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Oral history interview with Ferne Jacobs, 2005 August 30-31

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ferne Jacobs on August 30 and 31, 2005. The interview took place at the artist's home and studio in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Mija Riedel 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.

Ferne Jacobs and Mija Riedel 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

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Ferne Jacobs at the artist's home in Los Angeles, California, on August 30, 2005, for the Archives of American Art, at the Smithsonian Institution. And this is disc number one.

So you were born in Chicago.

FERNE JACOBS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: In 1942.

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And can you talk a little bit about early childhood experiences that affected you, the choices you made in life and art, any siblings, any particularly influential relatives? The idea of being born, which you were just talking-[they laugh].

MS. JACOBS: Well, I did say before we started that I wish I could remember being born. Wouldn't that be interesting? It would be great. And of course I don't. It's funny because before my mother passed away-my mother passed away about six years ago-she and my son and I took a trip to Chicago and looked at the cemetery where her parents were buried, and the so-called hospital where I was born. It was a big hole in the ground.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. JACOBS: -that it is no more. It was Lutheran Deaconess, I think. And it didn't exist anymore. So that is an odd feeling to go and not-to see this hole where you were born.

I was born in Chicago, but I have no memories of it. We moved to L.A. when I was very young. I was two and a half. And the only thing that is really interesting about that experience is I never felt at home in L.A. when I was young. I always longed for a major city. And at that time L.A. was not a major city.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MS. JACOBS: It was very secondary. It was-I mean, secondary-that is kind of an odd word. It just never felt like a serious city.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you think of as a serious city?

MS. JACOBS: I didn't know.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. JACOBS: But I think I carried Chicago in my blood.

MS. RIEDEL: That is interesting.

MS. JACOBS: I think I really carried Chicago in my blood. And I had this longing for being in a city-more dense, density, a lot of activity. L.A. always felt very laid-back, a lot of open space; nobody took anything very seriously, and I wanted something more serious and more active, where people cared more. I always felt that separation, for some reason.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember the first time you felt that or you were aware of it?

MS. JACOBS: No, I probably was a teenager, you know. Probably when you're young, you know, you just-it's your

family getting along. But then as I started knowing more about the world, being more involved in the world-going off places with my friend-not so family directed-involved, I missed some sense of a big city.

L.A. has become a big city. There is a point where I really started loving L.A. And I think it was when a lot of people from New York moved here. And it became much more serious. It became much more energetic. And it seemed-everything mattered more. When I was growing up, it didn't matter very much, it seems to me, though I grew up in a difficult family situation. It wasn't wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: What did your parents do? Were either of them inclined towards art?

MS. JACOBS: Nobody was, although there is-I used to have the feeling about my father-my father had a lot of energy. He was somebody who didn't care what anybody thought of him, and he would do whatever he wanted to do. But he was kind of an angry man. I feel bad for him. He was an immigrant. He came from Russia, the Russian-Polish border-a lot of violence, I think. And Chicago had a lot of violence. There was a lot of violence-he was Jewish. There was a violence between the Jewish people and the Polish people in Chicago. And I think there were gangs.

He became an attorney in Chicago. But then when they moved here, for some reason he never took the bar here. I think he was afraid, and I think he just didn't think he would pass. And I feel very bad that he didn't do that or didn't try. And he had so much energy; I thought if he would have focused on it, he might have even though he thought he couldn't, maybe he could.

Anyway, he became a silent partner in the furniture business. And they didn't do very well, so he became an active partner. And so he was in the furniture business. But I think he was very angry-

MS. RIEDEL: Did they actually build things, or they just sold them?

MS. JACOBS: No, just sold things.

But I always had the feeling that Dad liked to work with his hands. Well, he loved to garden, and his hands were always dirty and torn-[laughs]-you know, they were always cut and-had big hands. But I remember, when I had my son, that he always wanted to show Peter what to do. If there was clay, he wouldn't let Peter work with it. He wanted-[they laugh]-he wanted to work with it. I thought, my God, did Dad have some kind of ability that he denied himself?

And when he did homework with me, I remember, as a child, he would draw-

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. JACOBS: He would draw things for me. And I thought, God, you know, but of course-

MS. RIEDEL: As a way of explaining things?

MS. JACOBS: Yeah. And I don't know if he had some interest and his parents-or he, himself, stopped himself from doing it.

MS. RIEDEL: Did he want you to draw, or did he encourage that?

MS. JACOBS: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all.

MS. JACOBS: No, no, he didn't want me to be involved with art at all. He wanted me to be a secretary-[they laugh]-I mean, couldn't believe it. He always wanted me to get a job, be a secretary, and it was horrifying. And of course the wonderful thing was I had enough of his energy-

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. JACOBS: -that-[laughs]-I could not listen. I could say, I'm going to do what I want to do. That is the wonderful thing he did give me.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, you got that from him.

MS. JACOBS: I got that from him.

MS. RIEDEL: That independence.

MS. JACOBS: That independence-that what anybody thought, whatever anybody told me, I had choices and I

could do what I wanted.

MS. RIEDEL: That is extraordinary.

MS. JACOBS: Which is pretty amazing, and I thank him for that, because nobody supported what I wanted to do, nobody. And I did it anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: Your mother had no-

MS. JACOBS: My mother was from a more intellectual family. I think I get my intellectual curiosity from my mother. They were leftists. A lot of her family was very-I wouldn't doubt that they were members-some were members of the Communist Party in the United States-definitely very left wing. Not into my time; by the time I was growing up, or an adult, the relatives at first that I knew were more just liberal democrats, I would say. But they knew Shakespeare, they read, they-I don't know how educated they were, but they definitely cared about culture. It was a cultured family.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you read a lot as a child, or did you go to musical events, anything like that?

MS. JACOBS: No, but my mother-the sadness of my mother is-my mother was born in Chicago, but her mother died when she was very young. So there is a lot of breaks in my family: my father, kind of, having to come from Europe and out of violence, my mother's mother dying. So she gave up on life in some way. She really told me at one point-it was very sad-that when her mother died, she wasn't going to ask for anything from life, she wasn't going to ask for too much.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my.

MS. JACOBS: She wasn't going to ask for anything. And it was a real sadness.

MS. RIEDEL: How old was she?

MS. JACOBS: Nine, nine when her mother died.

MS. RIEDEL: That is an interesting conclusion to draw.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, isn't it? Well, her father was very unreliable. They had a very insecure life. And I think she married my father because she felt that he would make her feel secure. And it wasn't a good marriage. But he did make-[laughs]-her feel secure. I mean, we always lived in decent homes. They were nice. And eventually they just made their own lives. They did very little with each other.

MS. RIEDEL: What were their names?

MS. JACOBS: My father's name was Herbert. But when he came from Europe, it was Hymie Kapulsky, and it became Herbert Kent, can you imagine?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my gosh.

MS. JACOBS: So look at-look how you're divorced from your own roots.

MS. RIEDEL: Kent, K-E-N-T?

MS. JACOBS: K-E-N-T.

MS. RIEDEL: From Kapulsky.

MS. JACOBS: From anything.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. JACOBS: I mean, could be anything. I mean, suddenly I became British from-I mean, Kent-did it come from Britain? Kent the cigarette. I had no history, in a way. Kent-I could be anything.

MS. RIEDEL: Ferne, though-what did that-why did they choose that name? It's an unusual name.

MS. JACOBS: My parents were so odd.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes, Ferne Kent.

MS. JACOBS: My parents were so ordinary, but they named my brother and me two very unusual names. My

brother was named Claude. Now, and my father I think-

MS. RIEDEL: Claude Kent?

MS. JACOBS: Claude Kent. The poor kid suffered like crazy because of that.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. JACOBS: But my father, I think, named him-I think there was a wiz kid named Claude, and my brother was not particularly academic. It was-that didn't work. That did not work.

I was named after my grandmother who died young, this woman who died. Her name was Fanny. And I would have loved to have been named Fanny, I think. It feels very familiar to me. But my mother-I don't even know how she saw the name, Ferne. I don't know if she-because my mother didn't like plants. She didn't like my dad's gardening.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. JACOBS: But she named me Ferne. The F from Fanny. And F-E-R-N was too-not enough for her so she added E to it. So it was F-E-R-N-E.

MS. RIEDEL: What was her name?

MS. JACOBS: Her name was Libby.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. JACOBS: And, I mean, her maiden name was Astrinsky, which they changed to Astrin. So everyone was cut off, you know, from their history.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. JACOBS: And they never wanted to talk about their histories.

MS. RIEDEL: So you didn't grow up with stories at all.

MS. JACOBS: No, and my mother would tell me that my father's stories were lies.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. JACOBS: So I had a very hard time listening to his story. [They laugh.] I mean, it was horrible, and now I wish I remember more of his stories. I do remember some, but I don't know if they are truths or lies. But it is interesting-he did lie for a long time about his history. He wanted to be a German Jew, because I think the German Jews were more cultured than his family and where he grew up.

So even I noticed on my birth certificate, and I think-I looked at my marriage certificate recently. I'm not married anymore, but I was married. And definitely on my birth certificate it says German, which is a lie.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Interesting.

MS. JACOBS: Or it's a part of the world that changed back and forth between Germany, Poland, Russia-

MS. RIEDEL: So he just chose it during an era-

MS. JACOBS: He just identified German-

MS. RIEDEL: -when it was German.

MS. JACOBS: And then at the very end of his life he told me his real last name and the city that he came from. So I grew up with a lot of amorphous thoughts. I mean, I couldn't ground anything.

MS. RIEDEL: A lot of flexibility in fact. [Laughs.]

MS. JACOBS: Definitely. My mother didn't lie, but my mother didn't want to know anything about her history. I think she was in so much pain over her mother's death. Her father was-did nothing really. I mean, he was a junk peddler. They were very poor. So she didn't-she loved him, but I wonder why, in a way. I mean, he was very handsome, but sort of a do-nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: So the anonymity of L.A., of arriving in L.A., was actually sort of a welcome blank slate.

MS. JACOBS: It wasn't welcome, no. I think I would have liked to have stayed in Chicago.

MS. RIEDEL: No, but for your parents.

MS. JACOBS: Oh, for my parents. Well, but they-their whole lives they were in the Chicago Club.

MS. RIEDEL: After they moved to L.A.?

MS. JACOBS: I mean, how many clubs are there based on the city that you came from? Their whole social world was the Chicago Club.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MS. JACOBS: And these were all people who had come here from Chicago. And one would know-one would know one, and then they would know somebody else. And they were all-there were about 20 couples. It is so odd.

MS. RIEDEL: That is unusual. But you really grew up in L.A.

MS. JACOBS: I grew up in L.A.

MS. RIEDEL: And when you-I'm thinking maybe we'll talk about some of your first art experiences and when you started to look at-

MS. JACOBS: There was no art in our lives, none.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did that happen for you?

MS. JACOBS: I think it was through school. You know, it makes me feel how important art is in school if you want any kind of culture to go on in a society, because there is the opportunity, that if you don't get it in the home, which I didn't. The only thing I do remember is when I was young, maybe 10 or 11, we did go to the Pasadena Playhouse, and I remember seeing the *Mikado*. I remember exactly what I saw. It was the *Mikado*.

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you?

MS. JACOBS: I think I was around 10 or 11, because I remember driving home on the Pasadena freeway and sleeping in the backseat coming home. Well, the freeway was there. I don't know when they put in the Pasadena freeway.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, I don't know either.

MS. JACOBS: But maybe I was older.

MS. RIEDEL: And that is really your first experience of having been struck by something.

MS. JACOBS: By culture. It is the first time I remember seeing something. And then this van Gogh exhibit that-in junior high, when LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA] was still around the coliseum. LACMA used to be-all of the museums used to be around the coliseum. I don't know what they call that area. It's around USC. I don't even know if USC was there then. Probably. I never saw USC then. But it was USC, the coliseum, and all of the museums-where the natural history museum is. LACMA used to be there, too.

And I remember our school going to see a van Gogh exhibit. Okay, and that had a profound effect on me. I fell in love with it. I just fell in love with it.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it-I know color is hugely significant to you. Was it the color? Was it the motion?

MS. JACOBS: The texture, the motion-all of those paint strokes were so amazing. But I also-I identified with the dark pieces, too. I remember the shoes. I remember the poverty of the potato eaters. I just remember the earth, the earth-so close to the earth. I was so moved by it. But my art experiences started sooner, when I think about it. They started in grammar school, because-I was in the Girl Scouts and the Brownies, and one of the mothers loved art. She loved using her hands. She loved to use her hands.

And there were all of these badges. And I started doing all of the badges-the art badges, because she would show us these art projects. And I did love to color in coloring books. And I loved to embroider when I was young. So that was, I think, the beginning. And that is when I was in still in elementary school at that point.

At that point I was playing music.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. JACOBS: I was thinking of becoming a musician.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you play?

MS. JACOBS: Cello.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. JACOBS: I fell in love with the cello in elementary school.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. JACOBS: But by the time I got to junior high, I was too embarrassed to carry it around with me.

MS. RIEDEL: Big.

MS. JACOBS: It was too big. [They laugh.] And I wanted to be popular. I wanted to at least not be a nerd. And everybody-I'm sure people thought music was for nerds.

MS. RIEDEL: The cello is always-the cello case.

MS. JACOBS: It's such a giveaway. [They laugh.] It's just too noticeable. And here I was, this girl playing the cello. So I slowly stopped it. I had private lessons as a kid. And I played-though I really wasn't good enough to play-I played in the All-City Orchestra-the philharmonic hall one year. And I'm sure it's because there were so few cello players-[laughs]-they took some that really weren't-I really wasn't quite qualified. I don't even know if I played the right notes.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. JACOBS: I think I tried to maybe move my bow and then sit in sections and not play anything. [They laugh.] I can't remember, but I knew that I was outclassed. I knew that I shouldn't be there.

MS. RIEDEL: But it's interesting-just in using your hands, and you got this from Girl Scouts, and your father gardening, and then cello. So you already had that sense of working with your hands. You were compelled by that.

MS. JACOBS: I did. And I remember even in junior high taking art classes. Oh, by high school, I would do anything not to write a paper. A lot of the teachers would let you do these art projects-same in junior high. I couldn't speak French, but I did this wonderful visual notebook. So I got these good grades because I could-

MS. RIEDEL: For which class?

MS. JACOBS: For French.

MS. RIEDEL: You did a visual notebook for French class?

MS. JACOBS: Yes. And I could not speak any French.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you do? What did a visual-what did it look like?

MS. JACOBS: I just remember a drawing of the living room of our house. I would illustrate everything. I don't know. Wherever I could, I would illustrate it. And somehow that got me through school. Well, even if there was a class where you could write a paper, let's say on a state, okay. Or you could draw it. You could draw the state; you could draw where they grew things-maps, instead of writing.

MS. RIEDEL: So you really had a choice. You could accomplish the work through image-

MS. JACOBS: And I did.

MS. RIEDEL: -instead of words. And that was an early choice all through school, pretty much.

MS. JACOBS: All through school. It got me through school. I probably learned very little but I-[laughs]-I was honing my visual skills.

MS. RIEDEL: From the very start. And that is how you really started-you came to weaving from painting.

MS. JACOBS: Yes, yes. I was painting.

MS. RIEDEL: You came to fiber from that.

MS. JACOBS: Right. In fact, in high school, I don't even-how I did these things, I don't even know. But there was a man, Ron Blumberg, and he had a studio. And I must have been driving by then, because my mom didn't take me. My last year or so of high school, I went to his studio at night with adults, learning how to use pastels. He would set up these-he had all of these still lifes set up, and you would go from one still life to the other. You would do number one, then you do number two, then you do number three. But I was learning how to do cones and circles, and, you know, drapery, all of that stuff.

And he had a specific way of teaching it. And he had a way to make shadows. So each of us-we all did the same thing. But I was there and I was learning how to work with pastels. And that portfolio got me into Art Center, because after high school I went to Art Center.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were the only teenager in the class. Everybody else was an adult.

MS. JACOBS: I think so. There might have been a few others. Maybe there were seven, 10 people there.

MS. RIEDEL: And you found it by yourself. You just decided to go.

MS. JACOBS: I was mainly the-I was pretty much the youngest person there. I think I was maybe 16 or 17-maybe 16, because 17-I was already in Art Center, or 18, I was in Art Center. Maybe 17, when-you know, I just turned 17 when I went there.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were studying painting at Art Center?

MS. JACOBS: Well, at Art Center, since I knew very little about art-if I have a regret, I think I have a regret that I didn't go to Chouinard. Chouinard was more of the art school. Art Center at the time was very commercial.

MS. RIEDEL: Art Center College of Design.

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: In Los Angeles.

MS. JACOBS: And that was-it was on Third Street when I went and now it's in Pasadena. For one thing, I was one of the very-there weren't any girls in the school.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. JACOBS: I mean, it's amazing the things I did.

MS. RIEDEL: This was the early '60s-'60, '61.

MS. JACOBS: There were maybe five girls out of 40.

MS. RIEDEL: Five out of 40?

MS. JACOBS: This was '63. Wait, no it wasn't. It was 1961.

MS. RIEDEL: Sixty, '60, '63.

MS. JACOBS: It might have even been 1960. I think I entered art school in 1960.

MS. RIEDEL: A couple of years, right-'60 through '63, something like that?

MS. JACOBS: I think I entered in 1960, because I graduated high school in June of 1960 and I started Art Center in the fall. And I applied to go to Art Center. My parents weren't interested in me going to Art Center. And I don't know why. I think I was so terrified. And I knew where Art Center was; I didn't know where Chouinard was. I went and looked at Art Center and I just applied there. And I had to give them a portfolio. And I think I was maybe-there were five girls in a class of 40-all boys.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So again, here was this aloneness. Aloneness at Ron Blumberg, aloneness here.

MS. JACOBS: I went to Art Center-I only went for a semester. But I realized very early on-I said I would be a layout and design major, which very quickly I realized was not going to be for me. I did take a drawing class and I did take some painting, and I immediately knew that I wanted to draw and paint.

And I ended up doing-I didn't do very well. I didn't do badly, but I didn't do well. For one thing, in all of the layout and design classes, I had a really hard time meeting their deadlines. And they were worked-it was a very working atmosphere. They wanted to train you for advertising agencies. So they had a lot of deadlines. You had to do things fast. And I-look what I did, compared to what I do now. I mean, you can imagine-

MS. RIEDEL: The opposite speed.

MS. JACOBS: It takes me six months to finish something. I didn't want to work that fast and I really resented it. And I kind of-I probably turned in things late a lot. And then I didn't stay. I ended up going there at night. I got married-I ended up getting married-and went to work. You know, I had to learn to work-[laughs]-to make money, because my husband was in school. So I went to work, and then I went to Art Center at night for a while. And then we went to New York. And then I went to Pratt at night, painting. And it was probably-

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you, Ferne, when you were in New York?

MS. JACOBS: That was 1964.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were there for a few years?

MS. JACOBS: Just a year.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: Just a year. I loved it, but my husband hated it.

MS. RIEDEL: And when was your son born?

MS. JACOBS: Oh, he was he was born in '69. So we were back already. I mean, we were married about seven years before we had our son.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, one thing I thought would be really interesting to talk about is your education, because as we have mentioned, you didn't take the traditional route. You went to a number of different places, following different teachers.

MS. JACOBS: Yes. Let me say something before I say that, because I do want to say this. I left Art Center because I was pregnant. And I wasn't with my husband. It was before I got married. So I was only at Art Center for a semester and I was pregnant, and I was having a really hard time to-because I-I had a lot of morning sickness. And I tried to have an abortion-this was a time when abortion was illegal-and it was a disaster. So I left Art Center to go into a home, into a maternity home.

So I do want to say I have a daughter. And I want to acknowledge her, because I do have a relationship with her now. So I did go into a maternity home, had her, and then shortly after for some-I re-met the man that I ended up marrying. He and I went to high school together. And then I saw him afterward and then we got married. And that is why I stopped going to Art Center and then started going at night.

MS. RIEDEL: And then you just-you have reconnected with your daughter.

MS. JACOBS: So I gave her up for adoption at the time. And then I met her when she was 22. She is now 44. So I have known her just about as long as I didn't know her.

MS. RIEDEL: That is wonderful. That is really wonderful. What is her name? Do you want to mention that?

MS. JACOBS: Naomi, and she likes to be called Nome.

MS. RIEDEL: Naomi. And then your son is Peter.

MS. JACOBS: Peter.

MS. RIEDEL: And he was born nine years after that?

MS. JACOBS: He was born eight years after that.

MS. RIEDEL: Eight years.

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, great. Good.

MS. JACOBS: But I raised him. So when I talk a lot about raising a child, you know, I just raised Peter. But she is also very much part of my life and is my daughter.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, it must have been extraordinary to reconnect with her.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Anything else you want to say about that whole experience?

MS. JACOBS: Well, that was formidable to go through that.

MS. RIEDEL: But you moved ahead with the art regardless; you went to Art Center.

MS. JACOBS: Gene and I went to New York, and I went to Pratt. He was studying at Pratt. And I was actually painting on my own. My teacher, when I went to-the first-we were there for a year. Gene decided to go to library school. And he worked at the library at Pratt so I could go free, which-we both went free, which was wonderful. We didn't have to pay for classes, which was great.

MS. RIEDEL: Was he an artist as well?

MS. JACOBS: No, he was studying library science. So he was working at the library and going to library school. And I was working, of course-both of us, so we could survive. He was working in the library and I worked at Bonwit Teller, of all places. And it was great. I liked working in Bonwit Teller.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you doing display?

MS. JACOBS: Well, I ended up not-I wasn't hired to do display. I worked in handbags, and I was a terrible salesperson. But I would do the displays.

MS. RIEDEL: There we go.

MS. JACOBS: I would spend all of my time every morning-[laughs]-putting all the handbags and making them look-because they were-you know, the cases. I would spend as much time as I could putting them all in the cases and making them look really nice. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: So that training did pay off one way or another. There you go.

MS. JACOBS: And I wouldn't have minded-at the time, I wouldn't have minded being a buyer. It's interesting how things happen. But, you know, they were hiring people who had a college education, and I didn't. And I don't know what I would have done. But I was painting when I was working at Bonwit Teller. I just painted. And then I took a class at Pratt at night. Gabriel Laderman was the painter. He was the first real painter in that.

MS. RIEDEL: Ladderman? L-A-D-D-E-R-M-A-N?

MS. JACOBS: I don't know. Why, do you know who he is?

MS. RIEDEL: No, no. I was trying to make sure that we identify him.

MS. JACOBS: He was a really good realist painter. And he and I had our arguments. It was an interesting experience being there with him-Art Center didn't have a great painting department. They do now. I think they-I mean, I think they got wise and they have real painters. At that time, they really had more business painters, people who did portraits. I literally think I took a class from a guy who, like, painted generals, you know-like, portraits of generals. [They laugh.] You can see why I never did that great at Art Center. I did not belong there. I did not belong there.

MS. RIEDEL: You had a whole different approach-and different interests.

MS. JACOBS: Yes, I wanted the soul. Well, Pratt-Gabriel Laderman was a realistic painter, but he was a serious painter. I mean, he cared about art; he cared about painting. And he-I told him-I remember-I mean, do you want to hear all of this?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. JACOBS: I remember telling him-I thought I deserved a better grade at Art Center. I thought I deserved an A, and I got a B. You know, it's not that I got a bad grade. But I decided that I didn't like my grades at Art Center. I decided never to look at grades again.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. JACOBS: I would never look at grades. And so Gabriel Laderman said to me, well, do you care about your grade, or what about your grade? And I said, well, I don't care; I never look. He said, what do you mean you don't look? I said, I never look at my grades. He says, oh, you'll look at your grade. I think he mailed it to me or something-[they laugh]. The really interesting thing that happened between him and me-and can you imagine? I'm a kid. I'm in my 20's; I'm in my early 20's.

MS. RIEDEL: But you had that independent spirit you were talking about.

MS. JACOBS: And I did. And the most amazing experience I had in New York-I mean, this was the early '60s. Avery Fisher Hall [Lincoln Center, New York, NY], they did a modern music festival. So someone invited me and I went. And the piece I remember, I mean, [Edgard] Varèse was the opening. And I think he might have even been there. I think he was still alive. I think he was in the audience. And the major piece for me was John Cage; Merce Cunningham was on stage. I mean, his dance group was on stage. John Cage did the sound. And I think he had everybody wired up. So part of the sound was coming from Cunningham's-the movement of his dancers.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. JACOBS: And Rauschenberg had done the film.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, the sets and the-

MS. JACOBS: There was a film. There was a screen, and he had done a film for it. So it's Rauschenberg's film, Cage's music-sounds anyway, because it was all electronic-and Cunningham's dance.

MS. RIEDEL: Movement.

MS. JACOBS: I was blown away.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. JACOBS: I was in heaven. Isn't it interesting? Even then I knew about modern-you know, like, modern work, and yet I went into basket making. I mean, into fiber and these ancient basket-making techniques. I did because I felt this incredible connectedness to the earth or the-you know, but I knew a lot about art. I wasn't naïve and I wasn't-anyway, I went back to Gabriel Laderman's class the next night and said, I saw this amazing thing. And I told him about it. He said, it was awful!

MS. RIEDEL: He did?

MS. JACOBS: It was awful! I said, no it wasn't! It was great! He says, it's awful. I said, well, you have to tell me why it was awful. And he did this thing where he started twirling and he twirled out of the room like that was the end of it. He was telling me-he says, that is all they do. He says, that is all they do, is twirl. He only liked-one of our projects was to take-to start-we did three paintings. I have them here.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MS. JACOBS: Three paintings, because I always loved doing that project. They were small paintings. We did one small painting that was totally realistic of a still life. And then we abstracted it-we took out things. The second one, we took out, so it was more abstract, but yet realistic. The third, we abstracted and pulled out and simplified it to the simplest shapes that we could find in the still life-no, from our painting. The first one we took from the still life. The second one we started working from the actual paintings that we made. And the third was the simplest. So the second one was simplified and then the third was simplified even more.

That is how he saw abstract art, and he could not see it in any other way. You had to start with reality; you had to be able to paint reality, and then you could abstract it from reality. He didn't like John Cage. He thought-well, John Cage said-I mean, I heard John Cage interviewed. He studied with Schoenberg, and he couldn't do harmony. And Schoenberg said you'll never be a composer because you can't deal with harmony. You don't have an ear for harmony. And Cage said, I'm going to do it anyway, even if I have to hit my head against a blank wall.

Well, Gabriel Laderman couldn't consider Cage a serious composer because he couldn't do harmony. I could care less. I said what was there was so rich and so intense; it is totally legitimate to me. Well, Gabriel Laderman, he twirled out of the room. And I said, come back. [Laughs.] I said come back and talk to me.

MS. RIEDEL: And did he?

MS. JACOBS: And he did.

MS. RIEDEL: And what-go ahead.

MS. JACOBS: Again, I had this incredible conversation. Me, I could understand his point of view that he needed abstraction to come from reality, and he didn't respect somebody who couldn't paint reality. It didn't matter to me. John Cage could do whatever he was going to do, and something about the richness of the experience was all I needed. And I told him that. And I says, you're not going to tell me that this wasn't great; I know it's great. And I think he gave me an A. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: That is a great story, Ferne.

Well, it seems like you really pursued-you went on for the rest of your education and really pursued specific teachers. I mean, you didn't just go to one program, get a degree, go to another program. I know you were at CSU [California State University] in San Diego. Weren't you with Arline Fisch, and then Long Beach, maybe with Mary Jane Leland?

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And then I know you studied at Haystack [Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME] with Olga de Amaral.

MS. JACOBS: With Olga de Amaral.

MS. RIEDEL: And Peter Collingwood, then with-

MS. JACOBS: And I taught Peter how to make a basket.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you?

MS. JACOBS: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So it would be great-

MS. JACOBS: By that time I was his assistant, and he taught weaving and I did the three-dimensional fiber, and I taught-[laughs]-him how to do the three-dimensional fiber.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Can you talk a little bit how you pursued-

MS. JACOBS: Well, even Olga, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: There is a great story here.

MS. JACOBS: I mean, when I was at Haystack with Olga-well, she was the second session. I was there for two sessions.

MS. RIEDEL: When was this, Ferne? Was this-

MS. JACOBS: This was 1966 or 1967. I'm not quite sure.

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds right.

MS. JACOBS: Does it?

MS. RIEDEL: Sixty-seven actually, yeah.

MS. JACOBS: Sixty-seven, yeah. The summer of '67. And I had a scholarship for two sessions. And the first one was a woman from Maine. And then Olga was the second. I assisted the first person. I had a full scholarship. And then the second one, I worked in the kitchen. But I had put on too much warp-I put on-just, I don't know what I did. I put on way too much warp. So I made two pieces simultaneously. I was weaving two pieces at the same time next to each other because I had too much warp.

And Olga came and wanted me to do something. And, again, I didn't do it. I wanted to weave my two weavings. I wanted to get those done. So I said, Olga-I did it for maybe a day. She said just try it. And I did it for a day or two and I said, you know, why? Why should I be doing it? She wanted us to weave a rock. That is what she-that was the assignment.

MS. RIEDEL: To weave a rock.

MS. JACOBS: You know, just so you get the texture and all of that, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, and the dimensionality too?

MS. JACOBS: Probably. I don't remember. I think probably she wanted me to make something three-dimensional. And I just very quickly said, why? Why am I doing this? [Laughs.] And I said, Olga, uh-uh [negative], I'm not going to do this. And here I am. I mean, here she is, this very well-known weaver. I didn't know who she was, but at the same time, right before I went, there was an article on her work in the *American Craft* magazine, or *Craft Horizons*, it was at the time. And I would-oh, my-I get to work with this person and she is so good. And I got very excited.

And then I-but I told her I didn't want to-you know, here is this person who is getting written about. I'm a student. But I'm telling her I don't want to do her project. And I didn't.

MS. RIEDEL: I remember you asking her-or reading someplace that you had asked her should I get-should I go to grad school or-

MS. JACOBS: Not even graduate school. Should I go to school? Should I enter Long Beach State? Mary Jane really wanted me to go to Long Beach State and get a degree. And I said to Olga, should I-should I go to school, or should I get a loom and go home and go to work? She said, get the loom and go home and get to work. That is what I did.

But shortly after that, I mean, I had studied with Arline Fisch for a week. I mean, nobody a long period of time-Arline Fisch for a week, because I had taken a workshop with her. And I went down and worked day and night, day and night, at San Diego State with her. And she saw that I was serious and she told me to go to Long Beach State, and that is how I got-she called Mary Jane and said, take her in. And I just audited the class. I didn't take any other classes. I was an auditing student.

MS. RIEDEL: You were there specifically for that class.

MS. JACOBS: And even so, I didn't get graded and I stayed there a year, and even there, the second semester Mary Jane says, you know, you wouldn't have gotten an A this year. I mean, I did more hangings than anybody else. But she says, you didn't do the notebook. I said, well, isn't it nice that I'm not being graded, because I had no intention of doing a notebook.

MS. RIEDEL: And what-we'll get to your journals, but what-

MS. JACOBS: The notebooks were samples, just weaving samples and all-you know, the information on weaving. And I didn't do it.

MS. RIEDEL: Just exercises that weren't interesting to you.

MS. JACOBS: Right. And I said I'm not-I said, I'm not a student here.

MS. RIEDEL: There is no reason.

MS. JACOBS: I can do whatever I want. Yes, I can do whatever I want. So I just wove-I wove six hangings, where maybe everyone else did two. But I didn't do the notebook and I didn't do-

MS. RIEDEL: So it sounds like you really wanted to weave what you wanted to weave. You wanted to make what you wanted to make. And it had to be-there had to be a reason for it. There had to be something that compelled you to do it.

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And if you weren't compelled, you weren't going to do it. [They laugh.]

MS. JACOBS: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: That is why I didn't go to college. There were too many classes that I wouldn't want to take, that I have no interest in. If I'm interested, I'll study to the nth degree. If I'm not interested, you can't get me to do it at all.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did you find Dominic Di Mare, and would you talk a little bit about that? You studied with him for about a year on and off.

MS. JACOBS: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Not even.

MS. JACOBS: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, a few months?

MS. JACOBS: After I left Long Beach-I mean, I really learned how to weave. I give Mary Jane a lot of credit. Between her and Arline Fisch, I learned how to weave. Okay, so I learned a lot. So I could weave by the end of that year with her, and the experience I had with Arline Fisch.

Well, the thing with Arline Fisch-I was taking weaving-I mean, I came to weaving just because I walked into somebody's studio on Melrose Avenue before Melrose ever had any shops on it. Some guy-they were sort of private places and I don't even know why I was walking it. Maybe there must have been a few shops, because this was in the '60s. And this guy just had a studio and he had a loom. He had weavings. And I thought it really looked interesting to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, because how did that-I guess we didn't discuss that at all yet.

MS. JACOBS: How would I even-

MS. RIEDEL: And how did you get from painting to weaving?

MS. JACOBS: To weaving-because I was really painting. And I was learning about painting in New York. And then Gene and I came back to L.A. And I took a painting class, and they had weaving. It was Barnsdall [Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Art Park, Los Angeles, CA]. I wasn't even in a school. And the guy who taught painting wasn't very good. I mean, he wasn't very good-well, the weaving teacher wasn't good either. But I started weaving there. And I stopped the painting class, but I stayed with the weaving class because I really enjoyed weaving.

And I did that because Gene and I were going to go to Europe. I'm backing up, because I got married, I was painting, I was just painting on my own, and then went to New York. But you know what I was doing-I don't even know how I started doing this. I was working with jute. I was painting and I was-

MS. RIEDEL: Jute, the fiber?

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, no, just the fabric. The jute-yes. You know there were these jute fabrics at the time.

MS. RIEDEL: Like burlap?

MS. JACOBS: Yes, like burlap. It was burlap fabrics. And I think I wanted to make curtains. So I bought this burlap and I started cutting it and I started making these little knots and things on it. They were kind of pretty-kind of pretty curtains. So when I went to New York, I painted, and I started making these wall hanging out of jute and burlap, and beads, and stitchery.

[Audio break, tape change.]

MS. RIEDEL: Would you paint them too?

MS. JACOBS: I wouldn't paint.

MS. RIEDEL: But you embroidered them?

MS. JACOBS: I was embroidering them. So I painted, and Gabriel Laderman was so surprised that someone-and then I took this class, you know, painting, and Gabriel Laderman was so surprised that I had done anything on my own and that anybody-[laughs]-nobody-he's so shy.

MS. RIEDEL: Something that wasn't assigned?

MS. JACOBS: People would do nothing that wasn't assigned. You know, this is the problem with graduate school. People were waiting for assignments. And here I painted my boots and here Dylan-Bob Dylan-was singing "Boots of Spanish Leather," and here I am in New York with my boots of leather. So I painted my boots, you know, and I did these two burlap wall hangings. I showed him that, too, which made no sense to him though. Too abstract, wasn't realist-

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly, not really-[laughs]-but it was too functional. It was a curtain, right?

MS. JACOBS: No, in fact, this time they weren't curtains. I was just making these wall hangings out of these

burlap things.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that when you met Lenore Tawney?

MS. JACOBS: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Because you went to visit her studio in SoHo.

MS. JACOBS: That was 10 years later. We are all over the map.

MS. RIEDEL: We're still in the early phases.

MS. JACOBS: Because after Gabriel Laderman-before settling in New York, we went to Europe. We were going to go live in Europe, and Gene was interested in Scandinavia. And I don't like being a tourist, and we wouldn't be in Europe for a year. I said, well, maybe I'll learn how to weave, because I knew there was a lot of weaving in Scandinavia. I mean, this was just in my mind, because, you know, you'd see a lot of Scandinavian fabric. So I said, maybe I'll go to Scandinavia and learn how to weave. But we never got to Scandinavia, and we didn't stay in Europe.

MS. RIEDEL: But you started weaving anyway.

MS. JACOBS: So I came, we settled in New York for a year. Gene hated it, and we ended up back in L.A. So I saw that I could take weaving, and I took weaving and I became really interested in it. I loved the texture. I loved the yarn. I loved the smell of it. I never liked the smell of paint. I really love the smell of the yarn, so that's when I started weaving.

And then I had a German teacher at Barnsdall who had you go in a specific order. I don't even know if I could choose my own color. I think she allowed me to choose my own colors. But a friend of mine owned a weaving store, and she told me Arline Fisch was doing a workshop-I didn't know who Arline Fisch was. And I went to the workshop, and Arline taught us how to weave on a frame and to be very free. That's how I really started weaving. I wove a lot on the frame. I took them to my German teacher at Barsndall and I just hung them up, and she walked through them like you'd walk into a Japanese restaurant, you know, like the-

MS. RIEDEL: The curtains, drapes.

MS. JACOBS: The curtains. She wouldn't even look at them. She just walked through them, like, who put this up here, and didn't even want to look at them. That's when I called Arline Fisch and said, could I come work with you? And she says, come down. And I did, and so, see, I already had a bunch of weaving that I wove on my own and I-

MS. RIEDEL: On a loom or off the loom? Arline got you off the loom. She got you on the frame.

MS. JACOBS: On the frame. I had never-oh, I had been working on a little table loom. She had me working on a frame where you could work front, back, you could make shapes, you could do anything on this frame.

MS. RIEDEL: So there was no front, there was no back. There was no top. There was no bottom.

MS. JACOBS: You could do whatever you wanted. And I could have little things coming out if I wanted to. So I went wild. I started really having a good time with this frame.

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds like something you still do to this day, when you start a coiled piece-there's no certain top or bottom or even middle. You see as it evolves where it's going to go. You don't necessarily start with a top or a bottom orientation, right?

MS. JACOBS: No, that's been my thing. At that time, I started weaving my paintings. I had started painting-I don't know when I did this-I actually got a studio for myself for a while and I started trying to make three-dimensional paintings, and they were getting very abstract. I started painting on masonite, and I would build these pieces of masonite up. They were almost getting very sculptural, and then painting the surface.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. JACOBS: So when I started weaving, I started weaving these paintings. But they were pretty flat, but they were all shaped. None were rectangular.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so they were flat.

MS. JACOBS: They undulated and they had all these shapes. I mean, they were more-they were shaped. But they

did have a top and a bottom, and I did start at the top in the frame. I did start at the top. But then I did start adding little funny things to them. But then I went to San Diego State, and this is all in the year around 1965, and then went to Long Beach State, which is '66.

MS. RIEDEL: That was with Mary Jane Leland.

MS. JACOBS: Right, and I learned how to weave from them [Arline Fisch and Mary Jane Leland]. And then I went to Haystack that summer, and this is all within a year. I went to Haystack that summer, so very intense-first Arline Fisch and Mary Jane Leland, and then Olga de Amaral, all the media-

MS. RIEDEL: And was Peter Collingwood there, too, or he was later?

MS. JACOBS: No, that was later. And Dominic was right after that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, and how did you find him?

MS. JACOBS: Well, I went to Haystack. I did my two weavings. I met Jack Lenor Larsen that summer. It was a great summer. Met Olga, met Jack Larsen.

MS. RIEDEL: So that was really pivotal for you, that Haystack experience.

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've gone back to teach there as well?

MS. JACOBS: Many times.

MS. RIEDEL: And how many-was that the only time you attended? No, you've been there a number of times as a student as well.

MS. JACOBS: The only other time-I was a student that summer and then maybe three years later with Peter Collingwood, two, maybe three, years later, '71.

MS. RIEDEL: Was all that study at Haystack, and the independent work with Dominic, as important to you as any formalized program at a university or a school?

MS. JACOBS: Well, totally. It gave me my work. The thing about working with Dominic was to see the intensity and see somebody who was committed to work.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that work for him, because he didn't have independent students. And you, how did that come about?

MS. JACOBS: I don't know. I did the same thing I did with Arline Fisch. I came back from Haystack. I did what Olga said. I got a loom. I had a big Macomber loom, eight harness, 40 inches wide. I mean, I had a major loom that ended up in Berkeley when I started doing three-dimensional work-I sold the loom to somebody who lived in Berkeley.

I came back from Haystack. I went to work, and I had two favorite weavers in the country, Lenore Tawney and Dominic Di Mare. But somehow I found out that Dominic was on the West Coast in San Francisco. So I found a Di Mare in San Francisco, and I sent a letter and slides. And I swear, I think it wasn't Dominic. I think it was a cousin of his, but he gave all this to Dominic, and Dominic wrote me a letter and said come up.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

MS. JACOBS: It was extraordinary.

MS. RIEDEL: Was he still teaching junior high at the time?

MS. JACOBS: I think so. I think he was still teaching junior high and he was weaving. But it was at a pivotal moment in his life. He was changing. He had developed a very personal techniques for weaving. And I think he was wanting to change to paper at that point, and he wanted to teach somebody those techniques. At least, that's what we did that day. I went up and I spent a whole day with him and he taught me the techniques. These very personal weaving techniques. He changed-he and Lenore have really changed-a lot of people, not only them, but there was a whole group of people changing weaving, making it modern.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so we were talking about Dominic Di Mare and how you went to spend the day with him and

he was teaching you all of the very personal techniques that he had invented himself.

MS. JACOBS: Because what he did, he would weave these shapes on the loom, so they'd be connected at one point, and then he would take them off the loom, and he could make a lot of shapes for-I don't know. He had enough harnesses to make four layers, and I forget how many harnesses you need for that now. I think you need eight harnesses. And he would take them off the loom, and he would sew them together. So he showed me this technique. We spent the whole day together. By the end of the day, I was so freaked. It was so intense. It was really intense that day.

MS. RIEDEL: What was so intense about it? Or what made you so freaked out?

MS. JACOBS: He just kept giving me information on top of information, and talking, and he had a lot of energy, and I was just bowled over.

MS. RIEDEL: It's amazing that he would just give you all of this information. It is, isn't it? That strikes me as a pretty unique interaction between the two of you.

MS. JACOBS: Well, I think he knew he wasn't going to do it anymore. I think he knew that he was coming to the end of doing that, and I think he thought that somebody might carry it on. But what he and I realized later is, no, it's not to be carried on. Each person develops a very personal language with their materials and their ideas, and each person has to go through that process.

But that day, he gave me this information-and then I went home and started using this information to make work. I will say, my brother picked me up and took me to his girlfriend's house. And we were supposed to spend the night, and I said, Claude, I can't. I was so hyped that I asked him to take me home. And I remember getting home; my husband was staying with my parents. I remember, I think late, I think we drove home in the middle of the night. And I woke my husband up at 6:00 in the morning to tell him about this experience. I had to talk about it, because it was so-I was so excited, and I hadn't had that kind of experience and it was amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: What about it, Ferne-do you remember what about it was so exciting?

MS. JACOBS: I don't think I had ever-well, Gabriel Laderman was dynamic. I mean, it wasn't like I-but Dominic was incredibly dynamic. You know, and maybe it meant something to him for me to be there. I can't say. But that day, we worked nonstop, and the only thing we stopped for was Margaret made us her famous peanut butter-[they laugh]-chutney sandwiches.

MS. RIEDEL: Peanut butter chutney, a little bit of cheese too?

MS. JACOBS: Oh, right, right. That was our only break. And I never-I mean, when I studied with Gabriel Laderman-one night a week, a couple nights a week, and there were a lot of students. This was one-on-one.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you also think-I mean, just from everything you said about Gabriel, you spoke different languages, and you and Dominic seem to speak so much the same language.

MS. JACOBS: We did.

MS. RIEDEL: And something you said earlier, too, about, I wanted the soul in the work. And I think of Dominic's work that way, too. And I wonder if just the two of you really understood each other and spoke-was that part of it, do you think?

MS. JACOBS: I think so. I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: You were after the same sort of thing.

MS. JACOBS: Though I know he thought I was crazy. I probably thought he was crazy, and I was a little crazy then. So probably just the intensity of two crazy people in the same room-and obviously, a connection. There must have been some recognition.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you've been now such-I think he's referred to you as his best friend. I mean you've been friends for 30 years.

MS. JACOBS: Well, since 1967, almost 40 years. Wow.

MS. RIEDEL: So did you go back again anytime soon? How many times did you go back?

MS. JACOBS: I came home and went to work, using what I learned that day. And then I brought the work back to him, maybe six months later. And he and I both agreed that it looked too much like his work. And he told me not

to exhibit, but keep working, and I knew to stop using those techniques, that this is not the thing to do. And right around there, I think, Joan Austin had gone to Cranbrook.

It's such an interesting world. Joan's father had been a fisherman. Dominic's father had been a fisherman. And Joan [Austin] learned how to knot; she went to Cranbrook to learn basket making. She researched basket-making techniques. And I want them to know that everybody who is working with basket-making techniques really owes her a debt. She's the one who did the research, and she was the first person doing it. Where people were trying to make weaving three-dimensional, she came up with these techniques almost doing it naturally. And she had gone to Long Beach State. She was the reason I went to Haystack.

MS. RIEDEL: So you met her at Long Beach State.

MS. JACOBS: Right. She wasn't there. She had just graduated when I started, but she came back a lot, and she came back and showed her slides of Haystack. That's how I got to Haystack. That's how I knew about it. And she also, after I studied with Dominic, this is the same time, 1965-1967. She started-yeah, and Kay-

MS. RIEDEL: Kay Sekimachi was at Haystack, too, and had such a pivotal time there. I'm trying to think of the exact year.

MS. JACOBS: Oh, I don't know. I came back from Dominic. I was doing those weavings based on Dominic's technique. And Joan and I exhibited at the same time, and I saw that she was making these three-dimensional fiber pieces and they were done naturally.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, what do you mean by done naturally?

MS. JACOBS: Well, people-Dominic was sewing his together. Magdalena Abakunow-I never know how to pronounce her name.

MS. RIEDEL: Magdalena Abakanowicz, I think.

MS. JACOBS: Abakanowicz. [Laughs.] She was putting metal armature in hers. People were, yeah, using armatures. They were sewing. Everybody was trying to make three-dimensional things. They were stuffing things. They were trying this thing that naturally wanted to be flat-this flat hanging thing-into this three-dimensional sculpture. Well, Joan did it naturally with these basket-making techniques.

MS. RIEDEL: And was that the first time you ever saw that?

MS. JACOBS: Yeah. And I said, gee, that looks interesting to me. So she kept saying she would teach me how to do it and she never did. And then one day I went to meet her for lunch, during a class she was teaching-this had to be, like, in the late '60s-and I took a diagram, and I asked one of the students to show me what they were doing, and I went home and tried to do it.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was how you started coiling the three-dimensional-

MS. JACOBS: That's how I started coiling.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MS. JACOBS: But I think the year before I'd started making three-dimensional forms, I took a knotting class with Neda Al-Hilali at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], during the summer. That must have been around 1968-69, and I just came home and started making-I started trying to make something three-dimensional, and I just made a little basket out of knotting. And then I ran into this class that Joan Austin was teaching and saw the coiling. So very quickly, I stopped using the loom. This was around 1969-1970. I just came home that day and I started knotting three-dimensional shapes like baskets-they were basket shapes.

And then that's what I started doing, and I started-and I would coil one, I would knot one, and then I would twine one, because each one was very different. If I knotted, it was very hard to move color, so they were very simple. The coiling, you could use as much color as you wanted to because you could change the color at any time. And the hard thing about that was making them-to simplify them, and not make them look totally chaotic. And then twining was something else, also a very simplifying technique.

And that's what I did, and that was the beginning of my career. I did a series of pieces and I had a one-person show. Joan Austin was showing at a gallery called Galleria del Sol. It was in Santa Barbara. What was that-Mendecito? Or it was the place next to-

MS. RIEDEL: Fort Bragg, up in California?

MS. JACOBS: No, it was next to Santa Barbara. It was a very wealthy community of Santa Barbara, and I can't remember the name. But Galleria del Sol was in there. And I had-

MS. RIEDEL: Was that your first show?

MS. JACOBS: That was my first show. It was 1971. I should show you an announcement for that show.

MS. RIEDEL: You still have it? Great.

MS. JACOBS: I still have it. And Joan had a show there and she told them about me, and then they opened the Fairtree Gallery in New York very shortly after my one-person show. They took Joan's work, my work, and Julie Connell's. And Paul Smith saw my work at the Fairtree, and he put me in the first exhibition of three-dimensional fiber at the American Craft Museum, which was probably at that time a different name.

MS. RIEDEL: Museum of Contemporary Craft?

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, that was in 1971-72, and I had the first vessel shapes done. Joan wasn't doing them anymore. So I'm the one who ended up really taking it out into the world, even though she to me is the one who began it. Out of that show, he took my work and put it in this seminal exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts on 53rd Street. And from then on, that was how my career was made.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk a little bit about the vessel shape and the container because you've really taken that, and developed it.

MS. JACOBS: Let me just say one thing more about Dominic. I just want to look at this closer, because I went back in six months, showed him the work, he said, don't exhibit this. But then I started making these three-dimensional forms. I showed him those, and from that time on, we were friends. And I showed him how to make a three-dimensional shape and our friendship began. And so I-

MS. RIEDEL: So it really was a very brief mentorship, if at all, and became peership pretty quickly.

MS. JACOBS: Very quickly.

MS. RIEDEL: And how often would you see him? There was something that you were both after that few people understood, but that you both understood.

MS. JACOBS: Well, at least a couple times a year. And I see him now at least a couple of times a year. They would come here, and maybe three times a year, I don't know, four times a year. They would come here or I would go there. And we talk a lot on the phone. We always talk at least once a month on the phone.

MS. RIEDEL: And you always talk about work, as well.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, we talk a lot about our work, our ideas, our families, you know, our lives, what we think about.

MS. RIEDEL: And similar themes that are important to you both?

MS. JACOBS: Well, they meet, they conflict. Dominic always describes us as we're on the same horse but we're riding in two different directions. [Laughs.] But I think a lot of the different directions is he's a man and I'm a woman. And he wants to dominate, and I don't particularly want to dominate, but I definitely want an equal voice. And so I think my equal voice makes him think that I'm riding in a different direction. [They laugh.] I just don't let him dominate the situation.

MS. RIEDEL: And what's the horse that you both are riding?

MS. JACOBS: I always see it as kind of a folk art piece. I always see us on-I mean seriously, if I have an image of it, I don't see a horse galloping into the sunset. I see this handmade piece that is somehow the whole boat-you know like tramp art-or you know like some wonderful folk art bottom, and I see him facing one direction and me facing the other direction sitting on this thing-but it's wood, carved wood; I wonder how he sees it.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting; you're standing in similar spots, but you're looking at completely different views-is that what you're talking about?

MS. JACOBS: But that's not always true either. So many times-we love to look at art together, and a lot of times we have the same point of view, but sometimes we don't.

MS. RIEDEL: You seem to have similar processes, too, in the sense that you both seem to have very meditative

processes, and the other thing that's interesting to me is the-we haven't really talked about this-we'll get into it-but how you both have such extraordinary journals-just extraordinary journals. Very different.

MS. JACOBS: Very different, yes. I mean, his are totally visual.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], but really important to both of you. Your journals are very important.

MS. JACOBS: And mine are visual, too. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: That's true; they're totally visual. Mine are, too.

MS. RIEDEL: They're just completely different views. [They laugh.] Totally. It seems like he's a significant part of what you consider a community, if you had-

MS. JACOBS: Well, I don't-you know, I never see myself as having a community, but I definitely have particular people that I'm very close to, and he is one of them.

MS. RIEDEL: And then Lenore Tawney would be another one.

MS. JACOBS: Lenore, yeah, another one.

MS. RIEDEL: And anybody else?

MS. JACOBS: Well, they, in terms of inspiration-I mean, they so inspired me and, I mean, although our relations have been very equal. My work really was inspired by seeing their work and respecting them so much. Then other people I met later on. I'm very close to Marilyn Pappas. She does thread pieces. God, is there anybody else? [Inaudible] and then she had her-I met her at Haystack in 1971, and out of all the people-I've met so many people at Haystack-she and I became so close. We're like sisters. Lenore is like a mother. I mean, she is kind of my creative mother.

MS. RIEDEL: You want to talk a little bit about that?

MS. JACOBS: And I know-now I know Kay. I consider Kay Seki-

MS. RIEDEL: Sekimachi?

MS. JACOBS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Kay, a friend-a good friend. Someone-I can't think of anybody right now.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, maybe Patsy [Krebs], too.

MS. JACOBS: Oh, Patsy definitely.

MS. RIEDEL: Patsy Krebs.

MS. JACOBS: But, you know, Patsy is a painter.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: I mean, I have a very good friend who is also an artist, Claire Delmar, who makes wonderful-she actually draws circles on canvas, and they're quite lovely.

MS. RIEDEL: And who's the artist-Vija Celmins.

MS. JACOBS: Oh, Vija Celmins.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Who I know wrote-

MS. JACOBS: I don't know her, but I have-

MS. RIEDEL: She changed-

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, total admiration for her and her work, yeah. And early on, Ken Price and Ron Nagle were influences on me, because of the vessel shape and because everybody was doing such large work, and they did smaller, and I said, oh, good, I can make something small and it could be significant; you know, it didn't have to be huge.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. JACOBS: Because weaving was huge at the time, with the Lausanne Biennale and they had to be a certain size. I never exhibited there because my work was always too small.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you ever have anything to do with Fiber Works when it was going on in Berkeley in the '70s?

MS. JACOBS: No, I had an exhibit there at one point and I lectured there, but I didn't-I wasn't-

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Ferne Jacobs at her home in Los Angeles, California, on August 30, 2005, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number two.

And when we-when disc number one ended, we were just starting to talk about Lenore Tawney. And when you first met her, you'd seen shows of her work before, maybe read some things that she's written that had spoken to you?

MS. JACOBS: Oh, right, right. Well, I think the whole time I was weaving, I was very aware of her work. And then all of a sudden things started happening, like we were both included in the "First World Craft Exhibition" in Toronto [Canada, 1974].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: It was probably the only one that ever occurred, but there was one, and it was in Toronto. And my work was included; her work was included, of course. And I was, of course, younger. I was pleased to be included in that exhibit.

MS. RIEDEL: That was mid-'60s, Ferne? Sixty-seven or so, I think, about that.

MS. JACOBS: I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: No, it had to be later, because-no, it was in the early '70s.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: Because I was doing the three-dimensional fiber and I didn't start doing that until maybe '69. This is-it may be '72, somewhere around there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: Seventy-three, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: You both had work in that.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, so my work was evolved already enough that I could be included in the First World. I mean, the First World-there weren't that many Americans in it. And the book that was created, it was Octavio Paz-he wrote the introduction.

MS. RIEDEL: Nice.

MS. JACOBS: There was a book and I-our pieces were across from each other, which was really nice, in the book. And so I noticed that. And I went to the exhibit. I got to organize some lectures for it, and I remember loving her piece more than any other piece in the exhibition. It was a black cross, and there were like-she did this slit weaving. I mean, she revolutionized weaving. She made her own reed. She took the top off the reed, and she could move threads in and out, across the reed, so she could group them together and then separate them, and-

MS. RIEDEL: I saw a show of her work at the American Craft Museum [now the Museum of Arts & Design, New York, NY].

MS. JACOBS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's years ago, probably early '90s, and I was so struck by it at the time. Her work was really extraordinary. So powerful, so varied-use of text.

MS. JACOBS: Right, and color.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: Then she started painting and using paper in them and-well, this black piece-because of the slits, it was a rectangle piece-it was like a cross within a cross within a cross. And then in the center, the cross was just of light. It was so beautiful.

MS. RIEDEL: You mean, because there was no space there?

MS. JACOBS: There was enough negative space that the light could go through, and so it almost had inner crosses, like light. I just loved it. So thinking about that, and I read something that she wrote. It was some article in a magazine, in the quotes. I just felt that we had something in common. We shared something. So I decided-I was going to New York. I was teaching at Haystack for the first time. It was 1975. That was the first time I had taught there. I was a scholarship student one more time in 1971, and that's when I met Peter.

MS. RIEDEL: So you met Peter Collingwood.

MS. JACOBS: I met Peter Collingwood. But I was already doing my three-dimensional fiber. I was his assistant. I was making these baskets for him. Marilyn Pappas was there at the same time.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: So I kind of helped the students weave, but I did my three-dimensional work and I taught him three-dimensional. I think I taught him how to make a basket shape, so-

MS. RIEDEL: At Haystack?

MS. JACOBS: At Haystack.

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary.

MS. JACOBS: So we had a lot of fun. So I didn't actually do his weaving. I worked on my work, but I really-I did help the students. So I taught a couple of people how to make basket shapes, and that's when Marilyn and I met, and we became really good friends after that. And then-

MS. RIEDEL: Was it significant for you, Ferne, too-and we'll get back to Lenore-did it make a big difference to you to be invited to teach at Haystack and then also have your work included in that exhibit in Toronto? Were those big signs to you that your work was being accepted, there was a place for what you were doing, people were interested in it, or were you going to do it no matter what?

MS. JACOBS: Well, I would do it no matter what. I mean, listen, even with that kind of recognition, it hasn't been easy. [They laugh.] It's been an absolute struggle.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: The work takes a long time to make, and then everything doesn't sell. It's always a struggle. So I've done it all these years. I've done it for, what, 35 years, struggling all the way.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. With-

MS. JACOBS: Through good times and bad times.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. JACOBS: So the really important exhibit was that "Sculpture in Fiber" [Museum of contemporary Crafts, New York, NY, 1972] exhibit, because once-well, there were only 12 of us, I mean, in the whole country.

MS. RIEDEL: This is the one Paul Smith put together?

MS. JACOBS: Paul put it together at the Museum of-

MS. RIEDEL: Contemporary Crafts.

MS. JACOBS: -Contemporary Crafts. That was the real breakthrough, because he also curated the Toronto show, at least for Americans.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: I think he probably curated that. So once he knew about my work and put it in-and really brought it

into the museum, you know, in the Contemporary Craft Museum- I've exhibited steadily ever since then.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: So the [First] World Craft Exhibition was really just one more-I was very pleased, because there weren't that many Americans in it. He was saying that I was one of the Americans to be included in that, and that was-I enjoyed that a lot. I felt very good about it, but the real-the beginning was the Contemporary Craft Museum, and that, I think, was the important show that made my professional career take off, and I've exhibited ever since.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've exhibited in an interesting range of university galleries, museums, and private galleries. A very diversified mix.

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah. And mostly national, though?

MS. JACOBS: Mostly national, not international. I've been included in the international shows, especially American shows that toured internationally. I haven't really-I've been in a few international shows early on. It's funny. I think, for one thing, I'm not on the computer. I don't have a computer, and I think that keeps me from knowing about international shows. And I'm not-it's been pretty much national.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you don't have a computer?

MS. JACOBS: No, I don't.

MS. RIEDEL: And no e-mail?

MS. JACOBS: No.

MS. RIEDEL: That is interesting in this day and age.

MS. JACOBS: Yes, it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that a conscious decision, or you just don't have the time or desire that-

MS. JACOBS: I have no attraction to it, and I think it will just be distracting. I'd rather-

MS. RIEDEL: I can guarantee you that. [Laughs.] It is completely.

MS. JACOBS: I don't need another distraction, and I don't like it. I don't like the screen. I don't like the little mouse. I don't like any of it. I'm totally unattracted to it, and it's $2,000 and then the monthly payments. You know, I think I'd rather do something else with the money.

MS. RIEDEL: Bennett Bean was so offended by the monitor that he gold leafed it.

MS. JACOBS: Really? Oh, he did?

MS. RIEDEL: So you're not alone in that feeling.

MS. JACOBS: I just have no interest in it. It has no texture. I don't know. I just-

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. I've taken us so far afield; shall we go back to Lenore?

MS. JACOBS: Yes. So coming at-we were talking about Haystack and then this exhibition-because this is sort of the next phase. These are the early '70s. Being at Haystack in '71, I-and then slowly getting to-starting to see things by Lenore-you know, this writing.

Nineteen Seventy-five, I was invited to teach for the first time at Haystack, and I knew I was going to go to New York, and I said, I'm going to try to meet Lenore Tawney. Too many things had been happening, and I thought it was time. She and Dominic had been my favorite weavers in the '60s. I had met him, but I had never met her. I still felt a real-more and more-I felt some kind of kinship with her. And I was friends with Francoise Grossen. Do you know who she was? She was in fibers; she's not doing it right now, but she was very good. And I called her and I said, "Do you know how to get in touch with Lenore Tawney?" And she said, "I think she's in the phone book."

So I decided to call her up, and sure enough, she was in the phone book. And I called her and I told her who I was, and I told her that I'd like to come meet her. Now, I think-and I don't think she met a lot of people. Now,

why did she decide to meet me? I think she had seen my work in Cleveland. There was a-I don't know if it was an international fiber show or a national fiber show, but she went to see it, and I think she saw my work there and really liked it. So I think she might have remembered my name or for some reason-I don't know if she knew something, but she said, "Come." And I made a big deal out of it. I wasn't in New York for very long. I was there by myself. My family was back in L.A. I was staying in a hotel, and I had an appointment with her-I remember I think it was 3:00 in the afternoon, and I didn't do anything that day. I stayed in my hotel room because this-it meant a lot to me to meet her, and I was quiet during the day.

And then she had a loft at that time on Wooster [Street]-I think I met her when she lived on Wooster, and there was a big Italian fair and it was kind of scary. The whole thing was pretty scary. I lived in L.A. I didn't know New York well at all at the time. I mean, I had lived in New York-I had lived in the village. I knew the village, but I'd never been in SoHo, and SoHo was not a very nice area at the time. She was so gutsy. She had come to New York and lived at Coenties Slip in the '50s, the late '50s, and that was raunchy. And then here she was in SoHo, and it was pretty raunchy. It was still manufacturing mainly, and-

MS. RIEDEL: Were there other artist studios nearby?

MS. JACOBS: Probably scattered around. And Coenties Slip, there were a lot of artists, but they were living in really primitive conditions, illegal lofts right next to the ocean. Jack Youngerman was there and Ellsworth Kelly and really interesting people there. Agnes Martin.

When she was in SoHo, I don't know who was around her then. I don't know who was around her on Wooster, and I think it was a larger area, and I think people were more spread out and there was a lot of manufacturing. And at night it was really empty and dark and-so I went and there was some-I forgot the saint-there was a fair of some Italian saint. Gene can-I don't know. I'm not Catholic. I don't remember. But I remember having to pass through the fair to go to her place. And so here's-here's my quiet morning. Here's this chaos of this fair, everybody screaming at you to eat something and buy something. You know, Italians are loud. Everybody was loud. And they all looked like gangsters. I mean, they didn't, but-they were very Italian. Everybody was yelling and-

MS. RIEDEL: Boisterous festival.

MS. JACOBS: Very boisterous. Going to that, to her loft, and then getting to that loft, I didn't know anything about lofts, so I-I ring or whatever. And she is short; she's under five feet. She's under five feet or she's maybe five feet tall. She-she was like four-something between 4'9" and five feet. So I take the elevator to her loft and it's a-it's not a real elevator. It's a freight elevator. And I get up and I think I have time to collect myself. No. It opened right into her loft and there was no hallway, no nothing. There-it opens and she's standing there. And I'm catching my breath. And here's this small person looking at me with the most incredible eyes. I mean, so like lasers looking at my face. And I'm going, oh, my God, you know, here she is.

So I walked into the loft. It was one of the most amazing days of my life. I walked in, and it's pretty open. The space is pretty open except the kitchen. The kitchen is kind of marked off and she walks into the kitchen. I mean, it's open, but the shelving marks it off.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a loft.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Just one big room.

MS. JACOBS: But there's no walls.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: Right, it's just one big room. But the kitchen is marked off because of the cabinets and everything. And I walked in, and she says, "I want to eat a peach." She says, "Why don't you go look around?" And I crossed the threshold into the loft space from the kitchen, and I said, "No, I'd like to do it with you. I'd like to see your loft with you."

[Audio break.]

And so I'll wait; so we sat down across from each other like you and I are and I sat and watched her eat this peach. She never offered me a peach; she didn't offer me anything. I just sat and watched her eat this peach, and when she was done, we got up and we started walking around her loft looking at her work. We spent hours doing that and talking about her work.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. JACOBS: We just spent hours, at least three hours, and we finally had to stop because she was involved with meditations-it was Indian meditation and she was leading a meditation-she did have, like, a screened-off area, kind of a curtain, and there was a little altar in there and cushions and she had-she was having people over to meditate. So when they started coming, it was time for me to leave.

So-but otherwise, I might have been there for hours. Because we were slowly moving around the space and we were really talking about-[inaudible]. I was telling her my responses to her work, and she was talking about the work and-so that was the end of that experience with her, and then she had this-the next thing that happened was she had this-

MS. RIEDEL: Just one second, Ferne. Do you remember anything in particular that stands out?

MS. JACOBS: One piece-one piece, she did a collage of-she painted the background in blue, and then she had this box of lines-black lines, and then she had fire coming out of it. And we started talking about the fire and the sky and the blue, and this box of fire. I don't even remember what I said, but I was relating something about the sky and fire, and I-maybe I knew something about that. I can't remember what I said, but I remember saying something about that. That's the one piece I remember us talking about.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it the color or the combination-the metaphor?

MS. JACOBS: Fire and the blue-yeah, the metaphor. There was something about the fire and the sky.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Sounds like something that you might do in one of your dream journals, actually.

MS. JACOBS: Right. Those images would be very familiar to me; so, see, her images were very familiar to me and the ideas in them and somehow my thinking about it. You know, I can't remember-but some connection between the blue and red and the sky, and, now I think of blood and water and air and all these elements coming into being-

MS. RIEDEL: So much of that-so many of those were images that you have worked with for 30 years in the dream journals at one time or another.

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So, we'll get to those.

MS. JACOBS: So her collages in a way were a little like, you know, images that I was familiar with, and so I could talk about them, and I could-and she became interested, because I could really talk about them, and I showed some kind of understanding of the images she was working with, and it became a very dynamic conversation, which has lasted to this day.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. JACOBS: You know, which is amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: I just saw the postcard-the wonderful postcard she sent you. It must've been around the time that her exhibition, her retrospective, opened, because parts of that are from the cover.

MS. JACOBS: Oh, right, when the book was published, right.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. JACOBS: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: And she's got a little tutu on and drawings, and the postage stamp was almost 25 cents. So that must be older now, but clearly that was a postcard she sent you that had nothing written on it. It's all images except for your name and address.

MS. JACOBS: Are you sure?

MS. RIEDEL: I think so. It has a picture of her and it says, "Age five."

MS. JACOBS: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: But I don't think there's any text at all. I'll have to look, but I think it's-

MS. JACOBS: Maybe on the other side, I'm not sure, but there might not be.

MS. RIEDEL: I think there was a small-

MS. JACOBS: Sometimes she uses text, sometimes she doesn't.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: Well, I have a lot of her postcards.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think it's interesting that you got through high school based on images rather than text, and here you are literally having a conversation through images.

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Not necessarily text at all.

MS. JACOBS: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: Although our relationship has grown into text. I mean, she is amazing with words. She is 98, and she is still very specific about words, about pronunciation, and she can't see anymore. So our relationship is so much now about words. I read to her, and we have these amazing discussions about poetry and about, oh, philosophical writings and-

MS. RIEDEL: What do you read together?

MS. JACOBS: Well, we've read-what I love reading with her is Jacob-she always corrects me about the-

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so we were talking about Lenore and reading poetry and how she pointed it out when you mispronounced a word.

MS. JACOBS: If I tell you now this philosopher-this was one of the ones that she told me I was constantly mispronouncing, so it's Jacob Boehme, she said something like that, Boehme, and I always say Berm, I think, or B-O-E-H-M-E, I'd have to go look at that, but we would-he wrote a book called *Personal Christianity*. I mean, he was from like-I don't even know when he wrote. I think it could be from the 1600s, but we read that-excerpts of that, and it was phenomenal.

And I think one thing we have in common, and certainly we-I think we're both very interested in, like, a personal spirituality. So, we've read that, we've read poetry, and we've read her journals. And that's where what-how we got with Jacob Boehme-is that he was quoted in one of her journals, and she happened to have a book of his. And so I took the book, you know, and we started reading that, but a lot of the time we spend going over her journals and discussing all her quotes, all her thoughts, and have these wonderful conversations about them.

MS. RIEDEL: So you've looked at the journals with her?

MS. JACOBS: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And what are her journals like? Are they image and text, are they diaries-what are they like?

MS. JACOBS: Everything, but a lot of writing-a lot of writing. She started out-I mean, you know, she worked as a copyreader for a publisher, I think, at one point; when she was young to make some money.

MS. RIEDEL: I think I've read that someplace else.

MS. JACOBS: So words are very important to her, and her reading is so wide; it's just amazing. I've learned so much from her. She's introduced me to so many poets and philosophers. But I'm thinking early on-you know, I met her. I mean, I've known her-God, I've known her for about 30 years. But we mentioned she is 98. When I went there, she was 65; I've known her over 30 years, but I didn't meet her probably till she was 65 and I was probably 30-in my early 30s. She is 60 years older than I am.

MS. RIEDEL: Thirty years, 30 years older than you.

MS. JACOBS: Oh, 30 years older, right. [They laugh.] Since she is-all right, 30 years older, well, I-because I'm 62 and she is 98.

MS. RIEDEL: So, it's 35.

MS. JACOBS: Thirty-five, she is 35 years older than I am, and yet we are so close. We can talk very openly with each other; we are very honest with each other and have very deep conversations.

MS. RIEDEL: I wonder if this would be a good time to talk about your journals, and I wonder, any similarity with her journals? Do you have journals-I mean, maybe we should talk about the two different kinds of journals that you've kept for-

MS. JACOBS: Can I say one other thing about-

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, please. Absolutely.

MS. JACOBS: Well, to finish our talk about her, the next time I saw her-because, you know, I saw her in New York at that time, and then she had an exhibit at Cal State Fullerton, whatever, and it was such a beautiful exhibition, and she came for the opening and she gave a lecture. And that was the next time I saw her, because I didn't have any relationship with her at that point. And I went with a friend and we-you know, I saw her during the day and we said hello to each other and she was really beautiful. She said to me, "Well, come to my hotel with me." You know, "Come to my hotel, and then you can come with me to the opening tonight." And I said, "I can't do it. I'm with a friend," and it, oh, it drove me crazy. It broke my heart. I thought, you know, what am I doing, this is such an opportunity.

So I couldn't do it that night, but I went to the opening, and then I went to hear her talk, and she came to me after the talk. She gave a talk on the Great Mother. She thinks that her work comes out of the Great Mother-this idea of a great mother-and then she came up to me and afterwards she said, "I know that you understand my talk." You know, and I was very touched by that. I didn't even know her well, and that was the beginning of our relationship.

She and Dextra Frankel, who curated the show and directed the gallery, a group of them went out for dinner in L.A. a couple of days later and I got included in that. And then Lenore and I talked kind of very personally that night, and that was the beginning of our relationship, and it has continued all these years. And I talk to her now; I talk to her at least once a month.

MS. RIEDEL: You mean, you still visit her?

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Every time you go back to New York?

MS. JACOBS: Always, always.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking-

MS. JACOBS: We spend a lot of time together.

MS. RIEDEL: -earlier, too, about how oftentimes your trips are based on going to see people who are significant to you-Lenore in New York and Dominic up in-Dominic Di Mare-San Francisco, and Patsy Krebs, and then Cape Cod.

Well, we can talk about journals; we can talk about-

MS. JACOBS: Cape Cod. [They laugh.] I know. I'll go whichever direction you want to go. Well, maybe let's go to journals because-

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: -of Lenore, you know, talk about journals.

MS. RIEDEL: So you've kept-do you want to just talk about them, Ferne?

MS. JACOBS: Well, you're the only other person who has seen them.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, really, extraordinarily fortunate to have seen them. And we've been-it's been a wonderful experience over the past couple of years. We've gone through them, really, page by page.

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: The dream journals, which you've kept for 30 years, yeah?

MS. JACOBS: At least, yeah. Since the early '70s.

MS. RIEDEL: Since the early '70s, because you had them when Peter was born, I remember, and before that.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, he was born in '69. So, maybe around the same time, and I can't remember when I started-I'd have to look it up.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, I do remember him figuring in them from time to time, but extraordinary journals, narrative image journals that you've drawn from early '70s on, at least '71, I think.

MS. JACOBS: I think so, right, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. And then also the collage journals that you keep, and I've just been so struck by that-those two separate series of journals, both individually and what they have to say to each other, because the dream journals feel very narrative and very much about exploration of metaphor and imagery, color, a lot of unconscious images, and then the collage journals feel much more like playing scales. They feel like compositional exercises and experiences and studies of texture and form and shadow. So with that said, as a description-and then you kept the dream journals a lot longer than the collage journals, is that right?

MS. JACOBS: Those were relatively new. Yeah, they'd be only about three or four years old, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And the dream journals are all image, for the most part. There's a little bit of text occasionally, and then also you said you keep shorthand texts of the dreams-that you do short texts of the-

MS. JACOBS: But I have a whole other-a whole other set of journals that-where I just write down dreams and thoughts that are-

MS. RIEDEL: And we've never looked at that, because they're all in shorthand.

MS. JACOBS: Right, that I can barely read. [They laugh.] I can barely read them myself.

MS. RIEDEL: They're all written, but they're not in a language anybody knows.

MS. JACOBS: I think the only hope for those journals are that I've typed out some of it; just over time I ended up typing it out, like a dream I would type out. So somebody can, maybe, learn the language from seeing the typed page and the actual written page, but they're a mess. They're a mess, and there's a little drawing in those, too, like sketching things. So there're like three sets of journals, plus my work-the fiber.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, one of the questions that is part of this questionnaire is whether religion or spirituality figures in your work, if it's had impact. And I just-I was thinking about something you just said about Lenore's journals being a very personal spirituality. And I certainly get that from your dream journals. Do you want to just talk about it a little bit?

MS. JACOBS: Well, I think it's very true, and I think, you know, we were talking a little bit before we started, and something came up that I think is very important. To me, my journals are just finding my own personal story and not even that I understand it, because they're very mysterious. You know, they're very mysterious to me. I try to listen to these processes that go on in me, and then I just draw these processes, and I don't try to define them. And I think they're very hard to define.

And at some point, literally, the Jewish letters started appearing in them. You know, I was born Jewish-Hebrew letters, and I started following that. So there are crosses in them, there are Jewish stars in them, and suddenly, these letters. So it definitely feels-it definitely feels spiritual to me and has a spiritual component, and it comes out, I think, in the crosses and the Star of David and the Hebrew letters.

I think when I saw that, it's very much like a timeless force-an ever-changing timeless force that you might call God. You know, and because I've gotten involved with the Hebrew letters, just last year I joined a Torah reading group, and I actually have read the Old Testament through once, which is amazing to me. And I don't know, I'm trying to see-I know that the letters have made me think a lot about Judaism, and then reading the Torah has been quite an experience, because it is a dialogue with God. It's definitely an attempt to have a dialogue between God and human beings, however you define God.

The interesting thing to me in my experience of reading the Torah, and maybe even this whole thing with Hebrew-Hebrew was a pictorial language. It's a pictorial language and I made a point not to learn Hebrew but to really be with particular letters, because those were the letters that entered the journals. And so I stayed with the letters that entered the journals and-

MS. RIEDEL: Were these letters that you chose, Ferne?

MS. JACOBS: No.

MS. RIEDEL: They just came to you?

MS. JACOBS: They just came. They just came in the images.

MS. RIEDEL: And then would you go look up what they referred to?

MS. JACOBS: What they referred to pictorially, and one is fire. Maybe Lenore and I talked about that at the time. One definitely is fire; it's a shin, it's fire, it's a crown, it's a mother. I don't know if she and I maybe talked a little about the Hebrew letters that we could use. The Alef is very important to me, which is the beginning. It is the first letter, but the theme relating to Hebrew-

MS. RIEDEL: It's the first letter, you said?

MS. JACOBS: Alef is the first letter in the alphabet and-but it's always, to me, the beginning-you know, it's the beginning, and in my drawings it's always, to me, the beginning. The learning about the Torah, which is the first five books of Moses in the Old Testament, that God in the Torah is-I'm not sure because I'm just learning, okay, so I'm putting this out-

MS. RIEDEL: We won't hold you totally on the record-

MS. JACOBS: Don't hold me to this, but I think it's Hashem, and I think Hashem means what is, what was, and what will be. So when I say timeless forces, or a timeless force, that is a way of saying that. We make God way too specific in our culture, and maybe the beauty of my relationship with Lenore is we talk about the openness of religion and the openness of this idea of God and what it means. So going back to Lenore, you know, just we have that kind of conversation, and my journals incorporate that and work with it, and also, you know, they do other things. They do some very primitive things and sometimes there are reptiles in the journals.

MS. RIEDEL: Worms with question marks on their heads too?

MS. JACOBS: Worms, snakes. Yes, you know, the-

MS. RIEDEL: The bull, there was a bull in there, too.

MS. JACOBS: That whole bull, yeah, so there's a lot of natural-

MS. RIEDEL: Trees, I remember two budding-and there were mandalas for a while. I remember the evolving mandalas.

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: They were round and then different shapes, so it seems that there are all sorts of images that appear one at a time, and you work through them till you think somehow something is-till you're done,and then something else appears and you move forward with that.

MS. JACOBS: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: So sometimes it's-and when did the letters-yes, yeah.

MS. JACOBS: Well, let me say one thing just while it's on my mind. In the Torah-I mean, it's like this continuing thread, right, because I'm just learning this now. This is, like, right now. God in the Torah comes as a natural force. The voice or-not even the voice, because Moses is the only person who ever hears God's voice, but God comes in a cloud during the day and fire at night. I mean, it's amazing. We never think of that, and what if-I mean, I'm talking about ideas, but one thought I have is that, what if nature has consciousness, what if-like human beings have consciousness. If nature has consciousness, then God can be in that consciousness of nature, of human beings, and all the whole unity of everything, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that's coming out in, sort of, far-out physics-

MS. JACOBS: I think it is.

MS. RIEDEL: -quantum physics and a conscious universe.

MS. JACOBS: A conscious universe.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And it's interesting when I think about your journals in that format, because there are animate and inanimate things in your dream journals, all of which seem to have some sort of consciousness.

MS. JACOBS: Tell me what you mean. You mean that-

MS. RIEDEL: The tree, the hills, remember how the-some of the hills would start off small, and they'd grow, or there'd be a gap and there may be a bridge between them, but it seems like it was all constantly evolving, and there was an interaction between the characters, whether they were human or fish, I remember, or a bull, the worms. There would be some sort of interaction between the animate beings, the sentient beings, and the land or their environment. It was very much an interactive experience, as I remember them.

MS. JACOBS: Well, no, I think you are right. And you know, it's so interesting, because I was just talking to somebody about a piece I just finished-you know, a fiber piece called *Tides*. And I was telling her-you know, these were the collectors who bought the piece-it, to me, is moving earth. It's like the earth itself is in movement and these tides, these small pieces of blue that go up in the piece, kind of around it, are like these moving bodies of water, how the water moves, and, you know, it takes the shape of the earth. The earth is moving, and then this water and the tides are flowing, so here it is in the fiber, you know, in the work.

MS. RIEDEL: I think so much about motion when I think about your work-and I was just thinking about an earlier piece that you did, I think in 1974, called *Container for a Wind*.

MS. JACOBS: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: And then I was looking at the 2004 piece called *Wind*.

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And I was thinking about the differences between the two: one being so columnar and containing and a form that's very specific to the idea of containers; we think of that as sort of a columnar form-and then wind, which is so loopy and moving and so full of motion and twisting, you are hard-pressed to find a right angle in it. And how the concept of *Container for a Wind* doesn't seem to have changed as a concept for 30 years, but the container for it has changed or-

MS. JACOBS: Isn't it interesting? Or the-or the piece becomes the wind itself.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. JACOBS: It went from being a container-

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: -to hold the wind-

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. JACOBS: -and to let it go because of the spaces, you know, the-

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly, there are loops-

MS. JACOBS: -breath entering and the breath leaving. Yeah, these little-

MS. RIEDEL: Little openings.

MS. JACOBS: -openings.

MS. RIEDEL: Of two or three on each side.

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: The wind should be coming in and out.

MS. JACOBS: And out of it.

MS. RIEDEL: And the first piece and the second piece-

MS. JACOBS: The whole thing is in motion, like it's-

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. JACOBS: -it's just being blown on, you know, or the wind is, like, blowing right through it-right through it and-and changing the shape. I mean, the shape now is made by the wind.

MS. RIEDEL: The shape takes the wind, or it embodies the wind.

MS. JACOBS: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: It's wind-shaped.

MS. JACOBS: Wind-shaped, yeah, which I don't know what that means, but yes. Yes, so-

MS. RIEDEL: Do you see any-I can think of a few connections between the journals and your coiled-structure pieces, but I'm wondering what connections, if any, you see between the journals and the coiled work that you do?

MS. JACOBS: Well, I think the ideas are in both. I think-knowing my story is seeing it, because I don't know it, but I see it. I see the evolution of a story.

MS. RIEDEL: In the journal?

MS. JACOBS: In the journals. And that evolution of a story enters into the work. The shape isn't based on it or anything, but everything, the flowing-the flowing of these forces or whatever, you know, flow through it all, and it's the same forces. And I hope that in my work there is a depth of something that's-

MS. RIEDEL: I was thinking about the journals and how something will come to you, and you say you'll just work that image or that narrative through till it's done, and then something else will appear. There was, I remember, a bull, and then a boy was riding a bull, and I can't remember-certain shapes would turn into other things, and do you remember, you know?

MS. JACOBS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: And then I'm thinking about your coiled pieces and how you said that now there is a-this was it. You said, "to stay with each form until it becomes itself," and I sense that both in the journals and in the work.

MS. JACOBS: Yes, definitely.

MS. RIEDEL: You know, let me choose as a-as another topic that has come up quite a bit, it's timelessness and the evolution from past, present, and future. You use ancient basket-making techniques in making your work. I know there is another-one of the things you'd said a while ago was that-through your work, you appreciated a deep connection to the past, and it was a link bringing the ancient into the present and making it relevant now as an art form, and then hopefully nurturing it into the future.

I've not taken us away from the journals, I think-

MS. JACOBS: Well, no, that's okay, but yes. I mean, I absolutely-

MS. RIEDEL: Anything else about the journals we should-do you want me to talk about the collage journals at all, because we really haven't talked about-we can come back to this.

MS. JACOBS: Well, the collage journals-why did I start those? I mean, you would think the other ones would be enough. These I did see as a diary. They are different in the sense that they're diary. They also relate with my responses to the world, where the other ones don't. The other ones are totally inner. You know, if I'm angry about something or it's a political situation or-and I mean, because politics is deeper than the moment. There are things in play and why are they are in play and why are these things happening, and how it affects me emotionally and how I see the dynamic, you know, sometimes in the world.

One thing comes to my mind. It was this wonderful comic; it was from the comic strip of [Gary] Trudeau of *Doonesbury*, where he-after 9/11 at some point-it was a while later, I think, he just had the remnants of the towers under snow. Now snow comes into my thinking a lot, and I just cut that out and put that into the collage book, which I would never do in the drawing. But the collage, it's just I love that image and I love this-of course, the sorrow the loss, but also his drawing of it in the comic strip. You know, of course, being funny, but not funny at this point, by the time it gets very serious.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: And that it's under snow and it's snowing-

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, the World Trade Towers?

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, the World Trade Towers, yeah. And so I get to play with those kinds of images and I really

enjoy doing that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we should say the collage journals are done in calendar books, correct?

MS. JACOBS: No, they're-I put them in time. I mean, I marked them in time.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: They're presented in time. So, that's what I mean by a diary.

MS. RIEDEL: And present events-or current events are present in them because you're working with imagery from magazines and newspapers and that sort of thing. So-

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: -contemporary news figures from-figures in these-

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, in them; not totally, and it goes all over the place.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: But ones that I have-isn't it fun to suddenly have a palette of everything, every photograph, even words, but I don't use words very often, but I can just play with all these images just because I enjoy seeing them in magazines and books and wherever. So I have something of a whole new world of books and magazines and newspapers and-

MS. RIEDEL: With a subconscious undercurrent of current events, which is kind of interesting.

MS. JACOBS: You know, partially that and partially these other timeless themes, you know, that come in-the play between feminine and masculine, and the earth and the sky, and all the opposites and something that's busy and yet something that's simple; something that's, you know, round and fussy next to something that's totally plain. And then there is thread in those as well. So the bringing and the thread and-

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think of politics being present at all in your work, any of the journals or your coiling work, or having any influence there?

MS. JACOBS: I don't know. No, because politics in that sense is too narrow. It's great in the collages because-you know, the collage book-because those are in the moment-those are really for the moment, but the other work is really to give something to-something timeless.

Well, the journals are something timeless that's lived out in an individual, in me.

MS. RIEDEL: And we should say that you've read Carl Jung and you've been interested in that sort of imagery, so that sort of psychological narrative runs through them?

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Not specifically, but very personally.

MS. JACOBS: Well, I love Jung. Jung has had a profound effect on me, but people take it too narrowly, you know. Jung gave me a way to work with images, to really think about things. I love the idea of masculine and feminine, although most people don't like it at all. They don't understand what the feminine is. They don't understand what the masculine is. And I really work very hard to try to understand what these things mean for me, and I think that every one of us is made out of both, because these are forces. These are not human things; these are forces, and they function everywhere. And I see them in constant play with each other: sometimes for good, sometimes for horrible results.

To see how one dominates too much in the world-I think the masculine dominates way too much in the world, and I think the feminine has been fighting for recognition and an equal place, but the feminine to me is really about deep values. She knows the real value of things. Men seem to me not to care-masculine, not men, but the masculine doesn't care much, so much about what the real value is. They just want action and they want results, and they want goals. They have their goals, but they don't think what the right value of their goal is. And I think a man who really has a sense of the feminine brings value to what he does, and I think women bring-can have a direction, and that's the masculine in them. You know, having a direction and being able to have a goal to-because I think woman is much more about being.

She can just be; she doesn't have to have goals. She needs the masculine in order to get things done. The

feminine doesn't care if she gets things done; she just wants to be, but-I think about the essence of something. I don't know if I see the feminine as about essence, but I think the masculine might have an essence and the feminine has its own essence, and then the coming together of the two. So I watched that in play in a lot in my drawings.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I remember that from the journals. Constantly there are seeds being spread, and all sorts of spurting things and-

MS. JACOBS: And men taking care of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. JACOBS: You know, men watching over it and-

MS. RIEDEL: And things growing from those seeds, and that's all throughout your dream journals. I know you've talked about your coiling work, your structures, as having a long history with women.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, definitely feminine.

MS. RIEDEL: You want to talk about that connection a little bit?

MS. JACOBS: Well, I think it's really-I think in the beginning, I took to it because it was feminine. It felt very feminine to me about the rhythm, you know; it's very rhythmic and repetitive, and it's-you have to quiet down for it. It's very slow. It takes months to make a piece. And it's true, you know, being in the details, knowing the details, building something out of the details is quite an experience, but definitely feminine. And the earth-I think in the beginning, I felt very close to the earth; now it's the earth and sky, and getting energetic. In the masculine-its energetic quality, and maybe some getting a little more aggressive, and that feels more masculine and-

MS. RIEDEL: In the drawing scene?

MS. JACOBS: Well, the fiber-the fiber. I used to value a stillness, and now I love all this activity.

MS. RIEDEL: That's a huge distinction between earlier work and some of the later work. Do you-

MS. JACOBS: Definitely, definitely.

MS. RIEDEL: Obviously you see that, too-so much motion.

MS. JACOBS: Motion.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.]

MS. JACOBS: Dancers, yes, I love the dance, the dance.

MS. RIEDEL: And wind-

MS. JACOBS: The wind, yeah, whoosh.

MS. RIEDEL: And the piece-there was a piece called *Landed Moon*. So, again, talking about that conscious universe, the animate in inanimate objects.

MS. JACOBS: Can you imagine a Landed Moon? A moon that's landed on earth. Or, you know, it's being contained in the earth, kind of-

MS. RIEDEL: And the moon-it certainly has feminine connotations.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, uh-huh. And I love all that-Jung gave me a language-Jung gave me a language to explore my soul and my psyche, however you want, and I just am so glad for that. I mean, the self-the collective unconscious-you know, the collective unconscious is the timeless in everything. The collective unconscious includes animal, plants, and all the forces of the earth, and the universe. I mean, it's endless. That's the thing about Jung-it's endless; he doesn't-it doesn't limit me. This language I learned has given me this unlimited way of exploring things.

MS. RIEDEL: You were talking about your process of working and you said the excitement for you is in the details and going so slow, it's as if you find the form through the details.

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So we've talked about this a little bit-we've touched on it-you have some idea what you're going to do when you start, but the piece really evolves through the process.

MS. JACOBS: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It's very much an open-ended exploration.

MS. JACOBS: Yes. To me, it's living out a mystery. I have a thought that helps me begin it, but the very first line-and I've been talking with somebody that making these basket forms, or whatever they're called, is very linear. It's all based on a line, and from the very first line, the minute I see the actual line in front of me, the idea just fades away; it disappears and I'm left with that line in that moment, and I-building on that line and it just becomes a relationship between me and the piece. It's an incredibly intimate relationship, and the piece grows out of the relationship.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you say a little bit more about that? How does it happen?

MS. JACOBS: How does it happen? It is a mystery. It's a mystery. And I don't-I really don't like people-I really resented this about schools-universities where they you want you to be able to explain everything. I think that's horrendous. I think that is absolutely killing. I think the point is not to know.

You're bringing something into the world that you don't know what it is, and it's pretty scary. It can be scary. Maybe that's why people want to explain it all, because they don't want to go through the experience of being frightened, but I think it's important for me not to know, because for one thing I'd be bored to death.

I love learning it as I go, and I don't know what this is going to be until it is absolutely finished, and even then I don't know. I have a relationship to it just like anybody else. I have my thoughts about it. I have my thoughts about it while I'm working, and I see many things. But it's never totally defined; it's always unknown. There's always an unknown component in the process.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about your M.F.A. critique-do you want to mention that commentary-you had a very specific idea about what you wanted to do, and you were resisting the influence of synthetic materials or whatever else was being used a lot in the '70s, and it was something about being either too secure and committed, or too insecure and committed. Do you want to-

MS. JACOBS: That was-oh, we didn't talk about going to graduate school. I mean, I never got a B.F.A.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: I never went to undergraduate school. I did the-I learned from these individual people, and I love to learn about things, but I've done it all on my own. I've done a lot of reading and just thinking, you know. But I did go for an M.F.A. and they let me in. I went to Claremont Graduate-now, it's called Claremont Graduate University. They let me in with no undergraduate degree. I was already an exhibiting artist, and when I went for my M.F.A. critique, the head of the department, Roland Reese, said to me-well, they had been trying to get me to change, God forbid you should be in a craft media. They were trying to make my work look more like what art was supposed to look like, and I didn't respond.

And not that I have a specific idea of what I'm doing, because I just said I don't. I don't. It's a mystery to me, and it was a mystery then. This was around 1976, when I got my M.F.A., but I had already been exhibiting since 1971, you know, but he said to me, "You are either very insecure and are afraid to try anything else," because they wanted-he wanted me to use rubber in my work, they were-metal; they wanted me to get tough. Why does art have to be tough? That makes me mad. It doesn't have to be tough. Why does it have to be anything? If anything, it has to be true. And if it's not true-people who try to fit into a fashion or try to fit into the idea of what art should be-it won't be good art. You have to follow who you are; you have to follow what's deepest to your own nature, and that was what was deepest to my own nature.

So he said, "Either you are so insecure that you won't try anything out, you're too afraid to try anything else, or you're so secure that you won't budge," and of course, I said to you, Mija, was-and I might have said it to them, I don't remember. I don't think I said it to them-that I'm both.

MS. RIEDEL: I haven't read it-

MS. JACOBS: That I'm probably both-that I'm probably both. Because I'm so many things.

MS. RIEDEL: So graduate school was a really different experience for you than so many graduate students. You were already an exhibiting artist. It was already very clear to you, that you need to have your own ideas, and how important original thinking is as opposed to going to grad school and looking for inspiration and ideas from your teachers. You were quite a few years older than the average student.

MS. JACOBS: Probably about 10 years. Maybe 10 years older than the average student. And I thought that several students-a lot of these kids were making big mistakes, because they were looking for these teachers to tell them what to do, to give them assignments. They were having a very hard time. Not everybody, but some were having a very hard time working on their own, and I kept thinking, you are in graduate school now; this is the time when you really have to learn what you have to give.

Being an artist is giving. It's not about receiving. You have to have something to give-I don't know how to explain it, but you sure can't wait for somebody to tell you what to do. You know, that's not what art is. Art is bringing out something of yourself. You are offering the world something; you're not taking from the world. You're taking from the world to create it. It's not that you do it in a total vacuum of nothingness, but you don't want to take an idea from a teacher. You don't want to take an idea directly from anybody. You want to see how things that you've experienced in your life live out in you.

And I think-if I ever-my work ever started looking like somebody else's, I got away from that as soon as I could. Not that-you know, work grows out of something else, and it can grow out of somebody else's work, but you don't want to create their work. It's already been done, and that idea has already been created. You need to bring something individual to your own work, so you're not like a child waiting for a teacher to tell you what to make-

[Audio break, tape change.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is similar to that idea with Dominic, when you came back six months later and both agreed that your work looked too much like his, and so you had to do something else.

MS. JACOBS: I had to go do something else, and I never exhibited that work. We both agreed, and this wasn't-I mean, I have to find my own voice. So here I am in graduate school, and these kids got one to look at that, and I thought it was very important, very important. That is what being an artist is.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you think the strengths and the weaknesses of a university situation are for artists? You've done a lot of work on your own, studied independently; actually a lot has come out of your experience at Haystack. Are there particular programs that you admire that you think are doing a good job of teaching what needs to be taught, or do you think universities and art teaching are sort of mutually incompatible?

MS. JACOBS: I did admire Claremont. I thought they had a very good program. Because it was very open-it was open; you could take classes in any of the colleges that you wanted to take classes in, so if you had an interest you could follow it, but there weren't any requirements. So really it was perfect for me. I found the perfect program. So I had like an individual tutorial, where I just read and this man and I would discuss things and-

MS. RIEDEL: What did you read?

MS. JACOBS: Oh, God, I can't remember now. He and I actually just ended up talking all the time. I don't even know if I read anything. I don't think I liked what he told me to read, so I didn't read it. So we were just having discussions about life, you know, what mattered, why did it matter, what we thought about life, how we each approached the-you know, the way we thought. It was great. God, we had these great conversations with each other and-

MS. RIEDEL: And do you think that was as significant to your work, if not more so, than if you had read the assigned text?

MS. JACOBS: Yes, yes, I do. And Roland Reese, again-our seminar was that we had to build a lecture. So I went and created a lecture. And again, he gave us these lists, and I'd ask him if I could do what I wanted to do. And one night I gave a lecture on earthworks, and I asked the question, why did all these artists leave the gallery, and why were they out there digging in the earth? You know, why was [Michael] Heizer out there? I think one was in-oh, God, I forgot some of their names. [Dennis] Oppenheim, I think, or something like that, and Robert Smithson. They were out there. What were they doing out there?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: You know, in the middle of nowhere. So I thought about that, and I built a lecture on these earthworks, you know, and it was wonderful. I loved giving that talk. And then I-for the second seminar, I asked Roland if I could give a talk on the timeless in art-what makes art timeless? So I chose artists whose work I thought was timeless, and then I talked about it, trying to get to this idea of timelessness.

MS. RIEDEL: Who did you choose? Do you remember?

MS. JACOBS: Trying to think of who I chose. I can't-I don't know if I remember now.

MS. RIEDEL: Who would you choose now?

MS. JACOBS: Oh, who would I choose now? Well, Vija Celmins for me was such a figure, and she carried, I think-I don't know. I have artists that I love, but who actually carries that timelessness? She, to me, to such the nth degree is-her work is so timeless-

MS. RIEDEL: What is it-what are the qualities that make it so?

MS. JACOBS: There is nothing there that's [not] absolutely necessary and it's-well, she really deals with the basic forces of-I mean, she's realistic, you know what I mean? Spider webs. But she deals with the most essential shapes, a spider web-and activity. She forces you to think about the web as, maybe, a universe, and it's got so many levels. Those webs look like universes after a while, and they can be very busy and they can totally be so simple. She deals with the galaxies. Again, that incredible complexity, but so simple. The ocean-maybe it is; it's just this total balance between complexity and simplicity. You can see it as a monolith, or you can see the complexity of the waves and what's in the-I mean, she's amazing to me.

MS. RIEDEL: The details are so significant in her work.

MS. JACOBS: Yes. And yet again the simplicity and all the detail-that incredible detail in her work. I mean, she's so completely-anybody else? Maybe somebody like Agnes Martin has that quality about her work. Lenore sometimes, you know, Lenore has that-I'm thinking of men. I love Fred Tomaselli's work right now. He brings everything into it. There are birds. He uses pills. There's pills, birds, animals, leaves, humans, and they are so universal, and they do everything. They just do everything; they're constantly moving and they're running away; they're coming toward-that kind of timelessness in everything.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's just-

MS. JACOBS: And they start looking like globes and universes, and they're-so maybe there's something about the timeless of being intimate and expansive at the same time, and complex and simple. All these differences come together.

MS. RIEDEL: Because duality-you address duality.

MS. JACOBS: And it makes it very timeless.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, consciously and unconsciously in your work all the time, and in the journals, too-that duality of consciousness/unconsciousness, microscopic and enormous.

MS. JACOBS: And primitive and advanced. I mean, they're very primitive and something-

MS. RIEDEL: And has technology had any impact on your work at all? Either-

MS. JACOBS: I think I avoid it.

MS. RIEDEL: -responding to it.

MS. JACOBS: I think I avoid it.

MS. RIEDEL: So you talked about working very, very slow; that that's an important way of working for you-a lot of focus on the details-and if anything, that would seem more a response to technology than using some kind of tool-

MS. JACOBS: Well, I just-I feel like I'm-

MS. RIEDEL: Very dependent.

MS. JACOBS: -from some parallel to it. We're like in two different worlds. I don't live very much in the technological world. I mean, I like TV. I watch TV, I love movies, and you know, I live in a technological world. I use a washing machine and all that stuff, but that-the whole digital technology, I really get upset when I have to look at a digital clock. I like watching the motion of the hands moving, and I like that better than-the digital doesn't-you don't see the movement, you know, you just see this clicking of numbers.

I'm not in love with technology, but I use it. I don't have anything against it per se. I mean, attracted or not. Like I'm not attracted to computers and-I don't know why I love the slow, visceral. I like something I can experience viscerally, but I love movies, you know, that's visceral per se because there I love the human personality and I love the human mind and I love-I love things that share with me a human struggle-human learning.

MS. RIEDEL: Makes me think of one of the criticisms you had about graduate study and graduate work was it was kind of-it was heavy on the cold and on the intellectual, and one of the things you were just talking about here earlier-one of the things you like about Dom's work, for example, was the pursuit of the more soulful things. Maybe there is a warmth that's lacking in some of the digital.

MS. JACOBS: Texture, there's no texture in the digital world-in the technological world. I mean, maybe there are. Maybe people find-you know, or maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe there is texture that I just haven't experienced, but I don't see any texture. And in universities, I find a lot of it deadening, because it wants to explain the past. It doesn't have enough respect for the creative urge. It doesn't know to let the creative function. It wants to define it. It wants to put boxes around it, and I think the creative doesn't-that's not a natural way for the creative to be. And I think in universities-they're what? They are deposits of learning. They love the past and past learning. I think people don't deal with the future until they get out of the university, but I want be in all of it, and I don't want to be stuck in just living from the past.

MS. RIEDEL: Living in the past and the present and the future.

MS. JACOBS: The future-

MS. RIEDEL: All at once.

MS. JACOBS: All at once. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: So when you teach, how do you teach, Ferne? I mean-

MS. JACOBS: A lot of people have trouble with it. Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Do you have a teaching philosophy or specific things that you try to teach or-

MS. JACOBS: Yeah. An openness to each individual person, and to try to open that person up and to have them see something in themselves they maybe didn't see before that they can create out of. That's what I love.

MS. RIEDEL: So when you teach at Haystack in the summer, what sort of course would you offer and what would be-

MS. JACOBS: Well, I'm offering a new course, but they haven't said yes to it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: I've taught techniques, but around the techniques-I have taught fiber techniques, but around a lot of discussion about whatever comes up. It's very open, so that just something happens-to leave space for something to happen. That's what doesn't happen in the universities. Something comes up that is unknown, that nobody is thinking about, and-

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Ferne Jacobs at the artist's home in Los Angeles, California, on August 31, 2005, for the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution, and this disc number three.

Ferne, when we stopped yesterday, we were talking about universities, and you were starting to explain some of your frustration with their lack of leaving space for-did you want to pick it up from there? What we were just talking about right before the tape came on, can you just pick up with that?

MS. JACOBS: Making space to not know it, to be in the unknown; that my experience was so often that they wanted you to be able to explain everything, and I thought that was a mistake. That art can't be explained and that you-the students I saw that were so involved with trying to explain their work, I think it really limited their work, because they only wanted to make work that they could explain, and I thought that was really a mistake. I want to make work that I can't explain and hopefully never can explain; that I can come to it new and that others can come to it new each time they view it, or it's beyond our reach. I think great art is beyond our reach, that we never understand. There's just something there that always draws you.

MS. RIEDEL: It's almost something you can only glimpse and then it's gone.

MS. JACOBS: Isn't it interesting?

MS. JACOBS: Like I went to see the Rembrandt show at the Getty, these last portraits, and not all of them were for me, but some of them just have something in them that your heart-I was in awe and it's totally unexplainable. It's a presence that just is there. It's something about living presence-unexplainable.

Just like what's in our bodies, the human body and the physical body, and then, you know, there's this personality, and how does it live in the body, and I mean, it's such a mystery. So I think art should be like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, let's talk about your work.

MS. JACOBS: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: The evolution of your work, let's see, we can start with the container pieces which you described as capturing a certain stillness and small things that often were overlooked. That was-well, the earliest pieces were the basket shapes.

MS. JACOBS: Yes, and even as you're talking, I'm trying to figure out, why did I make basket shapes, you know? And I have a feeling that learning three-dimensional fiber-that was the most obvious, you know, to make the round shapes that had a bottom-that had a circular bottom.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it the sheer technical fascination of being able to make a three-dimensional-

MS. JACOBS: Three-dimensional form, right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: So I made all these basket shapes, and I think I saw them as basket sculptures, because I made sure that you couldn't use them. I always had something at the bottom. You'd never fill them with anything and they were rather precious. I think they're still beautiful, and you know, when I see the really early pieces, I think they are beautiful in their own way compared to what I am doing now. They were much more symmetrical, although they were unusual. I don't think they-none of them were ordinary.

MS. RIEDEL: Some had fringe-did any of the basket shapes have openings in them?

MS. JACOBS: No, but they had lines on the surface. I mean, they did different things; they had lines on the surface of different colors. They had different shapes. Some were more complex than others. Knotting is-I think I said this yesterday-knotting is very simple. You have a lot of threads, and to change colors is very-it's really difficult. Coiling, you can change colors as often as you want. So coiling tended to be more chaotic and I would try to make that simpler, and knotting, I tried to mix something into it. So the problem was always bringing something interesting into it; with coiling, it was about keeping it simple.

MS. RIEDEL: Got you.

MS. JACOBS: You know, and twining was maybe in between the two. The twining also was more simple, because it also involves a lot of thread. In other words, to change knotting, you have to actually change threads. You have to cut them out and put in new ones. Coiling, because it's wrapping, you're just using one thread. So you can change that any time you want. You only have one thread to change. Knotting, you might have 200 threads to change.

MS. RIEDEL: And knotting, you left fairly early on, while coiling, you've continued for 30 years, yes?

MS. JACOBS: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: And how about the twining?

MS. JACOBS: Well, the twining, I just stopped recently.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, but that was there from the very start.

MS. JACOBS: It was-when I started, it was mainly knotting and coiling. Twining, once in a while. Maybe because twining was the most limited. And it was soft.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. JACOBS: Twining is soft. I didn't like the fact that these forms would be soft and that somebody could actually smash them in, so I mainly knotted and coiled, because they created a hard form and I wanted that. Then-that's the early '70s, like 1970 to maybe 1974.

And in the early pieces, I was working a lot with lines, and probably at that point I started looking at Indian baskets and the patterns, but mine were much simpler and-they usually had, like, four-there would be four sets of whatever. Whatever was going on in a piece was done in fours.

Like I did one called *Rainbow Basket* and it had these little bits of color, but they-there was a line in the color and they repeated four times symmetrically around the piece, and then they had moose hair coming out. And the moose hair would cover up the color and then you'd open to the color. And over time, the moose hair has died. I mean, it's broken off. I saw it-I mean, several years back, but it was several years after I made it, and a lot of the moose hair was gone.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've used hair-from time to time, when you were looking for something softer, yak hair-

MS. JACOBS: Well, I used that in the long wall pieces. Right after I finished with the basket shapes, I did a series of long wall pieces that were flat, and then each row-the inside of each row was a hair-a type of hair, like mohair or yak hair or-and I would knot-those were all knotted.

And then it was all just about moving the lines, and I didn't want to have to think about fours. I thought, well, I can make these pieces with lines and the lines could do whatever they were going to do and I would let that happen. I didn't want to think about the symmetry of it, but then I would let the hair hang out-they were like scrolls. They looked like scrolls. And then the hair would be on the sides-along the sides, and you would see the hair all along the edges.

MS. RIEDEL: And these were all in the early '70s.

MS. JACOBS: Those were mid-'70s-maybe. Kind of early-maybe 1974, 1975. I only did them for a couple of years. I did about eight of them.

MS. RIEDEL: And then you talked about *Container for a Wind*, which I think was 1974, as being a really seminal piece.

MS. JACOBS: So that's interesting. So then the wall pieces had to be done in, like, 1973?

MS. RIEDEL: I think, yeah, they preceded.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, they preceded it. So that's around 1973. So goodness. So I didn't make the basket shapes that long either. Maybe a couple of years, and then the wall pieces and then-well, what happened? There is a piece before a *Container for a Wind*.

There's this small piece that we didn't pay attention to, but I was invited to a-I don't know if it was the first, but it was one of the very early-maybe the first even of the miniature textile shows in Great Britain. The British Crafts Center did a show, and you had to do the something that was eight inches or less. Now Dominic Di Mare loves materials and he had found the waxed linen thread. He just loved looking for materials in San Francisco and I don't know where he found this. I have no idea. Maybe it wasn't even San Francisco, but he turned-he showed me the waxed linen thread, and then I tried to use it when I wove.

I knew about it since the '60s, and I tried to weave with it on my loom and it was awful, but when I started making three-dimensional work, it totally made sense. It helps a lot in the work. But I am not sure; I think I used to-I didn't use it very often, but there is one piece in particular, it was called *Fountain* with these little-four again-little tufts coming out from sides. That was waxed linen.

I'm trying to think if there were others that were waxed linen, but I made one long wall piece in waxed linen. There was another fascinating material that was made out of oil. It was made out of petroleum; it was like a fake straw, and I was using that a lot in both the basket shapes and long wall pieces. It was a beautiful material. Remember we had the oil embargo; you know, we had problems getting gas? They stopped making the material because there wasn't enough petroleum for it. And I don't know if they ever started making it again, but I no longer saw it after that.

MS. RIEDEL: Who knows what you might have done with it?

MS. JACOBS: It's a beautiful material, but it's okay-the waxed linen really went perfectly with the three-dimensional work.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. JACOBS: And I started using it when I got invited to be the British Craft Center exhibit and I did a small piece that was eight inches. I don't even think it has a title, but it has these shell beads, and just making these openings for these shell beads, and that I did in waxed linen and, boy, once I did that, that was it-that was it, and I have used it ever since.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: So 1973-74, I started using the waxed linen on a regular basis, and then I went from the small little piece to *Container for a Wind*, which is pretty amazing-you know, and one-this small little beginning-to do such a large piece, that took me a long time to make. The wall pieces, though, had taken me a lot of time to make. The smaller basket forms and-I mean, six a year; I can make six a year of those. I don't know if I made more, so maybe that's two months. And maybe the long, flat ones took two or three months apiece, but *Container for a Wind*, that took time. That took more time.

MS. RIEDEL: How long?

MS. JACOBS: I don't know. It could be four months, five months, I don't even know.

MS. RIEDEL: Just working on that piece?

MS. JACOBS: I think so, and I don't know what made me do it. You know, so many years ago, but, boy-and a terrible thing happened when I was working on it. Do you know in the middle of it there was-somehow I woke up and there was a slash, not all the way through, but like a-

MS. RIEDEL: On the piece?

MS. JACOBS: On the piece, I had to cut out; not only did it take that long to make it, I had to cut out a good foot or at least half a foot, if not a foot, of that piece, because something scratched it.

MS. RIEDEL: While you were working on it here at home?

MS. JACOBS: Yes, overnight. I mean, not while I was with it; when I wasn't with it. I don't know. We had animals. I don't know if it was my animal. I don't know. Honestly to this day, I don't know if it was my husband. [They laugh.] He never confessed. It just was there. I had dogs. We had dogs. It was a total mystery.

MS. RIEDEL: But you were committed enough to that piece or you just-

MS. JACOBS: I cried. I cried. I literally cried, and I was in so much pain. The thought of having to take out all that work-but I did it, and I might have put it aside for a while till I could get over this sorrow, and then I went back and I finished it. So that was quite an experience.

MS. RIEDEL: So you worked on the column pieces and the waxed linen for a while, and then towards the-

MS. JACOBS: Almost through the beginning of the '80s, we looked at-yeah, beginning of the '80s.

MS. RIEDEL: And then there were the intersecting pieces?

MS. JACOBS: Was that right after that or it was-was there something in between? No?

Let me say something also about the columns. I think I really loved the idea of stillness-of being contained in stillness, so I think I was working very much with this idea of stillness. And one thing about the columns, when you're coiling-when I was coiling these pieces, it's very hard to make them go straight. You can't imagine how hard it is. I am not working with a form. Some people work over a form. So, they create the form and then it's-I would think it's pretty easy. They don't struggle row by row, and I really struggle row by row and everything is open. These are just walls. You can see within them, and I love-like looking into *Container for a Wind*, to me, it's like looking at the timeless earth. It's like going on forever. It's goes on forever in my mind and I love that.

So I have no inside form. I am working totally free-form, on my own, and the piece wants to go on a diagonal. The whole thing wants to go on a diagonal, so I'm constantly trying to form a column, turning it around to see that it goes straight. So going straight is not easy. It was a lot of work to go-to get those pieces to go straight up, to go in a straight-up column. So there was this real struggle for this stillness, that it looks so still and very quiet, but believe me, the struggle to get there was definitely, I want to say, major. Actually, even when I taught people who learned how to knot and learned how to knot over forms, they went back to the form, they-

MS. RIEDEL: And why do you prefer not to?

MS. JACOBS: I want the openness. I want the wall; I want you to be able to see inside. I think the inside is so incredible and I take a lot of care with the inside. I think these people who use forms, they have a lot of loose ends on the inside. They don't have to think about how to get rid of the ends. The inside of my work is-it's just about as clean as the outside, and I love the fact that you have the inside and the outside available to you.

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds absolutely like a metaphor for what we've been talking about: how your work's evolved, that dialogue between the interior and the exterior. So do you think that could be part of it?

MS. JACOBS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] All the way to the present, and in the present just as much in the past. This openness, this having the inside and the outside, being with both of them, and of course, psychologically, the inside and the outside-but so much the inside-trying to learn something from my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like it ties in perfectly to the whole idea of coiling and twining, too, because the coiling is much stiffer; it's much harder. It's harder to do and it creates a stiffer form, whereas the twining, it can be more freeform. It's much easier to do, but you said it's softer and it's more vulnerable.

MS. JACOBS: It's not easier to do. It's just about as time-consuming. It's a lot of work to twine, but what I did start doing in the '80s was combine the two, coil the bottoms and twine the tops, and-

MS. RIEDEL: Would you just explain real quickly the difference, so anybody-

MS. JACOBS: Coiling is a wrapping technique. I have a cord, you know; there is a long cord-not always long, but because I also made small little cords that would start and stop, where I could change the form in one place; that's how I could change the shape.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: That is sort of the beginning-I don't know how to explain it, but there are these lines beginning. Then you can go around and you have this long cord. I wrap around the cord. I wrap four times and then I make an eight-shape connection, just an eight with thread around the previous row.

MS. RIEDEL: Eight-the figure eight.

MS. JACOBS: The number eight, and then I just wrap and I pull. It's a constant pulling. Every wrap, and I wrap four times; each time I wrap, I pull. So, there is a lot of stress on my arms. So, I pull, I wrap, I pull, I wrap, I pull. So there's four wraps and then an eight shape. Four wraps, and then an eight. And then if I want to change the color, I just lay in the end with the cord, and I lay the new end with the cord, and I just start wrapping. So I can change that whenever I want.

Twining-so let's just say, when I started doing both, I would coil the bottoms-

MS. RIEDEL: Which was pretty much in the early '80s?

MS. JACOBS: Early '80s, I think we said.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: The top row of the coiling, the last row, I would knot on a warp. So it's almost like I would be getting to do macramé, you know, where you set up a row of knots and you have the-all those threads hanging down-

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: Well, in this case, I would knot-I would knot on two, then I'd make my connection to the previous row, knot on two, make my connection to my previous row. You can't even tell one from the other. You can't tell that I've knotted one row and coiled the other row. That all looks the same, but at the end of that row, I have threads. I have a whole warp, and I can have, like, 300 threads around the top, you know, just hanging out.

Twining is taking-it's a double thread; it's a thread that you fold in half, and then you put it around the warp thread, and then you twine it one over the other like you would do with a Band-Aid over your fingers. You know, if you are playing with a Band-Aid, not a Band-Aid, I am sorry. What do you call it? Oh, I can't even think of it right now, a rubber band.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay, okay.

MS. JACOBS: You take a rubber band and you wrap it. You know, how you-do you ever pull the rubber band-

MS. RIEDEL: Between the fingers.

MS. JACOBS: Between your fingers? That's twining.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: That's what we call twining.

MS. RIEDEL: So it's in and out.

MS. JACOBS: It's an in and out.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, but you are actually taking one over the other; you're taking one thread. You're actually taking it around to the back of the thread next to it, but you think about it as twisting.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, that's twining.

MS. RIEDEL: Great.

MS. JACOBS: So I started combining them, because twining is soft and it's dangerous. It's kind of scary, because the twining part, somebody could hurt.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: They could smash it. And I wanted to let the hard also become soft, and I wanted to work with this hardness and the softness and take the risk that somebody could hurt the piece, and some have gotten hurt. I mean, some have gotten misshapen and-but I'm hoping people are smart enough to put it back, and I try to tell collectors to put it back, but most often it's okay.

But I did that, and then for some reason, I started making forms and maybe like this, and maybe around the late '80s or early '90s, where you would have a bottom that was coiled and then the top was twined, but they would turn into two different shapes, and they would relate with each other, and a lot of times they would intersect each other. So there are a whole series of pieces where the bottom was one, then it became two shapes, then somehow-and when I say two shapes, two separate shapes-

MS. RIEDEL: Right, like the-

MS. JACOBS: -built from one.

MS. RIEDEL: Intersecting.

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And would one shape be completely coiled and the other shape completely twined, or would you mix and match?

MS. JACOBS: No, that-usually the top-

MS. RIEDEL: Would be twined?

MS. JACOBS: -would be twined.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And this started in the early '90s?

MS. JACOBS: And they have to be done simultaneously, so that they could be built up where they could enter each other and then separate back again. They would go through each other and then they would separate back into two.

MS. RIEDEL: And become distinct at the end?

MS. JACOBS: And become distinct, yeah. Then I think I went back to coiling and twining, but much more sculptural. You know that red-the *Red Slow Fire* it's called?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. JACOBS: And then the *Unfolding Water*, those are very sculptural, and no intersection or anything, but just plain sculptural forms.

MS. RIEDEL: And *Head*-that piece we were looking at-was incredibly sculptural.

MS. JACOBS: Yes, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So then the shape got very organic, very much about motion, by the time you were working on something like *Head*.

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about the pieces-we're jumping way ahead now, but into '99 and 2000. We were talking about *Purple Figure*-

MS. JACOBS: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: *Purple Figure* and *Snow Circles*, I think?

MS. JACOBS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: -as being so interesting because they were such a strong synthesis of the column pieces and the organic shapes; *Purple Figure* is very much a column, very symmetrical, but it had the spiral in it; it had the flounces. The motion was beginning to come in, but it still maintained the column shape, whereas Cloud Circles [*Snow Circles*], which I think was either a year earlier or a year later. I can't remember.

MS. JACOBS: *Snow Circles*.

MS. RIEDEL: *Snow Circles*, right, was-it feels like a-

MS. JACOBS: I like that-cloud circles. I think just-yeah, this one, though was *Snow Circles*.

MS. RIEDEL: And that felt so interesting, like a column that had been stretched to accommodate a female form. That was the first thing that I thought when I saw it-it had spiral to it, but it's so organic and it feels like a container that has completely evolved to accommodate the motion and the shape of whatever it's containing, as opposed to the essence having to fit the shape of the container. So I thought these pieces were interesting because there were the clearest synthesis I've seen of the stillness and the motion joining together.

MS. JACOBS: And funny-I mean, and done very close to each other.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, and both monochromatic.

MS. JACOBS: And one thing about those pieces, I started-also, which we didn't talk about-was trying to build pieces around circles; both of them are built around the circle, but differently. Every piece is different-every single piece.

One thing in my work, and then we can get to the later work-you know, the last one-I always want to learn something new. See, I always want to be in the unknown, and it's terrifying and that's maybe one of the reason why universities don't like it, but I am not saying all universities are the same. I have just seen that as a problem in some universities, you know, not everywhere.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you find that much more acceptable at Haystack?

MS. JACOBS: Well, Haystack isn't-well, especially when Fran Merritt ran it, anything would go.

MS. RIEDEL: So it was more accommodating-

MS. JACOBS: It was really a place for freedom. That was a place where you could do anything you want and-but then it depends on the teacher. Some teachers are more structured than others. One of my teachers wove shawls. One summer I went for two sessions. The first session, she was-she wove fabric and, I don't know, things that you would use. You know, she wove things for use. And then the very next session was Olga de Amaral, who was this incredible innovator. So one summer I had these two opposite teachers.

MS. RIEDEL: Back to back.

MS. JACOBS: Back to back. So, it really depends on your teacher and the teacher at Haystack.

But every single piece I make, I learn something new. I am having to do something I have never done before and facing problems I have never faced, especially even if it's just the shape. Each shape is so unique that there are always problems that I have no idea how I am going to solve.

And I think we did talk about this, that I said to you that I really don't know what I am doing. If I know the next row, I know I am okay. I know I will be alright-because sometimes I panic. Sometimes I say, oh my God, what is this going to do, and I have no idea. So I say to myself, look, just figure out the next row. That's all you have to know, and you will be fine. All right, I know I am fine because I've been doing it for so many years. So if I can figure out the next row, then-

MS. RIEDEL: And this is something you've come to over time. I mean, when you were doing the columns originally, you would have more than a sense for the next row.

MS. JACOBS: Well, not necessarily.

MS. RIEDEL: So the-

MS. JACOBS: The columns-every one of those is different. If you look at each of my pieces, every one does something different. So that the answer-you know, sometimes I would go back and look at the previous piece. I don't even remember how I did it. It's so in the moment, and it's so working out each row that I don't get-I never get an overview, if that makes any sense to you.

MS. RIEDEL: Completely. Trees.

MS. JACOBS: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Tree by tree.

MS. JACOBS: Completely trees. The only time I see the forest is when it's done. And by the time I'm on to the next piece, I can't remember the journey. The journey is lived and it's over. And when I'm starting the next one, I'm in that next one. I am in those trees, the other one is-that forest has been walked through and it is not going to be walked through again. And I keep thinking I can look back and solve a problem with the current piece by looking at the last piece, but it never works. It never happens. It can't.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. JACOBS: Because it's so in the moment. It's so hard to explain.

MS. RIEDEL: Makes a lot of sense.

MS. JACOBS: That's so in the moment; it's such a response to what is there. Believe me, but I watch the piece very carefully, very carefully.

MS. RIEDEL: And at one point you talked about it as a conversation, so that makes sense: a conversation between-

MS. JACOBS: Two people.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: And once that's over-you and I have a conversation. If you and I meet again, there is no way we can go back to the same conversation. It will be different. We are different. It's a different time. Even if it's the next day, the conversation is different. So that's how my work is.

MS. RIEDEL: And then the newest pieces are very organic. They are the multicolored pieces, and you've made three now, right? You are working on the third?

MS. JACOBS: I am working on the third.

MS. RIEDEL: *Wind* was the first, and then *String of Pearls* was the second?

MS. JACOBS: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And you're working on the third one right now?

MS. JACOBS: Oh, it has no title. Looks like candy to me. [They laugh.] But I don't know how to get candy in there. I don't know, but it's very colorful and it's very yummy. I think that it looks edible.

MS. RIEDEL: They're certainly the most colorful pieces that you've done to date-ever, absolutely.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, and this one is very-well, it starts with pastel, but it also gets dark and there is a lot of everything.

MS. RIEDEL: And these are fascinating for me, Ferne, because you are working with four-ply waxed linen and the very-

MS. JACOBS: Three, three.

MS. RIEDEL: Three-ply waxed linen, okay, but it starts off-

MS. JACOBS: Oh, I buy. I buy the thread. I begin with-

MS. RIEDEL: And then you separate the four ply into two plies, or a single ply, and then you make custom colors of waxed linen. You separate four strands of yellow and four strands of pink, and then you'll make a strand, a custom strand, that's two strands of yellow and one strand of pink etc., et cetera. And so you invented a whole new palette for yourself that didn't exist with that waxed linen.

MS. JACOBS: Right. So-

[Audio break, tape change.]

-not only am I using lots of color, like thread, but I'm mixing color, so I'm using two colors at a time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: And then when I make my [figure] eight, that makes four colors, so practically every row, every stitch, it's almost like four colors. You're looking at four colors simultaneously, plus all the millions-there's so many colors throughout it, so you're looking at, I don't know, hundreds-I don't know how many colors, but a lot of colors.

MS. RIEDEL: Certainly hundreds of variations.

MS. JACOBS: Lots of variations.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's so subtle that unless you're really looking exactly at a line of it-

MS. JACOBS: You don't notice-

MS. RIEDEL: -there's no way that-

MS. JACOBS: You're not aware of it, are you? Like, in *String of Pearls* there-it's red, but there's a million colors in that red and it's-when you get close to it, you see the purples and the blues and the pinks and the yellows and the oranges and the grays and the black. I mean, there's black in this current piece, even though it looks light. There's black in it, there's grey in it. There's everything.

MS. RIEDEL: *String of Pearls* is interesting to me because it's the first piece where the holes, or the openings, in all your pieces seem to figure very dominantly in the title. What we've talked about earlier as swooshes or little openings-little portals into the interior space of the piece-are actually the title of the piece: the string of pearls are those empty spaces, those portals, the openings that allow you to see in the interior of the piece.

MS. JACOBS: Right. And they're-

MS. RIEDEL: So they're actually the focal point of the piece.

MS. JACOBS: They are, and they go around it like a necklace. It's why I really saw them as pearls-and then there are the ones at the top. Now, why are they at the top and around the neck or whatever. Who knows? Who knows?

MS. RIEDEL: Sometimes they feel like bubbles-you were saying earlier.

MS. JACOBS: Sometimes they feel like bubbles. I-it's-

MS. RIEDEL: Very, very-

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, well, in a way they're like breathing holes or something. Yeah, they are like breathing holes or-oh, they could be so many things. Like in the lavender piece, you know, in *Waterfall*, they look-

MS. RIEDEL: It's a long piece-

MS. JACOBS: -they also look like a string of pearls to me. They look like a string of pearls. And that piece I started, just as I say, I created this whole row of open circles, just holes. I created these holes and started working around them. And they also look like sperm kind of wiggling up a river, and then there's this waterfall, and it looks like a bird to me. I love the fact that the work looks like so many things.

MS. RIEDEL: What's interesting to me about what you've just described is it could have been one of your drawings in your journal, the reverse.

MS. JACOBS: Oh, the birds.

MS. RIEDEL: The birds, the waterfall-

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: -the sperm swimming upstream, all of that feels like images that I've seen in your journal.

MS. JACOBS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: So if we're looking for the connection, the journals definitely surface in the work, though it's not direct at all, but there's a very clear connection if we look down a couple of layers.

MS. JACOBS: Yes, yes. If you look down the layers, you'll see lots of connections, but not conscious connections.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: Maybe once in a while one really affects the other and I'm very aware of it, but most often they're in the unknown part. They're-that's nice the way you said it. I like that. They're in the levels that are hard to explain, but they are there and they do cross each other and they use each other. I think they use each other.

But it's interesting to me in the later work, so much is based on circles, open circles, levels. You know, like some pieces, I'll make opaque circles. I'll coil circles, and I'll do five of them or six of them, and then I work around the circles, and the circles are the centers. There are all these centers, like planets or something, that I work around. And-or they can be open, and they can be holes and spaces and breathing holes or like breathing into space. Like the holes that are on the top of the pieces, it's like breathing into space, I think. I don't know, like *2001* or something, when he's going to that aura thing or whatever.

Not that. They're kind of opening up to the sky, maybe that's the-kind of open up to the sky instead of-because the ones that don't have them maybe are more grounded, and maybe the open holes on the top make a definite relationship to something above the piece in some odd way. I've never even thought about that before. See, that's a new thought I have about my own work that I-it never crossed my mind while I was working on it.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, you did say-thinking about new thoughts-you did say that doing this new work with the waxed linen, mixing the colors, allowed you at 62 or 61 or 60 to start to have a whole new way of thinking about the work, almost a whole new body of work.

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: You remember mentioning that?

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a whole new beginning in many ways, because of the options it offers color-wise.

MS. JACOBS: Well, the weirdest thing-I was in New York and one of the pieces-*String of Pearls*-was exhibited in June at SOFA [Sculpture Objects and Functional Art Exposition].

MS. RIEDEL: At SOFA.

MS. JACOBS: And my son came. It had been sold, so I said, "Come see it, because you'll never see it again. It's going to go into a collection." So he said to me, and I was-I was so surprised. He said, "This is the first time your work has changed in all these years." And I said, "What? It's always changing." He said, "But not technically. Like, this is the first time I've really seen like a technical innovation." I taught myself how to piece [small, individual, noncontinuous cores]. That, I totally taught myself. No-I mean, nobody ever did it, and I didn't know what I was doing and I just experimented because I wanted to make a different shape, and I found a way to do it.

Oh, another way I did know how to change a shape was through openings. And another thing that I learned that was such a shock to me and felt so important was I learned that I could make these openings by making different columns, so I would make one-we're talking about going around and around and around, and you have a column.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. JACOBS: Then if I split it into two columns, I could have a space in between; one column on each side of the piece, and then there'd be a space in the middle, so that was an innovation.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. JACOBS: Then according to Peter, my next innovation is taking threads apart and mixing the colors, and he got very excited about it. And I'm doing that in my 60s, and I think it's wonderful to keep learning.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that even occur to you? Do you know where that idea came from to literally take thread apart in order to reconstruct the thread?

MS. JACOBS: Reconstruct it. I know exactly how it happened, and it was this exhibition that I was in in Massachusetts a couple of years ago, where the middle generation-there were six of us who were chosen in my generation to represent fiber, and then we were to choose a mentor and we were to choose somebody from the next generation whose work we respected.

So I chose Lenore Tawney as my mentor, and I chose Kate Anderson as the next generation. And she makes these wonderful teapots, and she makes them based on other artists' work. Like she'll have a Georgia O'Keeffe teapot. She'll have a Jasper Johns-I think she did a Jasper Johns. She did Jim Dine. And I noticed that she does these wonderful pictures with a lot of popping color.

And I-there's a real problem in buying waxed linen. It's a very limited amount of colors, and sometimes the dye lots are pretty ugly. They can be too dark, they can be too bright, they can be a washout where there's no color at all, even though you expect it to be a color. Well, I was fascinated that I could see all these changes of colors, and it looked like she got a lot more color than I ever could, so I really studied her work and I-she works around a form, so she can start and stop colors constantly and then leave the ends on the inside, which is what I guess that she does. I can't do that because my pieces are walls, thin walls, and you can see the inside and outside.

But I thought what I could do is take the thread apart that exists, and I could mix the colors that way, and I could get that kind of popping color by undoing thread and reconstituting it. So mixing a yellow with a pink, a yellow with an orange, a yellow with a white if I wanted it lighter. And white can turn grey, so yellow with the white doesn't turn so grey. I suddenly had a new world of choices, and I thank her with all my heart. [They laugh.] I don't think I've seen her since that show, and of course I didn't start doing it until after that, but if I see her, I will gladly thank her; so she was really inspirational.

MS. RIEDEL: Isn't that fantastic?

MS. JACOBS: It was wonderful. It was-and here the person who I saw as the next generation ended up inspiring me, the older generation, instead of the other way around. It's nice.

MS. RIEDEL: It's wonderful, really.

MS. JACOBS: It's wonderful to be inspired by the young, which she's not real young, but she-

MS. RIEDEL: Next generation.

MS. JACOBS: But she was the next generation in terms of work, so-

MS. RIEDEL: Shall we talk about your travels? Since we're talking about Boston, should we talk about Cape Cod and New York and your trips there-the influence they have in your work? You're at Cape Cod every year. Is there anything else you would like to talk about though, work-wise?

MS. JACOBS: No, I think I'm fine for now.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, you go annually.

MS. JACOBS: Well, when I can afford it, I go twice a year-two, three times a year.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've been going for how long?

MS. JACOBS: And I go on the off season. I don't go during the summer. I go during the winter, in the winter, the fall, and the spring. And I usually go to New York, Boston, and-I have a very close friend in Boston and Provincetown-the Cape. Usually that's one trip.

MS. RIEDEL: So a community motivates some of those travels. Lenore is in New York.

MS. JACOBS: Well, and art. New York is the greatest city in the world, as far as I'm concerned, for culture; at least I can understand English. I can go see the theater in English. I love New York because culture is serious in New York. Hopefully, it'll stay that way. If it gets-our time is so commercial. I hope we hold onto the beautiful things that the soul gives. So I go to New York for people and for art. I always look at a lot of art when I'm in New York,

and that matters to me. It's where I look at art, and it's where I live in culture, the world's culture. I go to museums. I go to galleries. I love the theater.

MS. RIEDEL: And your son's involved in the theater, isn't he?

MS. JACOBS: And music. And my son is involved with theater, mm-hmm-experimental new theater. They do performance pieces-he and his girlfriend. They act, they write, they dance, they do it all, so their work is performed at P.S. 122 and places like that. I go to see their work. I go to see plays they recommend. I go with them to these odd things a lot of times I love.

And then Provincetown is just a total contrast to that. It's totally empty. I mean, total quiet. I love-well, the thing that New York and Provincetown have in common is that you can walk everywhere. In New York I can walk, take subways, no cars. Provincetown, no car. I walk everywhere. It's so small. It's a village. Well, and New York sometimes still feels like a village to me, but Provincetown is really a village. New York has several hundred villages and Provincetown is one. And I've got water on both sides. You've got the ocean on one side, the bay on the other. The light, the sky is truly unbelievable in Provincetown. The sky is amazing. And whales. I love the fact that I can walk to the wharf and get on a boat and go see whales, and I do that every time and just amazing things-where I was sitting next to the ocean around sunset and a whale came practically to shore just-it was feeding and you could see its head. It was so beautiful. I feel closer-I mean, there's not a lot of wildlife, but definitely the whales, and the coast there is so gorgeous. It's so quiet and empty, and the dunes, oh, I love the dunes.

MS. RIEDEL: What about Big Sur and Mendocino?

MS. JACOBS: I like Provincetown better.

MS. RIEDEL: Dunes. Maybe it's the dunes.

MS. JACOBS: It's the dunes. It's the dunes. The dunes are amazing. Oh, I just walk on the dunes. I'm all alone. I mean, I have a friend and we walk on the dunes together a lot. And there's also a little forest. There's a pond. There's a little bit of everything. I've gone mushrooming there. I love mushrooming. I actually mushroomed in Provincetown. One mushroom-and I researched it at the library and I-after I picked all my mushrooms, I went to somebody and showed them to her to make sure that I had done what I'm supposed to do, that they were all the same kind. This particular one was pretty-

MS. RIEDEL: And were they?

MS. JACOBS: I think so, but the trouble is later on-

MS. RIEDEL: Were they chanterelles?

MS. JACOBS: No. Chanterelles-like, I got chanterelles in Maine at Haystack. Chanterelles you can get in Maine. Oh, God, it's fabulous. Oh. Have you done that?

MS. RIEDEL: I have. I've done it.

MS. JACOBS: Isn't it wonderful? Where did you do it?

MS. RIEDEL: Outside of San Francisco.

MS. JACOBS: Oh.

MS. RIEDEL: We found them-the largest-we had them forever because they were all-

MS. JACOBS: Where? Oh, you have to take me, Mija. You have to take me.

MS. RIEDEL: That would be fun. You'll have to come. I think February is a good time.

MS. JACOBS: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: I will do that. We will do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: I did that at Haystack in the summer, after rains. And it rained and then we went mushrooming on an island, and my God, did we find the chanterelles. I forgot the name of this one. I can't remember it. It's-

MS. RIEDEL: But you found it in Provincetown?

MS. JACOBS: But now that I trust that woman, you know-I mean, how did I end up trusting this woman that she was going to tell me if these were all okay? And when I started asking people to eat them, nobody would eat them with me. They looked at me like I was crazy, like I was trying to poison them. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: And did you eat them?

MS. JACOBS: I finally found one person who would eat them with me, and yeah, we ate them and here-we're both alive, so-

MS. RIEDEL: And were they wonderful? Were they worth it?

MS. JACOBS: I think the gathering of them was a little better than the actual taste, but the taste was nice. But they were sort of like portobello mushrooms.

MS. RIEDEL: And-

MS. JACOBS: They had the flavor-they even looked a little like them. They looked like that cooked. Not raw, but kind of cooked they looked a little like portobellos.

MS. RIEDEL: Like portobellos?

MS. JACOBS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: If I'm correct, you don't coil or twine in Cape Cod?

MS. JACOBS: Oh, I do.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you do?

MS. JACOBS: I work. I work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. I thought you-

MS. JACOBS: I stay in the same place.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you paint, too?

MS. JACOBS: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. JACOBS: No, I-no, I just do my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. JACOBS: I stay in the same place, and it's really old and funky. It's like being on a boat. It's like I'm on a boat when I stay there, though what brought me to Provincetown was that I had friends who lived there, and she kept saying, "Come. Come and see this. I think you'll like it." So for maybe three, four years I stayed in their place. I had a place to myself and it was this darling little place and I grew-I just fell in love. I mean, and I was treated there. I didn't have to pay for a place, and I just fell in love. They would come maybe a couple of days-it was their weekend place, so I'd be there for two weeks at a time.

MS. RIEDEL: How wonderful.

MS. JACOBS: It was amazing. And they would come up maybe one weekend and spend time with me, and then they'd leave and I'd be alone again, and it was just great. And I-and then also it has art. It's funny art. It's a funny combination of Cape Cod art, and I really get into the Cape Cod art when I'm there. I leave it behind when I leave, but there's also the Fine Arts Center, so there's a lot of young artists who go through there and then some stay, so there's young art to look at and there's the Cape Cod art. So there's an art atmosphere; there's nature and the ocean, and the windswept dunes, and funny little things.

MS. RIEDEL: And how many years have you been going there?

MS. JACOBS: I don't know. I don't remember.

MS. RIEDEL: Seems like a while.

MS. JACOBS: I believe-I don't know. Maybe 10 years. Maybe 10 years.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's the main place? You travel there and New York, and then up to the Bay Area.

MS. JACOBS: And then I go up to the Bay Area.

MS. RIEDEL: Patsy [Krebs] and Dominic Di Mare.

MS. JACOBS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And Kay [Sekimachi]-

MS. JACOBS: And Kay.

MS. RIEDEL: And sometimes you'll travel for your shows?

MS. JACOBS: Right or teaching. I've been several places teaching.

MS. RIEDEL: Any other places you'd like to talk about besides Haystack-

MS. JACOBS: Well, not that I spent a lot of time, but I've given workshops in Alaska and Hawaii, several states. Alaska was quite an experience. I loved Alaska. It was really-you know, that wilderness, it was wonderful.

But getting to go to Hawaii and getting to go to Alaska and then several states; I love Milwaukee. Every place I've been to has something to offer. I was in Milwaukee in the winter, dead winter. It was freezing; like, it was zero or maybe five degrees or something. I mean, it was really cold. And who would think that the lake, whatever-one of the Great Lakes. I'm not sure which one, if it's Erie or Huron-but I was walking along the shore, and there were these huge pieces of ice that were circles.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. JACOBS: They were circles, beautiful circles, one after another.

MS. RIEDEL: On the beach?

MS. JACOBS: In the water.

MS. RIEDEL: Just round circles in the water.

MS. JACOBS: Round circles of ice, like tire shapes, but ice. They were like doughnuts. I think they were even empty in the middle. Why does ice make that shape? Figure that one out. And they were gorgeous.

So having those kinds of experiences. And something like that happens everywhere. It's wonderful. Plus the teaching and the students, and then when these interesting experiences happen that I would never expect, but I really-I was walking with this young man, and I think he said that that's what happens.

MS. RIEDEL: It must be.

MS. JACOBS: It wasn't just some-that might happen every year. I think people should go to look at that. [They laugh.] People go to the Grand Canyon. I think you should go look at the circles in the Great Lakes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I'd love to see that.

MS. JACOBS: In midwinter.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you done much international travel? Do you have an awareness of any international fiber artists or artists in general that have impacted you?

MS. JACOBS: Well, I haven't traveled internationally very much. Very little, actually. I mean, I've been to Spain. I've been to the Prado [Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain]. I've been to France. I've been to Paris, been to Nice-saw all the major museums in Paris. I've been a little bit in Italy. We got lost in Italy. We had some amazing experiences in Italy. We were at the very north end of Italy around San Remo or something like that, and we got lost in the Alps, literally, and it was pretty scary.

MS. RIEDEL: Driving or walking?

MS. JACOBS: Driving. No, you couldn't walk up there. We were driving. And we ended up going by this landscape of these-I don't know if they use them today, but there would be-we were literally in the Alps, I mean on a one-

car road. In other words, if we ran into another car, I don't know what we would have done. And there was no railing along the edge. There was just a drop on the side. We were terrified. We were pretty terrified. There was a drop on the other side. Only one car could get through, and we would come across these, like, tiny little villages. I don't know what to call them. They're not even villages-they'd have these little homes and there'd be a church. And they were totally empty. Nobody was there. And they'd be on the side of a cliff. How do the people-how do they get there and what are they doing there? And we never found out. Somebody said maybe that they were shepherds who would bring-kind of bring their flocks up there in the summer and the-

MS. RIEDEL: Summer houses or-yeah.

MS. JACOBS: With a little church? They were maybe, like, five houses, six houses. And this church. And they were on the side of these cliffs and we're going-we were full of anxiety. How can anybody be in those homes, because it just looked like the whole thing just kept going down. It was very-and we got stuck for hours-hours. We really were wondering where we would end up and if we would make it back alive.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that's how people feel when they come to California and see the houses perched on the cliffs in earthquake country. I think they have similar feelings.

MS. JACOBS: But these were ancient. These were ancient, and these were not built on stilts and there were no roads behind them. Mija, they were in the middle of nowhere. They had to be climbed to, and how were they even built and why would anyone bothering building them? I mean, it was-so-

MS. RIEDEL: So that was enough? That was enough of Italy?

MS. JACOBS: It was pretty strange.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: I'd love to go back to Italy, but I don't know. I am not a world traveler. I think I'm more of an inner traveler. I learn by going inside more than going around the world. Joseph Cornell comes to my mind. He never left Utopia Parkway and yet his work related to Europe. I may be a little like him in some ways. I don't have to go very far, but I do love New York and I feel like New York is a home. Provincetown is like a home to me.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've lived in this house a long time, your house here in Los Angeles.

MS. JACOBS: Since 1967.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk a little bit about this working environment, where you are and where you work, here, downstairs.

MS. JACOBS: Well, there's one other thing I'd like to say before this.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Sure.

MS. JACOBS: One person who inspires me, talking about never leaving your home, though I think he traveled a little bit, was William Blake, and we didn't mention him yesterday.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. JACOBS: And this whole idea of a personal religion, he's somebody to me who has really been an inspiration, the life he led, and how simple it was, and they had very little. But I remember his wife saying how happy he was, because he was always in this world of his creation, and it kept him really fulfilled. So that's why in a way I like traveling the way he traveled. He made up such a world-his books and the philosophy-and this personal philosophy he created is a very meaningful thing to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So we were talking about your working space, and you were talking about William Blake and traveling the way he does. And I have this feeling that your whole down-

MS. JACOBS: Traveling inward. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: That you're traveling inward. And your house is upstairs. Your home is upstairs. Your studio is downstairs, and there are three separate rooms. And in the first-or in one room-you work in your dream journal, and in the second room you do more of the coiling and the actual fiber work, and in the third room you do the collage journals, and so there is almost a very inner traveling that happens here as you're going from one sort of work to the next. And then we were going to talk a little bit about where-it's very quiet here. It's very quiet-windows looking out on gardens. It seems like a very nice peaceful working environment. Does it feel that way to you? I hear crickets now.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah. It is and it isn't. I mean, there are struggles. Dogs barking. That's the worst thing. Now, I love living here and I live on the side of a hill and I live away from cars. It's a dead-end street, and then you have to walk downstairs to my house and I love-I mean, I've lived here since 1967 and I hope- knock on wood-that I could die here. I'd like to live here till I die. Whether I can or not, I don't know. I've really loved it, but not that there aren't problems, but it is a neighborhood. You have neighborhood problems, struggles between neighbors sometimes, but other than that, there's a lot of greenery around. There's a big park I can walk in.

MS. RIEDEL: A whole hedge of bougainvillea here and beautiful palm trees. We're going to talk, too, about how your work evolved, what inspires you and how that inspiration has changed over time, and how one piece leads to the next; that your work comes from the work, as you were saying.

MS. JACOBS: Well, one thing. I like what you said about William Blake, and he goes into a world and it is interesting-it made me think about going through these three rooms. Like, why do I go into one room? Not float, but I get up in the morning and I-I get up late and I have breakfast late. Like, I don't usually eat till 11:00, and then I come downstairs. And it's interesting what room will I end up in, and so it is like a traveling-will I-sit at the collage book, will I draw?

I never do fiber in the morning. I usually draw or work on a collage book in the morning, and then I'll run errands, and then I'll come home and start working, and then I just work. I can work sometimes till 2:00 in the morning. So it is a world. I mean, it's a definite world and how I'm moved through that world is-it's just interesting to-you just made me think about it, but it is kind of true feeling. I kind of feel my way one place to another.

MS. RIEDEL: Great.

MS. JACOBS: I like that you said that. I just thought it was interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: And then when we're talking about how the work itself evolves, too, how one piece leads to the next, or the work comes from the work-

MS. JACOBS: Well, you know how people are always looking to be inspired by something, and they-a lot of people travel. I have a friend who does travel and she-and her work-Marilyn Pappas's work, we've talked a lot about her travels, and her work is based on ancient sculptures that have already been made. And she loves to work with these fragments, and she told me how they are-they represent time to her, and I can see it. It's so interesting for me, my work-so much work comes from itself-from my relationship to the work itself, so I don't have to really go anywhere. I don't have to do anything but work. Except, also I do, because everything I take in, I sometimes wish I could live out in my own work in some way, but I can't. You can never look at a butterfly and then, okay, I'm going to make a butterfly. Well, maybe some people can, but I can't.

So everything I take in, everything-I mean, visually, reading, learning just about everything that goes on. I mean, I read about science. I can't understand science, but I'll read about it, because I know something in me takes it in and does something with it. And so I take all these things in, but then it gets-something happens in my own inner world and then the work comes out of that. So whatever I see it's not direct, and everything that I am is what I hope gets into the work. And piece to piece, though, they come from themselves, and maybe that's because I've worked for so long that while I'm working, new ideas come to me, and there's usually one that sticks around. I never draw the idea. I never draw pictures. I don't want to draw an idea. I think I've tried to do that and it kills it. It just kills it for me. It becomes-first of all, the drawing is not fiber. It's not in the moment and then it's not an experience. I mean, why develop this silly drawing, although the drawing can be exciting to me, but I-

MS. RIEDEL: You draw all the time for your dream journals.

MS. JACOBS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But it's different.

MS. JACOBS: Totally different.

MS. RIEDEL: The directions are indirect.

MS. JACOBS: Totally different. The journals tell a definite story. Somebody called it illustrations. They illustrate a fairy tale kind of thing. My fiber is totally different, and so really, whatever has happened in this particular piece somehow inspires something new to explore in another piece, but it's also not direct.

I have this idea. I immediately think of the color. Color is very important. And then I'll just start with that color, but then the minute I start, the idea is gone and then I'm in relationship with that line and that beginning or the

circle. Well, the line-circles come out of a line.

MS. RIEDEL: Everything seems to come out of the line.

MS. JACOBS: Out of the line.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: Out of a line. And fiber, in this kind of work, it does. It's one-well, I was in Phoenix. There is a couple who owns one of my larger pieces. I said, "For all I know, if you took out and undid my piece, you'd have a line of wrapping that went all the way across Phoenix from one end to the other." I mean, it would be a long line, I think. Maybe it would be a mile long, a couple miles long.

MS. RIEDEL: You were talking about inspiration and influences. And you mentioned William Blake, and you wanted to also mention Ann Hamilton.

MS. JACOBS: Yes, there was one particular piece of hers that has just stayed with me and been very special to me. Now, see, who knows what this gave me, but there was a piece in a gallery in L.A., where the walls were covered over in wood, just thin pieces of board-wood board. And there was this wood table suspended from the ceiling, and there was a young woman on one end of the table, I think in some kind of chair that was also suspended from the ceiling, or there might have been a platform. And she had cut this book-an actual book-into a strip, you know, one line to another line to another line, but it ended up being a long strip that-a continuous strip. And then she was pulling the strip and making it into a ball, so it was a string of words from a book, but it became a ball of thread.

And then she would put these balls onto the table, so here were these balls of thread made out of books, out of words, but they started looking like planets on this table, like-almost like they were floating, because the whole thing was floating. She almost looked like she was floating. And it was the most amazing experience to watch her make these balls of thread that were paper, that were words taken from a book, which was a story made by human beings, a human story, and then making it almost look universal and timeless, like planets or something. That was one of the most moving pieces I've ever seen.

And-but again, it's this contrast of intimacy and timelessness. You see, the timelessness is on the table and the balls of thread that are books that-so there's so many things going on, and her activity-this meditative activity of making these balls. And I didn't see her cut. I don't know when the books were actually cut, if she cuts them or they're precut, but-and-but Ann Hamilton has to go through every page and cut all that stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. JACOBS: So that was an amazing experience. I can have an experience like that, and that will fill me for months. And I do that. When I do travel, I'm not somebody who likes to look at a million museums. I don't run all day. I almost will go to, like, see the one thing that really matters to me, and then I can just stop. I can stop after an hour. I can stop after two hours, but I usually see something that really matters, and then I don't need to look at any more.

MS. RIEDEL: Is there something that fiber does that nothing else does-one reason that you've been drawn to it all these years?

MS. JACOBS: I don't know. Thread-well, thread is so much, isn't it? It's such a basic thing. It's so basic and you need it. You can't live without it. I mean, maybe you will be able to-

MS. RIEDEL: -[inaudible] string theory of the universe.

MS. JACOBS: Yeah, when I heard the string theory, I got so excited. I just-but they're vibrating strings of energy.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. Strings from around-

MS. JACOBS: But-

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, and in spirals.

MS. JACOBS: Strings of energy, and even that, they say our universe is a fabric now, that we live on this fabric and that there are other fabrics and-wow. But fabric is very feminine to me. It's feminine. Thread is feminine, and the three fates-they weave your fate. God, I forgot what it says about that, but there are the fates. They weave our destiny. They bring us into life, and they weave our lives, and then they weave our death. I love working with it, though.

MS. RIEDEL: Given your interest in psychology, it's such a metaphorically rich material.

MS. JACOBS: Thread?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: Every eye needs thread.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. JACOBS: There's threads and threads and threads. And you're led through a labyrinth by the thread and you can find your way back. Anything is a journey. I mean, painting-painting ceramic. I think about making ceramics. It's different, though. Painting is different.

Fiber, you have to go in one direction. Well, you can build on. I don't know. Thread-I just love thread. Why? It's such a simple element and it's very flexible, but yet I make something hard of it, even though it's so flexible, and it's so nothing at the same time. But yet, I can make it hard, I can make a wall with something that's thin, I can transform this material. I feel very close to it.

MS. RIEDEL: You seem to have a very intimate relationship with it. You follow the thread row by row.

MS. JACOBS: And stitch by stitch. At one point I said, it's like making a body cell by cell.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. JACOBS: Stitch by stitch, cell by cell, I'm building a body.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you seen a difference in how your work has been received over the years?

MS. JACOBS: Not really. Once I was in that exhibit ["Sculpture in Fiber"], it seems to have sold steadily. There are rhythms. There are bad times. There are better times. There are years when I sell very little, and then it gets better. I mean, there was a year where I didn't sell anything, and that was very difficult. But it seems to get balanced out over time.

Nancy Margolis opened in Chelsea last year, the year before-she shows my work. And I loved the fact that somebody actually came off the street and bought a piece who didn't know who I was, and they paid a nice sum of money for it. That was the most thrilling experience. So it wasn't that they knew me, they knew my history. He just loved it, and he did have a collection. I think he did have some ceramics in his collection. He just loved it and he bought it. I mean, it was wonderful-because sometimes, so many times, it's well-known collectors, who are building a collection, which I love. I mean, I love that. No complaints. But this odd thing of, for the first time, being in a gallery where it gets a lot of street traffic, and that somebody actually would buy something off the street, that was wonderful when that happened. I'd love for that to happen more.

I sometimes am concerned that when this generation of collectors dies, that there won't be a new generation to collect, and that I find really tragic if that happens. And I don't know how we keep that from happening. I don't know if there are young people buying.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you have a sense that there are not?

MS. JACOBS: I feel that there aren't, not as many as the older generation. The collectors are getting older, and I don't-I don't know about the younger generation. I sometimes wonder if they're so into electronics and technology and-all these entertainment centers, there's all that stuff on their walls. All the electronics equipment. There's flat-screen TVs and, you know, all this-my goodness me. You have to have a VHS and you have to have a DVD, then-who knows, then you have to have a tape deck, then you have a CD player. I mean, it's ridiculous, and a phonograph, you've got to do-you have old phonograph records that you don't-I mean, I didn't want to totally replace.

So anyway, I sometimes walk into homes and that's all I see, are these huge speakers and things, and that's awful if that's what happens, but nobody wants the more humane-human things. Fiber to me is so human.

MS. RIEDEL: Perhaps it will be a pendulum that swings back from the more industrial, electrical, evolutionary things that don't deliver what something like the tactile quality of fiber can.

MS. JACOBS: I hope so. Yeah, I don't know the future. I really hope so, because I think it-I think it does have something special to offer. I almost want to say it's a gentle medium. It doesn't have to be gentle, but it is a quieter medium. Even when it's big and massive-you know, Magdalena-

MS. RIEDEL: Abakanovicz.

MS. JACOBS: Abakanovicz.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel, interviewing Ferne Jacobs at the artist's home in Los Angeles, California, on August 31, 2005, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number four.

And Ferne you were talking about the viewer moving slowly through fiber work.

MS. JACOBS: I think that's something fiber gives that's unique. I'm thinking, is it unique? Is there anything else? I'm sure that there are other mediums that do that. I'm thinking, you know, mediums with lots of parts.

I saw a show when I was in New York last time, and you had to walk slowly through it because there were so many parts to it. Now, in weaving or in fiber, it's not that there are many parts, but the element is so fine, and the element has to be repeated and repeated and repeated and repeated in order to get a finished object. So it's slow. And I think fiber gives a lot of things. It does tend to give a sensuousness, in a lot of ways. It's very sensuous, and I love sensuality. So much art refuses to be sensuous, and I think that's sad. And the experience of fiber is slow, slow and sensuous.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so you were talking about your relationships with dealers and what was important to you, because you've had long-term relationships with Nancy Margolis [Gallery, New York, NY] and Sybaris Gallery [Royal Oak, MI]; I know you showed with Joanne-

MS. JACOBS: Snyderman [Gallery, Philadelphia, PA], and Joanne Rapp [Gallery / The Hand and the Spirit, Scottsdale, AZ].

MS. RIEDEL: And what is important to you about your relationships with dealers. What has mattered? How has it been?

MS. JACOBS: Well, I think galleries are important and I think they need to be supported, because I'd been thinking recently, what if everything goes on the internet and there are no galleries anymore? So nobody gets to see work, you know; nobody gets to see anything live? I think it would be horrible.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't think that's going to happen. I think there will always be room for galleries, because people like to see the work in person and they like the social aspect of it. They like to talk with other people about what they think about the work.

MS. JACOBS: Right, yes. I think I'll just depend on that, too. And there is a wonderful dialogue-let me say-I have had good relationships with the galleries I've shown in, and of course, what is important is that they are honest, you know, that they do what they say they are going to do-that they pay you when they sell something. The worst thing that can happen for me is that somebody sells something and I have a hard time getting paid.

MS. RIEDEL: Has that happened to you at all?

MS. JACOBS: It happens once in a while and that's horrible. It's really horrible. It's happened a couple of times where they don't want to send the work back. But most often, the ones I've mentioned have been very good. And I've had good relationships with all these people. And they're relationships. You know, we have our ups and downs and there are sometimes problems, but they're all fair.

And you know, it's interesting, too-I spent a weekend in Phoenix and had a talk with-there were three of us there: a museum person, a collector, and me. And the one part that was missing was the gallery person. And we were talking about the value of the interchange between all of these parties, because the artist makes the work, and, you know, it's very important. But how the museum person was saying, collectors go around and see so much work and see so many exhibits in galleries, and they bring-they are the ones who, through their buying, through their supporting the work, bring to museums the knowledge of new people. You know, the museum personnel don't have enough time to do the traveling and probably don't have the budgets to do the traveling that collectors can.

So in each area, collectors can make museums aware of new artists, which is a wonderful thing, and of course, galleries make the work available so the collectors get to see new work, and artists make the work, which yes, that's me. So I think it's a good system, I do. And I hope that galleries are honest. That's the important thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Have there been any specific periodicals that have been helpful to you over the years? You

mentioned that you read some things by Lenore Tawney. Might they have been in *American Craft* or *Fiber Arts*? Do you feel that those periodicals have played an important role in the field, or have they meant anything in particular to you?

MS. JACOBS: I wouldn't doubt that they play an important role in the field. They're important in that you get to see work done in these materials.

MS. RIEDEL: We were just looking at an old copy of *Fiber Arts* upstairs, a black and white that had 10 images of your work from-

MS. JACOBS: Nineteen seventy-seven. I mean the work was from an earlier period, but it was published in 1977. So that helped people know my work, I'm sure.

But you know, there is also something about-I don't know if it happens, but I was thinking about this when we took a break. Painters-do painters ask about painters all the time? I think, for one thing, I do the fiber-I don't have to feel connected to fiber particularly. I love looking at everything. And so, I want to look at painting. I want to look at sculpture. I want to look at the best of the creative process. So I don't see myself as a voice for fiber or anything, and I'm not.

Art in America is just as interesting to me as *Fiber Arts* or-and I don't really look at a lot of periodicals, I have to say. I do get *American Craft*. I sometimes take *Fiber Arts*. I really read the *New Yorker*. I like the *New Yorker* art critic a lot. I can't pronounce his name for the life of me. Peter [Schjeldahl]. We like you, but we can't pronounce your name! [They laugh.] I don't have a clue how to pronounce his name, but I really like to read him. He's my favorite critic and he's about the only one I can read. I look at the pictures in all of these periodicals. I very rarely read the articles, which is too bad.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you like about his writing in particular?

MS. JACOBS: It's just so smart. It's thoughtfull, and it's his thoughtfulness. So much criticism, like so much work, is academic, in the sense that it follows certain patterns that there is a language that everybody needs to be talking about, like everybody needs to understand art. Well, why? Why not just give your thinking process, and why not let it be personal to a particular person? I feel when I read him, I am reading something personal-his attitude-he does talk sometimes in art historical references, but they're done in a unique way. The New Yorker, period, it's the only thing I really read, besides literature. I mean, I love to read literature and I love great literature.

MS. RIEDEL: Any books you want to mention?

MS. JACOBS: Well, I usually read one author indepth, but one of my favorite authors has been Shusaku Endo. He's Japanese, and I think he has had a profound effect on me. I'm reading-I think it's Jose Saramago. I'm reading him now. He's Portuguese and I love his writing. I usually find one author and I read quite a bit of their work. I loved Isaac Singer. I read a lot of his work. I really want to learn something and I want to be with something in art, you know, writing in art, where somebody is really struggling through something, really searching their own soul for something that-what matters. I don't like to be entertained. I want to learn.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned that a long time ago you read a rare collection of interviews of women artists that you felt was really influential. Or had it meant-

MS. JACOBS: No, that was Lenore. I think I read something Lenore wrote, or she was interviewed. I think it really talked-she mentioned Jung when she was talking about some work she had done around Jung, and then I had done work around that. And I thought-oh my goodness, I could meet her. We think similarly. We've had some similar experiences. I don't want to just meet somebody out of the blue. I respected her work enormously, and I think reading that, I thought, oh, we might have something in common, and it might matter to meet her. And I did meet her and we have this 30-year relationship with each other. Thirty years? Seventy-five-yes, 30 years. God, it's just so wonderful that I made that call. If I had never made that call, a real richness would have been missing from my life. But those things happen and probably are meant to happen.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you have any sense of where fiber might be going? And this is interesting because we just talked about the show that included Lenore and Kate Anderson.

MS. JACOBS: And others.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. But any sense of where things might be headed?

MS. JACOBS: In terms of fiber? First of all, I don't watch it that closely. You know, I was at this collection this weekend, and I saw a few new pieces by younger people, and I really enjoyed them. And there were three

younger people, and I said, great. These were creative. They were unique, and I thought, well, here's three different directions. One was made out of fabric and stitched. One was made out of pistachio nuts and wire. And somebody else-well, they were using some really odd materials-that one was-I forgot-some kind of lotus pad or some orange peel or something. I think Jan Hopkins-she works with orange peels or something. And it was delightful.

So look, three pieces, three very different materials that-young Japanese are working with bamboo. And it's just nice to see. I don't follow it that well. I don't particularly follow fiber. I don't particularly follow any medium. I usually love a few people in each, and that is what interests me. I do it through individuals. Like I do music-through individuals, and reading. There are a few authors that I will care very deeply about and others I'm not interested in reading. The same thing with art.

MS. RIEDEL: You look till you find a piece that you're interested in.

MS. JACOBS: And the person, the person. Yeah, I see the thing that really grabs me, really moves me, and then I want to see the person's work. Plays-the same thing. Playwrights-there will be a particular playwright or an actor that I love, and I want to see a lot of their work.

MS. RIEDEL: You find the chord that resonates and then you want to spend time with it.

MS. JACOBS: Yes, indepth, yeah. Rather than running to find the latest new thing. I have very little interest in that.

MS. RIEDEL: No entertainment centers for you any time soon.

MS. JACOBS: No. [They laugh.] They would all close. [They laugh.] If I was the client-

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think we may have covered it.

MS. JACOBS: Okay, great.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you feel there's anything else that you think you want to say?

MS. JACOBS: Thank you. I want to say thank you to Mija.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd like to thank you, Ferne; it's been just a real pleasure. It's been just terrific. Thank you so much.

MS. JACOBS: It's been wonderful. You're welcome. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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