BENNETT: This was a nice desk. This desk started with just this piece of walnut, just that little backboard. I said, "Well, I got this piece of walnut." That's the way I -- again, no plans. I don't draw anything out. It works out good. I just get to start and go.

MR. ADAMSON: It's interesting that occasionally you do find pieces of wood that you think are particularly wonderful, and you kind of work off them.

MR. BENNETT: That's Eastern walnut, you know, not California. All the rest of it's California walnut. I don't know; I just said, "Well, it's a backsplash." It's more the shape of the piece of wood. This was untouched. It was probably joined here and joined in the back, and this edge is sawn, you know. It's just kind of sometimes the shape.

[Turning pages.] Here's one of my favorite pieces. This is a nice page, too.

MR. ADAMSON: *The Venus of Willendorf*. [*The Venus of Willendorf Meets Alley Oop*, 1994]

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. I've always liked this piece. Very rude, you know? Nice and rude. Yeah, that's a good one. Fletcher Benton owns that one. [Turning pages.]

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, here's the pictures making the *Boston Kneehole*.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. See bricks? Now, the other thing I did, when we were proofreading it, no big deal; then after the book was printed, I started looking here. Six, 13, 18, 22. That was right. Two, five, nine, 14, and six is 20.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: And God, if I'd have caught that, man, if I'd have caught that, I'd have loved to come down here with a red pen with a correction. So somebody's looking at this book and thinks, "Oh well, somebody" -- because you can make this printing look just like real. They'd say, "Oh, somebody corrected it. You know, what if they corrected every book?"

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: You know? I wish I'd have caught that. But there's bricks. You know? And these are as drawing as I get. I just don't draw. But bricks. And that was a couple big glasses of Jack Daniels and some Camel cigarettes. And Sylvia came up with these damn photographs, which is really far out.

[Turning pages.] That's the desk in there [*Owl Desk*, 1999]. We'll probably keep it. It's just a big, cumbersome thing. I like it, but it's a little ungainly, you know? I did this when I cut my finger off and had Chris and Russell back helping me, guys that had worked for me in the past, because I couldn't work with this hand.

MR. ADAMSON: Chris Vance and Russell Baldon?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And oh, it's so beautifully built, man. These guys are really good. And again, better than I could. Maybe I could build it that good, but it would take me so long. And it's perfect, you know. I like it, but it's not a favorite. Maybe some day it will grow on me.

[Turning pages.] There's the trestle pin arrangement, two pins on either side. Bought that back. Guy phoned me.

MR. ADAMSON: The *Desk With Dangles* [1981].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It's over at the house. And I always wanted that back. And the guy got in trouble with the law and phoned me up. I hadn't heard from him in 20 years or so. *Desk With Dangles*.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you talk to me about the *Hobnail Partners Desk* [1989], these spiky things in the feet?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And then the kind of hourglass shape?

MR. BENNETT: I don't know. It looked good. I made these two at the same time. It's all I made, was two of these. But this one's not as successful as this one, although the painting in here is quite beautiful, quite gorgeous. I don't know, those shapes just -- you know, just they're coopered. These are coopered. Big piece of walnut here and here. A very nice desk.

MR. ADAMSON: There's a pun going on here; it's a partners desk, and you can have two people, one at each end?

MR. BENNETT: No pun. No pun. There's a drawer on the other side. I made a lot of those. This is a partners desk also. There's a drawer on either side. So no, they can be used from both sides. [Turning pages.]

MR. BENNETT: I should have always called this "Homage to Art."

MR. ADAMSON: *The Child's Desk* [1991]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, because this is one of the biggest band-sawed boxes in the world, you know? It weighs about 90 pounds, this big, giant piece of walnut. These are drawers, a la Art [Arthur Espenet Carpenter]. These stools swivel. This drawer has a whistle in the back. "Wheeeo, wheeeo," you know? Some guy in Alaska owns this, some doctor, and he wouldn't lend it for the show.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, what a pain.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. It really -- didn't anger me, but it kind of pissed me off a little bit. This would have been such a -- you know, "Whoa, what's that! He made that?" You know?

MR. ADAMSON: That lamp is very Greene-and-Greene-ish, too.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. But it's adjustable.

[Doorbell rings.] There's Sue. Are you going to continue this at another time?

[Pausing the tape.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, we have about 10 minutes here, so we're going to fly through the rest of this.

MR. BENNETT: Okay, we're gonna fly.

MR. ADAMSON: *Bull Desk* [1992].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, good one. That started with this piece of wood here, this big slab of walnut.

MR. ADAMSON: The slanted one.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. And then just everything kind of followed through. Yeah, I like this. It started with this, and it started with this horn shape. And I'd made this horn shape for a little stool that's out in the other room there. I was going to put it through. And I've never liked the way it looked.

MR. ADAMSON: It reminds me of Picasso, that desk.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, a little bit. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

[Turning pages.] This is a good piece here.

MR. ADAMSON: *The Little White Desk* [*Little White Desk with Lamp and Clock*, 1985].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, Gloria's Desk. [Turning pages.]

That's that green desk [*Greenie*, 1999] I was telling you about that sold at Snyderman's, the one Dan figured out that I made \$200 on it. [Turning pages.]

Look at that chair. Look at that chair. Those are good chairs, man.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. BENNETT: And they're comfortable. [Turning pages.] Metal. See you can --

MR. ADAMSON: Those are the ones you want back?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. You can do that with metal, and it's a nice spring. You know? Couldn't do that with wood.

[Turning pages.]

This has got a secret drawer. This drawer, it pulls out and stops, and nobody in the world could get it all the way out. They couldn't figure out how to do it. Down in here there's one of those one-inch-cube magnets, and you slide it off a piece of steel down here, and you put it up under the drawer, and you hear a little click, and the drawer opens.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: There's no visible latching or anything.

[Turning pages.] I'm going to get this back from Scott and give it to my granddaughter.

MR. ADAMSON: *The Pear Desk* [1999].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah.

[Turning pages.] This is a nice piece here.

MR. ADAMSON: *Kid Shit* [1991].

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Good color.

[Turning pages.] Silver leather, silver paint.

This is one of my favorite pieces, *Brançusi Desk* [1999], too. [Turning pages.]

And these, everybody likes these. I'm not that thrilled with them. [Speaking to microphone] So we won't mention who owns it. Sylvia loves them, everybody -- Scott wants me to make more of them, and I'm just not that -- well, this is a lot of work. That's a lot of work. That's three inches of aluminum.

MR. ADAMSON: I remember I was in your studio when you were making that, actually, in '99. [Turning pages.]

MR. BENNETT: And there's the other one. At SOFA, I was just sitting on a bench talking to some woman, and we were just kind of talking around, and pretty soon she says, "Are you Garry Bennett?"

I says, "Yeah."

She says, "I've got a piece of yours."

And I say, "Oh, you do? What piece is that?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's a big piece and it's really dark."

And so we started, "Okay, what's it look like?" And a lot of people that own this shit, I think they see it one time. She couldn't -- I mean, you could describe this, couldn't you?

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. BENNETT: She couldn't. So I got a book, and she said, "Oh, yeah, it's that piece there."

That's one of my favorites, too. It's a nice piece. [Turning pages.]

MR. ADAMSON: Here's *Hokusai Left and Right*.

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. No, that's *Hokusai Right* [1994].

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. *Bennett's Bennett* [1991] over there.

MR. BENNETT: This one was done in the other thing. Another one of my favorite pieces. *That Jackson, He Spits! -- Piet* [1994]. I want to keep that. [Turning pages.] I'd love to sell these *Hokusais*.

Jewelry. [Turning pages.]

Zoomo zoomo. This one's in the Montreal Museum. They're going to display it. [Laughs.] I'll bet those "Froggies" are going to say, "That goddamn Anglo, we can't put that shit in there."

I did a lot of casting, too, you know, silver, stones, and that. I was really anticipating this jewelry section in this book, but a lot of the photographs are not very good, you know? Nice necklace.

MR. ADAMSON: *Eat at Sylvia's* [1977]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, bacon and egg. [Turning pages.]

Clocks. Made a lot of clocks. This is the one I'd like to trade [*Flaming-Arrow Clock*, 1973].

MR. ADAMSON: [Off mike.]

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Sylvia's got to get going on that. It's a terrible mistake. If this thing were absolutely flat, you know, it would be all right, but it just looks like a shooting star that's coming in for a bad landing, you know?

[Turning pages.] Oh, God, that one. Oh, geez, I had to rebuild that one.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think of these as being psychedelic?

MR. BENNETT: No, not at all. No.

That's a good one. *Clock with Terminal Susskind Syndrome* [1977], showing an enlarged left ventricle.

[Turning pages.] It's fun to look through this stuff. Boy. [Speaking to microphone] For those out there in Radioland -- where the hell is that?

MR. ADAMSON: It's *Jessica's Clock* --

MR. BENNETT: Yeah, *Jessica's Clock*. [*Jessica's Clock, Adam and Eve*, 1976] [Speaking to microphone] It's on page 140. If you ever see this, I'll give you a good reward. Get it. Grab it. Whoever's got it doesn't own it, and I want it back.

MR. ADAMSON: It was stolen?

MR. BENNETT: It was stolen out of a show. Yeah.

These are a couple stands. I got these stands. You know, they were some sort of '20s display thing.

MR. ADAMSON: On the *Chinese Clock* [1992] -- [off mike]?

MR. BENNETT: Yeah. Oh, this clock was going to be titled the "Seven Bananas of Wisdom."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: So I went and got the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and read it, and I couldn't find a single allusion, so then it became *Seven Bananas* [1992]. "Salome and the Seven Bananas."

MR. ADAMSON: Did you make the bananas?

MR. BENNETT: No. I had a big bag full. I made a lot of banana stuff. And again, this is back to that same thing. You just tilt it a little this way, that way, change the direction of it, and they all look different. They're all identical bananas.

MR. ADAMSON: But you found a source for the bananas.

MR. BENNETT: At a flea market, I just got a big bag of wooden bananas.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: I mean, you can't pass it up. [Turning pages.] Lamps.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Who could, right?

MR. BENNETT: No, you can't pass up a burlap bag full of bananas.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: These are some of the lamps from the "100 Lamps" show at Peter Joseph. Some kerosene lamps. [Turning pages.]

This is a nice lamp here, too. Touch this metal here, and it goes on and off.

MR. ADAMSON: *The Monarch Oil Lamp* [1996].

MR. BENNETT: The epoxy, I mean it looks like oil, man. You don't even want to touch it. Electrical. You know, you run out of rooms.

[Turning pages.] We gotta go quick, folks.

MR. ADAMSON: You're almost there.

MR. BENNETT: *Oozer* [1996]. These are that series of real intense -- this is a nice lamp too, *Georgia O'Keeffe Lamp* [1985].

[Turning pages.] More lamps. Boxes. Boxes. And then we come to the last part of this, which is the table lamps. And I put a lot of effort into these things, bowling balls and everything. Anyway, that will do it. That will do it.

That's on the back of the book. This [*Tablelamp #17*, 2000] is my favorite one. I had this all done, and then I mocked it up downstairs. Everything would stay on top of each other. Totally unfinished. And I looked at it, and I said, "That's done." Because I would have slicked this all up, polished these. And so that's the way it is, right off the saw, so to speak.

MR. ADAMSON: All right, Garry, famous last words?

MR. BENNETT: Buy low, sell high? I don't know. I don't have famous last words. I'm glad I married Sylvia. How's that?

MR. ADAMSON: That's good. Okay, thank you.

MR. BENNETT: Or I'm glad Sylvia married me. Let's put it that way.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. BENNETT: That's more accurate.

MR. ADAMSON: Thanks. Okay, this is the end of the interview here. And I want to thank Garry very much for participating.

MR. BENNETT: Oh, gee, you're more than welcome.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. BENNETT: Let's thank Nan Laitman.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Absolutely.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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