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Oral history interview with Don Reitz, 2006 June 6-7

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Don Reitz on June 6, 2006. The interview took place in Clarksdale, Arizona, 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.

Don Reitz has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Don Reitz at the artist's home in Clarksdale—

DON REITZ: Clarkdale.

MS. RIEDEL: Clarkdale, Arizona, on June 6[, 2006]—

MR. REITZ: Six, six, six. Danger, danger.

MS. RIEDEL: —[laughs] for the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution. And this is disc number one. Hi, Don.

MR. REITZ: Okay—[laughs]—hi.

MS. RIEDEL: It's great to be here.

MR. REITZ: Thank you so much; it's really good to have you here. I'm glad we could come out to my place. It's much better to interview out here—to talk out here, that is—than someplace else. So, thank you for coming in, and I love the way you seem to get excited at looking at pieces. [Laughs.] That's such a reward for the artist.

MS. RIEDEL: It's such a treat.

MR. REITZ: I thank you for that.

MS. RIEDEL: We stopped at the studio on the way in, and it was wonderful.

MR. REITZ: A little longer than I anticipated, sorry about that. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: You said so many great things in the studio. We had to come in and start talking on tape.

MR. REITZ: That's all right. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So I thought we'd just start at the beginning.

MR. REITZ: Sure, go ahead.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were born in 1929.

MR. REITZ: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: In Pennsylvania.

MR. REITZ: Pennsylvania; Sunbury, Pennsylvania.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And your mom and your dad, John and Sarah?

MR. REITZ: Sarah and John, yep.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And three siblings.

MR. REITZ: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: Can you talk a little—I know your dad was an accountant.

MR. REITZ: My dad was an accountant, right. Yeah. He met my mother in Sunbury, Pennsylvania. She worked in a necktie factory where they did silk neckties. And they worked for the Sunbury Converter Works. It was a dye plant or something. He met Mom there, and that's how they met. I'm not quite sure about all that. But, anyhow, they got together. And I was born in Sunbury, Pennsylvania. And right after that, the Sunbury Converter Works, [he] was transferred to Belvidere, New Jersey.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. REITZ: And that's how I got to Belvidere.

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

MR. REITZ: When we went to Belvidere, we had—you know, people left, but we had no money at that time. It was 1929, '30, okay, so we lived on the town dump, actually, in a house that was furnished for us, on the dump. So Dad would take care of that and also do his accounting of books. And Mom would sew and things like that. And then we got by; then we moved up. My parents were quite religious; they were Lutheran.

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

MR. REITZ: Episcopalian, actually.

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

MR. REITZ: The minister gave Dad a job at the church taking care of everything, so they gave us the rectory, right, in town. We lived in there in the rectory of the Episcopalian church. Lived there for quite a few years.

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

MR. REITZ: Dad took care of that, and Mom did the cooking. And we had gardens; I don't remember not having a garden. I mean, she had the canned goods that were just piled high, and great cooking. She still thought she was cooking for thrashers on the farm, you know. She just—and I don't know how he lived through so many—you know, eight eggs for a cake or something, getting all that great, juicy fat off the chuck roast. I loved it. Why I'm still alive, I have no idea. Maybe that's why I had all these operations, finally. But anyhow, before there, we lived in Belvidere, New Jersey. I grew up there, and Belvidere is right on the—where the Pequest and Delaware [Rivers] come together.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm, mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. REITZ: So, basically raised on rivers.

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

MR. REITZ: Which I really, really—water has been a natural draw for me.

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

MR. REITZ: And I remember, as a young lad, we would play hooky from school—I never I did well in school.

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

MR. REITZ: I did—but I only got three As: gym, shop, and art.

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

MR. REITZ: The rest of the things, I got through school pretending I wasn't there. That's how I got such a great way. But anyhow, in the yearbook my—

MS. RIEDEL: Did they know that it was dyslexia at the time?

MR. REITZ: Dyslexia, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Were they aware of that at the time? Or was that figured out later on?

MR. REITZ: They didn't know what it was. They would just tell me I just wasn't paying attention; I was a troublemaker, stuff like that. But Ms. Shook knew, and whenever I'd go to take a test, I would get my paper and pencil, and then I would just start shaking. And I'd just put my pencil down and walk out of the room. And Ms. Shook—no, I don't mean Shook—Ms. Rosencrantz. Ms. Rosencrantz would say, Donny, Donny, now come on back, now. Come on back. And she would ask me questions verbatim, and I'd get 100.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. As long as you didn't have to write.

MR. REITZ: So it was really—she and Ms. Shook both knew this problem—it wasn't a thing that people knew about at the time. It's this dyslexia thing, see. And so—

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you then, do you remember?

MR. REITZ: Pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you then?

MR. REITZ: This was in fourth grade.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And was that information then conveyed onto other teachers who helped along the way or not really?

MR. REITZ: Well, I just got to be known as a really nice guy, but half the time I wasn't there. So my nickname was "Mile Away," because I was just—it said in the yearbook, "Mile Away," you know. And the yearbook says "Most Likely." That's all; just "Most Likely."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That's wonderful.

MR. REITZ: I was president, class president. It was a count—see, you make up for different things. I became the class clown, the comedian, to make up for, as I look back now, my problems with dyslexia and so forth. I remember we would play hooky quite a bit. And I would fish; I loved to fish. I fished every day of my life. Or we'd go down to the river, and we'd take all our clothes off and be covered in clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: River clay. And lay on the rocks. We were mud people. And I thought, man, when I look back, that started way back that then. You know, saying we'd go to clean off and hope that our hair would dry before we got home, or Mom would catch us playing hooky, stuff like that. So I went through Belvidere High School, and I always worked. I was one of the few guys that always had jingle in his pocket, you know?

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

MR. REITZ: We'd either hunt soda pop bottles, or when it would rain in the Delaware Valley, they would plow; the farmers would. And after it would rain, the arrowheads would just be sticking up like this. You'd go pick them up. And we'd sell them to Doc Cummings for a nickel a piece. One time he gave me a dollar because I found a tomahawk. He gave me a whole dollar. [Laughs.] Oh, that's great, you know. And years later I was in the [military] service, and Mom sent me a newspaper clipping—I was in the Persian Gulf—it said, Doc Cummings just sent his personal collection to the Doylestown museum [Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA]. [Laughs.] So all those kids supplied him with all this stuff. So we always [found] a way to make money.

I was fascinated with—I had hand—tooled suspenders. I had the first zoot suit in New Jersey—in Belvidere. And everybody thought I was—D.A. ["duck's ass"] haircut, you know. They thought, well, he is nuts; he is really out of here.

But I always worked. I worked at meat markets. I worked at—mostly at the meat markets. I was so small at that time. At night you would scrape the meat block off with scrapers, and I had to go to the other side and scrape the other side. I couldn't reach all the across to the other side. So I loved to be cutting meat. I always loved bone structure and pelvic bones and the neck bones and—I mean—just boning out a rib roast so—God, it was just fascinating to see all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Gave you a sense of structure, infrastructure, anatomy.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, yeah, so that's—now, that's what I do now. So my clay is like that, very viscous, very much that way, you know? And so it all comes back.

MS. RIEDEL: In terms of interior and exterior, would you talk a little bit more about that?

MR. REITZ: Exactly, here's this great—and I loved working in the meat market. It was fun because you were directly related to the public. It wasn't self—service. You knew what everybody wanted; you knew their favorite cut of meat; you knew what they wanted—or it could be you almost had cut, you know? Which I used to do for some people. I'd have it cut and ready for them, and they'd come in. I knew every Tuesday they would do this and so forth. And it was just a nice—and it was all good beef at that time because it was all from Kansas City; it wasn't fed with a lot of hormones and everything. Produce was really good. So we were very fortunate growing

up in that time period, I think, health—wise, you know?

Matter of fact, I wouldn't eat a pigeon today if you paid me to, right? It's squab. Unless it's raised on a farm or something like that. But my job on Saturday was to take my Red Rider BB gun and go to the water tower and shoot five pigeons for Mom to make pigeon pot pie for supper. I just got to thinking about that—that's how clean, safe things were at that time, you know? That's so sorry now that—well, whatever, it's another time period, but.

MS. RIEDEL: You've talked about trapping, too, and how your time outside during your New Jersey childhood had such an impact on you in the long run.

MR. REITZ: Yes, the natural world is my inspiration. Not the manmade world, not so much. It's always been the natural world. I remember I would lay on the station green. We lived right by the railroad tracks. On the station green, look up at the sky and just think about the clouds and what's growing underneath me. And also I looked at all the ants and this whole life that's down at your feet. And obviously amazed that—how an ant could pick up things six times his size and stuff like this. This natural world was so exciting, how plants grew, and how can—we picked wild asparagus, so it was really good—how can that grow overnight? I mean, here is a fiber which is growing. It just would blow my mind. Now here we have the century plant, which can grow 11 inches a day, you know. It's just amazing.

Also at that time furs were big, and I would [set a] trapline, about a two—and—a—half—mile, three—mile trapline on the Delaware River. And when I think now how Mom would just let me go. I'd get up at four in the morning and do my trapline, and—

MS. RIEDEL: Before school.

MR. REITZ: The river would be frozen over, sort of. And it was just—I don't know if she didn't care if I came back or not, but I'm sure, you know. She was such a great woman.

The cellar was full of my skinning boards. I'd skin them—because I'd get $3.65 for a good muskrat pelt, which was a lot of money. You never know—you just, by some sheer accident I'd get a mink. Big money. It was big money then because they're very skittish. They're very hard to—

MS. RIEDEL: You'd catch mink on the Delaware River?

MR. REITZ: Yes, Delaware River. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. The Delaware River is an amazing river because it has more kinds of fish than any other river in the country. It has everything. It has bluegills, sunnies, perch, pickerel, bass, pike, you know, trout. It has everything in the Delaware River. And shad. At that time they'd catch a lot of shad way up by—this is—Belvidere is by the Delaware Gap, just up from Easton, Pennsylvania. And the shad would come all the way up there. And I'll never forget, we'd get all our fresh shad. That time the shad roe, Mom would bake these big shads with bacon and that roe.

MS. RIEDEL: So she cooked whatever you caught.

MR. REITZ: So that's how clean the Delaware was. Then the Delaware got screwed up, but now shad are coming back, they tell me. So that's a very positive sign. But I loved the—I'd be by myself, out there. And it was that challenge, that I look now, of me against nature. Sometimes it would be snowing and icy, but you had to go because—this sounds cruel now, but it's what we did. You would set your trap so that the muskrat would go back in the water, and he couldn't get up, so he would drown. So it wasn't—or else they'll chew the leg off, you know. And it's just a cruel thing. I look back now; I couldn't trap. So I'd have to go, because maybe one wouldn't make it out there, and here he'd be suffering; it would be my fault. So no matter what the weather was, I went.

And then I would get home from the trapline, and I had also a morning paper, the morning something paper. I had to deliver that. And I'd go to school. By the time I went to school, I had a day's work in. I just wanted to sleep. It didn't make any difference—

MS. RIEDEL: No wonder you were Mile Away.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, I mean, I was just a mile away. And that's my practice. I realized that I could leave my body. I didn't realize it then. I realize it now. Well, I don't usually say that. I just pretend—I just visualize. I'd go off; I'd be all these things—I mean, I'd see a Tarzan movie—the real Tarzan, Johnnie Weissmuller, the real guy, I'd be Tarzan that day or that week or something. Or I'd be, you know, all these—John Wayne, the Wake of the Red Witch [1948]. I'd be a deep-sea diver. I'd be all these—and I've been every one of those things I had fantasized about in school. All of them. I've been a lumberjack, fisherman, trapper, hardhat, diver, run a truck. I've been all those things. That is just an amazing thing to me, that if you follow your bliss, you know, and don't hurt too many people on the way—because it's hard to do without other people being hurt sometimes, or seeming hurt. You have to do that. Because I did learn—and I shouldn't be talking, because I'm one of the biggest enablers in

the world. I mean, I cannot delegate responsibility, but I'm learning how to do it. Since my heart attack I really can do that now.

But you have to be true to yourself first. Then you can be true to other people. And I see how true that is now as I get older. I mean, when you're young—you know, that's why they send kids to war. Old guys like me, we say, wait a minute. We ask questions. I'm supposed to lie on a hand grenade? Are you out of your mind? Young kids, I'll jump on that. It's just like when I raised horses, okay, I had this one quarter horse—I had all quarter horses. I had this one Arab. She used to think, see, which would make me mad. I could tell my quarter horses to jump off a cliff; they would jump. I'd tell the Arab, and she would say, wait a minute, what would be better for this; have you thought this through? And I hate that. Especially when I came out here, I was running cattle with her.

But anyhow, I don't know where I was running with all of this. Just this business of nature.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, you've talked about pretending and fantasizing—I think that's where it started—that it's been important throughout—

MR. REITZ: And so I had one person who was a great mentor of mine. I've had lots of mentors. My first mentor was my father, and mother in a different way. Dad would always explain things by drawing in the dirt. I mean, I was from a hard German family. I never saw much affection between Mom and Dad because you didn't show that. You came to the supper table to eat, or Mom and Dad would fight, but you didn't say yes or no. You ate everything and sat there until it was done, even though you were done. Sundays, when company would come, three-hour dinner, you know. Jesus, man, I wanted to be out playing baseball. So Dad and Mom were my first mentors, of course.

Then Homer Hicks was my next mentor, my scoutmaster. And Homer, he owned Mayflower moving company, who I eventually drove a truck for.

MS. RIEDEL: Mayflower moving company?

MR. REITZ: Out in Colorado. So Homer was our scoutmaster also. And so Homer was just this wonderful guy. He would pick three of us up after work by the meat market on Saturday night, and we'd go up to Kittatinny Beach, up by the Delaware Gap, camping, and we'd fish for the weekend. And he'd tell us these great stories about different places and stuff. He was such—now I see he was a very well read man. He hadn't traveled out of the country or anything, but he was very well-read. I never forget, he had every National Geographic that was ever written, you know. I mean, he just—and he got his knowledge that way. And he imparted that to us. So he was a great, great teacher.

MS. RIEDEL: A wonderful example that you could learn without being in school.

MR. REITZ: Oh, absolutely. You bet. So then he took the scouts—we did scouting things, like we made boats, and we went on hikes. We didn't march in parades and stuff like that. We did real stuff, built tree houses. Somehow, I don't know, he got associated with the lumber company up in Canada above Montreal, Lake Cabonga [Manawali, Quebec] but—

MS. RIEDEL: Do you know how to spell that, Don?

MR. REITZ: Cabonga, like Cabonga Dam. I don't know what it is. Sorry. But he took us up there, and the lumber company leased us the lake for a dollar a year. We would go up there, the boys, and we'd—you had to paddle, I think it was six miles by canoe. You had to paddle and get to it. And we'd live off the land.

MS. RIEDEL: For the whole summer.

MR. REITZ: Well, we'd go for like three weeks. Three weeks, or maybe a little more than that.

And as an older person then, after the service, I'd come back, and we'd go up and hunt in basically the same place, after I lived with Charlie. That's when I met Charlie, the Indian, up there, who was my next—another mentor.

MS. RIEDEL: When you were a teenager.

MR. REITZ: Right. I was a teenager at that time.

MS. RIEDEL: The first time you met him.

MR. REITZ: The first time I met him. I was just amazed by him. Maybe the first time I saw people wear the layered look. Everything he owned, he wore. Two hats, two shirts, two pants, you know. It was stereotypical. He had no teeth in front except two eyeteeth, right.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: And it was just—if you ever saw Never Cry Wolf [1983]—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

MR. REITZ: He's exactly like the Eskimo. The old Eskimo. That's exactly like him. I thought, my God, there's Charlie.

MS. RIEDEL: And he was Algonquin?

MR. REITZ: Pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: He was an Algonquin?

MR. REITZ: Yes. He was chief until he got old, and then his son, I guess, one of the relatives; I don't know how they did that at that time. But he was 70-something when I met him. No, he wasn't 70 when I met him. He was younger than that, but still at that time anybody 70 was old. Now I don't think so. And that got my thirst for nature going, you know, living off the land and eating berries and stuff. Charlie would show us what to eat and how to set snares and so forth like that. I did enjoy it. When they would shoot a grouse, the Indians would let it hang for about four or five days before they cleaned it, to get it really strong. Oh, God. It was learning experience.

So anyhow, and after that I—let's see. I can't get it quite straight. I was growing up then, graduated from high school, and during that time I worked in a meat market in New Jersey. Then I went to high school, I graduated from high school, and I went in the navy in '48.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: I was in the navy, and they transferred—they sent me—from New Jersey, right?

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

MR. REITZ: So I'm going to see the world. I mean, anything across the Delaware River was the rest of the universe. So I thought, oh, this is great. I went to Great Lakes Naval Training Center [Naval Station Great Lakes, Great Lakes, IL]. So they sent me back to New Jersey, to Lakehurst, New Jersey, to pull in blimps. Then they found out that I was a meat cutter, so they put me in a commissary. I'm saying, I'm doing the same thing I did on the outside. So Chuck Yost, who was a lumberjack and a beautiful man. If you ever saw a man who I think is beautiful—he had a square jaw, perfect teeth, was from Minnesota, perfect type of guy, lumberjack. Built, really built. Whenever we'd go in a bar, I'd always say, I'm with him. Nobody would bother us.

So anyhow, Chuck came back from liberty, and said, I know how we're going to get out of here. How? See this? He gave me a little book called *Sub Down Diver Wanted*. And he said, get it? They don't have a hardhat diver. Don't need one at this base. We will put into school at Bayonne, New Jersey; we will get out of there; and they will send us overseas. I said, oh, nice idea. Good idea.

So we went and took the physical. He failed the physical. He had a murmur in his heart.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, no.

MR. REITZ: And I go up—at that time the Normandy had berthed in New York Harbor, and so the salvage squad started on the fantail of Normandy. When I got there, they were in the process of moving to Bayonne, New Jersey. I think it was '49 by that time, I think now. And became a master diver in Bayonne, New Jersey. And then I said, okay—they put me on return, going back to Lakehurst, New Jersey. So I said, how am I going to get out of here? I wanted to dive.

So to keep my interest going, I, and a buddy of mine, we bought a stock car down in Red Bank, New Jersey. And I'd drive the stock car and crash it up, and he'd fix it. Because I don't care what's under the hood. I don't give a damn what's under there. I just like to wreck them and stuff. And we had a lot of fun and a lot of stuff.

So anyhow, I said, I've got to get out of Jersey somehow. Well, I was young and—

MS. RIEDEL: Nineteen or 20, yes?

MR. REITZ: Yes. And sowed my wild oats and praying for crop failures. To be very honest, I got in a little trouble that way with the commander's wife, and so Lieutenant Rosa came to me and said, Don, you're about ready for a court martial unless you get out of here in two days. I said, thank you. So everybody would come in, and I'd ask,

what ship you're off of; do they rate divers? So I got—I don't know if I should be saying this in the Archives or not, but it's true.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. REITZ: And so one of the guys said, I'm off the USS Maury. It's a geodetical survey ship. Really? They rate divers? Oh, yeah, they have three divers. I said, what do they do? They go in the Persian Gulf for a year. I said, that's my ship. So I told Lieutenant Rosa, six o'clock the next morning, I'm going over. I'm up the gangway with my sea bag; I'm going to Saudi Arabia. And then I find out everybody else on that ship had to get out [inaudible]. It was like—wasn't ships with iron men. It was just—they would fight amongst themselves constantly. But we would go on the beach. One guy got in trouble, the whole ship was on.

I was sitting in a bar in Norfolk, Virginia, and a guy said to me, what ship you off of? I said, USS Maury. [He said,] I have two vacant seats next to me. I thought, wow, this is—wow. So one lad went to a house of ill repute, and he got rolled. The ship went over and destroyed the entire house. Just destroyed it. That's the kind of camaraderie that we had. We didn't have ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] or any of those things nowadays that they have. And so anyhow, I'm getting off the track.

But I grew up. I was growing up then. I was getting tough. I knew the realities of life. I was making decisions about people and—and about, you know, who I'm palling with, who I can trust. And trusting your shipmates—as a diver, you had to trust your tenders because this was all hard hat. Deep sea. See, I mean, I dove 333 feet on air. It took me—I'd work for 12 minutes on the bottom, and it took me five hours to come up because we had no recompression chambers. That's why they send kids to the navy, you know? Who would do that if you had your right mind?

But then what happened was, Amoco Oil was over there putting in oil wells, and they were pouring cement, or coffers, and their diver got appendicitis. So they wired the ship, the Maury, do you have a diver aboard? Commander said, yeah. They said, you want to go, Reitz? Yeah, sure, I want to go. So I didn't even get off the ship—and it was only a 400-foot-long ship, you know. And so I get over there; it was a big ship compared. And so I went over, and they said, you ever pour cement? I said, oh yeah.

So I'm reading in the boat, that little boat, about how to pour cement in my dive book on the way over. See, you never said you didn't know how to do anything. And I said, sure, sure, sure. They said fine. So I went over there, and I saw the rigging, and they had terrible suits. I mean, our suits aboard in the navy were good because we kept them up ourselves. They didn't have patches in. And I looked at it and thought, well, this must be the hose the cement comes down. Okay, that looks familiar. Okay. Well, I can figure that out. I said, sure, sure.

So they suited me up, and they tap you on the hat and pick you up so you can get over the side. But this was only in maybe two atmospheres, probably 60 feet. But I was still in a hard hat rig suit. So I was pouring cement in coffer dams underwater, see. So I poured the cement. And the hose comes down about like this. So I thought—you have a radio in your hat. You say, okay, shut it off; she's full. Not realizing I've got 60 feet of cement coming down that tube yet. It buried me, up to my breastplate. They pulled me up, said, poured cement, hey, kid? They said, that's okay; we like you. So, well, I've got to get back to the ship. No, no, no. We've got your sea bag. You're staying with us.

So I dove for Amoco Oil Company for the rest of my—well, hell, three-quarters of my time in the navy, and I was getting first class pay and overseas pay. I was getting diver's pay; I was getting hazardous pay; I was getting $55 an hour working for Amoco. I mean, I had so much money, I didn't know what to do with it. They'd come back and make goodwill stops in Greece and France and all these places. Well, I don't know whether it was goodwill or not, but I was a tourist, so when we stopped in [inaudible] Greece. I mean, I used to take ditty bags of money over, put them on a bar, and throw a party for a town. You came for a night; it was unbelievable what comes out. It was 15,000 drachmas for a dollar.

And when I got out, the discharge, I had a fishing pole and my clothes on my back. That's what I got out with. Money has never meant anything to me. Never cared about being rich. I just need enough money to get by, and if I don't have it, I'll find a way to get it.

To this day, if I have to gunk out a sewer, I'll gunk out a sewer if I'm broke. I don't let money get in the way of doing things that I want to do. I figure out how to pay for them later on. Work [it] out.

MS. RIEDEL: One of the things that strikes me about that story is that you were learning by doing, which seems to be a thread that runs throughout your life, in many different shapes and sizes.

MR. REITZ: Yes. And I was very fortunate I was in between wars. Well, I got extended for the Korean War, but I didn't have to go to Korea. So I never had to kill anybody. I don't know how you deal with that mentally. I wonder so much about that with these young men and young women. But I didn't. I just had to fight a lot, you know, and

oddly enough, I didn't mind—I got so I didn't mind fighting.

And that goes back to Delaware and New Jersey. What we'd do—this is crazy now; I know it's crazy, but lots of small towns did this. We'd load up a truck with a bunch of us guys, go to Stroudsberg, and fight the coal miners Saturday night, and then come back home. Everybody—it was okay; it was just what you did. Nothing against anybody. Just life.

And see, I always—see, whoever had the best boxing team, that's what church I went to. So I could be Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, all in the same year, see, because I was a good boxer. The church at the time was where you went for recreation. They had the basketball teams, the softball teams. The church was a great place. I had one minister, Reverend Brendasy; I just loved to hear him. And he would grab me, and I knew he was talking to me. He was really good, but I really loved his preaching fire and brimstone. So anyhow, that's—you know. And he got into this thing of fisticuffs and things. And, no, you weren't mad at anybody. And as I got in the navy then, I used to box in the smokers, you know. Well, in the smokers you never know who the hell you're going to box, golden glovers and everybody.

Well, I was doing really good. You're shipping, pull up alongside another ship, and then you'd have a smoker that night, see, in the front of the ship. I was really buff and good at that time, good on my feet. So I had to fight this little Filipino lad, little short guy. I thought, oh, well. So, the guys put all this money on me. The first round, we're sparring like you always do. Second round, I never saw so much leather come at me so fast, so often. I just got whipped silly. That was the last thing I learned. See, I was learning in situations. This hurts, and I'm not going to do this any more. So I stopped boxing, and I became a lover, not a fighter. It's a much better situation. I don't like fighting anymore. So that was my—but I did get to see a lot of the foreign countries.

And I remember being in Greece and places—and I'd have my hands on these columns that were made by the Greeks. And, my God, somebody had their hand here. This was before I ever thought I'd be an artist, because an artist is something someone else is going to be. It wasn't a real job. You would never be an artist. That was really—somebody else did that work. You weren't sweating, didn't hurt at the end of the day, you know what I mean? Well, I do now. And I remember marveling at the Greek columns and the Egyptian pieces, the apothecary jars, I'd see in the museum. Some of the first forms I threw were the apothecary forms, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. REITZ: Variations off the apothecary jar. Yes, they were just so clean.

MS. RIEDEL: The jars, too, that you had in the cellar as a child growing up—you'd put your hands on those, too.

MR. REITZ: There you go. There you are, you see. It's going back to my dad. We would go to the root cellar—all the jars with chow chow and pickles and—I mean, I'd get bad knuckles from shredding cabbage for sauerkraut. It's unbelievable what we had down there—salt-glazed crocks and jugs, like, you know, we always used. And you could see the potter's fingerprints in a hand-pulled one. And I remember as a young lad going down and putting my hand on the handle: somebody was here. Not knowing later on that this would affect me, you know what I mean?

So you go forward, but you're always going back to go forward. For me anyhow. Like now, even now when I'm doing, let's say, a drawing or painting, I don't question what I'm doing. Later I'll think about it. Maybe even a year later I'll say, oh, right. That's what that was about. Other people will look at it and tell me—matter of fact, some of the best criticisms I've had have been from poets. Poets seem to have an understanding of that kind of language, and they can phrase things. I'm not good with words. So that's why I paint, draw, and pot and so forth. But anyhow, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: These jugs—sorry, Don. Those jugs were salt glaze?

MR. REITZ: Salt-glazed jugs. Isn't that amazing?

MS. RIEDEL: That is interesting.

MR. REITZ: Salt-glazed jugs. And even at that time I was excited by the drips, the accidental drips, and now I put them on. You know, I throw feldspar on or frit, and it will run and get this wonderful drip. Everybody says, oh, that. And I say, no, that just happened. It's worth another five bucks, you know; you get a good drip. You sign it; it's another 10 bucks, you know. Pretty soon you've got a $100 pot. It was funny because that—when I went to school—I went to—

MS. RIEDEL: Shall we talk about Charlie briefly first, and after you got out of the navy? You did a couple of odd jobs, for a year or so—you were a lumberjack, right?

MR. REITZ: This is after the service. After the service I came out, and I was pretty screwed up. Not really, but kind of. I went back to cutting meat because I knew that. And I had to get out of that. So I asked Homer his advice. He was still living in town. He said, why don't you go live with Charlie, your Indian? Yeah, good idea. So I went up to see Charlie. And I said, Charlie, I said, can I live with you for a while? He said, what's the matter? I said, well, I'm, you know, just screwed up and da da da. And he said, how long will you stay? And I said, well, I'll probably—a couple of months. He said, you should go home. Unless you stay four seasons, what will you learn?

And I thought, right, because there was no time. See, time is nothing. Time is not—in Japan and so forth—it doesn't matter how long. The time—

MS. RIEDEL: The seasons.

MR. REITZ: So I lived with Charlie and Indian Mary, ran trapline, lived in a hogan [log dwelling] for a year And my name was O-May-Go-Kahn, which meant "beaver bone." We ran a trapline, and we trapped beaver, basically, and the things. And Charlie was my next mentor. He knew where everything was in the woods because that's survival, see. So I also learned, unless you're an expert, you're not going to succeed. You're going to die. That's the way it is in any profession. You've got to be expert at what you're doing and know it thoroughly, and to do that is not easy. So knowledge is not easy. Freedom is very difficult to come by. You've got to know so much to become this free.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. REITZ: So Charlie was my mentor. He would take me out, and he would make birch bark canoes, see. And he would say to me, see, now that tree—and at this time now he's about 70-something at this time. This is after the service. He said, this tree—I'll make a canoe out of in about 30 years. I'm thinking, whatever, you know. Whatever. But see, no concept of death. No concept of time.

And he would make birch bark canoes so beautiful. And birch bark canoes, they were very light, which is a relative term as far as lightness for canoes, you know. He would use very, very little pitch. He'd used boiled cedar root, which is called *wa-tap*, and he'd sew them with that. And when he'd put the canoe in the water, I'll never forget that: the canoe was just straight-on. I mean, dead straight-on. Beautiful. Then he'd take it out, and he started to peel back the birch layers and decorate, embellish it. You know how the different colors of a birch are? He'd peel that back.

And I looked at that. I said to him—I said, Charlie, who taught you how to do all that decoration? He looked at me. He couldn't get the concept that somebody had to teach you to decorate something. He said, after abundance, what? You embellish, right? Look at the fins on the Chevys. That's what that's all about, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: You embellish it. So that was a wonderful experience for me to have with Charlie. It was just a great experience. Then I came back down again in the States, and I started to go with my first wife, Johanna. She was a—

MS. RIEDEL: One thing I just wanted to—there was that wonderful quote that Charlie told you. Do you remember?

MR. REITZ: Yes, thank you. Thank you. That has been in every lecture and every thought that I'd have. It means so much. Because this man, you must remember, has never in his life been out of the bush. I mean, never, okay? Words would come out of him, and I'd say, oh, my God.

So he's here one day—you're right. In connection with the decorations. So he said to me, in response to that, he said, "Your eyes are like windows, and everything you see comes through your windows, goes down in your belly, and stays there, and when you need it, it comes back up out through your heart and then your hand." He knew it had to go through your heart first. We've had this heart bypass surgery in hearts for so long, you know. But it had to go through your heart.

It was profound, but I didn't realize how profound until later on. You don't know at the time of things happening, but later on you think, my God, that's—even to this day sometimes I'll say, that's what Bob Turner meant. He was one of my great mentors and teachers, Bob Turner. But Val [Cushing] and Bob were—Bob was just, God, what a person. If you ever knew Bob, and you knew life, his religion, his pots couldn't be anything but what they are. They're Bob Turner. He was the kindest man, the kindest man. I would get to Bob, and I'd say, what do you think of this piece? And he always found something good. He'd push his glasses up, and he'd go, ah, well, you see, now, well, see—trying to find something positive. And say, you know, I love this area. And I'd say, good, Bob. And I broke the vase; you can have that area. He's never forgotten that. He's never forgotten that.

And anyhow, I don't know where I was going. I digress so quickly.

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all. We've been—after you came back from Canada, you went to Kutztown [PA].

MR. REITZ: Well, no, when I came back from Canada, I went back to cutting meat again.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. REITZ: And then I was going—I got married. Johanna. See, at that time, in high school you didn't have a real steady girlfriend. Nobody did. Everybody just went with everybody. It was just a great gang, you know. A couple of guys had girls and girlfriends, but not many. I mean, I'm not going to pay $12 for a class ring and give it to some girl. Are you out of your mind? It was just that way. But Johanna, the gang was always a lot of fun. Johanna was really a lot of fun, and so we kind of got together, and I started to go with Johanna.

And we really started when I was in the service, because I would call home. And Johanna was the switchboard—we had switchboards at the time, see. She was a switchboard operator, so I would call, and she would switch me to everybody in Jersey. And she got fired because they found out about it. She was fired because she was connecting me with all my friends in Belvidere, from the Persian Gulf, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: That's a wonderful story.

MR. REITZ: So anyhow. So Johanna and I have been—we got married. We got married. And married by Reverend Brendasy, the minister who I was—and I had no money. And she had no money. Parents, they didn't have any money. So I decorated the church. I was in my dungarees decorating the church like 15 minutes before the wedding. See, I was getting flowers. I said, just sit down, I'll be right there. So we had two receptions. My family never drank, and her family drank. Matter of fact, that's how her dad supported their 12 children. He made moonshine up in the Kittatinny Mountains. That's what he did. He'd sell booze during the—New York City, and moonshine. Great apple, best apple, they say, in Jersey. I don't know.

So anyhow, they drank. So I had two receptions, one for my parents at a church and one for her friends in the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], see. Oh, boy, I got really—anyhow, I won't go into that. That's another whole story. But Johanna and I got married.

MS. RIEDEL: This was '52, '53, something like this?

MR. REITZ: I don't know; it's awhile back. But anyhow, Johanna and I got married, and I worked in a meat market. Again, at night I'd be painting in the bars. I'd paint pheasants over the bar doors and paint beers behind, and getting drunk. Give that painter another drink, you know. So I used to like to drink quite a bit. And I'd come home the same way. Johanna was quite satisfied living in that, you know. We'd go out Saturday nights; Sunday did this, and you know. And I just said, I can't take this. I said, this routine is killing me.

So one day I came home, and I quit work. I said—did I ever tell you how I quit the meat market?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. REITZ: There was this one lady, and I—my career, I dedicate to her, Mrs. Howsher. She was Harriet's mother, who I was kind of sweet on. Mrs. Howsher would come in. And she wanted, exactly, no bone, no waste, no funny taste. Heat it, eat it, and you can't beat it, see. She was that—see. So I would have an eye of round cut for her, which is in the icebox, and by the time she would come in, it would get nice and red, see. She would come in, and she said, Donald—she called me Donald, which I hate. Donald, God only knows, Donald Duck, you know. So she said, Donald, I'm having company. Always having company. I don't think she ever had any company. I need a—I said, well, here's a chuck roast. And I said, wait a minute. I have one saved for Mrs. Alteney's—don't tell Rosie. You can have this one. I'm not getting paid to be a psychiatrist, you know.

So what happened was, another occurrence with her was on Monday morning. Monday morning was hangover morning, and—because you only sold—you gave away soup bones and soup greens. You never sold the soup bones. People would buy cold cut—everybody had leftovers. So in comes Mrs. Howsher, I thought, oh, God, here she comes. What am I going to do now? So she said, Donald, I'd like some ground chuck. I said, yes, ma'am. So I got a chuck out of the case, started to cut the bone out. And she says, Donald, how much is that? I said, well, it's 79 cents a pound. She said, well, you had 59 in the case. Well, it's 59 with the bone in and it's 79 with the bone out. She said, well, why is that? Well, because cows have bones. I mean, everybody gets a little bone. You cut the cow up, and everybody gets a little bit of the bone.

See, and I was getting so furious, and I just had my knife in my hand, and I'll never forget, you know. I walk out around the counter, and I shook my knife and said, don't you get it? You know, the cows have to have bones. If they had no bones, they'd all lay flat in the fields; they couldn't fuck; they couldn't make babies; there'd be no

calves. Here, cut the son of a bitch. I quit. And I gave her the knife, and I walked out. Went to Charlie's for dinner.

Now see, these decisions we think we make on the spur of the moment, we didn't. We made them a long time ago. It just takes things to come together, right? I mean, so I went over to the diner. And a day from this time, this next week from this time, I was going to buy the other half of the meat market. And that's what I think triggered this whole thing, see, because I'd [have] been locked in.

I go to the diner, a little diner, Blairstown, New Jersey. Stoudy comes in, the guy there. And he said, what's the matter, are you crazy? Stoudy, you're crazy. We're just here for a visit. We're supposed to enjoy it. He said, what are you going to do? Of course, everybody in the diner was off their stool. And I said, I'm going to go to art school. Oh, whoopee, Michelangelo's going to art school. Everybody, yay, Michelangelo's going to art school. Nobody in Belvidere went to college, you know. I said, I'm going to go to college. That's it. Yup. Yup. You'll see. You'll see, you guys. I'm going to finish the month out, and I'm not buying anything—finishing the month out, get yourself another meat cutter. I'm out of here, see.

So I went home, said, well, I've got to tell Johanna about this. So I said, well, I guess I'll just straight on—I said, do you know, I had a very interesting day today. What happened? Well, I quit. You what? I quit. So we went round and round a little bit. She said, look, we just bought all this furniture. That was the first thing you did when you got married; you bought furniture and silverware. We got so far in hock, you couldn't get out. That was the way. It's a terrible thing to say. But you did. You bought everything. I said, we'll take care of it.

So her mother was there. Her mother was like 80, I think, an older lady. Wonderful lady. She loved to watch wrestling matches on the tube. That was her big night. So I said—her mother was there—I said, listen here. So I took these pants off. I said, put these on. I said, put them on. She might have said, would they fit? No, they're too big. Exactly. We're going to art school. If you want to come with me, fine. They're too big for you to wear. I'm wearing the pants in the family, see. Her mother just broke up. Just broke up. Her mother's going, heh, heh.

So she said, how are we going to—I said, okay. We'll go. You're right. You have to do what you have to do. I mean, we didn't have any children at the time, so as soon as we get in school, of course, bingo, bingo, you know. So I said, I'm going to art school.

MS. RIEDEL: You had the GI Bill.

MR. REITZ: Pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: The GI Bill.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, because I had the GI Bill. If I wouldn't have had the GI Bill, I never would have gone. So I went to New York City, looked at Pratt [Institute], and I—it wasn't right. The city—I love to visit the city. As a matter of fact, we used to camp in Central Park as Boy Scouts. I mean, get that, okay. Time has changed, right? So anyhow, coming back.

So Russell Emley, who lived in the apartment next to us, was a librarian for Stroudsburg State Teachers College, in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. He said, Don, why don't you teach art? I mean, I was thinking about security for the family, when I had a family, you know. And I said, teach it? He said, you're a teacher. I said, what do you mean I'm a teacher? He said, you have 12 Boy Scouts here, and people around the house every night, every day; you're making canoes—that's teaching. See, I never related that to teaching. That was just what you did. No, kid, that's teaching. That's teaching. You're born to teach, Don. I said, ah, well. He said, go to Kutztown State Teacher's College [now Kutztown University of Pennsylvania]. I'll give you a letter; see Dr. de Francesco and tell him I sent you and see what happens.

I have to go back a bit to my high school days. World War II was on at that time, and I was at a meat market. So I had all the coffee; I had all the ration stamps; I had all the butter; I had all the meat. Nobody could fail me. If they failed me—I had nylon stockings; I had bathing caps—they got nothing, okay? I had such a hammer, it was unbelievable, see? I didn't know at the time. Anyhow, this will be important at this time.

So I got to Kutztown and walked into Dr. Italo de Francesco, [and he] said, oh, Don, Don, yes. Well, do you want to be an artist? And, of course, nobody had to ask me that. I had not asked myself that. The only thing I could think of, is, just because I was an alcoholic, that it just smells right in here. He says, well, that's good. That's good. He said, I tell you what. Let me look at your file, your painting—

MS. RIEDEL: School records or—

MR. REITZ: School record—no. He said, you have to take an entrance exam. I said, Dr. D, I don't know—I was, at that time, 30 or so—26, maybe older, but I said, I couldn't pass. I can't take an exam. He said, well, let me look at your record. So he looked at my record, and he came back and said, oh, you don't have to take an exam. You

graduated in the top 10 percent of the graduating class. Well, if I wouldn't have had the black market, I'd never got to college, see? It's just strange how that worked.

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

MR. REITZ: And I told Johanna; she said, okay. Well, Johanna also then became a teller in a bank. So she said, I want to finish this out, so you go to Kutztown for the summer. And Stan Jenkins, a friend of mine who was a neighbor, we shared a little trailer, house trailer. Can you imagine two artists, with all their boards, in a little bitty house trailer? But we lived in that, to see if I liked it or not. So I really, really liked this. This is great. And then one day—

MS. RIEDEL: You were painting mostly, at that point, right?

MR. REITZ: I was painting, right, and making jewelry, oddly enough. I loved making—the soldering, the welding, you know. Physical. I liked that. But I liked—painting was really—because that's where high art was. It was on the wall, you know. This is high art.

So then Harold Mantz was another mentor of mine. One day I'm walking up the stairs, and he put his hand on my hand on the railing and said, you've got great hands. And how come I don't see you down in the pot shop? I said, where's that? He said, down in the cellar. That's where they all were, in the basement. He says, come on down. Said, okay.

So I went down, and he showed me; see, you put this on like this. This little treadle wheel. I still have marks from the goddamned treadle, you know, shins. You put it on, just squeeze, squeeze it like that. Just get in the middle; see, get it in the middle. Now put a hole down through it like that. Yup. Now squeeze it and bring it up. Yeah, like that. See, he says. Oh, there. That's good. You got it. He said, listen, I've got to go home—he was a bird watcher—I've got to get up at five o'clock and watch these birds. So, he said, you can stay as long as you want.

I stayed all night. I stayed all night. And he came in about six in the morning, seven in the morning, looked around; I had his shelves filled. Filled with these cylinders and stuff and just dumb things. Whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: You'd just thrown cylinder after cylinder all evening.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, just things and stuff like that, you know. And he said, stayed all night? And I said, yeah. And I didn't know, but I had used everybody's clay in their lockers. I didn't know it was their clay, so I would open up all the lockers, get all the clay out. So I used all their clay in the pot shop, see. And Dave Shaner could tell you, because Dave was a year ahead of me at Kutztown, see. I never met Dave at Kutztown, but I met him at Alfred [University, Alfred, NY] later on.

So anyhow, so Howard says, okay, now wedge this all up, and I'll tell you something else to do. The clay was never precious to me. It wasn't like a diamond or a metal, gold. It didn't have a value. It was two cents a pound. The only value it had was that which you gave it as an artist. You could wedge it back up. It was so forgiving. Painting was not that forgiving. That blank piece of paper is very difficult.

So anyhow, so I said, okay, so I then—I've been painting since then. Oh, yes, I did. Went back up, and I was painting. And Dr. D would come in. He had a bad habit of picking up the brush and working on your painting. So D comes in; look, you should take this. And I would go right around the corner, a little coffee machine; we had some books and stuff. I had coffee while he's talking to me. He didn't even know I was gone; he was working on my painting.

So there's this book down there called Craft Horizons. I said, huh. Who the hell is this monkey, ape-like-looking person who's standing with a striped shirt on, torn, and these paint cans like all around him? I said, ah, who the hell is this? It says "Peter Voulkos." I said, who the hell is Peter Voulkos? I was, goddamn, look at these pieces. They were on rockers, and there was holes through them. I said, man, this is hot stuff. And I started to do that.

So Pete was my first. And he had a one-liner in there that changed my life. He said, there are no rules, only concepts. I lived my life that way, but I built my art by their damned rules. I switched, and ever since then I've been a happy camper. So I owe Pete so much that he doesn't really—never really realized until later years when we got talking and so forth. He became then—of course, he was my hero first, then became a very close friend, all that stuff. Many people, Rudy [Autio] and a lot of people were—excuse me, I can't—she had hands about this big. I'll think of it. But anyhow, she was one of my heroes, too, because I went to a—watched her one time, and she said—this is way back—and she said, you must first be an artist before you can be a potter.

MS. RIEDEL: M. C. Richards?

MR. REITZ: No, at—darn it. That's terrible. It will come. But she was a great—man, what a great concept. Maija

Grotell. What a great moment. And she turned out to be a fantastic, to me, a really—a hero. She's really a wonderful, wonderful woman. And so anyhow, I don't know how I got off on that, but—

MS. RIEDEL: No, it was perfect.

MR. REITZ: It has to do with your hands. And so then, Johanna then came and right away we had two babies. We had a son, and we lived in an attic, see, because I had no money. We lived in the attic of this old house in Reading, Pennsylvania. And so to make money I would turn manure in the mushroom factories at night and go to school. And also then at night I would go out the fire escape, you see, and cut the copper flashing off the chimneys and make copper enamel jewelry.

My uncle gave me this one little kiln I would take. It was maybe three inches across, this little crucible, that it would melt—he worked for a die works company, and they would melt little samples in this crucible. And I had a little basket; I would lower one earring down at a time. I'd stay up all night doing copper metal jewelry, and I would sell this copper jewelry. Well, by the time we left there, there wasn't—[laughs]—any more copper on the house, you know. It was gone. And we got out—oh, God, but what was I going to do, right? It was survival, right. It was survival, see.

And so then what happened was, I got a job in Dover, New Jersey, teaching public school. And I think I was hired because I was big and strong. I'm not sure. Because they were kind of a difficult school at that time, and I remember Kunsel—no, that's Pete Kunsel. Something like that; this was the principal. I can't remember his name right now. But Huntzinger was the other art teacher.

And I would go in the art rooms and show the teachers, who were proud of this box of crayons that had their points on them yet, you know, and I'd break them, and I'd melt them. I said, you know, this is art; just let them do this. We'll melt this. So that's when I started doing workshops, because I had to get to the parents so I could get to the teachers so I could get to the kids. Parents had to realize when this kid brought home a green snowman, nothing was wrong with her; she just only had a green crayon, you know? And so I would pull things; I would—I'd go to three, four PTAs a month and come home pretty well smashed, actually, after a PTA meeting, you know. And look at somebody, try to realize who their son or daughter—oh, yes, I'd look at their eyes and try to make a relationship between them. What's she doing wrong? Why did you fail her? Oh, not really.

So anyhow, that's how I wanted to start doing the workshops. I can give people as much information in a weekend as I can in a semester, basically. All the information they need to go on their own. But the parents loved it, I loved it, and it was good. It was good.

MS. RIEDEL: It was a way to build enthusiasm.

MR. REITZ: A way to build enthusiasm. I would talk at women's clubs; I would talk at lawyers' conventions. I would talk at FFA [Future Farmers of America]. Didn't matter. They wanted to know about art; I was going to talk about it, see. And I think that that really was good because it made things clear to me when I was talking, too. See what I mean? That's when the lecturing and so forth started, back in public schools.

Huntzinger and I, we would paint houses in the summertime, to make a living in the summer months. We were off in the summer, paint houses, like that. And then Brent, my son—my daughter was born in Dover, New Jersey, in the hospital. All of sudden I had two children. So I said, you know, if I'm going to do this clay thing—because we had a dirt basement. I dug a round hole in there and made my first kick wheel out of cement in the basement, throw—it was wobbly all over. When we got to Alfred, all the wheels were true, and I couldn't throw on the damned things.

So I got this old kiln, a crank, kerosene-fired kiln from an old pottery, and moved into this shed. Well, one night we were in bed, and I looked up at the window shade and said, why is it so yellow? Because I had burnt the whole damned thing down. So I said to Johanna, you know, if I'm going to do this, I've got to learn what I'm doing, because I don't know what I'm doing. So there's a place called Alfred, and I want to see if I can get into Alfred University. She said, well, how are you going to do that? I said, well, I'm going to go up for the summer and prove to them that I can do this. Because I had no—basically, you know, I was a schoolteacher—to go for an M.F.A.

So I said, okay; so I went up for the summer. And during that summer I fired every kiln they had. I was even—got so good at it, like Prof Merritt, who was in the engineering department, would let me fire his white-work kiln in reduction because he knew I knew what I was doing. I cleaned it back up. And I just took on it like that. And Val Cushing and Bob Turner and Dan Rhodes, you know, just wonderful, wonderful people. At that time at Alfred, you just worked day and night. Nothing was locked up. That's all everybody did, was work.

And it was there that I first found Leach, Dick Leach, an undersung hero in the ceramic world. He was—gave so much to so many people. And few people know of him, see. Do you know Dick Leach?

MS. RIEDEL: No, I don't.

MR. REITZ: There you are, see. He's from Albion, Michigan. He was sitting in the corner smoking his corncob pipe. I said, Dick, what are you doing? He said, I'm firing a salt kiln. I said, what the hell's a salt kiln? He said, well, sit down here, and I'll tell you about it. I said, okay, what do we do? First, well, we've got to drink this gallon of wine. Well, so far it's better than anything I've done, you know. So then we throw this stuff in there. Okay.

So I said, you know, Dick, if we're going to throw this stuff in there, we'd better do it pretty soon because I can just about see the opening of that damned hole. Just throw it in there. So I threw it in there. It came back, snap, crackle, pop. I said, smoke. All right! See, I love theater, see. I'm a showoff. I love that stuff, see. The drama. This is great. So we kept throwing the salt in. We used to put it in little bags in water at that time. So I had some left in the—he said, just throw it in. I had about that much water in the bucket. It goes, pa-boom, you know, and the two bricks fly out. He said, there you go; he said, we're finished. I said, okay. We all went back the next day, and there were stalagmites; the stalagmites were growing off the shelf from all the salt we put in. But I could see the potential.

Because up to—I'd better go back a little bit. I became very dissatisfied with glazing. After I made the form, I was through with it. I didn't want to do anything else to it. I mean, the making of it was important. It was like, as Voulkos's quote said, it was like having a bowel movement. Once you're done with it, it's over. And so I had a hard time bringing myself to glaze them because—and we would go to Prof Mayers's glaze class. To get a copper red at that time was a great, great achievement. Now it's on everybody's computer. So I had a bushel basket full of these shards, and I finally got this beautiful copper red, but I never had a pot that wanted me to put it on it. I never used the damned thing. Pots weren't about that. They're much more organic and so forth.

So I tried then just doing raw nothing on them. That didn't work either. Then I tried doing sigallatas [terra sigallata, a watery burnishing slip], because Rhodes is into sigallatas at that time, and so I did some sigallatas. And that was pretty good. Val told me there was an old kiln up in the hill, an old wood kiln. He said, why don't you see what that will do? So I went up there, and of course, it was sewer-tile brown. I must have got cone 7 or something, maybe 6, even, I don't know. But there was something there about the excitement of the fire that was very, very beautiful, but it still wasn't right.

Then when I came down and did the salt firing with Dick, I saw that the sodium revealed all my scars, and I began to love my scars. I mean, I even love my stretch marks. It doesn't matter, see. Scars [are] what makes us different, uniqueness. That's what makes us unique, our scars. That's what it is. It's not how perfect we are that makes us—you know what I mean? As soon as people conform, they're not interesting anymore. When they're following their own self, then they're interesting, then their art is interesting. But as soon as they become like everybody else—you know.

I think there are too many books out about how to do too many things, because younger people seem to take it verbatim that, yes, I should be doing this now because this is what's going, this is what's hot, this is what's in books, you know? You shouldn't give a damn what's in there. You look at the magazines and see what your friends are doing. That's cool, but what you're doing is the important thing, and it's very, very hard. How many artists are there anyhow? Not that many. I mean, if you get one a year as a teacher, that's a pretty good average. People are viewing from their heart. They're not afraid to go beyond, push the limits. That's why I got so mad at the craft museum when they took the word "horizons" out of the word "craft horizons" from the magazine. It's about horizons, pushing back, pushing the edge.

A lot of magazines now are picture books. Which is nice. I look at the pictures. But so many people take it that this is what they should be doing. I don't know how I got sidetracked on that. Oh, because I was supposed to write a book. Jack Troy, really a wonderful, wonderful man, Jack Troy, he said, Don, you've got to come out to the farm. Well, let's see, I'm getting ahead of myself, but I'll just go with Jack for a minute.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure. Sure.

MR. REITZ: Jack said, Don, you've got to put this stuff down you're doing in salt—in writing, I mean—for other people. You've got to do that. I said, okay. So I started to save little notes and put them in a shoebox. I would read them and think, well, that's not really true. That's possible. So I just wrote and told Jack, I said, Jack, here's all my notes, everything. If you want to do something, you write the book. I can't write the damned book. He said, well, okay, so I'll be a ghostwriter. I said, no, no, no. You write it. You write the book. He's such a wonderful man. And he got so knowledgeable about salt and wood. He really is very knowledgeable now.

And he wrote the book [*Salt-Glazed Ceramics*. New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1977], and he asked me to write the introduction. So if you read his salt-glazing book introduction, it says in there, basically, don't read any more books. It says, there are too many books, you see. Right, because what happens, it's like—what can I say; it's like a bumblebee: actually his body is too big for his wings. He should not be able to fly, but nobody told him, I guess.

And then you've got Charlie, and this came from Charlie, okay. He said, and I don't remember what our conversation was, but he said, even a turtle wouldn't go any place if he didn't stick his neck out, because they can't walk with their head in their shell. That stuck with me all these years. So you've got to get your neck out there, you know. Every time you get it cut off, that's okay. You grow another one. It's going to be okay.

Anyhow, then I went to Alfred, and I said to Val—I'll never forget, down in the kiln room—I said to Val, I know how to make some of these, but I really want to learn how to fire kilns. This was before firing in the kiln, basically. He said, all right. Well, I said, we're having a big beer party at the Ledges'. I know how to do that. You know, I don't know how to fire kilns. He said, okay, all this stuff on the table, put in there. Okay.

Now I drove for the Mayflower moving company, right. If I can put a house and a half in a trailer, I can put this little bitty pot in that damned box. So I started to put them in there. I packed it. It was beautiful. I mean, I had concave and convex and all. You couldn't have got a fly around because I'd touch the pot, and then I'd just pull it back a little hair, because I knew they were going to shrink anyhow. So I closed the door.

So Val came in, and he said, you've done it. I said, yup. He said, what'd you do with the others that were left over? I said, I didn't have any left over. That's a glaze kiln, Don, there. I said, I know that. How do I fire it? He said, turn those burners on; just go slow. You know, I said, I know that, okay. So I fired the first kiln. I had 10 down, front, back, top, bottom, beautiful. So I already knew how to fire. I just had to have somebody give me permission that I knew how to fire. It was kind of like dying. Sometimes you have to give people permission to let go, and then they go, you know. Some people hang on and hang on for some permission. I don't know how I got into that. I guess I'm dealing with some people at the hospice and that thing.

But anyhow, so that's how I started salt glazing, actually. And I could see that most of the salt, the salt was brown and sewer tile and gray. I said, well, I could add color with just using slips. So I'd use colored slips under the salt. Now I could put color in the salt as I was—sodium, carbonates, you know, cobalt, rutile, carbonates in the salt as I threw it in, and it would flash at the ware. I would take bricks, and for instance, I would paint a brick with cobalt carbonate, and I'd group all my pots around that brick, and they'd be blushed by the brick.

I would lay pots. And I noticed that what I really liked was the bottom side of the platters. Not the top sides. So I began firing my platters upside down, and that's exactly what you do in the wood kilns. There's not that much—there's a crossover that's very simple, going from salt, because the vapor, which is wood ash, to a wood kiln. See what I mean? And not knowing about the—what about the salt.

And then I became known for salt, and then I became known for—here I am king of salt almost. I'm on a salt-free diet. But anyhow. And so I got a lot of recognition introducing salt to people, and then I went over and did a salt workshop for—who publishes Perception magazine? Janet Mansfield.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. REITZ: And then she took over salt. We introduced salt. So I introduced salt. I'm very proud of that fact, that I have introduced color and salt to different parts of the world.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were really driven to do that because you wanted to embellish the surfaces of your pots, not cover them over with glazy effect.

MR. REITZ: Right. I wanted to see what I did. I didn't want to cover them.

MS. RIEDEL: No shiny glazes. That goes back to your roots, really, when you started painting in Abstract Expressionism, with that immediacy and gesture.

MR. REITZ: Yes. I know that, and one thing Dr. D was always critical [of], I left so much canvas showing. It seems that it's another texture; it's a color; what's wrong with that? But of course, they weren't into that at that time. The state teachers college is a little more conservative than the art schools in New York City and, you know, stuff like that. Abstract Expressionism was in, and, you know, people were there. We ended up putting rocks in and sand and holes and dragging students through it and making high art.

Then I was very fortunate—well, I'd met Dave Shaner there, which was one of my big things there at Alfred. He was such a kind, wonderful man. I mean, I think the best potter I knew was Dave Shaner at that time. And Wally Schwaba [ph]. Nobody knows of Wally Schwaba. He was at Alfred, and Wally Schwaba, one of the best—I have pots here by him I eat out of all the time. A potter's potter. There's potter's potters, and there's potters who are kind of potters, and so everybody—if you're going to make pots—I don't quite know how to say it, but he supported his wife and put two kids through college [with] three electric kilns. Yeah. And of course, at that time—okay. I'm getting ahead of myself here. I think I am.

Well, anyhow, I'm at Alfred, okay, and so I'm really pretty damned good. I'll never forget one thing I thought

was, when you think you're pretty good, pretty soon you get shot down. I wanted to throw bigger stuff. So I said, Val—I'm a year older than Val. That's the only thing I had over Val. He was the kindest man, really wonderful instructor. I mean, he took every student like he was the only one he had. Just a wonderful man. Still is; a wonderful potter, too.

So Val says—I said to him, I want to throw bigger stuff, you know. So he said, watch what I'm doing. So I would throw, and pretty soon the damned thing would collapse. He said, Don, want to throw bigger things? You need more clay. Well, I'll be goddamned, it's so simple. Right. So then I started throwing bigger, and we had to rent a wheel, which had a seat. It was a kick wheel, you know, kick wheel. And it had a motor on it. So I would stand on the seat, and Sue Kim would kick the wheel, and I would make these big forms. And she would put the motor on. Or somebody else was around, but Sue Kim, she was a wonderful—still is, I expect, a wonderful, wonderful person. And we were very close together.

Well, in between this time Johanna and the kids all came. We lived in a barracks, because they had these barracks for people, you know. There was like eight families on top, eight on the bottom. They were army barracks. And you had a plywood wall between your houses. I mean, de Gangey's [ph] bed was next to that wall, and my bed was next to his wall, and it was like four of us sleeping in a bed. I looked at him and said, de Gangey, quit it. Quit it. It was kind of embarrassing at times, you see. But they had it—your fire escape was a rope you threw out the window, you see, and that's how you were supposed to go down it.

That's where I met Joel Meyers, the glassware Joel Meyers, who was a student with me, or at the same time. And Beata [ph], his wife, Beata, who's Scandinavian. Wonderful, wonderful girl. Good potter. Also a good potter. She taught—because we had no money, none of us, you know. So she would go, and we could get something, welfare stamps or something, and the government would give us butter, lard, and oatmeal and peanut butter, like that. Once a week we'd make a speed run to Hormel or someplace like that. And she showed everybody how to cook with lard, and it was really great.

I never forget, we'd have like a six-pack of beer—we never had money—and we all, about 12 of us, would share this six-pack, you know. Sit around. I'd go shoot something in the woods, and that way we had meat. Everybody would share the meat. It was really—Stan Zelinski, Gordon Barnes, there at the time, like that. And a lot of good people—a lot of good people. There was so much energy. Geez, it was—just really great. Anyhow, I did the Alfred thing.

And then the glass, Harvey Littleton and [Dominick] Nick Labino were talking about starting a glass renaissance at that time, Nick Labino from Pittsburgh [PA].

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: So he wanted somebody, Harvey did, to come out and take over ceramics so he could go full-time with glass. So called up Dan Rose, and Dan says, well, Reitz is a mature person, and I think he could handle it. I really think he could handle it. So okay, send him out. So I went out to interview—[aside]—what's going on?

MS. RIEDEL: I don't know, something about the generator. Everything seems to—

MR. REITZ: It's okay, there?

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

MR. REITZ: Well, that's okay. So, yes, where was I?

MS. RIEDEL: You were going out to Madison [University of Wisconsin].

MR. REITZ: Madison, right. So Harvey called me to come interview at Detroit [MI], because he and Nick Labino were having a meeting. So I met Nick Labino, and they were talking about the glass. Wow, that's fascinating, fascinating. So Harvey said—no, before that. Before that. I said, sure, I'd like to come out, Harvey, I'd like to come out. So I went home, told Johanna. Well, where's Madison? I don't know, it's way out west.

So I went way out west, and—well, it's not that far west, but it's out of here, and it's good, see. Okay. So she said, all right. How much are they going to pay? I said, I don't know. Does it matter? We have nothing now. It couldn't more bad, you know. So I'll never forget, she said, okay. So I went out and interviewed, and Harvey and Nick Labino, and he told me what they were going to do. And Harvey said, so my starting salary was $4,000, at Madison, $4,000. So we loaded up the kids in the Pontiac station wagon. I'll never forget, went in the gas station, and I said—I went in, and I bought a couple of bags of chips. Here you are, kids, see that? I never even asked how much they were. I thought, oh, my God, we were so broke. So we went all the way out, the kids in the car, and went to Madison.

MS. RIEDEL: And you also—at this time you had to decide between Madison and Archie Bray [Foundation, Helena, MT], wasn't that true?

MR. REITZ: Right, right. Because I was going to go out and work with David [at] Archie Bray. David came through while I was still—because he was in Illinois, teaching in Illinois at that time. He took a teaching job in Illinois, and he came back through to go to Archie Bray, to take over at Archie Bray. And he stopped, and so we had the evening together. He said, Don, he said, I've found out something. He said, you know, you can either pot and pump gas, you can pot and deliver papers, or you can just make pots. And I'm just going to make pots. That's why I'm going to Archie Bray, so why don't you come out? I said, okay, I'll come out.

Yes, this is very bad because, you see, my wife, we had to have security, you know what I mean? Johanna's a wonderful woman, and she's correct.

MS. RIEDEL: You had two small children.

MR. REITZ: Yes. So I can tell her—she's, look, it's September, and you don't have a job yet. I said, wait, I have all the people out there looking for this teaching job, and all the time I'm going to Archie Bray. I was lying. This terrible thing to do. And so, by God, they called me up. And I come home; I said, you know that guy? I got a teaching job. You're kidding me? No, no, I got a teaching job. I told you I was going to get a teaching job. I decided to take it for a year. Satisfy everybody. Then I'll go to Archie Bray.

Once we got to Madison, we found it was such a progressive school. I didn't realize that about Madison. Very politically progressive as hell. And the art—everybody, the painters, the sculptors, the printmakers, everybody were active, producing artists. You only taught three days a week. The rest of the time you were supposed to be doing your own work, and your work gave you authority to teach. That's why I stayed there for then 26 years, you see.

Everybody did art fairs at that time. You know, John Willoughby, everybody, myself, would do art fairs, because you go to Old Town/Gold Coast in Chicago [IL], do an art fair for a weekend—and they were selling—sculptors. Nobody went for the clown faces and balloons and stuff. They went to look at art, okay. And I would go to Bonawell Art Fair, Gold Coast Art Fair, and Milwaukee Lake Front Art Fair, and I would probably make my—almost double my year's salary in a summer, and I would only go to maybe eight art fairs.

MS. RIEDEL: And sell your pots.

MR. REITZ: Absolutely, sell my pots. Exactly right. And I'd sell the pots.

I thought, we got a formula at Alfred, okay. Throw a silver 10 inches high, okay, so it's 10 inches by four inches, gives you 40 inches, and you divide it by 10, which gives you four dollars. I don't know, it was some kind of formula.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: So I figured, so I thought, this is a little bit too lenient. I'd sell big pitchers for like three dollars, you know; nice covered jars would be maybe six dollars, seven dollars. So one time I—and I loved it because of all these people, you know, and I loved to watch and to—Kathleen can tell you. A beautiful form walking by is something to watch. It's beautiful. It's like looking at the National Geographics. I like to see places I'll never visit, you know what I mean? It's kind of like Playboy magazine. And the art fairs are that way, see. I love the people.

And so this lady came—I won a prize at the art fair in Chicago—Milwaukee [WI]—fair, big covered jar. For me at that time it was a big jar. So she came, I was watching her all—the whole day walking by, cowboy hat; she had on boots, looked like Justin boots, you know—at the time they were big boots—and she had leather britches; she walked by. And she came by, and she said, how much is that pot? Well, it's $110. Right now it would be—and she said, well, isn't that a lot of money? I said, well, I don't know. She said, how do people afford your work? I said, well, how do you afford the Bailey hat, Justin boots, leather pants? She said, I saved the money. I said, there you go. I'll be here next year. Right. And that's what it was.

I used to love to make these little jars that came up like this, had a little spout on the lid. I called them "refrigerator jars," because they fit in the refrigerator, and you put milk, fruit juice, something. This one lady would come every year; she'd buy almost a dozen every year. And after the second year I said, you know, what are you doing? She says, I put brandied fruit down in them and give them for Christmas presents. What a great idea.

Okay, we've got to go way back now when I was at public school making pots in my basement. I never, and this is true, made a pot for anybody else but me. Never. I was just fortunate other people liked my work, and they bought it. I never had to go to somebody else for ideas. Ideas are very difficult sometimes. Ideals are simpler

and easy. But I never had to do that. I just would experiment, always experiment.

MS. RIEDEL: A lot of your inspiration came from experimenting.

MR. REITZ: Absolutely. It was the experiment that was important. It was a chance factor, and I still live my life that way. The chance. And even when you open up a kiln, to this day, it may be in there. You don't want it to be because there's no place to go after—if you find it, you only go downhill from there. But it may be in there. So it's always open, surprise, surprise, surprise. People ask, well, how do I think about this? People say, well—I go to lectures—they say, well, Don, how do you know if it's any good or not? I said, would I work on something that's bad all day? I mean, I know better than that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: See, I don't care what you think. I don't care what the world thinks, you see? This is only for me, don't you see? It's my thing. It's not your thing, you know. So that's the way you have to think. That's what art is about. It's about your own expression. You're not like everybody else, you see?

MS. RIEDEL: You've talked about the object as being secondary to that process.

MR. REITZ: Absolutely. The object is secondary. It's the result of experimentation, of thinking. Not—actually not so much thinking. Intuitive thinking, I guess you might call it. Drawing from that past, that wealth. And see, that's what I tell young people today. Get a past. Don't live off somebody else's all the time. And get out of school. Now, would you believe, kids are in seventh grade, they go to France for a vacation. I mean, it's unbelievable, their possibilities they have. Go someplace; get some knowledge, you know?

But what are they doing with it? I don't know quite how to put it. There are so many good people out there. There really are. I mean, they're really, really good people. But because there are so many more of us, there's so many bad people—that's a very subjective, very biased, very prejudiced—that's what my art is.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about the importance of ideas—if you have an idea, work with it. And if you don't have an idea, it's not the time to be working.

MR. REITZ: Right. If you have nothing to say, don't talk. Just wait until you have something to say. Then say something, you see. I judged a show at Colorado. It was a multimedia show, which I really loved, because that time we delivered work to a warehouse, and jurors could pick it up and handle it, feel it, smell it, whatever. You didn't look at slides. It was not heard of, to look at a slide. So anyhow, we go there—and it was multimedia. Fiber, clay, metal, some leather.

So I said, the only way I'll do this show is if you invite the public to come while I'm jurying it, because I'll talk to the janitor if nobody else is there. I have to hear it and come back to what I'm thinking somehow, you know what I mean? And I'm good in front of an audience. I'm a show-off. I'm a goddamned performer. I know I am. That's okay. And so they said, okay. So [Paul] Soldner said, you're nuts, man. You're going to have 30 frustrated people there. And I did. I said, no, no, I'm not. I'm tired of this information—they don't know why it wasn't accepted. If it's accepted, they know the juror liked it, but why wasn't it? Which is more important than why it was accepted, you see. So I'd go to some clay, talk about this, talk about that; they could see. And go to a piece of fiber, then I'd go to some metal, go back to clay. Because it all has to be the same set of aesthetic values, which is your own personal likes.

Well, anyhow, unbeknownst to me, the lady who was going behind me, the secretary, [was] writing down what I said and put a piece [of paper] in every pot, every juried thing, why it was not accepted, which is the—and that happened to me—this is funny—when I was a student.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Bob Turner.

MR. REITZ: Bob Turner. Exactly right. He said, Don, why don't you put things on this clothesline show at Rochester? I said, oh, okay. So I went to the kitchen and took this cookie jar I had and put it in the show. And it came back. And there was a note in it. It said, Don, you're a hell of a craftsman. See, that wasn't enough. He said, by the way, thanks for the cookies. [Laughs.] There was still cookies in it, you see. It's because I'd never made anything for a show.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: My graduate students never worked for a graduate show. I said, you don't work for a show. You do work, and when it comes time for a show, just go to the studio and take something, whatever you have out of there, and put it in the show. If you do, I'll fail you.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: That's ridiculous, to work for a show.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd like to talk for just a minute about the cookie jar, and the back and forth that you've had—really from the beginning, from Alfred or before—between the functional and the sculptural, and how that works for you.

MR. REITZ: Well, I don't make that separation, you see. Part of function is artistic. How did you phrase that—the function and the—

MS. RIEDEL: The sculptural.

MR. REITZ: Sculptural, right. Thank you very much. They are sculptural. It has volume in it; it has mass; it has density. I mean, it's a piece of sculpture. Look at a teapot. Right now, if I see another teapot show, I'm going to throw up. Jesus, how many times can you rip off the teapots? But the cookie jars, the casserole. All right, for example, I said to myself, for, say, a casserole, I say, why does the foot always have to be under the casserole? Why can't the foot be outside of the casserole? That's what my columns are about right now.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. REITZ: I put it out there, and just the casserole got bigger. See? Why does the handle always have to be pulled? Why can't we squish it, squish it? Why do you have to do this? And these forms that I make with the wide rim, I'm just going to take the bowl and change the relationship. I'm going to make the rim important and the bowl secondary. That meant small bowl, large rim. Then I started to cut them out. Boy, I like that cutout. Then I started to work with crescent shapes. You cut out both sides, you've got three crescent shapes going. So then they were just sort of cut.

So then I said, well, I don't like that, so this is when broccoli [ph] came in, you know. I started filling them up with stuff, that crescent shape, so to get off from the knife edge. And that's when the broccoli starts to go over the glory bowls and all this stuff. I have all this broccoli. It took over the world. After a bit I began to pull a handle. I do a workshop, and the big thing people say is, Don, I don't know when they're going to quit pulling handles like yours.

Well, I'm doing a workshop—this is digressing, I might say, but I was doing a workshop in Australia, Adelaide, very straightlaced. And the Australian teacher is a wonderful man, but I mean, strict. I realized that they're still doing English pottery in Australia. I mean, they came over to Australia, but they're still going back to the roots. Which is okay, but it's not exciting anymore. You think that—because the country is so exciting. Look at Sydney. It's just wild. Love the thing.

So anyhow, so I said, okay, I'd do a workshop. So I said, I want you, you, and you. You fill that door, you fill that door, you fill the handles, right. You cover these chairs with clay, the whole thing. You cover these tables with clay. Had the whole shop—it was so beautiful. Everything in the shop was covered with clay. Like the chairs were clay chairs. Oh, I was so happy. It was just—oh, man. The kids—because I wanted to show that clay is something else than just this, you know. So the guy came in, the teacher is, really—well, Don, he said, I want to thank you for the wonderful workshop. It will probably take me months to get them back to where they ought to be. I said, okay. I did my best, you know.

But the sculptural aspects of clay, of pottery, I've never made a separation between them. That's what made my pots unique to me, the sculptural quality of them. I have a hard time talking about my own work sometimes, but the relationship of handles and relationship of—I think of a handle as something to hold on to, pick something up with.

Okay, one assignment—I very seldom gave assignments in school. But one assignment I would give, I would say, all right, I want you to make a unit which is hollow; you can fill it full of fluid and transport it to your mouth and drink from it. Now if I'd told them make cups, I know exactly what they would make. But this way they came [up with] all kinds of weird and crazy stuff. When I saw the graduates were sitting on their laurels and that stuff—first of all, when I went there, Harvey had all these overstuffed chairs and all that stuff. I threw them all out, because you don't have time to sit down in shop. Well, they had effigies of me and pins with voodoo dolls and everything. I said, no, no. You take responsibility for—don't kill the god. It's you. You're the one that's screwing up. So we came to love each other after a bit. We got very, very, very close.

But you know, there was a certain point where you can't cross as an instructor. You're still in charge. You can't become one of [them]. Parents try to be the best friend to your daughter. You can't be that. You know what I mean? That's kind of hard to say in a way, but, yeah. Anyhow, you're still the instructor, but you're very close. So when I find them kind of flattening out, I gave this one thing. I gave them each—I think it was two or three pounds of white flour clay. I said, okay, I want each one of you to take this and see who can make—and I used these words, which I didn't realize at the time—who can make it go the furthest. So I think it was [Ray] Ahlgren,

who now is very big in glass, was rolling out this huge coil up the hall. He had eight people working on this coil going up the hall. I said, okay, that's cool.

Then—Finnegan. Great painter now. God, he does great painting and sculpture. Finnegan, Jim. He made it into slurry and painted a line all the way around the school building, all the way around. That's cool. So they're doing things—so then—and I can't remember her name, I'm sorry. She was the most inventive one of all. She had—every day something was different in her studio. Her mind was so great. I don't know why I can't remember her name. She clearly dropped out of sight, actually, in the art world. She went to something else, I assume. Anyhow, she said, you have to all get in your car; we're going up to La Crosse [WI], on the Mississippi River. So I said, okay, so we went to the Mississippi River. She made it into a slurry, and she poured it in the Mississippi River. It went the furthest, right? That's stretching your mind. That's making your mind work.

And I'll say, do that in your studio, goddam it, you know. Don't sit there—and I don't want anybody telling me what you're going to do. You show me what you're doing. See, I never give advice. It's wasted. Advice is wasted, see. We talk about things. Who follows advice? I don't follow advice. Why would they? It's very wasted time. I had a rule: you never say, "I'm going to," to me. Ever. Show me what you did, and we'll talk about it. Tell me when you're done. I'm not going to tell you. How do I know what you're thinking in the process of making this, you know?

Let's talk about things, and so forth, but I don't have to talk about it while you're doing it. Your responsibility, not my responsibility.

And what's happened is that because of the pay system they have at the university systems, you're judged on your students, what's in the [display] cases. Well, so a lot of people come down giving you glazes that work. This worked; this won't work. There wasn't a glaze that worked in my shop. I had these crocks of clays; said, you want to use this crap, that's okay with me. Use it. But if you want to know how to make a glaze, come to me, ask me. But if you want to keep that vase, fine. And enough of them came by, I said, okay, I'm going to teach you about glazes today, this week, and we're going to talk about glazing. Well, until readiness occurs, until the need for them to know occurs, no teaching helps, you see. It has to be there.

So I used to give—graphic example. I was doing—talking about the glazing. I was doing a glaze, and I just gave it by look; I said, okay, this column, things melt. This column, doesn't melt. This column makes it stay on the pot where the glaze is. I want you to take base clays of anybody's glaze you like, then work on it, and pretty soon you—ball clay tastes sweet. I don't want you to do this, but it does. Okay, and so anyhow, I walk in in the morning, and I'm going to have the glaze class, and I go in the kiln room. And this little guy, wiry guy, he used to be a tennis wacko. And I said to him, I said, what are you doing? He said, I'm painting the kiln wash on these shelves. I said, where did you get that? I said, are you sure it's—yeah, yeah, it's kiln wash. It says right here on the lid.

You never put anything on a lid, you see. So I said, oh, it's kiln wash. Yeah, yeah. I'm going to surprise everybody, he said. Umm, okay. I looked at him, okay. So I went out and did my lecture, and I taught the class. And I said, now I want you to do me a favor. You know, I never ask you to do anything I wouldn't do, or frivolous stuff, do you agree with me? They all said yes. Okay. I want you here—I think it was Wednesday or Thursday morning—eight o'clock, we're going to load a kiln. Okay, they all came. Okay—I can't even think of his name. Open your kiln up. So he opened his kiln. Everything stuck. It was glazed, of course. And it had all stuck. So everybody—I said, no, wait, wait, wait. I'm going to teach you how to grind shelves. There's an object lesson. There you are. You never use anything [that] you don't know [what] it is. Throw it out. You put no names on lids. They go on the—these are object lessons, you see.

But I had—see, I'm not stupid. It was that much kiln wash on the shelves already. I don't want to wipe out an $80 kiln shelf. So they chipped, and they ground them, and they were moaning, but I'll bet you nobody after that did anything but read what they were putting on their kiln shelf.

Now one time [when] I was giving a lecture, I was trying to get across about volume. So I picked up a wastebasket and put it on my head, and I did the whole lecture inside this wastebasket. Well, nobody forgot that, see? You have to do some crazy stuff. That's what they'll remember.

MS. RIEDEL: It goes back to the theater.

MR. REITZ: You have to get them off center, okay. And people, by the way, going at that, teaching is so much of a responsibility. We try to teach art, which is very private, very personal, and [in a] very public place; very hard to do when you're teaching to the masses; and everyone is an individual, so it's very hard to do.

So I would watch the first day of class; I would watch them, what they would do. They would be on the wheel. I'd say, you have 20 minutes to clean up. Can you do it in 20 minutes? Tomorrow we do 10 minutes, whatever, to clean up. So you know, that wheel's going around and everything. I forget her name, but she was there,

freshman, and she was cleaning the wheel; it was going around, making this beautiful design. She was centered that way, see? She was centered that way. Greg, the guy's name is Greg. Here's Greg over there—[makes sound effects]—wiping it all. He's also centered, but that way. You have to see where everyone's center is [so] that you can make their learning effective, so it means something to them, you see what I mean? You have to handle it a lot differently.

I must say, one of the biggest—I don't know if you call it enjoyments or proud of—is my students, that complete faith in me, in the privacy we had with each other. They knew—I became a surrogate father. We all do. But they knew they could come to me with anything. They're away from home, you know? We went from pregnancy to dope to whatever, and it stayed with me. You've got to have someone to talk to sometimes. You don't have to solve anything, but you can talk about it, and it's out there. And that was one of the biggest rewards of teaching at the university level that happened.

In public school I loved to work with preschoolers and kindergarteners and first graders. After that they're kind of lost, but they are not afraid. They just go forward. If I could only put that in a jar and give it back to you when you're 15, 13. If you live to be 14, you know. Somehow we have this problem of now everybody doesn't talk to anybody. We have Internet, these Palm Pilot—not Palm, but pictures in telephones and pictures on video. You're talking to not real, live people anymore. And it's really very disturbing to me because I would say, get rid of the damned things and go to [the] country and visit what you're talking about. Do something like that. We're so impersonal. We don't look around. We don't see what's around us. This is a very general statement, of course it is.

But thinking about general statements, going back to the show at Colorado, and I'm jurying the show. So after the show I said, I don't want anybody to talk to me or ask me questions. After the jurying, at the party you can ask me, but I don't want to break my—everybody said, okay, fine. And they did. They were really, really, really good. Went through the whole thing, fiber, silverware, da, da. So the party that night, this one lady goes, Don, I want to tell you something. Said, you threw [out] every one of my—I said, sorry. No, [she said,] I learned more that day than I have since—in a year or two. I said, oh, good, thank God. I mean, she could have—she was like—built like a brown belt or something.

And this one lady came up to me, was a little bit perturbed, and she said, aren't your judgments very biased? And I said, absolutely. My judgments are very biased, very personal, very prejudiced. Absolutely. That's why you hired me.

And, oh, I know one thing I left out. You know Paolo Soleri.

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. REITZ: Arcosanti [AZ].

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. REITZ: Okay. I never heard of them, see. So I'm jurying the show, and there are these bells there. And they were bad, so I said they were bad bells; everybody said, oh, you have to put them in. Why do I have to put them in? Because they're Paolo Soleri's. Well, I don't know Paolo Soleri. They're bad bells, and they don't go in. They said, you have to. You put the bells in, and it's your show. I quit. See, I don't care. It's up to you. They're bad. I will not—the show becomes a critique of me, the level of this show. I mean, it can be fiber, metal, but it's all the same level of whatever. They said, okay.

So I'll bet you it was two years later; I'm down at the Corcoran [School of Art and Design, Washington, DC]. I went down to do a workshop at the Corcoran. And I went into the Corcoran [Gallery of Art]—Paolo Soleri had a show on; it was an environmental thing. I walked into this show. This can't be the same guy. Can't be the same guy. He came up to me; you're Don Reitz, right? Yes. He said, you threw my bells out—he remembered it. I said, oh, my God, no, no. They were a student—nevermind. They were terrible. It was good, and we talked for a long time, explained about his theory of environment and how cities could be contained. Man, he's a genius. God, he's a genius. It was really an eye-opener. It was really funny how these things, your paths keep crossing with people and stuff like that.

Even in the service, okay, we're in Naples [Italy], or Monte Carlo [Monaco]. My buddy and I are walking down the street, a little bit looped up, and this guy pulls up with a driver in a convertible. Hey, serras, want to go to a wedding? We say, well, yeah, we'll go to a wedding. Know whose wedding it was? Errol Flynn. Errol Flynn's wedding. One of his weddings. I spent a wedding, about two days total, who knows. So we just went to his wedding.

And another thing is, I told you I used to drive a stock car down at Bird Lake, New Jersey. There's a bar on the way back from there we go into. Its two crazy bartenders are absolutely nuts. They were cut, tied; they were

crazy. They were Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin. And then, aboard ship, Blackie Fernando was one of the—you could tell who we were, Blackie Fernando, Rick Shaw, bad people; we're divers. You had to be tough to be a diver, man. You did. To get through diving school, you had to be really hard. So anyhow, nobody messed with us. That was the main thing aboard shore.

So Blackie, when we were in Naples, Blackie would go off by himself, and me and Rick Shaw said, I wonder where the hell Blackie goes? We don't know. So we follow him. He went to this orphanage, and he would play with the kids in this orphanage. My God. We had to do something for Blackie, but we can't tell him we know that he's got this orphanage. And so we said, okay, let's throw a party for the orphanage, have it aboard ship. Talked to the captain, had it on board ship. This would be good public relationship. We'll put on our diving suits, we'll go down, and we'll plant a lot of toys on the bottom, and we'll bring toys up. Great idea. So we did that, and the captain said great. Because you—after you guys visit this port, we need some good relationships. Said, fine, this is good.

So we invited them over. We told Blackie. We said, you know, Blackie, we found out—there's this orphanage in town. He said, yeah. Well, what do you think, we can invite them over. And so far he said, well, that seems like a good idea. He never, to this day, didn't know we followed him to this orphanage, see. So all these kids came on board ship, and we're in our hardhat suits, and they lower us down over the side, then we have toys that [we] give them.

So when we come back to New York, they put Blackie Fernando, Rick Shaw, and I on the Dave Garroway Show, one of the very early talk shows before—The Dave Garroway Show. So I was on television for the first time in my life—and you know, and my mom, she loved to cook. If you ate, you're a good person. I could bring home—and I used to bring home—some of the worst sailors you could imagine, and they ate. Now he's a good boy.

My mom—I said right, Mom. Mom keeps coming back to me. Sometimes when I cook, especially if I'm breaking beans, my hands become Mom, just for an instant like that. Or sometimes when I'm out in clay, all of a sudden my hands will be Dad, just like that. I don't know what that's about, but it's a wonderful feeling, a wonderful feeling, you know, it's a wonderful energy feeling for me. But I'm digressing now.

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all.

MR. REITZ: But it is—it is—I almost said that it has been. I mean, it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Up until this point.

MR. REITZ: That's it. Interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems you've always learned from doing. I'm wondering how that's impacted your teaching philosophy.

MR. REITZ: Well, you know, it's interesting, to go back a little bit. When I first came in 1960, Bill Brown, Jane Brown had started Penland [School of Crafts, Penland, NC; Bill Brown became director of Penland in 1962; founder Lucy Morgan was director 1929-62]—actually, Francis [and Priscilla Merritt] from—what's that name, up at Deer Island [Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME]—he actually—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: Right, and then Bill Brown and Jane came. So then all of us were—Fred Fenster and I, Skip Johnson, we'd all go to—

MS. RIEDEL: You started going there in '63, I think.

MR. REITZ: Was it '63? Something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: For 20 years you did workshops there.

MR. REITZ: So we'd go every summer. And Bill was the greatest guy, you know, and Jane. Jane had done this survey, wonderful lady, of dyslexia people. She found, I think it was like 76—something like that—percent of all craftspeople who come there have some sense of dyslexia, because we learn by doing. We don't learn by the book. For me to get through a book, I—to this day, I don't read. I listen to books on tape, or I—oh, I'll read something, but it takes me forever to get through a—and then I have to figure out what the hell I just read, you know. It's very difficult.

Although I must say, Rick Pope, one of my students, he said, look, Reitz, he said, you're supposed to be our professor. So they gave me a briefcase to carry. I used to go with a brown bag aboard the plane. He said, besides, you're supposed to be reading. Rick said, I want you to read this book. You can do it. Okay. So it was

[Richard] Brautigan, Trout Fishing in America [San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation; distributed by City Light Books, 1967]. And I understood every word. He's just as nuts as I am. And he wrote the way I think. So I read the whole thing. It was beautiful. It was great.

So then Rick says, I've got another one for you, right, called Zen and the Art of Motorcycle [Maintenance] [Robert Pirsig. New York: Morrow, 1974]. I could not understand. It was so far out. I went three pages, said, that's it. So I have a very hard time. Most dyslexic people do. Even to this day, when we just went into the restrooms, "Men" is the little word, "Women" is the big word. Go to the little word, see. Now, that all depends, because sometimes they say—

MS. RIEDEL: "Damas" and "Caballeros."

MR. REITZ: Right. See, or they'll say "Gentlemen." I look for a small word, and I always look—I mean, you learn to do that, see. And so dyslexia has been a gift, actually, in a way because I had to learn by doing, by touching and feeling.

And my teaching has always been that way. You have to get your hands in this. You have to do it. I don't care what you do. Just get in there. Just get the slurry and draw half circles with the palm of your hand. Just get slurry all over your hands and see what clay, whatever, you know. But you have to learn by doing, by touching.

I don't care if it's successful or not. It may seem successful to you. To me, I'm not judging your work. I don't know if it's good or bad, or what effect it will have on the cosmos or the universe. How do we know? All we know is what we like. We can only—well, I said it down in Chavez. For me, aesthetics boil down to a very simple thing. It's a very emotional thing. To me, it has nothing to do with the golden triangle or the ultimate principles of design or any of that. It has to do with, how did it affect you? What was the effect on you? So all I can do when I judge something is know how it affected me, the effect that it's had upon me. I don't know how it will last in the history of time, and I don't really care, to be honest. It's like Henry Miller said, what do I care if I'm dead? I'm out of here.

I have a great tape. I taped [it] in 1962, down in my cellar. It was right when the Tropic of Cancer [Henry Miller. New York: Grove Press, 1961] came out. There was a lady who was an interviewer from Minneapolis [MN], and she was so—she didn't know from what. So she had Henry Miller, and he was wonderful to listen to. He was wonderful to listen to. And that's where I think I got a lot of my, maybe at that time, thinking about aesthetics. No, it was before that. But he reinforced. Everything he said in 1962—[phone rings]—is exactly what it should be.

MS. RIEDEL: That was just the phone ringing. Okay, but we can't remember what we were talking about.

MR. REITZ: It must have been really important, I know that.

MS. RIEDEL: So we thought we'd start up again with the importance of giving oneself problems. You've said in the past that you have such facility as a craftsman that sometimes it got in the way of the art, and so since—

MR. REITZ: Comes through, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And that you like to give yourself problems as a way around that. And we were just looking at the platter, the last one you made.

MR. REITZ: I want to go back just a minute because the whole thing of having too much facility, it gets in the way so often. Let's just take clay as one general place. That the person who has the great facility with the wheel, right away to start with, you know. I was fortunate. I never had a time I couldn't center. Because he didn't tell me it was hard to do. You know, didn't tell me it was hard to do, that it was impossible.

But once, who was—it was Ray Ahlgren, who now is Bullseye, or had Bullseye Glass [Company, cofounded with Daniel Schwoerer and Boyce Lundstrom] in Portland, Oregon. But anyhow, he could throw like—oh, God. He could throw stuff that's paper thin like it was nothing.

It was how I did it. It's like, can't you see? And art has nothing to—it's not like the Olympics. There's no degree of difficulty here. See, it doesn't matter if you hollow it out with a spoon. I don't care. It's easier on a wheel, you know. But to make a judgment on—and to hope that people can see how hard it was to do, or how simply you did this thing which was so hard, that—the thin cross-section, that has nothing to do with it. Unless the thin cross-section has something to do with the object that you're making visually, you see? This is my opinion, of course.

And so I think without struggle—this is important to me. Without struggle, we don't really see potential, because when we have this great facility right away, we don't search for anything else. We just go on with it, and when

you don't have the facility right away, and you try to get it, you find different ways. Different ways of holding your hands, different wetness of clay, different da, da, da. This is part of the body of knowledge which you're gaining to put back in your head that you'll draw on one day, see? And so if you start out with it, it was so good you did this, and you did exploring. So without difficulty, I don't think there's much advancement, actually, to be truthful with you.

There are always exceptions to the rule, but education and learning is a very—well, teaching doesn't work unless readiness is there from the person to learn. And to have that happen, you have to create the environment in which a student becomes ready without them knowing it, you might say. You have to lead up to that. To teach facts and dates and so forth is like—I would sit in on the art history lectures in Wisconsin that Warren Moon taught. He was good. He was good. And he taught history, paintings, what was going on in politics, in the arts, at the time this painting was done. It made sense that that's why the painting was like it was, you know. It was like, oh, of course, I see that now, you see.

And so this thing of teaching—it's even hard to talk about sometimes, but yet it's so simple. Letting people be themselves, giving encouragement, helping them out of some difficulties now and then, but not guiding their emotions, not guiding their—their abilities, you know, letting them find themselves. Letting them make mistakes, you see? Because their mistakes are simply their side of success. So without those mistakes you don't really learn a hell of a lot, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: It reminds me that one of the kilns you fired really early on, in the early '60s. It was right by a ditch, and it got flooded during the firing.

MR. REITZ: That was an interesting thing.

MS. RIEDEL: But instead of—you thought that was really interesting rather than a disaster.

MR. REITZ: Right. Right. What happened was, when I first moved to Verona when I came to Wisconsin, we lived in this little bitty house, and I had no studio, but there was a coal bed in it. So I cleaned out and whitewashed this coal bed, you know, small coal bed, and put a mirror in, big mirror, to make it look bigger. And I would throw in there—sometimes I had to turn the piece on its side to get it out of the pit—the bowl, used to throw big bowls. And so I built this kiln. And I saw in the back of the property there was this ditch. I said, well, hell, I can build this kiln on the end of the ditch, and I can stand in the ditch and load the kiln. That made sense to me.

So I built the kiln on the edge of the ditch, and it was all built, and we started a monsoon. It started raining. All of a sudden I realized it was a drainage ditch for the town, and I had the kiln going, see. And I remember the thunder and the lightning was coming down. I was out there with these—holding my burners up by hand out of the water, saying just one more, a little bit more, come on, a little more. The steam was coming off the kiln, the steam was coming—the water was going through the bottom.

And finally what I did, I think I got cone 9, about, I'm not quite sure, but I said, well, whatever. We'll just, you know. So next day I went out and opened it up. My God, it was beautiful. There was just, like, elephants'—beautiful—smooth skin on things, and because of the steam, and all of a sudden it occurred to me, that's what the engineers were talking about at Alfred. Why don't you put moisture in your kiln to create crystals, see? All of a sudden, right.

That's when I started to throw water. It's very dangerous to do. You have to watch what you're doing. And that's why wetting salt is so much better than just dry salt. The water—naturally, the water helped flow the crystals apart and make it smaller, not denser. But it's the atmosphere. So I would—wet snow, you know, whatever, get moisture in that kiln.

Then it went from that. I saw that affected things, that is—yes, okay. Now I remember. That's when I began introducing carbonates and things into the water that I threw into the kiln, that colored, like, one side. It was, throw one, flash that side. So this seemingly being a disaster turned out to be very important to my career, right, and pushing it.

And I began then—I took the door down quite early because it's gone anyhow, see—but I saw what happened, see. Taking the door down—that quick re-oxidized and brought that brilliance of the glass up to snuff.

So I began taking—as soon as I quit firing, I would take the arch completely out of my kiln. This is very dangerous, so be careful because the box has pressure. That flame comes out; it will burn the hell out of you. So I'm not advising you to do this, but I would take the arch out of my kiln, then I close the damper and cool it right down. And I never had, pardon me, any breakage. I think breakage occurred when it's cool, hot, cool, cool, cool. I think, not really sure about it. But, I didn't have breakage.

Matter of fact, one time we're up at Penland, and Warren MacKenzie was there, and we're all doing—I forget who

the weavers were and so forth. I almost went into weaving at one time, but it was too laborious. Anyhow, and so MacKenzie said, come on, Don, fire this kiln. You brag about throwing, getting water in your kiln. Let's take that door down right now. So I said, all right. We took the door out, and we threw all the pots in the snow. Never lost a damned pot. It was the amazingest [sic] thing ever. So I don't know what—but just throwing caution to the wind and taking those chances is what I hope my students would do.

See, I'm not grading you. When you come into my class, the first thing I give you is an A, okay. If that's what you came here for; you got it, now get out. Want to stay and work? We'll work. But I give all As. And Harvey was just—he'd say, you can't do that; you can't do that. I said, Harvey, it's the smartest class I ever had. He said, you cannot. I said, Harvey, there's one thing that we still have as professor. You can't change a grade; the dean can't change a grade; the board of regents can't change a grade. Unless you prove I'm crazy, which you probably could do, you cannot change this grade. And he would storm out of there. What do I care about a grade? If that's why you're there—it was a communication that went on between them and me, between them and them, between each other.

So I took the walls out of the pot shop. I left them up to be, like, shoulder high so they had shelves. But I said, I want you to communicate. You're in your private little areas, protected little things, see.

Here's my glaze book. My recipes are in there. You want them? There they are. Take them. Do what you want to with them. There's no secrets in this thing. Because, see, years ago colorists would be hired for their box of glaze formulas. They were very, very secret. I said, here they are, right there. You're welcome to them. Take them, any. They could copy them. So I would say, we are sharing our experiences with everyone here. And then we would have—look, we would have potlucks on Thursday nights. Potters and metalsmiths are excellent cooks. They are excellent cooks. We'd have these tremendous feeds.

One time—I love those grads. They were so good. One time we were in the basement of the education building, where the pot shop was, okay, when I was there the first time. And so it's like 10 [degrees fahrenheit] below [freezing]. I mean, Wisconsin is cruel, cruel—you step outside to feed the birds, but come back in 10 minutes, or you're dead. So I said, boy, I wish we were down in Miami [FL]. We were talking about this. We ought to go to Cuba or something. Someone said, well—who said that? I forget. Esher, I guess; Fred Esher. He said, why don't we bring Miami to us? What? Let's have a beach party right here in the basement. Okay.

So the guy went to bring up a dump truck, a whole dump truck full of sand, pour it in through the basement window. We had beach chairs up; we had pina coladas; we had this one guy—was a bird guy—he brought his parrots. We had palm trees we had made and such, and I have a picture of me and Paul laying in our bathing suits. It's 20 below outside; we're there with sunlamps. It was—that's what I mean. It was a happening. That helped everybody. It helped my mind. I owe so much of my ability to think ahead and experiment to my graduates, to the communication between the graduates and myself. There was dialogue. We're all, yeah, let's do that, right. We can do it.

There are no bounds. There are only the bounds you impose upon yourself. If you think about it, you ought to be able to do it somehow, see? And whatever you want to be, you can be. Especially in this country. It's amazing. There are no rules. Like Pete said, there are only ideas, concepts. And I don't know, I get going, going on this thing, but it's very important to encourage creativity. And I judge more—let's see, how can I say this? Not so much on the work but on the person. I judge that person, a body of work, to really see if this person has anything going. It takes time, but I'll look at a body of work when I'm talking about people and say, oh, I think this person really has these down; she's out of school three or four years. Yes, yes, this happened. Nothing's happening here. It's the body of work, the breadth of their expression, their willingness to take chances or willingness to—their astuteness to realize that the mistake was a possibility for advancement to turn that around and do something with it.

I marvel at amputees. Just think about that, what they are able to do, and it's a tremendous handicap that you or I can't even think about. I don't know what I'd do without my hand. Some people have to do that, and they—a lot of them don't. Some don't, of course; they don't. But what we have is a kiln with a fire on it is nothing compared to the problem some people have in this world, you know what I mean? It's all relativism. Everything is relative. And so that's why you know as much about art as I know. Do you like it? Okay. People say, well, I don't know about art. I say, you don't have to. Buy something, or whatever, if you like it.

So this guy says, just the other day as a matter of fact, in some place. Anyhow, this collector—oh, Florida. It was down in Florida, St. Pete[rsburg], Florida. And a collector was there at this dinner we had. We had a dinner, salt-free dinner for me. It was terrible. Like cardboard. It was terrible. But those gals were so good. Anyhow, this guy was there. And he said, one day I'm going to buy one of your pieces, Don. I really do want one of your pieces. Now that tea set, that's your signature work, is it? I said, do you like it? He said, I'm not partial to it. I said, when you see something of my work that you like, please purchase it. But don't purchase something just because I made it, because you have to live with it, and it will mean nothing to you.

I wasn't kidding. When I had this heart attack, this operation, people thought I was dying, so many are buying my work. I sold a lot of work in this last year. And so it's really—don't do that, you know? Like when I said don't do it, it reminds me of [what] my dad used to say. My dad used to say, he said, if it hurts, don't do it. And, oh, I just thought of this. I was in Dover, New Jersey, and got bursitis, bad, in my shoulder. So I went to the doctor. This sounds like a vaudeville joke, but it's not. It really happened. I went to the doctor and said, my shoulder hurts when I do this. He said, don't do that. No kidding. So for 12 bucks I got a whole lesson. He said, right. The problem with you is, you need neck exercises. That's what it means. He said, quit this and do this. Instead of shaking your head yes, shake your head no, and you'll be fine. You're just shaking yes all the time. And I thought, yes. No is in my vocabulary at some point. Oh, I'll take care of it. Don't worry, I'll take care of it.

Because all my life people have said, listen, Reitz will do it. Don't worry about that. Reitz will take care of that. No, he can handle that. So I've got everything like that, but I've had a lot of help, of course I have.

But I'll say that I go back to our farm. Johanna and I had that farm. We were married some 20-26 years I think we were married. And she had to put up with so much. I couldn't live in town anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: This is in Wisconsin, in Madison?

MR. REITZ: So I would just take off sometimes. And I drove—I took this road down toward Dodgeville, Wisconsin, and hit this dirt road. That always turns me on. I hit this seven-mile dirt road. I saw this farm. I knew what I wanted, see, in my head. When I buy most everything, I have something visualized, and when the real thing opened up, I just purchase it or gain it or whatever. And I stopped at the top of the hill, and here's this farm down in the valley, and it's green as grass, farmland around it, trees around it. It had a big barn. It was 800 feet long and 50 feet wide, big hip-roof barn with silos and so forth, house. I said, God, that's it. There wasn't a "For Sale" sign on it or anything. So I drove down the lane, almost a quarter-mile lane down those damned lanes, see. I talked to the guy, old Dave; he's an old man. He was older at that time. And I talked to him and told him what I was looking for, and I loved the farm.

Well, he says, me and Mom liked it a lot, too. We've been here all our life, basically. Basically, he said—I forget exactly what he said. He said, well, a lot of people wanted to buy this. There's a fellow from Chicago wants to buy it, but he wants it for the wrong reasons. He said, what do you want to do with it? I told him what I wanted to do, I'm a potter, and so forth. He says, well, come in. Mom's making dinner. We'd go in, and we had canned—you know, we used to can meat. So we had a really great—we talked to everybody. And he said, now, me and Mom are getting pretty old, and we can't—it's too hard to farm anymore. So we would like to sell the farm, actually. And he said, the thing of it is, I have to have someone who will let my son farm it, because he has a farm but not enough land to support himself with.

Hey, I don't know how to farm. We'll sharecrop it. He'd furnish the machinery and know-how; we split the crop. I'd do that, fine. This went on. He said, okay; then he said, it sounds good to me. So, Dave, how much—it was 120 acres. How much is the farm? He said, well, Mom and I are thinking about $11,000 anyhow. I said, well, that sounds good to me, but I said—this is 1962 or '63. I said, I think you'd better put 12 on it, to tell you the truth, David. I think that's a little bit low on that. He said, well, no, I want 11. That's really what I want. I said, okay, we'll let it [be]. How much interest? Well, he hadn't thought about interest. I had to talk him into three percent interest, see. They were such nice people. So he said, all right, you're going to buy it. I said, I have no money now, but next week I'm having a sale, and I'll have money. I'll have $500. We'll shake on it, then.

So we shook on it, and it was the only contract we had. There was no way I was going to foul this guy up because that handshake was so important. We shook on it. I had the art show; I had about $800. Gave him $800, and that's how I got my farm. However, the barn, you know how it's great because it hasn't been painted in a thousand years. You know how old farms are.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. REITZ: So I told Johanna, well, I just bought the farm. What? I bought a farm. She says, oh, shit. You've got to come see it. So I loaded the kids in the car, and off we go. So we're driving. We go—it's 40 miles from the university. I said, soon. So we hit this dirt road. She said, oh, damn. I said, don't worry. So I stop the car, stop the car. I looked over there, she says—they all said in unison, that's it, Dad? You have to have vision. This can really grow. They said, oh, man. Honest, we can make it work, we can make it work.

So they didn't want to go down, but we went down, and we met Dave. She said, oh, they're really nice people, Don, but she said, how do you get out of here in the wintertime? He said, oh, we have no problem with that. But they only had horses. They didn't have a car, you see. I tell you, so I would plow that damned hill in a blazing snowstorm, which I loved to do. It was theater; I was going to kill myself at any moment. It's wonderful, see. But it grew to such a thing that—it had no basement, of course. It had one central kerosene heater, and that's what heated the place. And no bathroom.

It had an outhouse, so Johanna gave me a week and a half to get a bathroom, or she was leaving. Cool. So I had a bathroom, and I dug the whole basement out by hand. Dug it out by hand with wheelbarrows. I'd come out and sleep there at nights, teach in the daytime. Go out the next day. And I built the bathroom, and I put hot water heat in, baseboard heat. And I had people put the baseboard heat in and so forth. And so we got that going. Then we moved out there. Then later on I built a three-story addition onto the side of it.

To make a long story short, it became a halfway house for the world. That was, I think, one of the problems that Johanna really wasn't ready for. She was a little shaky with the arts anyhow. There were a little bit—pot was coming in. But anyhow, I had 21 horses. I raised 21 horses. I'd get a little bit drunk at the horse auction and have an empty truck and walk out with a damned horse, you know. But I ended up with 21 horses. Everybody had horses. I had 14 rigs, full rigs. I had a beautiful cutter. I'd play Santa Claus, Christmastime. I had one horse that would pull, and I had a Santa Claus suit, see. And I'd dress up with the Santa Claus suit. If you want to see a kid's eyes light up, when they see Santa Claus coming down there in his sleigh, ho, ho, ho; I'd go to the farmhouse, here comes Santa Claus. I'd have toys for everyone. They'd say, wow. And of course, Wisconsin, whoa, would Santa like a little brandy? Yeah, I'll have a little, thank you.

Well, by night I couldn't hit myself in the butt with a baseball bat. Johanna would go home by herself basically, pull—go home basically by herself. And I would be—the barn was up on a little bit of a slope like this. The house was down here. Well, to get to the house I would keep walking sideways to it, you know. Well, it was snowing like hell, and Johanna used to hate it because she'd have to walk the horse out because I was too smashed to do that, and it was because it was sweaty; horse was sweaty. So I fell down in the snow, and I couldn't get through the snow, see. So Johanna walks past me, she says, Santa's gonna die, and she walked right past me, walked right past me, put the horse away, and then she goes back up. She goes, Santa's gonna die. She wouldn't help me get in that house. I finally made it to the damned house. Oh, God.

But it was—I used to have so much good fun. And I had trap shooting, skeet shooting, on the back porch. I had the training rink we had flooded in the wintertime for ice hockey. I had basketball in the hay mount. I had handball, of course. I had an endless tow rope on my tractor for going up the ski hill. We'd pull people with skis behind the horses. We had a rec room. You could put a five-foot log in the fireplace I put in the rec room. I built that myself. Down there I had a pool table. And my big thing was to get an Italian slate pool table, and I finally got one. And then I got divorced and everything. And I had shuffleboard down there, and I had horseshoes. Everybody was just—I never knew who was going to be there. But all the kids came to my house to play. I knew where my kids were. It was very, very good. But also the whole university would come to my house, and I would step over bodies at night sleeping. I didn't know who would be there.

But I made the rule—because Johanna was—you know, I have never allowed anybody to smoke pot on my property. I said, you do that on your own; I don't care, but nobody does that [here]. It was a rule we had. And all the people were very, you know, you don't do that at Don's house. Okay, that's fine. What you do is your own thing, but at my house it's different. So anyhow. And I have nothing against it, whatever you want to do. I mean, I drank, so what the hell's different, you know?

So anyhow, there were two rules. I said, you could pick the morels and pick the ginseng, but you leave the hemp there. There was wild hemp. We used to grow hemp for rope and stuff, for burlap and stuff. So they all did that. And they—of course, I got a little jealous of [people taking] the morels because I love morels. I cook them in butter; they're just all right. It's a great, great place. It was a great place. I had built it. I had a couple of salt kilns there I had built when I was out there. I had gutted the whole barn out for my studio. Then I—Johanna and I—the kids had graduated, and Brent was out in Colorado, and Donna had followed him to Colorado. Brent wanted to be a ski bum. I said, you know, you don't have to go to college. It's up to you. Follow what you want to do. So he got to be an expert skier, and so good that Martina Navratilova and John Denwood would ask for him to guide when they would go up on the deep powder. He's going down this slope that's like crazy. It was crazy, you know. And he's excellent, excellent.

Then he got into kayaking and became a world-class kayaker, and Martina Navratilova actually talked him into going into this kayaking business. He was a national whitewater champion seven years in a row, and he holds seminars now all over the country. He's 50 and still kayaking.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's go back, if we can, for one second, to the farm and what kind of work you were making at the time.

MR. REITZ: That's important, isn't it? Right. Right. Well, I was doing a lot of experimentation. Putting pieces together, parts to the whole. That's where, actually, some of the first skirted vessels came from. They were covered jars but skirted, you know. And I was using—actually, I did a lot of slab work at the farm. I rolled—like a piece that's up there on the very top shelf. They were rolled around and highly decorated in salt, cylinder forms.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, cylinders.

MR. REITZ: Working with basic shapes but altering them to become something new, other than what they were. And working large—

MS. RIEDEL: Box forms, chunks. Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. REITZ: Bigger pieces like that. I had a freedom out there that I could experiment. I was by myself and just—the pieces were all salt glazed. I did most of it, and I was fuming a lot of pieces at that time. I was firing with oil and wood, with fire. That's where I fired my first wood, was out on the farm. I built this little wood kiln in the side of the hill because I didn't have enough money for bricks. So I just built it in the dirt and brought a fire to that. And I figured that you can't heat the work all the way through, you know—[laughs]—so I had cone, oh, 26 or something, I don't know. So I went back to my salt. But I had lots of wood because I had this 120-acre farm, and it was covered with woods and orchards and was just gorgeous, man. In Wisconsin, you know, the horses would stand in grass up to their bellies. It was just beautiful.

So anyhow the work was—like this cylinder, the—

MS. RIEDEL: Baroque vessels.

MR. REITZ: Still staying with the vessel form, but carrying it to places that it hadn't been before, you know? Because the vessel's been very important to me. Ever since mom's root cellar, the vessel has been important. And whether it was utility or not was another thing. Most of them were utility. You could use most of them. Others were baskets or cylinders, but they came out, grew out of utility. The pitchers—I was really famous for my pitchers. My pitchers, I just loved making pitcher form. It was like a libation, a pouring out, you could serve. It has a neck, has a throat, has a spout. It was a sculptural form.

MS. RIEDEL: It was an early celebration vessel.

MR. REITZ: It was a celebration, right. That's what they are now. They're a celebration of the vessel, you see. That's what they were. I've changed now, going to the other pieces. They still grew out of that genre of the pottery experience. Also I was subsidizing my university salary, which was $4,000, with the art fairs, so I was throwing a lot of functional ware also. But functional ware which wasn't the normal functional ware.

MS. RIEDEL: Innovative functional ware, like the refrigerator jars.

MR. REITZ: The handles were looser, they were—that knob—on thing, the thing where the cups were whole different shapes, and different jars were flattened and paddled, and different—I did a lot with decorating, a lot. I pulled out also—I went through my Norwegian period of slip trailing and decorating and combing and all the—I love to do that with the wet clay. And that's when I—okay, this is good. I said, okay, now I really—when I first got the farm, I had to build this toilet for this bathroom for Johanna, so I had to put levels out for the septic tank. So I had all this dishware. And I figured, well, I don't know what to do with this dishware. So I threw it all in these laterals for the septic tank, crushed up. Okay, from now on I don't get up from that wheel until a piece is finished. I finish it right on the wheel.

So I throw a form. I'd immediately decorate it, immediately put slip on, take it off, and set it on the ware board. It was done. Never touch it again. And I'd say, well, why don't I just put it right in the kiln, you know? Why wait? So I would take them off, get a ware board, pull ware boards out, put them in the kiln. Some were a little higher than the nine-inch shelf, and I'd put the shelf on it and kind of squish it down a little bit. That's where this flattened, bulbous [shape] actually came from.

MS. RIEDEL: Slumped.

MR. REITZ: In reality. So I put them in the kiln, just put them in the kiln wet. I could throw a kilnload in a day. It was no problem for me to throw—I was very prolific in decorating. If I have to work fast, I don't think about it—if I think about it, it doesn't work. Now painting is different. If I'm doing murals, I used to have a cigar. Something about that oral thing—I'm not quite sure what it is—I think—I don't know. It's a different thing.

But I would put them all in the kiln wet; put them all in the kiln wet. Say, well, close the door. So I picked the door up. Well—

MS. RIEDEL: So they were still wet. You'd just thrown them.

MR. REITZ: They're all soaking wet. Soaking wet. I said, well, I'll light up a pile. What the hell. I lit up a pile, went and had dinner. And before this Johanna said, now look, this kiln, we're broke; don't experiment. Really don't, because we need real work now. I got it under control. So I went out and put in another pile of it. By five o'clock that afternoon I was finished with the kiln firing. Didn't lose a piece. And I'm saying, of course. Engineers have fired things in kilns in industry wet because it's the steam that keeps it from blowing up. It's inside the kiln.

Keeps the surface moist; it dries from the inside out because the steam is on the outside surface.

So then I would take buckets of water and throw [water] in the kiln before I'd load it, get the kiln really saturated. Then I would load the kiln with wet ware, close the door, fire it. Never lost a piece. Never lost—well, I wouldn't say never lost a piece. Of course, you lose some pieces, but it was negligible. So that gave me that instant—I didn't have to fool with them anymore. And that's the other thing; it's the salt bit. I didn't have to re-glaze them. They were finished.

Well, actually, it's not true because it's how much reduction you fire with them; it's where you place them in the kiln; it's what you put around them in the kiln; it's about what you did during the firing, whether you flashed them with copper or sulfur like that, how fast you cool it. So it's still the act of creativity. That's what I like about the wood firing.

MS. RIEDEL: You've talked about painting with flame in the kiln. Let's hold that thought because I'm going to stop this disc here and put in another one. We'll come back to that.

[END DISC 1.]

Okay, we were talking about painting with flame in the kiln.

MR. REITZ: Right. And it needs to be understood with wood because you have a real flame. Gas is a short flame, and you don't repaint with the flame in the gas kiln. You get different effects by the reduction or the oxidation or how close it is to the burner, the quality of melting or putting a pot over the fire box, which will get really a lot of salt—inside the structure doesn't get as much salt. So that way you're painting with the kiln. You say, okay, this piece, I want this piece to be really frontal, so you put it really close to the back wall of the kiln so it gets frontal in that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Flash color.

MR. REITZ: It's how you position things in the kiln. There's also working with the colorization and texture and how it's going to look when it comes out. So that's very important. You don't just put them in. Like the glaze stage, you just sort of put it in the fire, and it's done. This way, you still create sideways, because you're not painting with the flame; you're painting with the atmosphere, how it's being pushed around through the pieces, which is exactly what you do with the wood. So it's not far-fetched for me to go to wood at all.

In the wood kiln, what the fire in a wood kiln does—like with the Anagama—you load from the back, all right, to front. And so you load, thinking, okay, the fire, the flame is like water, point of least resistance. So you put pieces here that will block this and push the flame here. Piece will push it back down here. Put this against the wall; put this one over here.

But now, like my big Anagama, I'll put a row or so, say, of tall things in the very, very back, okay. Then come up here; I'll put a row of shelves tightly packed with pottery right in front of that but to the left side. I'll put big pots on the right side. Then the next row will be a row of shelves on the left side—right side of pots on the left side, and can push that thing around. In the very front you put platters upside down, and you'll put them against things; you'll shield things away from stuff. Sometimes it's how you keep the wood ash off of things, which is very important.

So that whole thing of painting with the flame is so exciting because [of] the stacking of the kiln. Stacking the kiln is important in the salt glazing, but it's much more important in the wood firing. David Smith from Wisconsin, probably one of the best wood-stack persons I've ever seen stack a kiln. He is so thoughtful about what he's doing. We put everything out, of course, so you can see all the shapes you have. That's in his computer upstairs. And he starts from the back, hold, this. This, this. By the time he's through, it's just—the loading is beautiful. Then the firing. Then the firing. Slow firing. And my big kiln requires six days, basically. And it's the type of wood that you burn.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. What do you prefer?

MR. REITZ: Well, I really prefer pine and oak. The oak gives me a hot flame but short. Pine gives me a long flame but not so hot. So therefore, the oak flame takes the ash back to the back of the kiln. My kiln is 14 feet deep, so it takes it all the way to the back and along. And the flame, you know, kisses the ware in places and stuff like that, see. It's expensive here because oak is like $400 a cord, whereas in Wisconsin it's like 50 bucks or something. But I also use ponderosa pine, which is kind of like burning the Sunday newspaper; it gives you kind of a yellow color, but the BTU factor [heating value] isn't that great. Pinion is a little better. Now I've been using more—we can get hickory, so I've been using hickory quite a bit now. It has almost the same BTU as oak, and both of them have more of a grayish coloration than the pine has. Pine is a more yellow.

Depends on where the pine comes from. If the pine comes from Sedona [AZ] with the red rocks, it's going to be much more green. Comes from Flagstaff [AZ], it's going to be much more yellow. Same tree. Different parts, it takes the minerals out of the ground.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Exactly.

MR. REITZ: Yes, so it's very important about your wood. I always keep about 20, 30 cords of wood chopped so they're there ready. You don't—firing a wood kiln, we don't do anything but fire the kiln. We don't chop wood; we don't do any—just listening to the kiln. Your whole concentration is what the kiln is doing, because you listen to what's happening. You can feel the kiln; you know when it wants to be fed. You listen to her; the kiln will tell you what it wants. You can't go faster than what it wants.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you hear?

MR. REITZ: You can hear—you hear the softness; you hear the flame as it will work through, or as it will wander through, depending on the first part of the firing, you know. You'll hear when it dies down. You watch the coal bed. You don't let the coal bed get down. Most people have a tendency to fire too much, too fast. They'll put too much wood in, so they can't ever get temperature because—coals give you temperature. Flame doesn't give you temperature. The coal bed gives you the temperature. So really, you have maybe a four-foot-deep coal bed in the front, but white, white coal.

And so you'll fire, and then you look, and your coal bed will be aflame, and then pretty soon it will burn down, and it will be coal, and it will be black. So when they turn—all of a sudden they'll just go fshooo, shine like that for about three seconds. We call it "sunshine." That's when you stoke it. That's the hottest point in your firing, all that time for three seconds of heat, basically. Heat rises, you know, and that gives you your coal bed. So we have white coals. Dead coals kills your fire.

So it's very important how you fire and how you throw the wood in. You must be sure to crisscross your wood when you throw it in rather than putting it all side by side, you know. Crisscross the way you throw it in. The amount you put in. When we are getting up to cone 10, toward the end we're putting a huge armful in every maybe four or five minutes; firing, it needs to be fed. And it will tell you what it—it will lose temperature. But when it's hungry, it's hungry.

MS. RIEDEL: And this is the kiln you fire six days, 24 hours a day.

MR. REITZ: Right. Yes, 24 hours a day. I have six people and give each one a shift. Too many people is no good. I have rules here that when we're firing kilns, that's what we do. We don't drink; we don't have loud music. We're just firing the kiln. That's it.

It's so different at the university. There's hundreds of kids around there, music, loud music, and I—I can't do it. I can't do it. It's too confusing, so confusing. When I go places to fire kilns, they know that. And they're very good, you know, because they're going to learn something here, or what's the point of being here firing this damned kiln? You learn something, especially when you open it and you go, well, guess I shouldn't have done that. And that's okay. You can't make a judgment right away whether it's good or bad because you still have in mind what you think should have happened, what you wanted to happen. But in about a week you will accept or reject what is there.

And I relate that to people: if we can get past and accept people or reject them for what they are, not for what we want them to be, or try to make them into, maybe we wouldn't have so many divorces, right.

So all of this art, all of it relates to humanity. It all relates to the world, the cosmos, and to us as a human being and as a culture. It's not just firing that object. The object is there, and it's gone, and it's an object. It's very nice, and I'd love to have it around. Don't get me wrong.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. We're sitting here in a room filled with—

MR. REITZ: So it's not what it's about. It's about building your development as a person, and people around you, and how you react, you know, how you react to people around you. That's how I judge a lot of people, how they react to the group, how they can handle this or that kind of thing. And you're learning all that by this participation of this—of these six people, sometimes, firing that wood kiln. We're all working as a unit. We all know when we have to sleep, when we have to get up, when we have to do our things, when we're not firing the kiln, when it's in between shifts [and] we're usually cleaning up, stuff like that. And everybody works together, and it's a very—of course, of course, that's the thing.

As a painter, it seemed like they're much more isolated, because they're in their studio by themselves painting this thing. But in clay it's always been a communal effort. You buy tons of clay, and you share it with the

community; you split that—because it's cheaper to buy tons. In Japan, the early—the cultures would buy a community kiln. A town was built, and it was a town kiln, each. But the ones that were successful, each chamber was a special—was a family, okay. They weren't all over. So if your chamber didn't work, that's your problem, see what I mean? And that's why a lot of the communes didn't last, because you found out two or three people were making all the money. I don't know how I got onto that. But it's this whole thing of sharing, which potters, craftspeople in general, have always done, especially, I think, the clay people, because of the need for what they're doing. They need extra bodies to help them with their work.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it hard for you to strike a balance between teaching and being surrounded with this large community of people on campus and again at the farm, when you prefer a fairly private way of working?

MR. REITZ: That's the thing. I'm kind of an oxymoron in a way, I guess I might call it. I'm a very private person, actually. But at a workshop I'm very gregarious. Is that what you call it? Outward?

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

MR. REITZ: Because I'm on stage. I enjoy it. The audience is feeding me. But when I'm home, I'm really here; that's why I live back in the canyon. People can't find me, and there are no building codes, so this is cool. So I can do what I want to do. But when I'm teaching at the university—it 's what got difficult at the university for my teaching, and why I quit it before retirement. I think about it, I had three years for retirement; I just quit, rather than waiting. I want to quit while I'm a good teacher. I don't want to—see, you think about hostage. The university can hold you hostage for this retirement thing because you have this health plan, because you have this—very hard to think beyond that sometimes. You can't stay as a bad teacher. It does everybody a disservice.

But what got me was not the students so much, but the faculty, what's happened to the faculty, you might say. The turnover came after some people died, and just that attrition would happen, and the younger people came. Well, it seemed like the younger people, there's less hours, fewer students, more grants, more this. And they didn't want to teach, basically. They wanted all the facility of the teaching for free. This is really a blanket, gross, you know, over-judgment. I'm not judging anyone. I'm just saying what happened.

And so one day I'm walking in the hall with Wayne Taylor, who is dead now. And Wayne said to me, if it wasn't for all these damned students, I could get some work done. Because everybody had their own studio at the university. I never had a studio at the university. I would come up to my studio at the university, and we'd do yoga in the morning before class. Right. Something to get our heads straight first, see.

And so anyhow—and so Wayne—so I said, oh, man. That's it. That's exactly right. So that afternoon there was a faculty meeting, which I never went to. I didn't go to teach to go to faculty meetings. That's why you hire a chairman. If he can't run the school, fire him, get another chairman. I don't have to have a faculty meeting every week. It's crazy. Anyhow, I went to the meeting because whenever I go to meetings, everyone goes, oh, here's Reitz. What the hell does he want now? Because whenever I come, I was pretty dogmatic about what the hell I wanted to say. But that's why I hired—not why, but Bruce Breckenridge and I taught together for those 26 years. Hired Bruce, and Bruce would take care of all the politics. He's really good at that, and I'll take care of the physical plant. And it made us a really good team. We were a really good team, and the students respected that. It was really good.

So anyhow, I went to the faculty meeting. I raised my hand. I'll make a motion. Why? What? I move we reinstate the five-year tenure review policy. What? Yeah. You guys are living on—everybody, you're living through your students, vicariously. You haven't done anything since crisis Mexico con Stan Galli [Stanley Walter Galli]. You guys are not working any more, not like you used to be. You don't work. You're living through your students, for Christ's sake, or something. Not even that. So I said, I think you should be reviewed, because I see what's coming from some of us, and it's crap. Because we were hired here as artists first, and art gave you something to teach. Then you're also a teacher. You weren't a teacher—you were an artist who became a teacher.

Okay, so anyhow, so I said I want to vote on this. And of course, all the older guys voted yes, good idea. And I'm making a judgment between young and old here. I don't mean to do that. But this happened that way. Said, yeah, I think you should be. And so a lot of people did vote, said fine. Oddly enough, the metalsmiths, the wood people, the weavers, the clay people all voted yes because we were working.

MS. RIEDEL: They wanted to have the review.

MR. REITZ: So I said, okay, I just wanted to see, wanted to get a vote over with. By the way, I quit. I'm out of here. And I quit that day. Of course, I finished my contract out, but then I quit. So I came home. I was married to Paula Reitz at the time, and Paula, she wasn't quite as used to me as Johanna—as Johanna was—of walking.

MS. RIEDEL: You were married to Paula at the time?

MR. REITZ: Paula—yes, I was married to Paula at the time. And I came home and said, well, flash back to what I had told Johanna. I said, I had an interesting day. I said, well, I quit. You what? Two years—I quit, honey. I just—I quit. I really do not want any more of this. I am a good teacher, and I'm not going to be if I stay here. It's starting to affect me. So I'm a good artist, and I'm not afraid to make a living on my art. So Paula said, no artist makes a living on their art. I said, well, you're looking at the first one. And so I said, I quit. So I quit that year. So that year, it was, I think, in '87 or '88 I quit.

And so Paula said, well, what am I going to do? I said, well, I'm not sure, you know. Come on—oh, I'll go back just a little bit. I was at Madison, Wisconsin, and Don Bendel, a very close friend, was from La Crosse, Wisconsin. And he came down; he was going to stay with me, but we're too much alike, so he went to Milwaukee, got his degree in Milwaukee. Then his kids had asthma or allergies so bad, he found the best place in the country to go, and that was Flagstaff, Arizona. So he moved to Flagstaff, Arizona. I would come down two, three, four times a year sometimes to visit Don. I would drive all the way, 33 hours straight. I loved the drive. I would just drive to visit Don, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: This dates back from the early '60s, and you would build kilns together.

MR. REITZ: Oh, yeah. Let's see, I must have met Don in '60. It was in '60, '61, something like that. So I would go down, drive down, and you drive straight down, you hit I-40 at Tucumcari [NM] and hang a right to go west, and I felt like I was going home. All those years I felt like I was going home. I says to Paula, I'm just going to go home. That's all. She said, you're going to the desert? I said, well, it's kind of high desert. Right. It's dry heat, right. But I feel like I'm home when I'm there. So she said, well, I'll—oddly enough, the guy who was teaching with Don retired, a position became available. Paula applied for it, so she got the position. So she actually moved out three months before I moved out. And I had moved out earlier. I had come out and bought the house and with the GI Bill—got a loaner. She had a loaner. I forget how I finagled it somehow, got a house for us out there in Flagstaff, and she moved. She loved Flagstaff. It's the high country; it's mountains. It's a beautiful little town. Just really a nice place and good school. Little more low-key school, and so forth.

So we lived—I was up there, and I said, I've got to have my own place. I've just got to have my own place. So I said, I'm going to go find a place, because then Don said, down in Clarkdale is the old mining town down there. You can find something cheap. So I drove down to Clarkdale down here, and I was looking at places, and I passed a sign that said "Ranch for Sale." I said, gee, that's by Tuzigoot National Monument. There's a pueblo [Native American village] right at the end of my thing, a pueblo. I said, well, I'll drive back a dirt road, right. Well, so far I'm okay. I hit the road, and the Verde River goes right through it; Verde River right through it. Beautiful. God, this is nice, and it was a ranchette, five acres. And the house was kind of dilapidated. There was coyote dirt in the house. Still, it had potential. There wasn't a tree here. Nothing. Was just ground. Nothing here. Not a tree.

MS. RIEDEL: You've got 20- and 30-foot trees here now.

MR. REITZ: Right. I plant two every Christmas. I plant my Christmas trees and stuff. I can't handle any more with water. So anyhow I bought this place for very, very cheap, very cheap. Drove back and told Paula. I said, come down. So the same thing. It was the same. She said, oh, my God; she said, I'm not moving down here. I said, I'm not asking you to. This is going to be our other house. I'm going to live down here. And you live up there. And we'll get together, do our thing. Which really put her on her own, which was good because then I was becoming an enabler also, which wasn't doing her any good either. So I said, okay.

I moved down; I started fixing. I said, it's got to be—have potential. [Phone rings.]

I think we were talking [how] about I am—one of my many bad features is I'm an enabler, and that really doesn't do anybody any good, basically, when you think in the long run. Maybe if I wouldn't have been such an enabler with my daughter, Donna, bailed her out of all the problems, she wouldn't have gone on drugs so bad. Now she's been clean for nine years, has her own business, has bought her own house, bought the house next to her. I'm so proud of her it's unbelievable, but I did enable her. When she came back out, I helped her get ready, but I didn't enable her after that. But Paula went on her own, was doing most of her own raku-ing and stuff, and she found her way. And now she's doing great work. Great figures of work and great plant work. So that was good.

But then I built this place up to—now Paula—Paula and I, we grew apart. Separation doesn't make the heart grow fonder, you know, and it was basically my fault. Paula genuinely was a good person, too. She's still—we have lunches, and we talk about her and her new husband and so forth. He's a really nice guy, really nice guy. So it's the way it should be.. So she came down, her husband came down, about, oh, several months ago. And she looked around; she said, my God, I didn't think you were going to do it. I said, I know.

So now I have—it went from five acres to 40 acres I bought. And then I kind of had to sell 20 acres to Joel Eide, who was here—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Right.

MR. REITZ: —was head of the museum at NAU [Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ]. Joel has his adobe house he built down here. So now we both have 20 acres, and the Verde River goes through the back side of ours. Some years I own to the river; some years I own through the river, depending on where the river goes. But it's nice, there again, see, having water, being raised on water, having water in my life. It seemed like I have that fire, water, and sky or whatever, wind. That's funny. I can't stand wind. And maybe it's because I have sinuses so bad. When I get headaches, really. The wind is not a sign for me. Wind is not good for me. Yes. So anyhow—

MS. RIEDEL: Fire, air, water.

MR. REITZ: Yeah. So the place was just right. And right now I do feel like I'm home. I don't want to move. I'm surrounded by Indian burials. Some nights it's really true, I will be working, and I'll go, okay, hello. And you have this sense of spirit, something. I can't explain it. And that's good I can't explain it because, see, there are so many things that happened to me that I can't explain. Like, I've had two out-of-body experiences. Believe it or not, all I know is what happened. See, I know when I broke my leg—the first time was in the truck wreckage. And I'm on the table there.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this the big 1981 truck—okay. We should probably talk about that.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, right. Serious, serious thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Because that was a huge event in your life.

MR. REITZ: Yes, that was a real turning point in my life, right. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So let's talk about that. Will you tell that story?

MR. REITZ: Bill Brown's son was getting married out of Penland, and I had told Billy when Billy was growing up—oh, [Billy said,] I'm not going to get married, Don, you know. I said, Bill, some day you'll—you let me know. So sure enough, Billy grew up, and Jane called me and said, Billy's getting married tomorrow. I said, why didn't you call me? She said, he doesn't want a bother. They're having it at a little church at Penland up on the mountain. So I said, I'll be down.

So I went to the house and started to pack. Paula says, well, where you going? I'm going to Penland. Billy's getting married tomorrow. She said, well, Penland, that's—I said, no, no, I know; it's 15 hours. I just go down here, turn left, go to Chicago [IL], turn right. I'll be there. Don't worry about me. I'll be fine. And so—because I had stopped my drinking at this point, cut pretty much. Just more social, but I had stopped that whole thing, so I was pretty good.

And so I got down there, drove straight on through and got down there, and Billy didn't know I was coming or anything. So I went behind a church. A call of nature had come upon me. Went in the woods behind this church, and there Billy was, also nervous. He came around the church, and we met back there. Billy said, Don, what are you doing here? I said, what does it look like I'm doing here?

See, there's a certain time you can't send flowers; you can't telephone; you can't write a letter; you can't send—you've got to look somebody in the eye and say, I love you, and I'm here with you. And that's why I went down. I told you I'd be here, and I'm here. And so at the wedding. Beautiful wedding. Had [inaudible] and the old Penland. It was just a beautiful, gorgeous wedding. And then Billy also went AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] at that time, so there was no alcohol at the reception, which was good for me because I had to drive back that night, see.

So I got back in the truck, I said, hug, hug, kissy, kissy, I want to see you all happy. And I was driving back.

MS. RIEDEL: You drove 15 hours down, stayed for the wedding, and turned around and came back. With no sleep.

MR. REITZ: Just drove right back. And so I got as far as Cleveland [OH]. Cleveland? Yeah. Cleveland. And Cincinnati [OH]. Cincinnati. Yeah, not Cleveland. Cincinnati. And I was turning off onto another highway, and it was raining, and all of a sudden my truck just went sideways. I'm a good driver. I'd never had a wreck until that time. Well, I'd had a couple, but not—and so anyhow, all of a sudden it turned sideways, and I see the telephone pole coming at me. And I'm saying, this is going to hurt, and I can't watch this. It seemed like five minutes—it seems. I just turned my head away, and bingo, man, I hit that pole. I had the radio on, and it was just exactly midnight. I hit the pole and totaled the truck, and my eyes were full of glass so I couldn't open my eyes. And if—I had smelled for smoke, and the truck was not on fire. So I said, okay, I'm safe there. I said, okay, let's take count. Oh, God, that right leg is going whoa—or that left hip was gone, too. Damn.

MS. RIEDEL: You'd driven an ambulance, which is how you knew—

MR. REITZ: Yeah, yeah, right. I'd driven an ambulance for a while, too. So I'd got all the stuff—I've delivered three babies in my time. One I didn't have to touch. It just popped out with 45 pounds of pressure. I said, okay, Rosie. I said, thanks, Rosie. Pop. My God. Anyhow, that's another whole wonderful thing.

So I smelled for smoke; there was no smoke. And I turned the ignition off; the car had stopped, I said, okay. I started to examine myself, and I said, okay, what—what's all this water on my elbow? I hit it, and all the bones were sticking out. And I hit my elbow, oh, I broke my shoulder, too. My shoulder's broken, my elbow is broken, my arm is broken, my legs are broken in three spots, and my hip was gone, broken. So I said, this is not good. This is not good. I can't pass out. If I pass out, I'm dead.

So nobody was on the road. Nobody was on the road. So I would change all that negative energy into positive energy and say, boy, my right arm feels good. Whoa, my right leg feels good. Damn it, that feels good, you know. Then all of a sudden you get nervous, and your bones start clinking together—you know how it does that—and you feel sort of nauseous. And so I was just making myself in water and I'd go fishing. I'd just go fishing, and it felt cool, whoa, cool, cool. And I always had that power to do that, see.

See, I learned how to—I did, as a younger person—how to relieve pain by visualization. I didn't know it was that at that time. My grandmother, who was a healer, Grandma Wright in Pennsylvania, wouldn't go to doctors, and she taught me how. She could draw pain right out of your shoulder. She was wonderful. And so she taught me. We didn't know about visualization, but that's basically what it was. So I just visualized myself not being there. That's what I did in school. That's how I got through school, see. But anyhow, I kept things moving here and didn't want to pass out.

So finally, I think it was an hour and a half to two hours, I did that until finally somebody came by and called an ambulance. An ambulance guy came. When the ambulance came, the ambulance driver opened the window, or through the broken window, he said, here, put your hat on. You look like hell. Is telling me—[like when I was] talking to a person that I used to pick up [when I drove an ambulance]. You look like hell. Said, okay. He said, what's the matter? I said, well, look—I was in the ambulance. I said my hip was gone; my shoulder was gone. I said, you know, I can't get out of here. He said, all right, you're okay. I'm fine. Okay, he said, we're going to tear the truck apart. I said, don't cut those boots. I'll kill you if you cut those boots. I had just bought a new pair of boots. Don't worry, we won't do that. They did Jaws of Life [hydraulic rescue tools] and cut the truck apart. Then when he was going to pick me out, he said, this is going to hurt. I said, I know. He said, don't worry, though, buddy; I got you. So I just gave myself to him, and I passed out.

And I wake up in the ambulance. The ambulance is going along, and I'm saying, don't I even rate a siren? Turn that siren on! He said, wait a minute, wait a minute. This guy's one of us. We're going to take you to the good hospital. They turned around and took me to the good Lutheran hospital. All those things happen, good fortune continues to happen to me all the time, you see. Of course, getting to the emergency room at three in the morning is like hell's kitchen or something. They must put ice on—X-ray table, get you on there. They were so—I had to hold the thing up so they could take an X-ray of the thing, and so I said, I have to call my wife. Called my wife and told her; I said, I'm all right. I'll let you talk to the nurse. And of course—don't worry, it will be okay; it will be okay. And she said, don't worry; it will be okay. Be okay. So they told her, just don't worry; we're going to put him back together a little bit. But we don't think he'll walk again. We'll find out if he'll be able to handle it, his legs.

So I said, no, no, I'm going to walk. Your condition is voluntary, and I choose to get well. I don't choose to be sick. And so I found—cutting the story short—but what happened to me is—talk about the experiences happening to me—Paula came down, said, well, I got some bad news for you. I said, Dad died. Because what happened before that, I was on drugs, right, from the surgery. And I floated up over my body, and I saw me down there. They were working on me down there. I thought, God, this is cool; man, this is cool. And I went up, and I got to the ceiling, and I said, I can get through that. Bingo, I'm back in my body like that. Now who knows where I would have went if I'd gone through the ceiling. I don't know. It was really strange.

So the nurse said the next day, or whatever it was, she said, really had a trip, huh? You kept hollering, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy. And that night Dad died. And so I said it was just—I don't know what that means, but all I know is that happened. All the wonderful things always happen to me like that. Then I thought to myself, usually when you're doing something, it's not for the reason you think you're doing it. Let's say you and your husband or your partner are having a fight. You don't care whether the picture is straight. It's about something else. Let's find out what are we really arguing about here. It's not—it's about that. I said, why am I really here in this hospital?

I mean, I thought I had died. People all over the world sent me these flowers. I said, get them out of here. They took them all down to the children's ward and decorated the halls with the flowers and stuff like that. So this big

nurse who was a physical therapist said, all right, you're going to walk today. I said, oh, no, I'm not. And she said, you're going. And she picked me up, and oh, my God, she was a wonderful lady. And so I got down there and looked around, and there's [people] that are never going to walk. I mean, they are not going to walk. This is probably why I'm here.

So I got upset and said, okay, all you sickies, let's go; I'm here. We're ready for exercise. Let's get going. So every morning we'd do these—I'd go down, and they'd be there; all our sickies would be there. Let's go, one, two, one, two, let's go, let's go. So I figured—so I sent out and had T-shirts made, see, said, "I think I am, I know I can, I will." And that's what our motto was. All right, let's go. Because that's really the reason I think I was there, not just to get myself better, see what I mean? See, once you start thinking about other reasons and that something is helping—you're helping someone else—you forget about yourself, and you get better for them.

Then Jane Brown talked to me about visualization, and I said, oh, yeah. Because your arm has pain—if you have pain, first you have to decide exactly where is it. Exactly. What color is it? How long is it; how wide is it? Once you've made it into a concrete thing, then you can move it out and theoretically put it on the blackboard and erase it. I've never been able to do that, but damned close to doing that. So it's a great thing. She taught me about visualization, which I had done ever since I was in school. That kind of thing.

Well, I started putting myself back together, visualizing joints and breaks, puttying them up with clay and mortar and stitches and picturing myself walking and running back on the station green when I was a kid and flying kites and stuff. And so I said to the doctor, I said, you know, what do you think about the power of the mind and, sort of, healing? And he said, well, Don, he said, I'm a high-priced mechanic. I don't know. But whatever you're doing, I'd do it, because you're going to walk again. You're getting out of here in 12 days—earlier than I thought you were going to get out of here. So he said, just keep doing whatever you're doing. Okay.

So it's a matter of choice. See, I choose to be sick. I could have chosen to be a cripple the rest of my life and to get all these accolades, and the world would feel sorry for me; oh, poor Don, he used to be—I don't want that. I choose to be good. I choose not to hurt. And so that's easier said than done. Of course, that's an over-simplification, but—and that's how I got through the last two, three operations. I had eight operations in 11 months on my heart, my chest. But I just got over it. There was a time that I said, I almost said to myself, it isn't worth it. I almost let it go. But I didn't.

Anyhow, so that teaches you a great lesson of survival, and I've always been able to survive. Always been able to survive. But at that time my niece Sara, five years of age, would send me drawings to make me better. She drew every day, and I thought, my God, how can she draw so good? I mean, they were just—it's because she's five! That's why. So then I became—my search for my five. I had Danny [inaudible] and said, he said, Reitz lost his worth; so now I'm in search of my worth. Where is my five? I want my five back. I want a world that's five. I'd do anything you want to do at five. That's a major number. So that was my search for five, because of Sara. And then Sara would draw me—then Sara came down with cancer, Wilms tumor, that you're born with, and it waits about five years and then starts to kill you. It's really something to think about.

So now it's my turn to help Sara. Sara was going in the hospital, so I still had—I had crutches—I was in Wisconsin; she was getting operated in Philadelphia. So I put my cane on the gas pedal, and my seat made a cruise control like that. I would just drive, because after you get out of—as you get out of here, you hit one stop light from Wisconsin until you're in [New] Jersey on Route 80 or 90. So, but I stopped for food or stopped to go to the restroom, so on, and I would buy books every time I would stop. And this would happen every time I'd go back to see her. Well, I'm getting ahead of my story.

Back to the hospital. My sister was pushing her into the operating room with the people, and she said, oh, I know Uncle Don's here. Uncle Don is here, and Nancy turned around, and there I was. She just about collapsed. It was just uncanny, uncanny. And so Sara and I made a pact. So I said, Sara, you've got to get better. I got better. You've got to get better because we owe. All right, Uncle Don, we'll do it.

So the operation was a success—they took her kidney out and an ovary out and stuff like that, or whatever he did. And so—but we made a pact then that every day we would think of each other at noon. That way we could communicate. So one day I'm in school, really busy, never thought about Sara at all. Never thought about Sara at all. That night my sister calls me. She goes, how you doing? Fine, fine, fine. She says, Sara wants to talk to you. Sara says, Uncle Don, where were you today? And I just about dropped the phone. I just—it just blew me away. I said, Sara, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I apologize. I was working so hard. She said, that's okay, Uncle Don. I just missed you, that's all.

Man, oh, man. When you're that age, you know if you're going to die. You know—you know so much because you haven't been tainted yet by our culture and society or whatever it is. You've not been put into a channeled thing. Sara would send me drawings, and I would send her—I would make drawings in clay about her and me and dealing with the death figure and all that. That's why the whole series came about, was to help heal both of us,

see.

And so when I would go on, I would make trips back and forth, and stop at rest stops. So I don't read, as you know, so I'd buy her something. I bought her books. And the first book I bought her was *The Velveteen Rabbit* [Margery Williams. New York: Avon Books, 1922], because it had pictures in it. The next book I bought was *Through the Looking Glass* [Lewis Carroll. London, Macmillan and Co., 1872], and the third book was *The Little Prince* [Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943]. And she made me read them to her, so now she becomes the teacher, and I become the student. Laboriously I read it. *Velveteen Rabbit*, that's not for kids. This is heavy stuff. This is heavy stuff. It got me thinking about the child like in the dreams. So that went through my whole time period of getting well and everything.

So one day I'm in the hospital—or in her home. She was at home, not in the hospital. She had lost all her hair with the chemo and all that stuff, and there's a guy down at Philadelphia who makes wigs for kids, just wonderful. The [Ronald] McDonald House they stayed at, wonderful. So she had—she's just clipped. So her mother was pushing her through the store and says, oh, my God, what beautiful hair. You like it? You can have it. And she would do these things, just blow my mind.

When she was maybe three—she was the only girl, right, and she was a baby when Christmas came. She had all these presents, and she said, I thought it was Jesus' birthday. Just blew me away, you know what I mean? I said, my God, she's been an older woman for a long time, actually, see.

So to make a good story short, I'm healthy, and my work went on, and Sara got healthy and—oh, I've got to tell you. The last time I went down to her house, she said, Uncle Don, if you're such a good artist, how come you need my drawings to copy? You're closer to the paper than I am. I don't know. She said, look, I'm okay. You're okay. So at that point I turned my studio into a sandbox because in your sandbox you own the sandbox.

I don't know if this quite right, but you're not God; you are—you're in charge of your sandbox. And when I'm in my sandbox, I'm not afraid to do anything. Nobody makes a judgment about you at your sandbox. So my studio became my sandbox. So I could do whatever I wanted to do. I was free.

MS. RIEDEL: This was a whole new kind of work, colorful and earthenware—

MR. REITZ: Yes, that whole thing is just so—the narrative was so important about—and I got reading then, poetry, [William] Blake and people like that and so forth. And I got into different things of that nature and listening to a lot of books on tape and stuff. A one-liner would come up, and boy, there would be drawing about me and Sara and stuff, and it was basically to—it was one of the larger paintings.

But that's when I started working with the black clay. The reason for the black clay—well, in the first place the reason for the color was because that helped me get better.

So here's what happened. Okay. After the wreck, I'm at home, and Bruce Breckenridge comes over, and he says, Don, he said, you've got a good right arm, you know. You should draw. I mean, you're sitting here feeling sorry for yourself. So he brought me a drawing pad and a pen. And I could not violate that white page with a line. I couldn't do it.

So Bill Brown called, and Bill said, how you doing? I told him, you know, Bruce Breckenridge just brought me this tablet. I can't put the first mark on the damned thing. He said, oh, don't worry about that. Three days later, special delivery comes with a drawing pad with a note to Don: "I put the first mark on every page. Continue." And I've been drawing ever since. See how easy teaching is? It's so simple. [Inaudible] that whole thing of me starting to [inaudible] Sara, of course. But then the—that was before Sara was—was—

MS. RIEDEL: Sick.

MR. REITZ: Was sick, right.

MS. RIEDEL: But you weren't able to work yet, exactly. Because you weren't able to throw—

MR. REITZ: I wasn't able to throw, so I just hobbled down the shop and did tests. I needed color. So color, that—

MS. RIEDEL: And clay was being used as a canvas.

MR. REITZ: Right. And the color then changed my whole palate with low-fire colors, so my whole palate changed. And then I didn't like drawing through and seeing this bisque-colored clay. So that's when the clay body turned black. That was the reason for the black clay. And the reason for the fibers in the clay was because of the making paintings, which were—my graduate students were rolling out these paintings for me which were two feet wide, four feet long, and a quarter inch thick, see. And the fiber was holding them together. And I [inaudible] painting with them and drawing with them and all these symbols.

And then Sara got sick, and then I—that's obviously why I needed that palate, that it had a palate. Salt glaze would have nothing to do with this imagery and so forth, you know what I mean? And I was still in glaze. So I was still drawing, painting, but it's with the palate of clay as my medium and the way the clay works. And it's so forgiving; I was never afraid to make a line or to draw or to paint onto it. You just wipe it out if you don't like it. And usually you don't. Usually working spontaneously, I like what happens after I look at it for a while. And I don't think about what I'm doing when I'm painting or drawing. It's after it's over, I think about it, wow, that works; good.

And now after 20 years or whatever—Sara now, by the way, is 20-something or 30. She has two children now. I'm healthy now. So see, it all worked out fine. It all worked out fine, for the best. And it's because you had that common denominator that you need to heal each other. And it's hard to do things by yourself. It's when you're working for or with someone else that it's really important that things happen, I think. I don't think being a hermit is that healthy for you.

I find living out here in Arizona in this canyon, the workshops are very healthy for me because I can communicate with people.

MS. RIEDEL: You need that give and take. You've always talked about the giving and the taking.

MR. REITZ: Right. Right, right. And I know that—as I said, the workshops started back in elementary [school] when I was doing—

MS. RIEDEL: The '60s.

MR. REITZ: Teaching, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk a little bit about those, too—what they're like for you. You've done workshops all over the world.

MR. REITZ: The workshops now?

MS. RIEDEL: How they've evolved.

MR. REITZ: Well, they evolved, as I said before, from when I started teaching public school. I had to get to the parents before I could get to the teachers before I could get to the students. So the parents had to know that just because the snowman was green—that was the only crayon that girl had. It's not because there's something wrong with her. So I can go to PTA meetings. We'd do string pulls. We'd melt candles; we'd do finger painting. And the parents would just get excited, involved in it. So that's when I started my workshops, out of a need. All of this stuff comes out of a need, see. There's always a need for something, and that's what starts everything. If there's no need, you won't do anything, see.

The need to express, the need to get to those kids, that's where it started, the workshops started. And I found that I could get across to the people in workshops because—I have a gift for gab, I do. And I show off, you know. What the hell, I'm in charge, right? And so I thought it would get to the kids and so on. But that's where the workshop starts. Then at the university I would talk to everybody. It didn't matter; I'd talk to contractors' groups, Better Homes & Gardens. Doesn't matter. I'd talk to anybody that wanted to hear about art. I'd talk to them about art.

And when I quit teaching, I'd just do the workshops. Because of the workshops I can get across what I need to get across, get to people in two days that would take a semester sometimes to get across at the university level. It's so concentrated. And when I walk into a workshop, if I see them taking notes and start asking about glaze calculation, I've lost them. I said, no, I'm not talking about clay. I'm talking about a way of life. I'm not talking about pottery. This is a way of life, the way we relate to things, the way I relate, the way you relate. That's what's important to what you're doing, see. Now is your time to get yourself—see, if you're not doing what you want to do, you just didn't want it bad enough yet. When you want it bad enough, you'll do it. But until you want it bad enough, you're not going to do it, you know.

And I know that family will get in the way, husband, wife, kids, whatever, but if you want it, you'll do it. You've got to find a way to do it, see. So when we're at a workshop, everybody, this is your chance. The wife is home; the husband's home; you have no kids; you've got two days. You do it now. When you get home, you don't care. When you go back and want to say to your husband or your wife, make your dinner today; this is my day to do art, and you can clean the chemistry experiments out of the refrigerator. That's fine, whatever, but this is my day. You don't even come talk to me today. This is it. Take a day for yourself. And that's what the thrust of my workshop is. Find your way. Be yourself. That's what you've got to do.

And I do it by lecturing and by demonstration. I've found that when the two work together, by not just saying

what to do, but doing what I say, and showing you how spontaneous I work, that anything is okay. There are no rules. It's all legal. Doesn't have to be round. I don't think it is. If it's too heavy to pick that up, then it's too thick. If the pitcher's too heavy to pass, it's too thick. If you pick it up and throw it to the ceiling, it's too light. So it's a value judgment.

You've been picking up this glass of water ever since you were two years old. You know how much that is going to weigh. That's what your judgment is. If it weighs more than that, it's not—to me, you know. I know what it's going to be, and I'm not surprised by its weight. So weight, that used to be—people would make cylinders and cut them down. I don't care. It'll come to you later on. Forget about that stuff. And just throw that—that's what I do, this thing. Throw clay out, cover chairs with clay, work with slips, wet clay.

We'd line people up, and I'd get in the line, and they cover us all with clay and make this living mural of us under this wet slabs of clay. We had one in Hawaii which was just—just another aspect of the workshop, isn't it? Because of clay. And I say this over and over again. I've probably said it on here, I'm not sure. But I'm 76 now. I'm playing with clay, in mud, trying to figure out what I'm going to do when I grow up. Know it's going to be something important, but I don't know quite yet. And people pay me. They pay me to go all over the world because of mud. It's the damnedest thing.

I just follow my bliss, and it works out. It's—[Joseph] Campbell was right, you know? Exactly. And so I—I'm so fortunate. I'm a very fortunate person. I try not to do too many things to excess. I try to live rather modestly, in a way. It depends. Well, I never care about money. I just make it and spend it. They ask me about cash flow. I don't know. I'm easy with cash flow. It flows right out. I have no problem. If I want more money, I just go make it. Money has not been a thing to work for. Now it's enabled me to do something else with it, to better somebody else or me or whatever. And then last Christmases I've been giving a lot to children's organizations and to world organizations, and to buy animals for people in their name, you know. This year I bought two llamas, an elephant, and a water pump for people in Africa. I forget what it's called now, the organization. I give them for gifts, that in your name I bought these things. Because we have enough stuff. There's enough stuff. I don't need any more stuff.

So anyhow, money itself is not evil. It has the potential of becoming evil, but it's not in itself. It's what you do with it and how it affects you in your thinking. It can become very evil, but I never worry about the damned financial thing. I probably would have kept my meat market. I don't worry about it, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, actually, that segues beautifully into the relationships with galleries over the years and what that's been like for you.

MR. REITZ: I don't have many galleries. I have Udinotti, my gallery here in Scottsdale [AZ]. I have that one in Georgia, Atlanta, the Great American Gallery, and then it was the Concord Gallery—I can't think now. Sorry. But anyhow. And I have Maurine Littleton [Gallery, Washington, DC]—

MS. RIEDEL: For a long time—'85 or so.

MR. REITZ: And the Perimeter Gallery in Chicago. The reason I'm not into so many galleries is because this will be the conversation: "Wow, we like what you're—you think you could do more of these in a different—bigger?" I said no. This is what I do. The other comment is, well, the trouble with Don is, you're going to change. You change so much. I said, yeah, that's the only constant I have in my life, is change. But they want you to be recognized from across the street, so people can say, that is a Don Reitz, you know. I don't care about that. And so it's hard for me to deal with galleries.

But galleries are very fine. They're very good. And it's interesting to deal with galleries because most galleries nowadays—in the earlier years, when I was in the gallery in Chicago, to the 8 gallery [ARTSPACE 8] in Chicago, she would say, look, we haven't been selling these this month, but I know you need a couple of hundred bucks, and she'd give me a couple of hundred bucks, and she will sell something next month. So that was the relationship you had. And they took a third. They took 30 percent or whatever. And if they bought it outright, they may give it to them for half. But on consignment—I mean, when I had my meat market, could I go to Swift or Armor and say, I want a load of meat. I'm not going pay you for it, but if I sell it, I will pay you for it. If I don't, you take it back. That is ridiculous, you know.

So when I have a show now, I say, I want you to guarantee me you'll sell one piece. There's no guarantee—and this puts them—it's not egotistical. It's just I want something also, you know. I want you to work for me. I can sell them by myself, but if I'm going to give you—now it's 50 percent—if I'm going to give you 50 percent, I want you to work for me. See what I mean? And they're very happy to do this, see. I have good relationships with my galleries because I have never, ever undersold my galleries. I had—that was my biggest gripe with, especially, educators. They have their electricity free, their clay is free, their firing is free, and they sell these, you know, 20-inch bowls for five bucks. I say, you've got them in the gallery for $35. They give you 12 months of the year exposure. You've got a weekend here. Why are you underselling?

As a matter of fact, I got into a fight. At the Bonawell Fair, this guy was waiting to the end of the fair, then he'd lower his prices, so everybody would wait to the end of the fair. So I'd give him hell. I'd get so mad at him, and he started cussing me out, and I just popped him, right through his whole damned display. I said, you know, clean it up, and don't come up. Because every time I see you, when you walk the street, cross the street, because if you don't, I'm going to whip your ass. That's it.

The only time I ever remember getting as mad as that was one time [when] I did that to my tender when I was diving. One time when I was diving—I don't have a very violent temper. I'm not a very violent man unless I have to be. But I was diving, and I was cutting off the bench keel of our ship. We had hit coral, and it was rolled back, so I was going to cut it loose, this huge piece of metal. So I was just down on the stage, just under the—cutting it off with a torch in the water. I'm holding onto the piece I'm cutting off. But I'm on a stage. The piece came with such force, it took me off the stage, and it fell about 60 feet, you know, in the water.

And I said, God, my ear's going pop, pop, pop, and I'm telling them, increase my air, because you can literally be pushed up into your—in your helmet. Your body's 90 percent water, and the pressure is—one atmosphere is like 11 tons of water on you or something. Know what I mean? Thirty feet. So anyhow, so I got—where was my tender? He's supposed to be on the other end of my line here. I said—his name was Rick something. I said, Rick, are you there, Rick? Yeah, he said. Where did you go? What happened to you? I said, we'll talk about it, Rick. I'm going to come up now.

So I come up, and I got to the stage and was being decompressed—I didn't have to decompress because it wasn't that deep. Got off the stage, and you come up on the stage, take aboard ship, and you get off, clomp, clomp. You see, some remain calm. Take my hat off. They're talking away, not even listening to what they're saying. Take my breastplate off, take my weight belt off, take my shoes off, got all the way down to the underwear. I took Rick—man, I plastered him against that bulkhead. I literally pounded him then. I said, you had my life in your hands. You could have killed me. I don't want to see you. This ship is 300 feet long. I don't want to ever see you again. Stay out of the way, or I'll throw you overboard, I swear to God. I was—and I'd never really lost it that bad. But he could have. I could have fallen deep and been killed like that.

But that is—so what I said earlier on about trusting people. You had to have a lot of trust with your tender. And I didn't scope him out enough before I said he could be my tender. But anyhow, I don't know how I got onto that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we were with galleries and trust.

MR. REITZ: Oh, yeah, yeah. Thank you. I'm sorry. I digress so much.

MS. RIEDEL: Don't worry.

MR. REITZ: But I really—I have not had experience with more than two galleries that I felt were unethical in their payments, and one well-known gallery still owes me money from the '70s. But I cross them off. I've had great relationship with the galleries. As long as we have a contract and, they—mostly it's a verbal contract. But I usually get paid, and every now and then a check will come in, and that will be cool.

The L'Atelier Gallery was good, but the Udinotti Gallery down in Scottsdale, very good this year. And other galleries have been pretty fair, too.

MS. RIEDEL: And you also sell your own work.

MR. REITZ: I also sell my own work, right. And people will come out; I'll sell my work. But I will not run a show; I will not undersell a gallery. I will give them a collector's price, which is 30 percent less—generally 20 percent. They come out to the ranch, I give them 30 percent, and the galleries all know that, and that's okay, because I would get 50 percent if they sold it anyhow. So—but if they come to me via the gallery, then I give them their commission, see. I've never, ever been unethical that way. I don't like people who are unethical like that, who—because the galleries have overhead. They have rent.

I know it's hard to understand; like, you're getting all this work for nothing, and I'll take it back if it's not sold. But they have, okay—what's the name of the gallery in New York? Dammit, I can't think now. He said to me one time—I can't think now. He said, Don, I would love to show you in the gallery, but if I sold your show out, I couldn't pay the rent. Your prices are too low. You've got to bring your prices up.

I've always had trouble doing that. I was always known for, not lower than other people, but they were very moderate prices. Slowly over the years galleries have raised them and raised them. A good example of functional ware which transcends function by size and by price is the pitcher form. I was selling three-dollar pitchers, and right now a pitcher is $3,000. So it's—it wasn't my doing. That's what the galleries put it up. I wouldn't pay $3,000 for a damned pitcher. It's crazy. It's a lot of damned money. Like this—your larger sculptures that are $20,000, $30,000. Of course, out of that you've got to remember I will get $10,000. And I've

had all the expense of making, all the expense of holding. They don't sell like function ware. I mean, you'll sell maybe one every—sometime but not that often. You sell a lot of big pieces. You might sell one out of a show, sometimes two.

So people don't understand that some of these pieces have been—and wood firing is very expensive. I'm paying $400 a cord for oak, and we use eight cords to fire for six days or seven days, you see. And then this may not work, so we fire it again. Some pieces have been three times firing. That's 24 days they've been under heat, plus I have six people firing, plus I have my helpers here. I have all this expense. So there's not that much profit. And I must say that what I fire is very experimental. I can't help myself, see. I can't help myself.

And I probably have 25 percent loss in the wood firing. It's a lot of loss.

MS. RIEDEL: That is a lot of loss.

MR. REITZ: Exactly, but I say, well, that's the way it is. I've got to learn when I'm working.

MS. RIEDEL: And by loss, you mean cracks or pieces that you can't re-fire—

MR. REITZ: Cracked, or just throwing dumb stuff in, or break—of course, aesthetic is a very personal thing, and I think it's a good piece, or it doesn't go further than dry. And if it's still good, I'll slake it down. But if it's good enough for bisque fire, then it's good enough to take through everything, because you've changed it from dirt to ceramic material.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: So when they go in that kiln, they're—aesthetically, they're good pieces. Now sometimes a piece will change by shrinking, especially a bulbous piece. And sometimes I lose them that way. And I'm being too critical, most people say, but if I don't think it's that good, then I can't afford now to have them. But good the way I feel good. Or I will lose them through cracking or breaking, or a piece will fall over another piece. You know. Because wood firing is a very chancy thing, you know, and so forth.

But I always used to—like I was telling you about when I did the first wet firings; Johanna says, don't experiment. This is actually—she didn't know it, but I didn't lose one piece. I said, thank you, God, because we were broke, man. We were broke. But, yeah, go buy another horse. The worst thing you can do is go to a horse auction with an empty trailer. Worst thing in the world you can do.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like the dealers were really helpful in raising your prices.

MR. REITZ: Absolutely. Absolutely. The dealers, and the artists who were ahead of me, like Voulkos, Rudy, who commanded more wages. See, now—and this is—I guess this is okay to say, because Dale Chihuly, one of the best marketers I've seen in the country, you know, and because of that—prices of glass have—he has helped set the standard for price of glass. So why knock that? You don't necessarily like all the forms. That's beside the point. And I must say, Harvey Littleton said in the very beginning, we're not making nickel-and-dime stuff. They want a piece of glass—like the Natzlers [Otto and Gertrude] did. The Natzlers started out with high-priced work, did so much, but then they did. They set standards. And Harvey helped his glass people. You know, they're paying 50 bucks for a little bitty paperweight. That was a lot of money at that time. Or $150, something like that. But he set standards. Whether you liked the work or not was something else. And that helped you with your work.

And so the galleries would—because I never raised my prices. It was the galleries who said, look, we've got to do this because now—see, over the years, slowly, slowly, slowly, if you have earned, paid your dues, then somebody has to pay for the time spent. You're not buying just this piece. You're buying 50 years of work. Of experience, you see? It's like a lawyer will tell you, well, I had to go to law school. You're paying, right—what the hell do you think you're doing in art? You're not just paying for the piece. It's a different way of looking at it. There are a lot of other ways to look at it. But the galleries have been very good to me, and I'm very fortunate.

And collectors have been very good to me. I have some very, just fine people who've helped me along the way and have helped sell a piece to another collector, and so forth. It's very strange in the glass community, though. It really is. If one collector buys a piece of glass from me, you can count 20 who are going to buy it from you. It's not like that in clay. That's a really strange thing. But that's cool. That's okay. I don't mind. That's good. That's good.

And I meet so many very interesting people. Some people have the notion that if you have a lot of money, you have to be hotsy-totsy. How do you say it, have to be—not true. Not true. Some of the finest people—anybody who collects clay, I think, pretty wacko, you know. But they do. And I find almost all my collectors are people—and other people's collectors—have been very—they make you feel comfortable, although you're in a

multimillion-dollar home and all that, but they make you feel you're okay. They're just—and when you get them in the element of their home, any kind of dinner party, they become somebody else, or something else, because of what they're expected to be, or I don't know. But most people are just wonderful, wonderful people. And the collectors and the galleries.

So you can't just go out there and say, well, I'm going to raise my prices. Or I can't. I can't. And whatever—one thing I did learn, though, one time—Pittsburgh. I forget the name of the gallery. I had three pieces in there, four pieces. They were bottles. They were bottle forms. They were there for two years in this gallery, and he said, well, Don, he said, you want to sell those pieces? I said, yes. He says, okay, I'll sell them for you next month. He tripled the price and sold them in two months. If it's not worth that, it's not worth anything. It's something to do with the financial—our culture, the financial thing has something to do with the value of it, whether it's good or not, you see.

Now I'm debating about putting my personal collection of work in the front of a gallery, because I have to have some place to put it, but it's not for sale. So if people go through that, and they see, well, what this is—well, it's not really as good as this, is it, because he doesn't have it. You know, very difficult—

MS. RIEDEL: That's difficult.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, it's difficult. And it shouldn't be that way, but it is. So if I like something, the prices—well, it can get prohibitive, of course, but I'll find some way if I really, really, really, really want it, something like that. But yes. So the galleries have been good to me.

MS. RIEDEL: You've also had a lot of museum and gallery exhibitions over the years, and university gallery exhibitions. Last year you had a significant traveling retrospective ["Don Reitz: Clay, Fire, Salt, and Wood." Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, 2005].

MR. REITZ: Yes. It was really nice. I was very happy with that, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: What impact has that had on your work and on sales?

MR. REITZ: Now, it was very strange. First of all, Jody Clowes did a fantastic job of writing and finding pieces. I don't know where pieces went. I never kept records or kept slides or something like that. And found pieces from the '60s up until now. So there was—how many pieces were in that show? I don't know if—

MS. RIEDEL: Sixty-something?

MR. REITZ: Sixty-something, yes. Sixty-some pieces in that show. They went from the '60s to the present. And when I walked through the show, I was just astounded at the breadth of work that I've done. The way, the direction, you forget about it, because you're working in the present, not the past. Now I don't rely on the past, but, wow, I was really good. I was really good.

Then it went to the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina, and they did an excellent job of installing. As a matter of fact, I could see the time progression a little bit better in that show. If you started at one end of the Mint and went through the other end, you came out at the present. Since the very beginning, you could have the sense of development.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you learn from seeing that?

MR. REITZ: I learned that I still want to take chances, and it pays off. I was proud in the beginning pieces from little teapots to little things to now the structures and so forth. I was proud of the fact I took chances. I know there are some pieces I've done, I'll never get credit for starting, but that doesn't matter with me because I don't—you know, I was there. Especially with the low-fired color stuff and the drawings and stuff. I felt really proud. I don't look at the tapes that they make. I don't listen to my speeches. I had a hard time looking at me on television or something like that.

But I looked at this retrospective, and I went through it. I said, you know, I must really be pretty damned good. And I've never said that before in my life. I said, yeah, it's good what I'm doing. And then I would wonder how I did it. We all do, don't we? How do we have a farm and make pots and have a family and teach at university? Because you were younger, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there particular pieces or particular elements of pieces that really resonated with you?

MR. REITZ: Actually, I can't say there are. Because each piece has its own time period and its own thing, and there weren't any—I have no special preference. I'm trying to think. It's a very good question. Because, see, the pottery forms stand on their own as pottery forms. Vessel form. That's what I was doing. They're really, I felt, really without being egotistical, very competent forms.

MS. RIEDEL: Strong, beautiful.

MR. REITZ: And then I'd go into the sculpture work, which was very comparable. So they all seem to be in their own time period, their own genre, I think. Very successful for me. I was very happy to see it. Of course, they picked the pieces that have been collected and stuff. Of course, there's been a lot of duds. Of course there are. But I was happy.

I guess I was most happy with the—there's one little piece in the show which is about this big. It was a piece of clay that was on the wedging table, and I went to wedge it and thought, wait, wait, wait, wait. It's already there. I'm not going to make some damned pot out of it. So I just hollowed it out and made it. It's right in the book. It's just—it's a little sculpture piece about like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it one of the chunks or punch outs?

MR. REITZ: Chunks. It wasn't a punch out. That was the beginning. Or it might have been a form of a punch out. But I think it's in the front of the book there.

MS. RIEDEL: It's called Chunk.

MR. REITZ: Yes, just a little piece, about like this, and it was laying on my—it was on my wedging table, and I was going to wedge it, and I said, nope. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. So often we don't see what's right in front of us. We're trying to make it into something better than, when in fact it's okay like it is. And I'm not going to try to change you. You're okay like you are. I won't try to change you. I'm okay like I am. I'm okay, you're okay, right?

You know the guy who wrote a book that's called I'm OK—You're OK [Thomas A. Harris. I'm OK—You're OK: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis. New York: Harper & Row, 1969]? He committed suicide. He wasn't okay. He wasn't okay. So I don't know why I brought that up.

MS. RIEDEL: You have an interesting way—you've talked about form as a cross section, in oneself, of material and spirit. And it seems as if that rings true in your range of forms. That's what you look for.

MR. REITZ: Yes, that's a good, very good question. What really makes a piece successful for me, in a personal way, [is] that feeling that I'm in the cross section. I am one with this piece. And when you're making it, that's the way you have to feel, that it is me. I'm just putting out me. This is who I am, what I am. And it's very intimidating because as an artist you're laying yourself out naked in front of the public to see all. With the Sara series, psychiatrists have a ball with my drawings. Jesus Christ, you've got troubles, boy. You're really screwed up, man.

But, see, see, what man can't control, or is in fear of, he puts on the walls. Look at the cave drawings, right? Look at our cave drawings today. Same thing. Once you get it up there, you can deal with it. In here, it's too abstract. Can't deal with it. I just got some drawings from a group of people who were, they say, mentally disturbed people. Oh. They were so good. And I can be mentally disturbed myself. Oh, you know, the five-year-old, the preschooler, their view—as they see—get this, as they see the world and the universe and that which is around them.

Okay, when I was student teaching in Reading, Pennsylvania, right, very conservative place. And so I had an art cart which I'd push around from classroom to classroom so they could have art. When I'd come in, the teacher—I'd say, go take a smoke. And they'd go take a smoke, and I'd take over the class, okay? So this one day I took over this one class, and the teacher said, now I want to do something—it's George Washington's birthday. We want to get some posters. I said, oh, okay. Don't worry about it.

I said, hey, you all know who George Washington is? Yeah. What did he do? I don't know. What did he do? Oh, he crossed the Delaware [River]. Right. How did he cross the Delaware? In a boat. How do you know it was a boat? How could he have crossed the Delaware? He could have swum, right. He could have swum. He could have done this. So we did this whole thing of how George could have crossed the Delaware. He was being pulled on the tails of donkeys. The teacher came in; it was freaking funny—it was beautiful. She about flipped out, you know. I said, hey, happy birthday. So I walked out. So they didn't like when I came by.

So this one teacher was just a real bitch, basically, and so I went into her class, and we're doing something on the farm. They were doing something, so I said, I'll relate to that because the farm is great subject matter, animals. What animals do you have? What animals do we know of? And I'd tell them stories. So pretty soon they'd just start working. You don't tell kids to start. They just start. We tell stories like that. And so this one little girl who was in the corner, she hadn't been relating to anything for all the times that I was there, and all of a sudden she started to draw. She was doing something. I can't forget; it was great. It was terrific. I didn't say a word to her.

So in comes this lady teacher. She said—I forget her name. I kind of think it was J—because it sounded like

Pennsylvania Dutch, Jenny, Chenny, Chunk, something. She said, whoever saw a cow like that? Whoever saw—I said, may I see you for a minute, please, out there? Don't ever say that to that kid. That's how she sees a cow. That udder is this big. She's looking from the belly up. I want you to get down on your hands and knees and see what you see on the floor. How big is that tail? Do you know? I am so depressed when you come in and ruin what I just said. First time she's touched paper.

She started to cry. I said, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. No, she said, you're right, you're right. I've fouled it up. She was a younger person and—but I was so mad and angry that she just—I don't know if she was through with teaching. So I don't know if she went back to drawing some stuff or not. But you know, why do you think your mother's face is this big, you know? Read the letters. These are letters to you. What kids draw, they are letters for you. Read them. Don't try to make them something they're not. Let them just go. Their expression is so pure and so clean. And somehow we try to get that back now. What is my—can we get it back? After you've lived for so long, can you ever really get it back? I doubt it. I think not.

But you can approach it from an angle that, I'm going to be my own person, and what are my fears, what are my loves, what are my likes, what are—you know. And that's one thing I do in the classroom. I say, okay, I want you to list everything you like, what food you like, what drink you like, what games you like. That's who you are. That's who you are. So everybody's list is—you're going to be different. But you listen; that's who you are, and be that person to me. You can even list your dislikes if you want to. I don't care. That's who you are. That's the way to find it out.

And my goal in everything I've done has been to, me included, help people, or make situations so people can find out who they are. I would say, will the real Don Reitz stand up? Who am I? And sometimes I think I'm somebody else, and I'm not really. It's so easy to lose sight of who you are in this culture of how you must dress, how you must look, what kind of diet you're on, you must have this kind of makeup.

Women now, I feel sorry for them because they are inundated. The commercials on how you should look, what breast size you have, what hairstyle you should have. My God, when I had this chest operation, I had this pectoral flap. I said, God, women go through that? My God Almighty, I'd die, know what I mean? Jesus Christ. Be proud of your body. It's okay, you know? Take care of your body. It's for longevity and for life. But we're going to age. That's just the way it is. You can either age gracefully and embrace it, or you can be discouraged the rest of that [life] you're living. I find nothing wrong with, well, growing old. Whoever said "those golden years" is good is full of crap; I often wish I had my strength. Since the operation I wish I had my strength back and do things I used to do. But I still—my mind is still very, very energetic, very positive, and working all the time.

And what's frustrating, I can't do what my mind is saying now because I need help. I need helpers, and I have two helpers now who come in and will throw and do things. And the good part about the clay was the throwing of it, the making, the touching.

MS. RIEDEL: The immediacy.

MR. REITZ: Now I have to work vicariously, and so these two guys are—I think I can do it. I have great faith in them, and they just want to work and help me. And of course, we have a mutual understanding, because to live here is isolation, and if you're not satisfied, you think—let's give ourselves three weeks, and let's talk every three weeks. Please don't feel any kind of a commitment to me because, you know, yes, no, yes, no. Usually they stay. They stay.

So anyhow, that is the frustration I find, that my mind and my thoughts are so much advanced to what I can physically do right now. But I'm going to get back to that. It's just—the doctor said, Don, you've only had an operation a year or so ago. Said, you know, you need more time. Your outside body is healing, but your heart is not yet. It takes time. Time. Don't foul it up.

MS. RIEDEL: We should talk, too, about the still lifes that you're doing. After the accident in '81 you started a whole new series of work, the [inaudible], the wood fire, and now you're doing this whole—

MR. REITZ: Now what's happening is that I started to put together the jars and the slabs and things which broke, which didn't make it in the kiln, and make still lifes. And I loved it. I thought they were so—wow, here was a useless thing that I gave growth to it and beauty to it. So now I'm thinking, why don't I just make some still lifes now? So I'm going to make still lifes, because I like to work on large things, just for my own benefit right now. Nothing wrong with smaller pieces. But I want to relate one-to-one with them. I have these throwers who are good throwers, and another guy can build. So I make these still lifes, like four-foot-tall, five-foot-tall pieces, put them together, bend them over one over the other while they're wet, and this is my still life, and fire them together.

So now you buy this still life, not a piece, a pot. It's not a celebration of a vessel any longer. It came out of that, but now it's something else. Now it is truly a sculptural response to an abstract thought or emotional feeling.

And that's what I want to get out, that this inert material can become alive, and how they relate one to another. It's the principle of still life, right? Oranges, apples, vase, and how they relate to one another. When we first started to paint, that's what we did. But now I want to make these still lifes, not just work with shards and that. So we'll see how that works.

MS. RIEDEL: In these pieces you place jars next to tea bowls—

MR. REITZ: Right. Right. And I was doing some sketching. I very seldom sketch because once I sketch, I'm tired. I do some sketches on the floor, but I used to paint, or take a brush with water, and just do the sketch on the cement floor, because then it would be gone, but it would be in my mind. I wasn't going to try to make a picture, see what I mean? And so the idea, I would put out on the floor, and that was—then it would go away, and I still have the idea.

And so I have this idea. Now I don't know how it's going to manifest itself, but even of, say, okay, doing this abstract still life so they're recognizable forms, right, and then putting in an apple or something to kind of throw it—I thought it would be kind of corny. You don't know until you do it, but just an apple shape, really luster of shape. Maybe not. At least I think this is a new direction for me. Whether I continue with it or not, I don't know. But I have to try it. I might say, this is not working; we're going to do something else then. I know it will lead to something else.

I want to go back to some walls again. I like working with walls and units, like I'm building walls inside the kiln and using them as—as art.

MS. RIEDEL: Like the mural in the studio?

MR. REITZ: Murals and stuff like that, freestanding walls, things like that. I have some ideas again that I want to talk about in my monoprints. I usually rent this studio down in Phoenix [AZ] a couple times a year. I haven't because of my sickness yet, but I want—I'm anxious to get back to rent that, the print studio, and get some of these ideas on paper. There's another way of expressing another thing, and the monoprint seems to be the way I can. It's very hard for me to do with etching. But get there, just slap dab, punch, punch, push, pull. Then doing the monoprint series.

MS. RIEDEL: The prints started in the '80s, after the accident?

MR. REITZ: Yes. Well, actually, I did them, which people don't know, I did the prints while I was in Wisconsin with Dean Meeker up in the print lab. But I gave them away, all the prints; I should [have kept] some; I wish I had. Well, I don't wish I had. People enjoyed them, so I would just—but I like the printing process because there were students there to help you. You just did the drawing; they did the grunt work.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned that as a nice reversal of the teacher—student relationship.

MR. REITZ: Yes, right. Exactly right. Just this last year I went out to Sitka [Arkansas] and did a week out there with a printmaker, and did aquatint, which I had never done before. Another good experience. And that week I was a student, and she was the professor. She had all responsibility. I had no responsibility. It was so great. I had no responsibility. I was free from—because I'm usually the one who has to solve all these problems. Oh, let Don do it. I didn't have to solve any problems. She did all that. So it was a nice way to be a participant in a workshop and not the leader. It was good. Anyhow.

MS. RIEDEL: What difference do you find in the printing and the monoprint process versus your drawing on clay?

MR. REITZ: Well, the drawing on clay—I get into the body of the clay, and the clay does things which I don't want to draw through, not necessarily drawing, but it's that—it's freezing that line at that time, let the line pull through the clay, or how the brush hits it, how the slip can drag or trail through it. The monoprint is close to that, but you're doing it on a surface. I guess I use a monoprint like I do paint on clay, basically, except for the digging-in process, and I really like that digging into the clay. I really, really, really enjoy that so much. Or adding to the clay. Like with my plates and adding squares and Xs and Os and things, or the archetypal forms, like that. I enjoy that. There's this organic plate and then superimposing this rectangle or square, get the relationship going between them and that plate. Or taking the rim of the plate and pushing a stick through it to get an undulating and coming up, you know. That was the first time I did it, was right there.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. REITZ: That was done in—when that was done[, it was] the first time I saw I could paint on a plate and then put skewers through, and it would undulate the paint. But goddamn, I thought that was nice. So I've had that all these years.

MS. RIEDEL: You've talked about the clay pieces as an expression of your emotional state.

MR. REITZ: In the '80s?

MS. RIEDEL: As a way to register what your emotional place is.

MR. REITZ: Oh, yeah. Right. Sure, sure, sure. Even prior to that, like these were done—'70s, I guess, something like that. And that time I—well, okay, as we look back, the farm was a great experience, Johanna, the kids, and we were doing all that. And then I went through a divorce period, and my studio was now no more 120 acres. It was in a studio at the university, a room. And so I had no privacy at all. So the only privacy I had was doing these jars. That's how the lids came on these jars, because I didn't want anybody—that was my own—the tie-downs came because of that, because I tied that down in there. And then I was really going through a bad time with it, and after a bit, I lost all color. That's when the black period came in. So it was all black.

And then I began altering from inside. That's when the altering of me inside trying to get out. I realize now, trying to get out of the situation I was in in the jar. So the jar of clay became a metaphor for my life, as it always is. That was a very profound time period. Some of the strongest pieces I've done [were] in that time period, as I looked at the retrospective, really strong. As a matter of fact, the gallery up in Pomona [Pomona College Museum of Art, Claremont, CA]—I was selling the strong pieces of mine up there. This gallery has 83 of my pieces. Just a pretty amazing collection—pretty amazing collection. But that was a very difficult time for Johanna and me and for the kids. It's not an easy thing. We're all—we never fought much. It's just that we grew apart. We just—and no point in making—now Johanna's very happy.

She married Red. We used to all go together in high school, and nobody had a girlfriend or anything. Red was just the greatest guy. He's the comic that we used to have more damned fun [with]. But we used to dance. You know, we'd go to Sailors Lake and dance to the big band. Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Gene Krupa. They all came to Sailors Lake. We'd all dance and dance, and we danced all the time. Jitterbug was in; we used to dance crazy all the time.

And so she went back to New Jersey, and she went back going with Red, an old boyfriend of hers. Red had separated from his wife, and so Red and she then got married. She's living the life like she's in Belvidere, very comfortable. They have their cabin up in the Adirondacks [NY]. They go into the Masonic Lodge. That's fine. She's very comfortable. Much more than when she was with me. I was too scattered, and it was very difficult. I realize that now.

And sometimes I was quite selfish, too, because my art—but yet I must say that raising the children on the farm, I spent more time with my kids than most artists spend with their kids, because we'd work together; we'd hunt together; we'd fish together; we'd do the chores together; we raised the horses together. So it was good. We were very close with the kids that way. And when they went away, then she and I were there—but she's really a good friend.

It was funny, we both went back to our 50th class anniversary, and so I go back, all right. So we all had name tags on. I couldn't see to read the damned things. This one girl came up to me, and said, Don, oh, my God, you look so good. How are you? Oh, yeah, I'm trying to think, look at her eyes, who is this? I took her to the prom, for crying out loud, and I didn't know who she was. They all got so old. They said, Don, you've got to read these names. I said, why? Because you were vice president. I said, I was? Yeah. I'll be damned. So I started reading all these names, and all of a sudden realized, these are all the people who are dead. They're all gone. And all of a sudden it was a realization that Bob [inaudible], Gene Snover, they're gone, and that was amazing.

But anyhow Johanna and I and Red, we all sat at the same table; we danced together. It was very nice. But for a long time it was a very difficult divorce because she wouldn't have anything to do with me, for a long, long, long time. And I don't blame her. Paula [Rice] and I just had a mutual—we were good.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting that your work got very black at the time.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, it did.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you've talked about color in many different ways, but one of them is as a healing force.

MR. REITZ: It is a healing force. It was. Like when I had my wreck, my first wreck, and I developed color because of that, because of happiness, and the images through color became playlike. They became almost comical. I would just put the slip and then go back in and draw what I saw. They were like ink blots, and so it was a—yes, color is very healing. It made me feel happy. That's why I really did [it], I guess. It made me feel happy again. I worked myself out of the black period with the help of Paula, and it was a great time. We had a great time.

Madison was a great place. It was a great town. Madison is a good university. It's a good college town. It's one of

the cleanest environments around, and no industry in it. Very nice place. They have—winters are terrible. But it has great lakes there. This one lake is Eleven Mile Lake, the other is Twelve Mile Lake, the other is Nine Mile Lake. So Paula and I got together—I would see Paula; she would be in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I'd be doing a workshop in Florida, so I'd go to Florida by way of Arkansas, right? I said to Paula, I can't keep doing this. Why don't you come up and—and she and a couple of girls got together and started Calabash Pottery or something like that. I said, come up to Madison and become a graduate student. You'll have a studio; we can be together. So she became my student as a graduate student because that way she got her studio, you see?

MS. RIEDEL: This was in the '70s, yes?

MR. REITZ: Yes. So you see, here's the thing that people don't understand. When you go to college, you'll never have that much again, ever. You'll never have that kind of studio again for a long time. You'll never have that much freedom again. You'll never have that much physical plant again. I mean, what you're paying for is minimal because you got a lot of stuff for your buck if you use it. And all the help and everything else. So anyhow, it was very good for Paula. We were living from hand to mouth, and we were broke; we were living in this apartment.

So whenever I get broke, I go buy something. That's the solution to being broke, see. It doesn't matter—this time we're broke. I said, come on, we're going out to the mall. So we get in her little VW; we got to the mall; we were going to buy a T-shirt. So the boat show is on. Oh, my God. So I'm a nut about boats. I get in these boats, and she said, I've not seen you this happy for—well, I said, I'm in a boat for Christ's sakes. She said, well, that's something. Yeah. In a boat. So I said, well, you should have this boat. Paula said, if you're going to buy a boat, I'm not going to go to the bathroom over the side. I want a bathroom in the boat if we're going to go in a boat. I said, yeah, well, here's one with a bathroom and kitchen, refrigerator. Look at this, 27-foot Larson Command Cruiser, sleeps three people, four people. This is a great boat. The guy said, you could probably afford this.

So I got thinking about it, and so we got back in her car. We started—she says, where are you going? We're going up to River Falls [WI], where they make this boat. I want to see them make this damned boat. We have a credit card. We'll sleep in a hotel tonight. We'll be okay. So we go—whatever. So we—this place where they're putting on, guniting on the fiberglass on the boat. Not a mask on one. Everyone was so high. I thought, Jesus. It was a kick, man. But I thought it was really good. It was built very well. I got excited about it. It was something to do.

The next day we go—and she says, where are we going? Going to the mall. Uh-oh. So we go back to the guy. I said, how much is this? He told me. No, no, how much do you really have to have for the boat, I said, because I want your bottom price, because I'm going to ask you once, and then I'm walking away. If it's good, okay. If it's no good, I can't do it. He gave me the price. So I figured out what my payments would be, and they would be—I had just finished paying off the farm that I'd given to Johanna, and my payments were exactly the same as these payments. So I said, well, I haven't missed that, so what the hell? We'll buy this. So we bought the 27-foot [boat]. So we got this boat. The guy said, where do you normally dock? I said, well, I live in the country. Well, we'll put it in my driveway.

So I put it in the driveway, and we would—it was still small enough you could trailer it,, just small enough to trailer. We trailered it and put it—I said, you know, Paula, we can't keep trailering this boat. We've got to get an apartment on a lake. She said, we can't afford that. Ah, we can afford it. We'll get an apartment on the lake. So we got an apartment on the lake; the boat was docked at the apartment. We come out from the second floor, get in the boat, go to school, teach, get in the boat, come back home with the boat. I lived on the boat. And then sometimes I wouldn't make it home. I'd start drinking, and I just—I'd go to the boat, call her. She would know that I'd be okay if I was on the boat. So anyhow, I was on the boat.

The boat was a great—oh, God, it was so cool. It was so cool, man. And we used to go out and sleep because the mosquitoes would not be out on the lake. We'd be out and get up in the morning, the mist about this high, you know. We'd fish. And Paula said, you don't really enjoy the boat. I said, what are you talking about? She said, all you do is work. I said, you don't understand. Just stay on the diving platform. Feed the ducks. This is fine. I'm polishing, and I'm making coxcombing on all the wheels and Turk's Heads [knots] and macramé curtains. I'm making and all the stuff I used to do in the navy. I had just a great—I kept that boat spotless.

One time I'm coming back from the university, and I felt the urge for a drink. So I opened up the liquor cabinet and threw the anchor out, started drinking, and pretty soon I got a little high. So I thought I'd take a nap; so I just lay down, basically passed out. Next thing I heard, these car horns are honking and honking. People are hollering; what the heck is happening here? What happened is, I'd thrown the anchor out but never tied it off, so the wind pushed me all the way across the lake, and pushed up onto the highway. And these people are pushing me off the highway. It was so funny. Okay, so it taught me another lesson. You've got to tie the anchor off if you're going to throw it in.

I don't know how I got on that, but I enjoyed my life, and if I'm going to be hung up by what I can't have or can't do, this is no way. I can do whatever I want to do. You have faith that you can do it, you see. And then we bought the place out in the country, and then I bought—this is great.

I'm in Florida, down in Florida, and Stan—he does tournament fishing.

MS. RIEDEL: This is recently?

MR. REITZ: Recently, just last week. Last weekend down in Florida. So he does tournament fishing, and so I stay with him. So I started looking at some of these books and the prices of boats which weren't as big as my boat. They were going like for $150,000 or $400,000. Jesus, what the hell's it worth? So I bought that boat for—and trailer—for $18,000. I had it for eight years. I sold it for $27,000 because the boat will appreciate if you keep it up, and it's not salt water. But now the boat would be worth, oh, God, who knows?

I sold it to my secretary in the school, Kay, her husband at that time. Her ex now. No, he still has it. I just talked to her today. No, he still has the boat. That's fantastic. It's got a Mercury 988 engine in the thing, twin screws. Beautiful piece of equipment.

MS. RIEDEL: It goes back to your time in the navy and back to the water.

MR. REITZ: Back to the navy, back to what I like, the water.

MS. RIEDEL: And fishing.

MR. REITZ: Fishing, that's right. Snorkeling, whole thing.

MS. RIEDEL: It all keeps circling around.

MR. REITZ: And even Paula—when Paula would go down, we'd go down in the little Verde River here, but snorkel and get crawdads—

MS. RIEDEL: Really? It looks about two feet deep today.

MR. REITZ: And my housekeeper—she'd boil them up, we'd have a crawdad dinner.

MS. RIEDEL: Right out of the river here?

MR. REITZ: Yes. Right here. And they have catfish in the river, and they have bass, smallmouth bass. So I'd be—when I'm here alone, I'd go down and catch a little bass and have dinner.

Well, here's a great thing. People tell me, how can you live alone? They don't understand because—this makes this point. Dan Anderson came out, and they said, okay. They said, we're firing the kiln; we're working. Not firing the kiln. We're making pieces. Five o'clock, says, cocktail time; five o'clock, cocktail time. I said, no, no, we don't drink at the house. Bring the bottle. We go down to the river, take our clothes off. We sit in the middle of the river, cigars, Jack Daniels. And all of a sudden the horses come down—Sukie's horses come down to drink. Then the cows came down to drink. Then the herons would fly over. Bald eagle went across. And right on cue the coyotes started to holler. And Rick said—

MS. RIEDEL: Dan.

MR. REITZ: Dan says, you're really not alone, are you? I said, no, I'm not alone. I have all these things with me every night. And it's just—now the fires are bad, and it's so dry that the mountain lions are coming down now. So I have to watch myself down there at night when I'm firing kilns because I see some big tracks down by the river. Big—old—the older ones are coming down. They catch dogs and cats and easier stuff to eat. My gas tank, which is right here beside the house, my one propane tank, I went out to turn up one afternoon, and a mountain lion went right up from underneath that tank, went across this in about three jumps. She was so beautiful. I was just in awe—her tail was out like this. God, what a beautiful animal.

And I said, at least she went that way. She could have killed me. But she decided not. She went the other way. So they're not so quick with humans. You hear about, all the time, people being killed on the trail or something like that. They're old and, I think, desperate cats. I'm not sure—I would never hunt a cat, but if one was in my place, I would shoot him. I've fired a gun at night—I fire my kiln with a .38 at night. I'm the only guy, I think, that fires with a .38. I have it hanging right there. So I don't know who's watching me, but somebody's out there. Not that I would ever have time to do that probably. Here in Arizona it's still the west, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: It's the wild west.

MR. REITZ: You can carry sidearms anyplace you want to as long as they're not concealed. You can go in a grocery store, see guys with sidearms on. I don't know why they need to do that, but they do. Cowboys are different. They have their sidearms, and they do cowboy stuff, which you need to do. But you don't need to have a sidearm going into the grocery store. But it's Arizona.

MS. RIEDEL: Going back to that mountain lion, I was thinking about where you've found inspiration over the years. And you've talked about nature.

MR. REITZ: Yes, nature.

MS. RIEDEL: And in Abstract Expressionism. You've acknowledged many people who really inspired you, mentors. It would be interesting to talk a bit about anyone who comes to mind, I mean, Voulkos or [William T.] Wiley or [Franz] Kline or [Mark] Rothko or Blake.

MR. REITZ: Right. They were my first heroes, of course. Kline and—

MS. RIEDEL: Rothko?

MR. REITZ: Rothko. Wiley, you know, [Wayne] Thiebaud, and they really influenced me so much. Just the freedom of Kline. How you get several brushstrokes that I—just unbelievable. And Wiley, when he was doing the skin, painting, drawing on the skinlike canvases, just blew me away. So they were very exciting. Other artists were—but this is really strange: that the only clay person that's really affected me—two, I figured it out—has been Voulkos and [Jun] Kaneko, and Rudy in a different way. Maybe three. Not many clay people have affected me at all, actually. I like their work, but they haven't—I haven't felt a need to work because of them. Pete or Rudy, we were working at a workshop—they give me energy, and just talking with them, I get from them—they're just very—especially Voulkos.

We owe so much to Pete. And I gave the lecture when I got the Voulkos award [Peter Voulkos Visiting Artist Fellowship, Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, MT, 2005]. I said, you know, I don't want to hear anybody say that Pete "used to do," because he's here. He is not in the past tense. He's all around us. He gave you the authority to kick in that jar. He gave us license to do this stuff. So just think about that. And none of this stuff is original. [Inaudible] original, when you think down to it, you know what I mean? We're all influenced by something or other, where we don't even know it sometimes.

But the most evident influence was maybe by music, a lot, music. My drawing was influenced a lot by old country-western.

MS. RIEDEL: Willie Nelson? Well, you mentioned Willie Nelson as a more contemporary influence.

MR. REITZ: Willie Nelson, Ernie Tubb, Lefty Frizzell, all the old ones. Hank Williams, Sr.—because they were talking about life things. They were the blues. They were a junction from the blues, you see. Blues were about life experiences, and because of the blues then the country-western started to talk about—there's this one by Terry—not Terry Allen—but that, you know, his partner said, now that's really a good country song. He said, no, it's not, because you haven't talked about hurting or getting drunk or your mother being killed or being in jail. He said, you've got to talk about that. So this guy wrote a song about that. I went downtown to pick my mother up from the train, and she got killed crossing the tracks, and I was drunk. I mean, he truly wrote the country-western song. And if that ain't country, he says, I'll kick your ass. It's really great.

I mean, but they're—I did so many good lines like that. Like I'm always a step behind myself, and just things that you come out of. Like Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, a lot of the songs they didn't write, but they sang these songs. Like what the hell's the guy? He's a wacko. He used to dress in drag, and he wrote these country-western songs. Can't think of his name right now. He died at 27 of drugs or something. More than that, his 30s, I guess. But he wrote a lot of these country songs that people like Willie sang and Waylon sang and Kenny Rogers, and people sang a lot of those. But I like old country because it's about those. It was like when I'd be at Penland, the cloggers, Toe River Valley Boys, that was earthy. That was really down—I understood that it excited me, you see.

I told Bill, I said, when I come down to Penland—oh, we were talking about—he was going to give me some land I could build a house on. I don't want a house, Bill. I want a porch. I just want to build a porch. And put a rocking chair on the porch, and I'm going to rock. I'm going to put a fake dog out there, fake smoke, and I'm just going to rock. Just rock and listen. That's when I was still drinking. We'd take five dollars, walk through the woods to this cabin, put five dollars on the table; we'd come back in about half hour or so, and there'd be this white lightning, jar of white lightning, on the table, and it would just knock your socks off. It was, whoa, white lightning. And there's a song about white lightning. I don't know how I got off on that. But—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, apparently. Sorry, go ahead.

MR. REITZ: That kind of earthy, real-life situations that really affect me. And all artists have responded to tragedies in a positive way. Not necessarily tragedies but—

MS. RIEDEL: Struggle.

MR. REITZ: Yes. And I mean, I like—oddly enough I love [Spanish guitarist Andres] Segovia, see. Really love Segovia. I just think he's fantastic. And I used to play a little whale music, whale sounds. I used to play that a lot in the studio. So I'm quite diverse, or I really enjoyed quite a few classical [musicians]. Now I play a lot, like a lot of jazz. I like jazz quite a bit, which was an offshoot from the blues. I also like blues a lot. So I mean, it's all okay. It's all about different stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you play music when you're working?

MR. REITZ: Pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: Do you play music when you're working?

MR. REITZ: Yes, when I work. I don't play music that I have to listen to, that it's words. It's just there's something there. And sometimes I'll just sit up here and listen to [Dave] Brubeck or something. I like jazz because it's like I am. It's just a little out around, a little off-center, you know. And I like it. I like that. And I like blues because it's talking, again, about real stuff, and pretty tough stuff, actually. So the early blues are about [that].

I got a commission by [W. C.] Handy, who started the blues, actually, out of—in Illinois, where was the Handy Foundation [W. C. Handy Foundation for the Blind, New York, NY]. I did a wall for them, and did it with kids. It was all about his music, and all the kids did pictures of Handy and music and stuff. His blues started coming up the Mississippi [River] or whatever. I was very honored to do that. They gave me the key to the city. It won't open any doors, but here's a key. Okay, this is cool.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you done many commissions? There's the big one in Grand Rapids [MI].

MR. REITZ: It was Cedar Rapids [IA]. It was a big wall commission. I just did a big mural which was—not just, but it was 18 feet by 12 feet. Up for the Chandler Arts Museum [Chandler Center for the Arts] in Chandler, Arizona. And I—not too many commissions, really. I mean, people have commissioned me to do ceramic forms, but not like you might see in public commissions. I wasn't going to do a lot of public art at one time; when you figure you get two percent of public art or whatever it is, for two percent art or whatever it is, you pay for the clean-up, the installation, but you're not making anything on that. It's not really worth it. For some of them.

And Kaneko does very good—Jun—with public art. And it was subways. The guy is just prolific. Of course, he runs a very tight ship, has good helpers. And he has his wife Ree; she's dynamite as the agent, dynamite go-getter; she really is a backbone for him, too. I'm down there working. It's humid as hell in Omaha [NE], and I said to Ree, how does Jun deal with this when he goes outside? She says, he never goes outside. He just works. He has two huge warehouses. One is his studio; the other is his museum that he's made, the Jun Kaneko museum [KANEKO, Omaha, NE].

And I watched him. When he did the big pieces out in Fremont, California, he did them inside the kiln, beehive kiln, 14-foot Dangos [dumpling form] he did. And he had an eye infection, so he worked all the time with his eyes taped open so they wouldn't shut. He loves problems, to solve problems. It's just amazing. I had a mural that I was going to do down on the floor. He came down, and I said, Jun, I don't know how the hell to hang this. Well, that's easy. No big deal. Very simple. You just put the hole here, put the hole there. I see. Ha, ha, ha, ha. He's just great.

To work in his studio is really a treat because he's allergic to dust. It's amazing. Every night his studio is washed, and it's cleaned, and it's really amazing. I don't know if you've ever been to his museum. You know how big warehouses are. It's five floors. They're filled with Dangos, a sea of Dangos. Ten heads, big heads. Unbelievable. Unbelievable. And he does a lot of commission work for people. His paintings are gorgeous, so [inaudible] quite a bit. And the last paintings he did were on a very fantastic paper that they made for him in Japan special. They were four foot by, I think, six feet of rag-type paper. And they used just the soot out of the chimney and water for his ink. Beautiful. I admire him a great deal.

I admire—like many people for different reasons. Like [inaudible] Maija Grotell. I admired her for being a woman in those ages and saying what she said, and how she talked about art and clay and stuff that was quite outspoken at that time. Wonderful woman. Wonderful woman. And Tashiko Takaezo. Quiet, quite Japanese type of thing but forceful. Forceful woman. She knows exactly what she wants to do. And then Vivika [Heino], who will tell you exactly, you know—and Bob Turner, who was more like—like Tashiko; Bob Turner, quiet and gentle man, you know. Val's that way. I've been affected by so many people, it's hard to—not just the old establishment but younger people also.

MS. RIEDEL: A lot of your students—

MR. REITZ: A lot of my students, oh, right. I always gained. What happens, if you are not willing to learn as a teacher, you're dead, see. You're there to learn as much as they are, see, and that's what keeps it going. That's what's keeping freshness; that's what's keeping it going on, won't stop. As long as your mind is active, and you can see the relationship of life to your students and to yourself—I think it's about relationships of things, like parts of the whole and all that business. Yes, if you stop learning, you're dead. Forget it. If you think you know, you're dead. You don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: It ties right into your endless experimentation.

MR. REITZ: Right. Right. People think, well, if you have a direction, then we must follow this direction. It was like—when you think that—this is a line from Henry Miller. He said, when you think if Christ came to earth, would there be more Christians? Wouldn't there be more people like Christ, and are there any, you know? You can't follow the biggies. You've got to be your own—and you'll always be your own thing.

Many people try to be Pete. You can't be Pete. How do you touch clay? You can be inspired by Pete, as I am, still am, and in awe of, but you'll never repeat Pete. A lot of people say, well, aren't your plates kind of like Voulkos's? Are you kidding? You've not seen a Voulkos plate for a long time if you think mine are like Voulkos's. We're totally different, but we're both Abstract Expressionists. So do that to clay, it does something. But it's how your hand is and how you touch clay. And I'll always have—when I'm working, I always will see his hands in front of me. Sometimes when I touch clay, I'll feel like Pete's hands. He's such a gentle person. He knows the roughness of—when he was on the heavy drugs, it was quite embarrassing a lot of times. But he was honest with you, honest as hell. But he's just a gentle man. He's done so much for so many people. And has really not asked a lot in return.

MS. RIEDEL: You met him early on in '66, at a Super Mud conference?

MR. REITZ: Oh, yes, Super Mud.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you talk about that?

MR. REITZ: Right. The first time I met him was at the Super Mud in—in—where was that now? It was Penn State [Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA]. It was Penn State. Don Tigney organized it. It was in reaction to NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts], which was getting too damned big, and it was time to disband. But have they? No. Of course not. But anyhow, so okay, so Don Tigney invited Voulkos, Bob Turner, Rudy Autio. He said, we need one more person. And Rudy said, there's this young guy in Madison. We ought to have him down here. He's unknown, an unknown to the world, but I think he's got something.

So I owe a lot of my success to Rudy Autio. A lot of—a lot of that. Because that got me in; the door opened for me at that conference. The first Super Mud. So [we] all went down to work, and I was the young kid, relatively speaking. I was about as old as some, but in clay I was not that old. So I was wedging Pete's clay, and pretty soon it came my turn to work. I had nothing ready. Pete just laughing, and Rudy's laughing. You're learning. Son of a bitch.

And so I'm up there throwing, and Voulkos said, hey, Reitzy, throw us a typewriter. And at that time the city was—Penn State was dry. A dry city. And so we went out that night—that day they became un-dry, whatever you call that. And so we're at the bar, and so Pete says, well, I'll have a—at that time he was drinking Cutty Sark—and I said, I'll have [one] with him. You could tell the waitress didn't know what the hell you were talking about. We explained to her what it was and how it was, and I just want it in a glass, a little—a glass and no ice and stuff like that. She brought back these water glasses, like this, full of whiskey. I'm saying—Pete said, shut up; she doesn't know what she's doing yet. So, we'll have another round of these glasses. So she brings glasses of whiskey. It was so fun.

Pete—you see, it's very interesting because everything he's done is so he could work more. He starts out with cigarettes; he's going to work more, more up with the cigarettes, and coffee. We're all then big coffee drinkers, all of us. Always coffee, cigarettes. And then it went to whiskey. And of course, he always drank with us. He would sip. People thought he just drank the bottle. He would finish a bottle or two in a workshop, but he would sip it, okay. Sip all day. And it helped him stay awake, because his hours were like from noon to four in the morning, then he'll sleep until noon. That time period was—that was a different time period. Then he went in—then the drug scene came on. He found he could stay awake longer. And then he got really pretty bad with the drugs, but he never lost sight of his art. Never lost sight of his art, which was really strange.

He may not know my name. One time he didn't even know who the hell I was, you know, but he never lost sight of his art. Just amazing. And then he came back around, and actually [Jim] Leedy captured him one time and put him in rehab, and kept him in rehab. Then Leedy went and got him out when it was time, brought him back

home. And Pete would go to three or four meetings a week, and Leedy said, you only have to go to one a week. He said, those bastards need me. They're all fucked up. They really need me, you know. And so he'd go back and help everybody else out. Oh, God Almighty.

This is what he would do. One time at Kaneko's we were working, and he was doing the biggest stack he ever did. He lowered John Balistreri down inside the stack with a rope, and John would push out, and Pete would push inside this thing, see, to get it. So it was about finished, so we're all—

MS. RIEDEL: How big was it? Do you have any recollection?

MR. REITZ: It was about 12—let's see. The kiln was 12—it was about eight, seven or eight feet probably. Seven. They sold it at the—out here at the spring, Desert Palms, here.

Anyhow, it was getting to be like 11 o'clock. And Pete at that time was coming down around nine o'clock to change this whole thing around. So it was nine, 10 o'clock, and I said to Balistreri, do you think we should check on Pete? No, he'll be down. Don't worry. He's okay. Because Balistreri had checked on him. He's okay, just getting up late. He'd been thinking all night about this piece. Something not quite right yet.

So he comes down like this, with his glasses in his hand. You've got to see this thing. He's down, walking like this [mutters]. Hi, hi, hi, Reitzy. Shit. How you doing? All right? Yeah. He's got his breakfast in his hand and his glasses, and he sits in a chair like this. He sits down and—yeah. Looked at the stack across the way. You know, um, he says, push. Balistreri pushed it. Yeah, that's good. We didn't see him the rest of the day. But it was all about that one thing that wasn't right, you know. He's just—he was just amazing.

And the day before he died, we were at Ball State [Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH], Balistreri and Rudy and I and Pete, and doing a workshop for friends of Pete. And I had this shirt—he did this drawing, last drawing he did. He did it blindfolded.

MS. RIEDEL: Really.

MR. REITZ: He did it blindfolded, right, on the back of the shirt. It was in celebration, the "Friends of Pete" it was called. What an appropriate thing. And that day he gave one of the best talks to a girl who was interviewing him on the radio, or whatever. Was interviewing him. And he wouldn't let her interrupt. I just stopped working. He said things I'd never heard him say, so clear, so concise, so—wow. And Dan Anderson stopped; Rudy stopped, said, goddamn. He was saying so profound and so fantastic.

And then we thought we were all going to go back out for dinner. Pete said, no, I think I'll go upstairs and rest for a while. So he went up to rest awhile, and we went on out to dinner. We went back, and we checked in on Pete, and of course, he was dying. He was in bed. And Jun got him, called emergency people. And so—it was Pete, classic Pete. It was like two in the morning, one in the morning, something like that. And so the ambulance came, said, okay, where's the patient? Pete was in the bathroom combing his hair so he can go to the hospital. He's combing his hair to go to the hospital.

So he lays down on the litter, and the guy said, I'm going to put some oxygen. I love oxygen. Yes. He said, have you had an operation? He said, I've had everything. Fuck, I'm in the National Geographic. He said, I love oxygen. They put him on the truck, and we all said, all right, see you later, Pete. He died on the way to the hospital. It was just—but what an appropriate thing. I mean, here we're having a big celebration of "Friends of Pete." Just—I never heard him speak so clearly. And that's what happens at the time of death. Many, many times you hear that. Your mind just clears, and you see. I don't know.

It's funny, I've never been afraid of death per se, because we're all going to that. I've been scared of how I'm going to die. I don't like pain. Don't like pain. But my own personal belief is that energy is never—gets expelled. Energy is here, and I don't know if we come back or not. I'm not sure, but I don't think it ends at this point. I don't know what it does, but I'm just going to say surprise, surprise, surprise. Because what the hell? That's the great thing. That's all going to make us—that's what we're all going to do. And pay taxes. Other than that we're free as the devil. It's just amazing. Sure.

But I can see Pete and Rudy and the older echelons have been a big influence on me. And as we said, a lot of the younger students, too, but the—you know, it takes a lot of time to say and perfect things sometimes. I listened to him. Anyhow, I really love him desperately, and Rudy and all.

MS. RIEDEL: Such funny stories about him making coffee in the morning.

MR. REITZ: Oh, yes. He had a thing about, if the water boiled, you had to throw it out. You can't boil the water before it poured in the thing, you know, the strainer. You know, French press. Hey, Reitzy, goddamn it, don't let that water boil. Get it out of here. It's not—I said, I got it, Pete; don't worry. So I have the picture of him. As I told

you, he's sitting over there, and every morning I'm making coffee. Every morning those very words; I'd say, don't worry, Pete; I got it. I got it. I got it. And before the whistle goes on the teakettle, I'm pouring my coffee out. Every morning I think of that man. It's just amazing.

The spirit of the person, of people, of things, energy is always with you. It's always going to be there. Well, what you want to be remembered as? What do I care, basically? What does anyone know how you're going to be remembered, and that—and it doesn't matter. I've been a good person, basically, I think, in my life. After I'm dead, I'm out of here. It's your problem, not my problem.

It's like when my son called me and said, you got a little money now, Dad. He said, now I want you to take your house payments and put 30 grand down and get some of this interest off your house. I said, Brent, when I have $30,000, I'm going to put a swimming pool in. You pay the interest off when you get the house. What the hell? I am going to put a swimming pool right out there. Who needs a swimming pool? I've got to get a car, another car, too. All my vehicles—this road, as you can see, it's so bad, it knocks the hell out of them.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that seven miles of dirt road?

MR. REITZ: No, this one is about four and a half miles of dirt.

MS. RIEDEL: It feels like seven.

MR. REITZ: Well, it keeps a lot of—when I deliver work, or my helper delivers work, if they last to the highway, they're not going to break in shipping, because this is the worst part of the travel, is over this road. Because what has happened, when I first moved out here, it wasn't at all. Because nobody came out here hardly except some hikers. I have all the red rocks of Sedona, but I don't have the people, see, population. But now the four-wheelers, the off-road vehicles, they all come out here, just go, like, 60 [MPH] up the road. This is all open range. There's a lot of cows and horses on that road. And it's very dangerous.

So the road gets to be a washboard because the wheels bounce, and so it's very—Dan told us the town was very financially astute. They made it into a primitive road so they don't really have to take care of it. People who live in that area, the school bus used to come out and pick up kids, but they won't come out anymore. So they've got to take their kids into the school bus stop because the road is just too bad. I pay the same taxes they do in town, but I don't get anything for them, basically. I'm just paying the tax. A lot of it, we're helping the schools.

MS. RIEDEL: You get the privacy.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, sure. And I have my privacy, right? Which I enjoy. I treasure my privacy.

MS. RIEDEL: And you often have people out here. Does Donna still live here, your daughter?

MR. REITZ: Donna has her own house. She bought her house—

MS. RIEDEL: But you have assistants here. You've always got an assistant or a helper.

MR. REITZ: Well, I never used to, but over the last five years I've always had an assistant. Someone here. Usually young people who have come from undergraduate school, who I meet at workshops, and I think they have something going for them. They bring with them that which they learned in undergraduate school. Now they're getting education in what art is really like. Very little of your time is spent making art. The rest of it is packing, shipping, chipping shelf. So they get that education. Then they go on to graduate school with that education. They're much better equipped to go to graduate school. I think anybody who goes from undergraduate to graduate school right away is crazy. You don't have enough knowledge to get what you need out of graduate school that way. You're too immature yet.

So I've had good helpers. I've had a couple—one guy—they all have my American Express credit cards, because when they deliver work, it's on the credit card, the gas, the lodging, as long as they don't misuse it. And I'll say—like I said, have dinner in town on the card. They need some rewards and stuff like that.

They don't realize that when I get my American Express bill, it's all listed, who bought what. I looked at this and said, my bill's pretty heavy. Here this one fellow—I won't mention his name—he had on there racquetball lessons, guitar lessons, flowers for his secretaries at Madison. I said, you know what? Why would you do this? Well, I didn't think you would mind. I didn't have any money. I said, you're out of here. You have today, and then you're gone. Get your trailer cleaned and go. Because we're not going to have a good relationship from here on. Don't ask me for a letter because you won't get it. I've only had one like that.

I had one other guy who was—I misread his character, and he turned out to be very self-centered; everything was basically for him, and so I had to let him go earlier than he wanted to go, too, because, you know, they have it made. I give them a room, a relatively nice trailer to live in. I give them a big studio to work in. I give them all

their clay; I give them all their electricity, all their materials; I give them all their firing. It's all free. All they have to do is work, and sell their work if they want to. In return, they give me work. So theoretically there's not much money exchanged, but you know, I always help them out a bit here.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's an apprenticeship situation.

MR. REITZ: Yes. It's kind of an apprenticeship. In a way I don't like to call it apprenticeship because then that means that—I don't know what that means. I don't like the word "apprentice" because they're on their own. It is an apprenticeship in a way, I guess, but I'm not teaching them, except by observation.

MS. RIEDEL: That's sort of the way you learned, too, isn't it?

MR. REITZ: That's right. Yeah. Yeah, right. If they can handle that, that's fine. But to say, okay, now here is what you do, this way; I'm going to give you problems to do. What they do with their own work is theirs. I never judge their work. If they want me to say something, I'll go down and look and say, well, I think you know how to make that form really good now. Why don't you make something else for a change? You really know how to make a tea bowl. Now it's time to make something else. Or I might say—I'll say something when I see that. Like Heidi's [Heidi Kreitchet] been very good. She's progressed very well. She's now going out to study with John Neely, out in Utah. That's why Mat Rude is here now, back again. And then I have this guy coming from Florida, very nice guy.

And at the end of the month then Bill may be here six weeks or something like that. Then I have the full-time guys coming. I met a really wonderful lad. He's coming up on the 21st. His name is Jesse [Albrecht]. And he was in college and was in ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. So he did his term and finished in Iraq, Iran, Iraq, whatever, did his thing. Came back, finished his lessons, his schooling, and still working there. I met him at a workshop and so forth. Very nice lad and very nice guy. Mature. Mature person.

I said, you know, it's really hot out in my place. He goes, well, if I could handle Iraq—he said, I don't need a flak vest either, so we're okay. So I said to him, well, what did you do in the army? He says, I was a medic. I said, you're hired. You're definitely hired. No kidding. So you see, everything comes to me fortuitously. It's really, really nice. I've had very good helpers. They all have their own thing they've contributed to the ranch here.

We call it a ranch. It's not a ranch. But I like to—I don't want to be a cowboy. I like to play cowboy. There's the saying, to throw a long loop for short pay is dumb. Because cowboy life is a tough life. I've seen kids over the Perkins ranch, these young guys, and it's a very lonely life. They have to help birth cows; they have to know how to fix fence, how to fix up their horses. It's a tough one. I really admire them. I couldn't do it. I like to play cowboy. I like to shower at night, have a nice bed to sleep in.

But at first I ran—I got rid of the horses because I wasn't riding them anymore. I had three horses here, so I gave them away because I wasn't riding them. But I still have the saddles. I love saddles. I bought a saddle in Montana last year—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, there's how many saddles on the front porch?

MR. REITZ: They're really nice pieces of equipment. So anyhow, I—I don't know where I was going with that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we could go either to the whole idea of pretending, which we've touched on briefly—I don't know if there's anything else you want to say about that—and also workshops, but I think I should change this disc.

MR. REITZ: It's getting on to be pretty near five-thirty.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Let me just finish this. This is Mija Riedel interviewing Don Reitz, at his home in Clarkdale, Arizona, on June 6, [2002,] for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is the end of disc number two.

MR. REITZ: That was great.

[END DISC 2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Don Reitz at the artist's home in Clarkdale, Arizona on June 7, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number three.

Good morning.

MR. REITZ: Good morning, hi.

MS. RIEDEL: Good, how are you?

MR. REITZ: Saturday is the most difficult.

MS. RIEDEL: It is, isn't it?

MR. REITZ: It's kind of the way it is at your studio, though, isn't it? You get down, and you say, well, I'll put the Willie Nelson on for a minute. And well, I'll have another cup of coffee—say, come on, Reitz, you got to make a move here someplace.

But it was the same way with the workshops. Every time, to this day, every workshop I go to I say—like a half-hour before or so I'll say, what am I doing here? What am I going to do? I'll figure out something. I get up there, and then they introduce you. And then you get your hands in the first clay, and then it's all okay because, you know, I think part of that fear is that this one won't be as good as the last one. Or like that last piece you made yesterday—you can't come up to that standard today, that sense of that fair—something.

I'm not quite sure what it's about, but it's always—my crutch used to be—I think it was Jack Troy who wrote or thought about that. He said, Reitz lit his ritual cigarette before the workshop. Okay, I haven't smoked in 20 or 30 years, so—but that you do something to get you moving into the groove of where you're supposed to be. And at the workshops I immediately said hello [to] the audience, and so forth, and thanked them all for being here, and thanked the people who brought me here, and so forth, that you sort of transition, getting into it. I say, okay, what the hell do you want me to do? And someone will say, well, throw one of those—[inaudible.]

I'd say, well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm not going to do that; I'm going to do this. And we'd joke—that humor has helped me in the whole life—[being] the class clown in high school got me through high school and stuff. It's been like a dialogue that starts through humor at the workshops, and then it goes into—and it never gets too damned serious. I mean, I don't want you to take this stuff serious. And it is stuff; it's just clay. It's just dirt and mud, you know? You have freedom with this stuff.

And when they see a piece might have collapsed, fall down, I applaud, they applaud because, look—so don't put people so high. You can admire people, but don't put them on such pedestals that they can't fall off, because we all fall off. So don't be disappointed in life when somebody doesn't reach the expectation that you had. You have met people like that. You've read books about them and so forth, and all of a sudden you meet them, and they haven't kind of lived up to what you thought. Well that's okay, because that's the way life is. Everything is not the way you want it to be.

And I think that's what I try to emphasize in the workshops, is that you have an idea—a concept—to start with when you're working, and then you let it progress from there. You're going with this concept, and you're not trying to remake the sketch you just made. If you want to, that's okay by me. But I don't think that's healthy to do because you already have that thought out; you could already do that, but you let it grow. And what's nice about the workshops is these pieces have always grown in front of the audience, because I was never sure what I'm going to do with the piece. It just sort of grows.

The spontaneity of the workshop and the spontaneity of life is what I really thrive on. The risk-taking, not knowing—that seems to be what life is about for me. Risk is good. And if you fall flat on your face, then you get back up and do something else. That's the way it is in life. If your first job doesn't work, it takes you to another job. Or—[laughs]—in my case, if your first marriage doesn't work, go to another marriage—no, that's terrible to say that. But you just have to be able—you have to have a resiliency in your personality and in your mindset that nothing is going to deter you.

And also, I'm a big show-off. What the hell? I love theater. I love drama. That's why I love the salt pieces so much. The first time I threw a first handful of salt, and it bounced back and burned holes in my shirt, I said, all right—[laughs]—that's what I'm looking for. That's what it is about—wood: you're opening that door; you're throwing that wood in; your eyebrows are getting burned; your hair is scorching—it's just—the thrill of that. I can't separate the thrill—what you do at a workshop to the thrill of opening a door and throwing wood in. It's kind of the same thing that happens. In a different way, of course, but there's the same energy—energy from the audience, energy from the piece you're throwing, energy from the kiln, energy from the wood—which transfers into you, and you're just content to go on.

Well, I didn't know, I'm getting way off the track now, but—

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all.

MR. REITZ: The workshops have been really my most self-inspiring things that I have done, I think. It's not self-inspiring, because everybody is helping me at the workshop, so I don't need to say it's self-inspiring. What I mean is that I haven't referred to someone else's thought concepts or things like that—things that came just

from inside of me. And the workshops have brought that out, I think.

And teaching. Teaching is a big workshop, basically—kind of. It's a little more directed. And I said before, we try to teach art, which is very private, in a very public place, which is just almost impossible to do. I don't know if you can teach art. I don't think you can teach art. You talk about it all, but you can't teach it. You're kidding yourself if you think you can teach art. That's something that is so entrenched in a person—I don't know quite how to put it; I'm not that good with words. But it's something that it's there, or it's not there.

I think we're all given gifts at birth or pre-birth—I don't know, whatever you believe. See, I believe that we are born knowing. And I believe I'm just trying to find out that which I already know. And so I believe that. And we're each searching for our gift, and what is our gift? Most times the gift isn't solely for you, but it's what you can do for others or the culture or the enjoyment of the race, or whatever. Once you find—you get a sense that that's your passion, that's your gift, then you go with it. And it may lead you to other forms of expression, but that same sense of gift will be in that expression's form.

It's hard for me to put my feelings into words sometimes; that's very abstract thinking. And that's what's so good about the clay, because I don't really think when I'm doing the clay that much. I react to what just happened, because clay is such a pliable, and instant, spontaneous thing. And I slap a piece of clay down and say, oh, wow, that's cool. Something will fall on the clay—all right, or, not so good; we'll fix that up. And we have this dialogue going on between you and the object—and in workshops between you, the object, and audience, which is very self-sustaining. For two days I don't have any trouble—not now because I'm not as healthy as was, but I would go through a ton of clay in two days. I'd say just have a ton of clay. I'll get rid of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Two-thousand pounds, wow.

MR. REITZ: And I would go through a ton of clay, most thrown on a wheel. And I never had helpers at workshops—yes, I have. Several workshops Mat Rude, who is one of my helpers here, I flew him with me. And it was really a nice experience. I would do the throwing and all, but he would have the clay wedged. And Mat knows me so well now that he just hands me tools, like being in an operating room. [Laughs.] You know what I mean? Just, boom. He knows what I want, and where it is. And the productivity level increases. And also the fact that I'm thinking solely about the clay imagery—let's say the imagery. And things just handed to me. And I don't bother my mind about those others things when I'm working with Mat.

But when I do work, my shop is, really, I told my housekeeper—she was one time cleaning my studio—I said, don't ever, ever come in and clean my studio, because half the stuff that you put in order, I don't know where it is now. And it may look like chaos to everyone else, but it's where I know where it is. If I'm going to reach for something, I want it to be there. So all around that wheel are sticks and old bones and sea shells and stuff which I make marks with. I have sticks down in my studio that I have had—I'll bet you that one stick must be 30 years old that I've been making marks with—because it's my mark now.

And speaking about marks—I'll show you—for every one of my plates, when I sign my signature on something, I go like that. Now, that's my mark. And that's my—and it's in my plates; it's in my drawings—I can't help it. I just do it. So I say, well, that's me. But with different tools I mark with, I have favorite pieces. There's one bone down there that is just great. There's this old stick. Anything is good. I love old two-by-fours and stuff. When I start the workshop, they look at my list, and they say, I'll need a ton of clay, three two-by-fours, sledge hammer—and I do punch-outs and stuff. And they say, okay. [Laughs.] That's what I do.

MS. RIEDEL: That's the way you work.

MR. REITZ: I'm digressing.

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all. You always come full circle, and the tangents give us all sorts of wonderful stories and insight that we'd otherwise miss.

MR. REITZ: But my life is one big digression, isn't it?

MS. RIEDEL: No, I think it's one big circle, no?

MR. REITZ: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Keep circling back around.

MR. REITZ: If I'm doing a lecture—which I'm not that comfortable doing until I get started. Once I get started, I'm okay. But I'll say, now, this is a lecture in coherency, but just hang in there because, sooner or later, it'll come back to what we're talking about. [Laughs.] Just have faith.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: Talking about my lectures, a long time ago at Princeton [University, Princeton, NJ]—[they] wanted me to do a lecture, so I went to Princeton. And I forgot to take my slides with me—because I was doing a slide talk. So I thought, well, I'll go down [to] the library and pick out some slides about other peoples' work and stuff like that. So I went, and I couldn't find the slides. I said, where are your ceramic slides? And she said, they're in the "minor arts." And I had my lecture right there; I had my topic right there, see—a good thing recorded as the minor art. So the whole lecture was on the minor arts—no slides, just talking about minor arts.

To preface this, my son, Brent, who was young at the time, said to me, Daddy, he said, you're going to Princeton. That's a big, famous place. Yeah, I said. What are you going to say? I said, I don't know, Brent; I'm not there yet. When I get there, I'll figure that out. He said, okay. He's just like me now. He does the same—and Donna—fly off the cuff, you know. And so that brought me—my lecture came from that, see.

That's another thing. My brother, before he died, worked for Provincial Insurance Company—Francis, my brother. And he was manager of one branch or whatever it is. And I went to the office, and I said, is Francis in? He said, no, he's doing a lecture right now. I said, oh, can I—he said, yeah. So I went to the back of the room. He's talking the same thing that I talk about. He says, visualization. He says, you want a Cadillac? Visualize a Cadillac. Visualize the wheels. What color is it? What's the steering wheel width? How does it feel? How does it ride? How does it smell? And I'm thinking, he took my lecture. But he didn't because he had never heard one of my lectures. He had never heard one of my lectures.

MS. RIEDEL: Isn't that interesting.

MR. REITZ: So I thought that was really funny. So I was in Washington, and I was doing a lecture at some place, and I saw—I forget how—oh, Reverend Brendasy, the minister who married Johanna and I and who was my minister then, was doing a seminar—someplace—and he came. Saw my name—no, you know what? It was at the Corcoran, actually. I'm sorry. Yes, it was at the Corcoran. And he stood in the back of the thing. And so after the lecture he came up to me, and I said, Reverend Brendasy? Yeah, he said. Don, he said, it was great. I said, how'd you like it? Well, he said, I'll tell you what, Don. There are no souls saved after 20 minutes. [Laughs.] I said, okay. I said, okay, okay. So I thought, hmm, yeah, a little wordy. [Laughs.] That was cool.

Anyhow, these are things which happen to me all the time—these things happen to me. These little vignettes that you don't count on, these little sidetracks and informational comment—I mean, you can count on things that you'll never count on. Something will happen; don't worry about it. And all you can be at a lecture, a workshop, whatever, is who you are. Because they've come to see me, don't you see? They've paid their money to see who I am.

MS. RIEDEL: And because the early workshops were more participatory. When you started in the '60s, a lot of raku—

MR. REITZ: Exactly, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: And then over time they evolved more to—

MR. REITZ: They evolved in a more of a—that's true, that's true. The first workshops were total participatory. We'd do raku; everybody would do raku. We'd do walls. We had to do stuff. The students would cover chairs with clay. We'd do all that stuff. And, still, I do that sometimes now, but mostly it's just—they know—I'm not trying to be—it's really funny talking about yourself. I mean, it's hard. But they know who I am.

They know who I am, but they don't know me. They don't know the man, you see. And so I think that's what's important. So after the workshop they know me now. They know who Don Reitz really is, you see. Because I'm very open with my life, my background, my loves, my desires, my whatever. We talk about all sorts of things, you see. So they know me now, and so they can relate to—oh, of course, that's why his work went this way or towards that. Then they can know themselves and know their work. Of course, that's why your work is going this way. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

And it could be a negative thing. It could be my work has been like a thesis on everybody else's work in the world. So what am I doing? I'm just copying everyone else. And you might even realize that about yourself. And then that'll set you off and say, well, now I'm going to find out who I am. If I help one person—it never failed, at the end of a lecture, someone—or two—will come up and say, Don, you're just what I needed in my life right now. That makes the whole lecture valid for me. That one—if you affect one person at a lecture—or in that semester—if you affect one person, that's all we can do, in a positive way, see.

And I'm always so pleased [about] that, and it makes me feel good that sharing what I have gone through—like with the Sara issue here, when I talk about Sara. I have had many people who are recovering and are going through chemo[therapy]. Someone once said, I needed this; I needed this very much. And I know they did, because I needed it. I needed from Sara. So, anyhow, the lectures serve that purpose also—or the workshops

and that. So they are so multiple-faceted that you never tire of them. [Laughs.] I get tired sometimes when I do them. But I don't let people know it, see.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: They do not know, at the end of the workshop, I go to the hotel room and flake out—I lay down—I'm in a bathtub soaking. I am sore. One time in Houston, Texas—Houston can be just the most ungodly humid place in the world. And I was doing a—it was like a participatory—everybody's working. And I'm hot, and I was working. So I would say, okay. Now my hotel was just across the way. So I'd get really tired and humid, and I'd say, okay, now I'll be right back. And I'd go and I'd jump—[laughs]—in the swimming pool, you see—[they laugh]—which they did not know. Now, you better come back soon.

Okay, what? Is that all you guys have done? Come on, let's get going here. They couldn't understand how much energy I had—[laughs]—it's because I went swimming three, four times a day, you see. They didn't know this. [Laughs.] So those are the little funny things that happen.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've done workshops all over. We were counting last night. We figured, at minimum, 10 a year for 40 years, so at least 400—

MR. REITZ: And it's taken me all over the world.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: I've been in every state—Canada, Hawaii included—at least two or three times—well, not—some states three or four times. But at least I've been in every state in America—all the states once—at least once, some twice, three times now. And I went through all the providences of Canada. Then Japan, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, England—

MS. RIEDEL: Europe.

MR. REITZ: France, Europe, that whole thing. So I've really traveled—

MS. RIEDEL: Australia, New Zealand, too.

MR. REITZ: New Zealand, oh, yes, New Zealand. My favorite place is New Zealand, my very favorite place.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you want to talk a little bit about that workshop? That was really an interesting one.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, in New Zealand—which one was that?

MS. RIEDEL: With the Maori.

MR. REITZ: Oh, the Maori.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. REITZ: In Auckland. Yeah, I flew into Auckland, of course, but then I did workshops at Rotorua and other places. But the Maoris gave me a great honor because—and it does seem that I am really accepted almost immediately by primitive cultures—not primitive—native cultures—like the Inuit, the Eskimo, the American Indian, the aboriginal, and the Maori. I mean, all these people have right away taken to me, and I've taken to them. And I'm so happy that happens. I don't know what it is, but it must be good. And I've had people say, aren't you part Indian? I say, no, I'm German. But, whatever, you know. I don't know what grandma did, but maybe I am. [They laugh.]

But anyhow, the Maori people—I did a workshop in Auckland, and they have a big Maori, the Maori do. Maori—a place, a meeting place, where they meet in a meeting house and so forth, and Aucklander totem poles are there and stuff like that. They're very gentle, a very gentle people, a very quiet—it's a very nice feeling. So they gave me this honor, this award: they carved me on their totem for disseminating knowledge throughout the world. I thought, what an honor. So I had to go on [to] the Maori to be presented with this little award—it was not little; it was a wonderful piece of jade—well, not just that, the fact they gave it to me was important, not the object.

And so I said, well, now what do I do? Because the chief and these ladies and everything were up on this platform there outside. He said, well, just walk down and stop a little ways down there and so forth. And I said, well, how do I know? He said, you'll know, you'll know. So I said, okay. So I went down a ways, and I just stopped. I don't know why I stopped; I just stopped. And they said something, and the chief motioned. I came up to the chief. I went through the whole nose-nose rubbing to the whole group of people up there—the chief, everything. So he gave me this wonderful pendant, their symbol, carved out of jade. It was an old one, actually. It was not a

new one; it was an old one. And I thanked them, and I didn't know what to do. So I took my shirt off and give him my shirt. [Laughs.] And it was the best thing I could've done. So that night, then, we had a hay-ga, which is a—put down the pork and fish and things in the seaweed and bake. I was the pakee-ha, you see, the white man, the pakee-ha.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. REITZ: And at that time he lifted—I wanted to get a tattoo, because during the [military] service I always sobered up before I got one, you see what I mean? I always wanted a tattoo. I don't really want one, or I would've had one, I guess. But I wanted to get a Maori bracelet around my arm. And so the chief lifted the taboo for me—that it would be okay for me to have that on my arm. But I never got one [before]. But now at my age I get one, and the color will be perfect when I die. [Laughs.] I mean, it won't—it won't—but now, God. I can't do that now.

But anyhow, that was a wonderful workshop. The people are so nice. I went to Rotorua, and there's all this sulfur, and it's hot springs; it's minerals. You sit down on the curb in town, and it's hot because of the volcanic action and things like that. And these big pits where the Maoris still cook in them. They lower their food down in baskets into the hot springs. And they cook everything in the hot springs. It's really quite a wonderful place. I love the people. They're very—well, there's more sheep than there are people, actually. And they're very much rural by nature. They're very strong, hardy people. But yeah, I like New Zealand.

And contrast—and I also love Australia, for a different reason. Like Australia—okay, here's the difference. In Australia, everybody's on vacation, on holiday. In New Zealand, everybody works. [Laughs.] That's kind of what happens, especially going into a city. Now you go up to Queensland [Australia], or you go up to—that northern—it's not south, like Sydney, where it's a great—I like to go to Sydney. I go up to, what's that street? King's Row or King's—you know, weird, weird people. [Laughs.] It's really funny. It's just great. And it's normal. I mean, they're weird, but they're normal. [Laughs.] It's just great. And we have a great time; I have a great time.

It was a strange thing. Teaching at Madison, I had a 99.99 [percent] hiring rate with my graduate students. If they wanted a job, they got it. I was proud of that.

MS. RIEDEL: That's impressive.

MR. REITZ: And so this year Gudrun Klix did not have a job yet. And so I said, don't worry, Gudrun, something will come up. And so the fellow, I forget his name now, from—where is the animal called the devil—from—I am so sorry I cannot—

MS. RIEDEL: Tasmania?

MR. REITZ: —Tasmania, thank you, Tasmania, called and said, do you have somebody who wants to come over to Tasmania, because I really need a good person. I said, I have a person. I said, Gudrun, how do you feel about Tasmania? She says, oh, I love it. Fine. She loved it—the beaches and everything are just absolutely superb from what I hear. I had never been there. And it was just superb. She loved it, so she did very, very well. She then went to Sydney and did very well at the Alley Tira. Now she's head of the arts school at Sydney in the university, for goodness sakes. And so it's very strange how your students get around the world, too, you see.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, that's nice. Yeah, the workshops have allowed me the privilege of meeting different people, and a little bit of understanding of different cultures, and a better understanding of the planet which we live on. And that's pretty good when—[laughs]—you're working in mud. People pay you to do it—pretty exciting.

MS. RIEDEL: You talked about Japan, too, as being out—

MR. REITZ: Japan, yes, Japan. I love Japan, actually. It's so different from our culture. Sometimes it seems barbaric, but it's very good. How I got to Japan was through the kiln firing.

MS. RIEDEL: Through Yukio Yamamoto—right.

MR. REITZ: Yukio Yamamoto—see, Phoenix is the sister city of Himeji. And so Yukio Yamamoto came over here with a little show—to Phoenix—in the sister city program. So [Don] Bendel [who was teaching at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ,] went down [to Phoenix]. He was working in the shop down there [at Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, outside Phoenix]. He wasn't working, because they only gave him a key, and they really didn't let him work a whole lot. And so he—Don Bendel, my true spirit—met him, and said, Yukio, you come up to Flagstaff. Ah, where is Flagstaff? Up in a yama ["mountain" in Japanese]—up in a mountain. Oh, yeah, up in a mountain—I come up to your place. He said, yeah, come on. So he got in Yukio's truck, and up they

came. So Yukio is looking all around. You know, he loved it, because Flagstaff is a beautiful town—it's all hills—it's kind of like Japan in a way. Oh, nice, nice area.

And so I had not met Yukio, but to kind of find out what he wanted to—I had to go back a ways with Yukio's history because it was very important, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. REITZ: During the war—World War II—Yukio was a—[laughs]—kamikaze pilot. You don't see many surviving kamikaze pilots.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. REITZ: One day, Yukio and I were in his bathhouse taking a shower or a bath. And I said, Yukio, what are all those holes? And he said, oh, American. Very good shot. I said, oh, Jesus, I'm sorry. He said, no, nice idea. I said, what are you talking about? He said—and then I found out he was a kamikaze pilot, and every time he had to take off and was ready to go, he was ready to get blown up in that stuff and everything, the Americans would strafe the air field, and he never had to go, you see?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MR. REITZ: And he's wondering, why is he being saved? There must be a greater reason for this. And through his art, he's figured out—he said, people don't start wars, as we know. Governments start wars. People don't want war, for crying out loud. And so he said, maybe if peoples could meet other peoples and know peoples, it would stop some wars. So maybe through my art—maybe that's what I'm supposed to do. So he thought through his art he could bring peoples together.

So—long story—so he came here and went to Flagstaff. And, actually, he's looking around because there are many more potters in America than in Japan, actually. And he looks around, and he said he wanted a place to build the Noborigama Tozan kiln, which is an ancient kiln which was built by the Tozan potters when they came over from Korea—that—and wars—yeah, all that stuff.

We didn't know—all of a sudden he starts drawing in the dirt—again, drawing in the dirt. And Ben will say, oh, right, yeah, boy. So he got the university to donate six acres of land where Yukio could do this thing. So then—

MS. RIEDEL: This is the mid-'80s? Around '85, '86?

MR. REITZ: Eighty-two, I think it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Eighty-two.

MR. REITZ: Wait. Hmm. Before my accident. So it had to be in the late '70s. I can get you the right dates from Denma.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, okay.

MR. REITZ: So he said, I want you to meet a friend of mine who we have to talk to. So they got in the van—I can picture Yukio sitting cross-legged all the way in the van like the guy, you know what I mean. And so they came all the way to Wisconsin. And—no—yeah, it was before my truck accident.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. REITZ: Before the truck accident, right. Before the truck accident because I was still good. Paula and I were living outside of Madison. And so anyway, Yukio came, and he started doing calligraphy and drawings in my studio. And all of a sudden we thought about the kilns. And we started drawing these on the board—Tozan kilns. I thought, man, if you could—exciting. So we planned out how we could build them and how many kilns and so on—he and I did them. And he went back to Flag[staff], and then—because I was—now, wait minute—it was after, because I was doing low-fire color work.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: So that was after the Sara series, after I was—

MS. RIEDEL: Because I think the kiln was actually built in '86.

MR. REITZ: Right. That's right. Exactly. Okay, thank you.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. REITZ: And I said, I'll be out to help you build the kiln. Well, that's when I went out to build the kiln. I did the first wood fire. And that's my change from my color to—back to wood and salt and so forth.

So anyhow, I met Yukio. So—now—the long story. So Yukio said, you must come to Japan. So Bendel and I go over to Japan. And we worked for a while in Japan; this is great. Then Bendel says, well, your students should come over here to America. So his students came over to America, and then our students went to Japan. And then people from Russia [came] to the kilns. And then our students went to Russia, to Georgia, and so forth, and then Australia and Sydney—all the places I had done workshops and all these places all over the world.

And so one man's dream, you see, worked out. He built a kiln, and the kiln brought everybody here. And all our people went there. So that's what he did with his art. He died, now, a couple years ago. But I'd go to work—he was a great mentor. In the Japanese way, they do things in the minimal—they sum things up very easily.

And I'll never forget the one thing—we had a little conflict because [he] was a shogun—he would really be, you know, hai, ya—that's what he'd say. So what happened—I'll tell you something, what happened was very exciting because Yukio said, we must dig here. Bendel says, we'll get some [funding] to him—no, no, no, no, no. Just start to dig. He said, we need some money—no, no, no. Money will come. You just start to dig. He didn't realize that, though, Flagstaff is on the side of a volcano—[laughs]—and you hit about three inches of topsoil.

So he's digging—we're digging away. And we had made this flag—the Arizona flag was kind of like the rising sun flag of Japan. We had this big flag up there with Yukio's picture in it; so all the plumbers and contractors would drive past it, and they would wonder, what the hell are those college kids doing out here now? Sometimes they would stop. And they'd stop and say, what are you doing here? And we'd say, well, we're building this kiln. He would say, you can't—I'll bring my backhoe up. You can't dig through these hills. So he brought his backhoe up, and he brought his friend over, the electrician. These people are going to kill themselves, you know.

The electrician came up, too. So pretty soon the whole town, which Yukio knew, was involved in building, right? And so it got [going] so well that the first firing—first day of firing—the first, really black smoke that came out—I looked out of my room and said, oh, goddang. I went down to the diner and had breakfast, and the town paper said, we are firing our kiln this week. And so Yukio knew the whole town was okay, see.

But prior to that, how the money came—Yukio saw some work of this fellow—I'll think of his name shortly—and wanted to have a show of his work. He was an alumnus of ASU—or of Flagstaff [Northern Arizona University]. A painter—a great, great, good painter, but then he quit painting and went into real estate. And he became a multimillionaire through the booming real estate. And Linda was his wife's name—and I'm so sorry I don't have any—but anyhow. Yukio wanted to see his paintings. And he said, okay. He made an appointment for him.

Now, we didn't know this, but he was manic-depress[ive]. Had houses full of paintings that he would go and just paint for two or three days. And nobody knew this except his wife and a few people. And so the day before he was to come down, he committed suicide. So one day, then, Linda called and said, Don, I know that Yukio would like to see these things—so come on down. So they went down.

Yukio said, oh, wow, they're so—they're expressions of this inner—they're like [Edvard] Munch painting stuff. They're just really fantastic. And so Yukio says, you have telephone? We have show in Japan. She said—because he never showed his work to anybody. She said, okay. So Yukio got on the phone—

So if you were a school chum of somebody in Japan, you're always a school chum, you see. That whole lineage goes through. So he's chums with the mayor of the major city. The mayor says, yes, we give him a show. Says, six week, you have a big show. Say, oh, that's great. Sure, we'll pack them, crate them and stuff.

And then Linda says, well, why are you here? So we started explaining about the [kiln plans]—she said, well, what do you need? Bendel says, money. How much do you need? About [$]30,000—so she wrote a check out for $30,000. Somehow Yukio knew, you see, that the money would come. And I've learned that from Yukio if nothing else. Just start. Don't wait till you get all your ducks in a row. Just start, and your ducks will get in a row later on. Because how do you know how you want them set up in the first damned place, you see?

That's how I got to Japan. Bendel and I would go over every year and work—Jimmy Leedy—go over and work for a month and then would come back, and the next year would have a show. That's when Japan had money. And we'd come back with lots of money, back with lots of money—which was good—it saved us a little. But that was my association with Yukio.

He was a great philosopher. He would come down every morning. See, he doesn't realize that when he fires kilns in Japan, they're sea level. We're at 7,000 feet in Flag—a whole different atmospheric pressure, I think. So we know how to fire the kiln somewhat, but we're learning this from Yukio. So Yukio comes down—he comes down

in the morning—no, no, no. Very bad, very bad. See, he has to say something negative first so you'd pay attention. And then, it was like, okay—well, oh, thank you, Yukio, domo arigato—thank you, thank you. And he'd say, ha, ha, good. And he'd go off to his room. And we'd put things back the way we had them, because we knew that was the way it was going to look anyhow, you know. He'd come back and say, ah, see. [They laugh.] We'd say, yeah, you're right, Yukio. It really kicked right up.

So one day, Yukio comes out. I'm in charge of the ship—I'm in charge, you know. And Yukio comes down, and he starts chewing me out because the wood wasn't split just exactly right, and this proportion—and in front of everybody. [Speaking in Japanese]—Yukio. Come with Don. So we go off the side, and I said, Don Reitz, Yukio. Yukio in Japan number one. America—Don Reitz number one. He said—[speaking in Japanese]—he goes and sits on a rock for a half hour. And I thought we had it straight. He was boss, where, when—see what I mean? And it had to be that way—[they laugh]—I mean, it was just amazing—it was just amazing.

So, anyhow, we'd get treated like royalty over there because the mayor of the major city is a school chum, and all councilmen and all the things—they've all gone to school together. I mean, we had dinners that were like, I don't know how much money they've must have cost. The mayor would always say, ah, Don Reitz, huh? Don Reitz, please, sir. He always made me eat this poison fish—[they laugh]—this blowfish. And it's beautiful. They slice it paper thin, and it's beautiful. And I'd think, oh, please, don't let me die; please, don't let me die. And they'd laugh, and they'd say, oh, very nice, Don Reitz.

And so—people would come—we ate everything, you know. The villagers would come up and peek in the windows at us, you know, to see the Americans working. We were very primitive—not primitive, but it was a small town. And so they would come up and look in. And they said that—to Moshiko—they'd say, well, ah, what do they eat? She says, everything. Ah, everything? You know, because we ate raw fish, and nothing was cooked. Well, it was—some things were cooked, of course. But most of it was raw and live. It was very delicious, you know. We went out one night with the mayor. Went to this restaurant which must have been 1,000 years old—the villages where the potters came over from Korea—where potters came over—so we went, and we were going to eat. So you'd pick out your fish and so forth. And you think, fine—and so they bring this whole, big boatful of fish and everything else. And Lee and I were working, and I'm looking—there's this flounder there like—well, we called it flounder.

I said, Jimmy, this fish is still alive. Ah—so I put my chopstick in his mouth, and he bit my chopstick in his mouth. And he bit my chopstick, and I said, oh, my God. [Laughs.] Jimmy, what do we do? He says, ah, more sake, more sake. [Laughs.] So we'd just drink enough sake, and we didn't care. And we found out then—Bendel, the great analyst—you know what they're doing? They're just trying to see how low the Americans—what crap we will really eat, you know? How far—anyhow, I'm digressing but—

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all.

MR. REITZ: Japan was one of my favorite countries that I really enjoy. I have a great—my family—you might say my second family in Japan. But, yeah, so anyhow—that's due to workshops.

MS. RIEDEL: I was thinking—in workshops you were able to do really creative work. And you've talked about clay as being both a receptive medium and a collaborative medium. And something about the way you've described the workshops also relates to both giving and receiving—there's a collaboration between you and the audience, to some degree. I was hoping that you might discuss the creative language of clay, in general, and your own specific thoughts on clay as an expressive medium.

MR. REITZ: Right, right. Okay, we'll start someplace. It is true that a workshop gives me as much as I give them. And it comes back through the audience or through what happens with the clay at that time, because clay is so receptive to whatever force you apply to it. It's a recording device. Clay, you think about it—after a culture is gone, what do you have left? Teeth, bone, and shards—that's how we know about cultures. It's pretty amazing. So, if you let a piece get fired, and it was terrible, you've done a very [great] disservice to the next generation here, you see. But the audience's response to different things, that's energy, and that energy comes back to me because you can never give everything away. You can't give love away, you can't—because it will come back. I mean, give it away and lose it. You get back from that giving—you give back from that, whether it's money you give or whether it's your thoughts or emotions, whatever, you see. And I've always gotten back from the workshops—it's always gotten back to me.

And the expressiveness of the clay—you do things at a workshop with clay which you wouldn't do in your studio. But yet you bring that knowledge back to you in your studio.

And that's another thing that you could do. It's how you hit the clay or how you touch the clay, how it responds to you, how you touch the clay, how anyone touches the clay. That's important, and if people think you can make a Peter Voulkos plate by just crashing it, it's not that; it's how Pete touched the clay. How I touch clay, how Rudy touches clay, Jun—it's how each of us put our forces into those materials, which is our recording device. It

is recording your emotion and physical response to your emotion at that time and place in history. It's the greatest recording device that we have. Clay is just—because when you push it, it's there—if you want it to be—but it's very forgiving. If you don't want it, you just erase it, you know, about like painting with papers. It was just about that forgiving, you see. But that's why I think that, at the schools, why the ceramics classes are totally always filled; there's always a waiting list, because the clay is a natural thing. Once you squeeze, it you're playing in mud again. You're back walking in the fields with the dirt and stuff in your toes; it's a natural thing to do. You start bonding with it and—and so I know that they don't want to get rid of ceramic classes, because they support three or four other classes—which they don't support, you see, their—in, just in terms of the university's thinking.

But the students can—they can always seem to be emotionally okay when they're with clay. I had a trainable class one time, when I was [teaching] in public school. You think that they can't do anything, but their expressions could come out with the clay. I mean, like Billy would sit in the corner and just—they're trainable; not educable, but trainable. I forget what they called them. But Joe—I'll never forget his name, Joe Montain was the teacher all day. I only had to be in there for a couple hours a day, a week. But Joe was there, I'll tell you. Patience had Joe, just a wonderful man. I mean, like Billy would just sit in the corner and rock, would rock, rock. Somebody had to keep closed these doors. Had to keep closed the doors. So I made the mistake one time, I'd say, okay, bring me something creative now. So I said, we're going do papier-mâché. So he tore—I said, we got to tear this up. Oh, man, tear, they were tearing paper like crazy. It was all over, the wheat paste was all like this. Oh, my God, Joseph, just go; we'll get it cleaned up. That's right, they were so enthusiastic, you know.

I don't know where I was going with that, but in the public school systems, too, clay seems to be a medium that kids, the young people, all people, just relate to right away. It's something to do with our past, I guess—anyhow, it does afford me and other people a way of expressing ourselves very immediately. The immediacy of that expression, freezing it in time. I know I'm not hitting what you're after.

MS. RIEDEL: No, I—we're getting there.

MR. REITZ: I don't know—

MS. RIEDEL: Are there any limitations that you've encountered in clay?

MR. REITZ: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. REITZ: No. I would go to workshops. This is a prime example. People ask that question: how big can you make it? And I'd said, well, you know what? See this building, made out of a little box of clay. They're called bricks. So it depends on how you can deal with it. Well, once you blow that up, and I have six bags of clay, I says, now, do your fire, slow it up; this brick is six inches thick; it didn't blow up, it depends—think about it. You got to dry it, fire it, so this bisque fire—sometimes I'll bisque-fire for five days if I'm—this is thick and heavy stuff. If you've made it, why screw it up? If it's good enough to bisque-fire, then it's good enough to exist, so why break it up through your stupidity?

And so I haven't found any limitations with clay. I can print on clay. I can print with clay. I can print on a slab roller. I can mix colors with it and use it wet, use it raw, or fire it. I have not found any limitations that I cannot overcome. Or anyone could.

I wouldn't want to work alone, like down in the basement. Picking these huge pieces up, of course. I was strong enough. And I thought, wow. Getting them in the kiln, it looked like I was building in a pyramid. My ramps and stuff, and all this—lot of these crates. So when I built a bisque kiln out of my studio, the floor of the kiln is on the same level as my studio. The burners are below that level, you see, so that I make all my pieces on dollies. So I just wheel them into the kiln, then we just set it—I'll slide it off the dolly, and it's down. So I wheel everything around. I don't pick things up anymore. So that's getting older or smarter, you see. So that's something you learn. So—to answer your question very simply, I have not found any limitations, whether it be with color, or able to express things, or thickness, or thinness, or as an art, and as a sculptural medium.

We can thank Voulkos for a lot of this—and others, but maybe Pete was [the] one that opened the doors. He took clay from the potter to the art level, to the sculptural level. He gave us permission. And I tell everybody, you're altering that form; you're kicking into it. That's only because Pete gave you permission, 100 years ago, which you don't even know. You think it's because you just invented—nothing is new. You can go back in history and say, oh. Oh God, they did it so much better.

I say, oh, my God, it's like my first forms were—I was enthused when I was in Egypt, the apothecary jars, that's what they were about. But think how much better they once were, because they weren't trying to make art out of them, see. They were just—they filled a need. And that's what we do; we're filling a need here.

And what gets me irritated, they say, well, I'm just a potter. Then I have nothing to talk to you about if you're "just" a potter. But if you're a potter, I got something to talk to you about. Don't you understand what you're doing? You are making things which are in celebration of the meal. Celebration of the form. It's not just a pitcher; it's the pitcher you've just made. You are enhancing a person's lifestyle through this. Through color and form and objects. If you're not a good cook, it's okay. You got good pottery, you got broccoli and paprika, and you know, you make a good meal, you see. So people bother me when they say, I'm just a potter. Boy, that bugs the hell out of me.

MS. RIEDEL: That actually ties in beautifully to something you wrote about form a couple of years ago.

MR. REITZ: Oh.

MS. RIEDEL: You said, some people feel that "function" is a bad word—it really bugs you. That as an artist, you are making pottery that is in celebration of the meal, and the celebration of the vessel, and celebration of the pitcher.

MR. REITZ: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: You're not making dishes.

MR. REITZ: That's right. You're not making—tailors make dishes. You make pottery, because you're a poet.

MS. RIEDEL: And the form has to somehow transcend the physical to the spiritual world.

MR. REITZ: Oh, that's very important, see.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: That's one thing I left out. Whether it's pottery, sculpture, whatever it is, the form, the physical, has to transcend itself to the spiritual.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: Like poetry, Paula's anyway—she would start with the spiritual and go to the physical. See, I start with the physical, and it takes me sort of spiritual. It doesn't matter, but they both, to me—it's only what I think, you know, is there has to be spiritual and physical. They have to inter-react together. Somehow that form has to transcend itself in some way, or rather you go to something great, as we all do. We have to transcend who we are to put forth as people. Go beyond our physical bodies. And I'd be a little concerned. I thought there was so much emphasis on the physical bodies, especially—I mean, the females have such a cross to bear nowadays. They have to be just perfect. I don't know how I'm getting you to this, but it's, you know, be proud of your body. I'm proud of my stretch marks. That's what makes me different.

Anyhow, I'm digressing, but the forms do have—I feel the very important theme—if you're doing pottery, you're making poetry. And they have to go beyond the dish, beyond the plate, because the industry can make a dish. They can make a thousand plates while you make one. And better than you can, actually. Stronger than you do. We use reduction, which weakens the hell out of clay. The only reason you reduce something is for color. That's the only reason. There's no other reason. That's because everything else that happens in reduction is bad. So anyhow, that's how—

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about infusing your personality—

MR. REITZ: Pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: Infusing and imbuing your personality in the work.

MR. REITZ: Exactly. I'm on hundreds of peoples' tables now. I have meals with them. They live me. The one lady at an art fair—we used to make good money at art fairs, though, because people bought real art. It wasn't painting faces and balloons and all that stuff. They went there to buy art. And so she had done it. I hope you don't mind; I have your—I used to make hanging planters, because I love that form. It's bags that are hanging. Patsami used to give that [in] beginning classes. I want you to make a home for a plant. It's not a "planter": it houses the roots structures; it's a home for this to live in. And so I'd make these hanging units, and on the way to the art fair, I would buy plants to put in them, see. And I would hang them up, and people would buy them. They'd buy them like crazy. So this lady said, I hope you don't mind, but I don't use your planters for planters.

I don't mind at all. If I'm in your bedroom, it's cool with me. What do I care what you do with it? You purchased it; it becomes yours. I have plants sitting in Pete's pieces. I have Balistreri's pieces, I have—you know. Yeah, they enhance the things that don't matter.

MS. RIEDEL: How many kilns have you got out back now? Let's talk a little bit about that.

MR. REITZ: Well, I have seven kilns, actually. I have one kiln up here at the house, where my helpers work in the basement. I have a large basement. That's why I bought the house, because there are no basements in Arizona, but the basement is cool. So that's why I bought it, someplace to work; it was hot as hell, but the basement was cool. So I built a kiln so they have a kiln out back here, a big kiln for their use, too, okay. And especially the bisque things that take in my kilns are quite a ways down by the river of—as you know. Then I have another bisque kiln down at my studio and have series of electric kilns. And down at the studio, my other kilns I have—I have a salt kiln, which has been firing there for 16 years. The same damned kiln; it's amazing, big kiln. And then I have a big Bourry box kiln, wood kiln. Then I have a training kiln, and then I have a big—the biggest kiln I have is the Anagama, which is my own design, Anagama, which is a flat floor—

MS. RIEDEL: The Reitzsagama?

MR. REITZ: The Reitzagama, yeah. They've named it the Reitzagama. Yeah, Reitzagama. And I built it—it's oddly, in fact—it's a hole which is on the hole. But if you took a silo and cut it in half and set it on the ground, that's what it looked like. It's 14 feet deep, five and a half feet tall, five feet wide straight back, because I wanted a kiln where I could just walk into. I ask, you guys, are you going—why you built the kiln so small? They said, oh, Japanese, very little. And I'm not small like that. I want to walk—I'm too old to go to my knees and go in to the damned kiln. And my pieces are too big. So I wheel them in on the dollies and set them up. It's easier to load the kiln.

Then I have a wood soda kiln. And so there's—yeah, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven—seven kilns I have.

And the story I tell people when they come into my kiln is that I put on a—I used to put a lot of barbecues, so there's one customer of mine, would bring his CEOs over from different parts of the world, where his things were, his offices. And they would play golf and do things down in Phoenix. Well, this time he wanted to come up to my place for a day. I said, okay, come to my place. So I did; we played. And so one of his CEOs from Argentina said, I want to see these kilns that everybody's talking about. And I said, sure, come on, and we go down to the kilns. He's looking around; he's very interested. He said, ah, he said, you have no university affiliation at all? I said, no, no. You have no students here? No. All this is just for you? I said, yep. And he says, and you don't make a product that really sells? I says, right. He said, this is a losing proposition. I said, of course it is, because whoever said art and commerce had anything in common at all? They don't. It can become commerce, but it doesn't start out as commerce. That's not why you do it, see.

But it is funny that I have all these kilns. Well, I have for me and my son, and when I was filling the Anagama up, David Smith from Madison came up to help stoke, because the greats of the Balistreri could fire. I had people coming and flying in to fire things. Well, it's not just for me. When I started with fire, I didn't have a wood kiln, so I went all over the country firing different people's wood kilns—

MS. RIEDEL: You did? Frank Boyden?

MR. REITZ: Frank Boyden's was one of the first wood kilns, and I loved Frank's—and I love Frank as a person, and I love his work. I love his prints as good as his pots, actually. He's a tremendous printer, trim maker, drawings—drawer. And anyhow, and he loves to fish, which I do, too.

But Frank—we'd fly up there with fir, old fir. They used to pull it out of the rivers. It was in the rivers for years and years and years. They'd pull it out of the river, and it would dry. And he bought a tree one time that was in front of the logging place and six—I think it's five or six years—he used that same tree to fire his kiln, a big fir tree. It was eight feet across, the section. And it was such an explosive wood; it was unusual. That was the first firing, then.

Dan Anderson, of course, I fired in Dan Anderson's kiln. A wonderful man, a wonderful teacher, has a wonderful kiln. And I would fire with Dan—quite a bit at Dan Anderson's kiln. And I fired at wood kilns in Flagstaff, of course. And then, wood kilns in—actually, we built a wood kiln up in Alaska. What's the capital? Juneau. Fire there and different woods, different things. In Nanaimo [BC], off the coast of the northern part, west-northwest, above Seattle, because you're going—what's the city at the end?

MS. RIEDEL: Vancouver?

MR. REITZ: Vancouver, thank you so much. I'm so bad. [Inaudible]—Nanaimo—we built a Noborigama kiln out of that one, five chambers. A Nobirigama is multiple chambers—Noborigama, more than one chamber. So the kiln that we had [in] Flagstaff is five-chamber Noborigama. So we built that same kiln up at Nanaimo. And we would fly there with the woods. They were exotic. They were fiddleback and pine, all these exotics woods, and they just—these scraps that we just used. And it was beautiful, a beautiful thing.

So I've come to know the different woods and how they react from the different minerals they have taken in and knowing that pine—depends on what part of the country it comes from—it will produce different colors. Just locally here, Sedona is famous for its red rocks. Well, you get pines from that, and it's full of iron. And you get these beautiful greens from the pine. You go to Flagstaff, not that far away, another hour away, and the pines are ponderosa pine, and they take more of a yellow color.

So I'd fire—[inaudible]—wood kiln, and that guy had given him this grapefruit. They take the trees out—orchards—every so often and plant new ones—[inaudible]—grapefruit. Well, it's a yellow—what?—it's yellow. So he said, well, Don, what color will this be? I said, well, yellow. It's going to be yellow, of course. And the damned thing was yellow, beautiful color, beautiful fire, grapefruit wood.

And I found apple—fruit woods burn very nicely. Different woods. So I was very fortunate traveling from different kilns before I built my kilns, see. And when I moved here, I knew I was going to put an Anagama, but I didn't know where. But Dave, when he still living with the Perkins Ranch, had a bulldozer, and he was cleaning out part of the back over here. I said, Dave, bring your bulldozer over here and get me a ramp. I'm going to build an Anagama here some day.

Thirteen years later, I built the Anagama. But I knew someday I would build one, see. I had the other kilns prior to that, but the Anagama here—then I built the right scale, so that the transition from the low fire—which was because of Yukio Yamamoto and Don Bendel of Flagstaff that we decided that. Oh, well. I remember a flame and flushing and the quietness of the wood kiln. Did you ever watch—most animals, when they drink, lap. You ever watch a horse drink? No noise. They just go like this. That's the way a wood kiln is, just quiet, just quiet. A little noise, just the burn and some crackle, it's just doing its thing. It's so peaceful and gentle. I mean, you can contemplate, and it is such a place to have a friendship happen and things like that. In the community of people who are working on the kiln. And so that's why I went to one. Then I came home, and I didn't have a wood kiln, so I made pieces and would transport them to Frank Boyden's and other people's kilns, the firing wood. And then I was also doing my salt, and throwing wood into the salt kiln, too, and throwing a kind of a bastardized wooded salt kind of fire, which were very lovely, too.

But then my images changed. My Abstract Expressionist nature came back to me, with the slapping clay; hitting it, break—because the accident in wood is important. You hope for it. You never know what you're going to get. That type of form will go into it.

Now, the pitcher form I put in the salt kiln. It seemed to be more delegated to that type of service. But then the wood kiln, they're much more abstract; they're much more organic and much more intuitive—spontaneous things, and that's what I like about the wood. And doing what I used to do, my painting when I first started, you know. And it was interesting because I was doing more sculptural pieces at Alfred towards the end of my Alfred thing, and—because some of the early ones in the book, you can see they're like animal-like forms, not animal; you can tell, but they're very viscous; they come up—and then because of economy, had the wife, two children, I decided to do more pottery, because that was selling.

So that's why I did more, and more, and more, and more pottery, and I left the sculptural aspect. And then the pottery turned itself into more sculptural forms. The handles, I could not let them go, and I—yeah, the feet, the footed form, the skirted vessel, that was way back. And it was just nailing wood—none of this stuff was just nailing wood; it was all—the precursors were back in pottery. Pottery was the precursor to all this stuff that's happening now, actually.

And so that was why I went into pots, and because of a financial—but I was glad I did. Then it took me awhile to get back out of pots, and pretty soon, you're doing these big sculptural things. They're all breaking; well, you're not doing pots; you don't need that thin crust. Who's going to pass it around the table? No one. It could be a ton; it doesn't matter. I said, oh, yeah, that makes sense, because the wood is quite hard on the ware. It can really, really—hits it. Really, really gets on, and lots in my kiln—I mean, we throw wood right on the ware in the hold. And I love that part, because my kiln, when I'm through, two, three, or better of white coals, throughout the whole kiln, you see. And as these burn down, they give you that rainbow effect.

And so you're painting, see; you're still painting with the fuel. You're painting with the loading, how the flame will go, will the pattern on the take. And so all that is such a creative experience. The whole thing about the workshops, the pottery points, my own studio, the load in the kiln, the finishing, the glazing—it's all creative process. It all has a spontaneous quality about it; each one seems to be an individual. Each piece—and I can tell you, if I see pieces, exactly when I made it. I can't tell you who owns it or what, but I can tell you when I made it. Not the year, but I remember making that piece. Every one, every one, they're like your children; it's just—and I made hundreds of thousands—I throw a kilnload a day. I was that good. That good. I mean "good" by—how do you call it when somebody's facile or didn't really do a lot of work?

And that's when I was firing wet. I would throw a kiln wet, and we'd get two kilns a week in, and it was a lot of

work. And then I found out that I wasn't paying enough attention towards going in the kiln. But I was being spontaneous, and I said, why don't we sit back now and see what we've done here and try to absorb something from that so that it's not ugly? Then it became a little more sculptural. And then I went through my—I call it my Danish period, with slip trailing, and feather combing, and the whole thing.

So, see, I know—and this is not being facetious or whatever, but I know how to do everything. I'm an expert.

MS. RIEDEL: That goes back to Charlie.

MR. REITZ: And that's what you got—this goes back to Charlie. I had to be an expert. See, to be free—it's a lot of damned work to be free. Nothing is free.

I almost went into wood, wood and fiber. I almost went into both of those. Because wood, I've done wood all my life, too. As a child, I made cedar chests in high school, and all those things. So anyhow, Eckto [ph] was the woods man up at Alfred. And so the gal came through here, and she had this piece, and he said something about it. And she said, but Mr. Eckto, all I want to do is express myself. He said, good God, with what? You have yet to express with [wood], which is true. And his way of teaching people technique [was] in a creative way.

You don't have to cut down 700 cylinders to see if you can throw or not, but you can teach it. But you have to have tools of your trade. A good writer, a good actor, they all have their tools of the trade, and they're successful because they are geniuses—well, not geniuses, experts. You have the great commands.

When I hear someone speak and I'm just enthralled—he has a great command of the subject and of the delivery—I'm just in awe. Some people I can listen to forever. Joseph Campbell, I believe in his philosophy, and so forth, and following your whatever, sort of passions, and so forth. But I like to hear him speak also. I have this tape, as I told you, made in '62 of a Henry Miller interview, but I just taped in my shop when it was on radio, you know, from Minneapolis. And what he said in '62 is exactly the same as today, applies today with all this stuff. When you sense someone, or a writer, or someone, or a potter, an artist who has command about [what] he or she is doing, you sense it.

Even Native [American] art. I love that, Native art. I collect a lot of Indian work and old pawn [older, traditionally crafted, usually silver-based Native American jewelry], and I love that because it was made not for art. It was made because they had to do it, and something inside of them made them do it. I want to show you before getting—I'll get it right now, because it's right here.

This is the walrus that I was talking about.

MS. RIEDEL: It's made of black stone, about six inches long.

MR REITZ: This walrus, carved out of stone, was given to me by the Eskimos up in—above Ringlet Inlet [ph]. It's an old piece, and it was made because these people understood everything about the walrus. They would hunt the walrus; they'd sit there waiting for the feather to blow in the blowhole. They would thrust the spear in the walrus. It would fight with—either he would get killed, or the walrus would win, or he'd win. And to get the walrus out, cut it open, eat the liver, the heart, drink the blood, and drag it all the way home, skin it, use everything, make raincoats and things out of intestines. Eat every bit of it, the bones were used for some stuff. They knew the walrus, you see. And this is the essence of a walrus, not a picture of a walrus.

Now, I'm sorry to say, they put some of the Eskimos into production, making loons, or decapitation scenes, or stuff like that. But this was made out of just expressing. And it looks like somebody really did this piece [of] art well, or whatever. It was made—he had to do it. Something inside of him made him do it. I can't get over the amount of knowledge this person had about what he was doing, how expert he was, and how Charlie—I lived with Charlie the Indian—how expert and the knowledge he had of the woods and the animals, because if you don't, you're going to die.

And it's the same thing in any business or any art. You must know—I really know my material good. I know what is wrong; I can feel it; I can taste it; I can smell it. I know what's happening; I know what's happening in a kiln. When I had my first kiln—one of the kilns in Verona, Wisconsin, I know that when I get to the edge of my garden, if I can smell, I'm about cone 7. And my depth—if I put my hand on the corner, I could touch—count to about one, it's about cone 9. So what I would do at the university, I would say, okay, I want you to fire this electric kiln, or gas kilns, whatever. Mostly—[inaudible]—and I put cone packs in, say, okay, now I want you to look at color and the cone. Okay, this is the color of 02, 06, 01 area; I want you to know without firing cones. So I don't use cones. The last time I circled that—I just don't use cones. I just know where it is. You know cone 10 is white; 06 is orange. Pretty soon somebody got it, and if you know—got to know colors. That's having command of—you can't depend on parameters and all these things. They're nice to have, but you have to be in charge of them. It's like—they tell me about computers; they're not smart. They're only going to do what you tell them to do.

Anyhow, I'm going on and on and on.

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all. I was going to ask how you kept track. With your dyslexia, you probably didn't keep detailed kiln logs.

MR. REITZ: No. I never did.

MS. RIEDEL: But how have you recorded all this knowledge over the years, with salt firing, and wood firing, and which effects are produced by which combination of fuel and stacking? Is it all in your head?

MR. REITZ: Yeah, it's just—

MS. RIEDEL: At this point. How did you build up that knowledge?

MR. REITZ: I think it probably started very, very, very young, with my dyslexia, having to make up for that in some other way. Having to remember certain things, how to judge things around me that are happening and associate with something in the past.

I remember a lot of things by association. So it's the associations that I remember, and I can come back to. For instance, if I'm picking wood, I can visualize; I don't think about it; [I] visualize—oh, wow, yeah, Frank's wood was really great, or we'd do this, or we'd do that, but it's by—I don't keep notes, and that was the trouble at the retrospective. They had a hell of a job finding where anything was. I just can't—I just don't put things down on paper, and I just remember. Or if it's important to me, I remember. If it's not important, I don't even try to foul my brain up with it. I let it go; so I'm not quite sure how I do that.

When you mentioned it—I haven't thought about that until you—gosh, it really is quite remarkable, what I do remember. It's just, to have lived this long—my recall is fantastic. That just goes to getting old; they say that's the first thing that goes. I'm not sure about that, but recall time. And my brother, Alan, fishing on the [lock]. I can—just like that—jump into that situation; I'm there, right like that. When we look at a bad picture, I don't just look at the picture; I am there, see what I mean? So that you don't forget those things, and if it's important to you, I don't think you'll forget it; you'll bring it back.

Some people jog the memory back to them, so it is kind of amazing to know that I have retained not much knowledge about—I'm more knowledgeable about my craft than anything else in the world. I'm not good with people's names, or dates, places, but they don't seem to be important to me, the names or dates; they're never important to me at all. So I don't remember them, you see. But about my craft or about the physical world, I'm very—I think I'm quite knowledgeable about the physical world. I can do about anything if I want to. And that makes a great exaggeration, probably, but you know what I mean.

And so I'm a very fortunate person, that I had so many experiences, that the experiences that I've had have been very meaningful, and therefore I have put them back in this brain. We only use the half of it anyhow, or a quarter of it. There's lots of room in there. So when I'm still able to recall, I'm not stuck "counting flowers on the wall." "Don't tell me I've nothing to do," right, not "watching Captain Kangaroo" [song lyrics, "Counting Flowers on the Wall," 1966, Statler Brothers]. I really had important things happening to me in my life. And some things, most people don't—a lot do—but that's not important, but to me, if it's important, it's important.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: And see, if I think I'm having a good time, I'm having a good time. I don't depend on somebody telling me I'm having a good time. Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. REITZ: It's very simple, so if you like somebody, I don't have to tell you whether it's good or not. You like it; it's okay; it's good then, see. And I come back to that whole thing again that I get most upset at, a hundred times, about esthetics being a spiritual thing or a cerebral force or a gut feeling thing. It's not really on paper, something like that. I don't know quite how it is. But I'm sure my—what some people think might be—handicap has not been a handicap that has affected me, unless I go to a woman's restroom instead of the man's restroom; then I get in trouble. Right, when it's funny, because when driving truck at the—the trick is the weigh stations. They have a sign out, "Open/Closed." You're ready to head in the truck, and, see, short words out.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: Long words, "Open/Closed"; I said, right. That's how they do it. And you see, I spell—which drove my secretaries crazy. They refuse to do anything unless I dictated it, because I spell with visual equivalence.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: "Yesterday," I mean, it looks like yesterday; it looks like this; that's what it looks like. It's a long word; it's a short word, and I'd say—that's how I look at words; they are pictures in themselves; they are pictures. Cut, you can see the word "cut"; it's cut. It's like a something—I don't know how I'm bringing it up, but that's basically how I get through things. And I fake my way through so many conversations, it's amazing. For instance, if you don't speak—in Japan, something I don't speak—when I'm in Japan, I can speak some, but when I'm out of there, you don't, because of—you know.

Yukio took me to a Zen Buddhist meeting one time, and so they're talking about, oh, yeah—[speaking Japanese]—ah, no, ah, hai [yes, I see], hai, hai, no. All frigging night. And then, however, Zen Master said to me, what do you think about the unborn mind? And it was right up my alley because [of] how I believe that we are born knowing. However, they went, "mm," which is very good. I never even thought I made a hit. He was this obnoxious bastard; they really are. That's good. I think my way through.

When I used to drink a great deal—I've done more workshops so hung over. The audience never really knew it, I don't think. I was so sick and so hung over, but I faked my way through the whole thing.

One time I was out, and Rose Slivka and I and a group were down in southern Illinois. And George, her husband. And we got playing this jug band. At night, we're pumping—[blowing sounds]—perfect. So pretty soon somebody says, Don, it's 6 a.m. You got to do a workshop, he said. And I could not talk. So I got up there, and people are waiting for me to say something; so I got up. So I got a big piece of clay and threw a huge bowl. I filled it full of water, and I put my head down in the bowl, then I poured the bowl out and said, okay, I'm ready. Is everybody ready to go? And that's how it's set up—okay system for that time, see.

And I did that workshop in Texas, and it was Lubbock, Texas. If you ever need sand, Lubbock has sand. One of my favorite songs is "Happiness is Lubbock [Texas] in my Rear View Mirror" [1980, Mac Davis]. And so, like I said last time, whatchamacallit said to me, he said, well, I know the last I saw you last night, you were flying through the air into some bedroom. I was in a conversation with [James] Melchert then—and I love Jim, he is so well read. He's just so well read, you know. He—and at Utah, the guy who teaches out at Utah, dammit, he's such a good—he had his studio in Japan for 12 years. He can speak Japanese so fluently that the Japanese, they are astounded, because even the inflection of the word—he is so, so good. Both of these people are so well read, and I'm in this conversation, and I just found myself, "Really, right, mm, ah, yeah, yeah, yeah, sure, that's, I guess so," you know. I felt so stupid that I could not go on with it or fake my way through it. So we'd do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well that must come from all the international traveling. Just having to adapt to wherever you are.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, yeah. And so the—

MS. RIEDEL: —with somebody's verbal skill—

MR. REITZ: And every now and then somebody would [say] something; I agreed, oh, yeah—or something about something, a little smidgeon, which breaks the ice. They don't know I don't know anything else. I could say konichiwa [greeting], that's it; I'm done. [Speaking Japanese.] I'm done. Forget it, that's it, you know.

MS. REIDEL: Let's talk a bit about the figures in your clay work. The sheik figure, the refrigerator man—

MR. REITZ: Right, right.

MS. REIDEL: Figures that have appeared in the narratives, and whether they're associated with pretending, with the environment—

MR. REITZ: Yeah, it was pretending.

MS. REIDEL: —with the earth.

MR. REITZ: And actually, they were pretending, but finding reality through pretending. It's like a play. I'm trying to think. I never did any drawings of figures in clay until the Sara series. That, I think, started the drawing, the real drawing, and that was actually by accident when Sara and I were both healing each other.

I was still doing pots. I mean, I was doing some pottery forms, because I could still use my one hand. I get pots kind of like this, and one day I put this white brush stroke on this pot and said, wow, the refrigerator man kind of found a life. I had put a belt, eyes—little things. Then everything else I would hit, it was like they were shot prints. Everything would hit, I would start accenting and draw—something would come out of it. Like that lion would come out; the refrigerator man would come out, all these things. So the handprint was the, "I am here; I am witness to," you know, for Sara. I'm with you. And then the refrigerator man went gray.

Oh, this is very interesting because, when I'm painting, I don't look at colors or anything. I dip into a color; I would just do it. I don't know, they just worked that way.

And so my refrigerator man was always a white brush stroke, right. And Sara came down bad with this one tumor thing, and I dipped, and I all of sudden realize that the refrigerator man was out of gray paint. Just—I didn't make him that way; it just went that way. And there's always in my drawings—most of the drawings, you'll see there are three flowers usually.

MS. REIDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: And one is broken, but it's still blooming, and that's what we are. We may be broken, but we're not out of here. And the flowers were a symbol—color was—is a symbol of happiness. Flowers were a great symbol for me of happiness and getting well, growing right. Then the animal imagery always stood for something that we are—we better get a hold of because we're destroying them. Or the fragileness of the animal, or they would portray the uncanny trust an animal has in you. How frail they can be and how sometimes they're mistreated, which goes with other human things. Then after the refrigerator man, came another man, a figure with a round head and face, and he became my sort of alter-spirit person.

And then, I'm driving through New Mexico, and there's a place on the highway outside of Albuquerque. If you go at sunset, the sun sets right on the damned highway. It's just—absolutely is amazing. I was sitting on this ball they call Earth, and I got out of the truck, went out there, then held my hands out, spread legged, and I was like, I am riding this ball, and we're going round and round and round, and our planet Earth. And I got thinking about what we're doing to the planet Earth, because I just came from—I must say, it's like a second Mesa [AZ]. The image was just trashed, garbage all over it, and I said, why are the Indians—where's the one that's crying because we're—you know. I didn't mean to degrade that, but I was thinking about that.

And all of a sudden this image came out of the drawing, became the she-lady, the she-person, she became a symbol for life; she was in charge of the Earth. She was God, Buddha, whoever, whatever you need, but there's something greater than us that was the creator, the creating force or something. And the breast forms then came; breast forms were about nourishing the planet, the earth. It poured juices from the gods to make things grow, the trees and so forth. Sometimes there are some airplanes in them—trains were always in them, because trains—goes back to my childhood because me, Bobby Robbins, and Ziggy Mueller, we would jump off the train bridge. When the train would come, we'd jump off the train bridge into the Pequest River, see, just before it'd get to us. Then we found out that there is a space in the bridge, about 20 inches—the tracks. So we get underneath that space and let the train run over us, and Christ, you know.

So trains have always been—but trains are always carrying something, giraffes, people, going somewhere, and the poet, he—I forget who it was that said, you realize, of course—no, he was a psychiatrist, actually—he said, "You realize, of course, that every train you make, the headlight is on." I said, okay, yep. "You always had a headlight on the train. You are always going somewhere; you're always piercing the dark. You're going"—and the trains are always wrecked—there's always a wreck at the back of the train. Engines never—off the track and—so, yeah, I mean, poets and psychiatrists had a field day with my work.

The fly and then the ghostly figures, they came through like—well, I would be sick as a little kid in our—the bedroom, where it had heat, came through registers in the floor from downstairs. The grownups would be downstairs talking, and I'd be up in the bedroom-have a fever—the light would be coming up through, and the wallpaper is just weird stuff, and creatures would come there. Really, I thought, if they were really our friends, really our protectors, they are protecting us from—they can be our protector. That's why they had all these animals that had these weird shapes and so forth, and fishes, and things of that nature.

So all the imagery came from some meaning which was happening to me now or happened to me previously, which I had forgotten about and didn't consciously do it. It just came out because I let it flow. I look at those painting now, and I say, how the hell—how'd I do that? It's really amazing. Or I say to myself, who did that? I mean, that's the question; was it really you, or who? And I believe that a great deal.

It's like when you're centering on the wheel. Who's centering who here? Right, right, and that's very important to know, but—anyhow, I do believe in forces which act upon you, which we have no control over, and they could be negative or energy forces. I believe in that, and I can't explain it, nor do I want to, nor do I care about explaining it. This is what I think, and so I don't rely on—I very seldom sketch, very seldom sketch. It's either on the floor or something, or on a matchbook cover or something like that. But I believe that'll work out. And images just come, so I can't explain where all the images came from.

Well, the one—a lot of the reading I had done for Sara, like the Velveteen Rabbit, that giraffe figure sort of, that came from the books, and The Little Prince. Those images came from those stories, you know, or Blake. I read Blake, and she loved Blake, too, and a lot of images came from the Blake poems.

MS. RIEDEL: She loved William Blake?

MR. REITZ: Yeah. William Blake. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MR. REITZ: The other person who I could understand and read his book—Rick Pope gave me—is Trout Fishing America—you know, what was his name?

MS. RIEDEL: Brautigan.

MR. REITZ: Brautigan. Yeah. Yeah. He thinks the way I think, and so I could even read the whole damned book, Trout Fishing in America, God, yeah, right. He's wacko, see, same as me.

So, yeah, yeah. And then I have other people. It's quite a switch, and it's from a workshop, doing workshops, in the Northeast. I'll think of it now, where everybody goes on vacation, where [John F.] Kennedy's house is.

MS. RIEDEL: Maine?

MR. REITZ: No, not Maine, but down the side of Boston [MA], off the—

MS. RIEDEL: Cape Cod [MA].

MR. REITZ: Cape Cod. And so I was doing a workshop there—one of my collectors has a house I live in—the American painter—it'll come to me in a minute. I bought his house when he died, and it's right on the beach, the American painter, paints houses.

MS. RIEDEL: Winslow Homer? No?

MR. REITZ: Oh, damn it. Well, I'll think of it, but the important thing is that I was there, and I was sitting at the table that he sat at. His coat is still there. The window is still there that you always see in his paintings, and everything. And I'm sitting there and thinking that was just wonderful.

So that night, Saul Bellow was doing a lecture, so I went up, and, matter of fact, I had his books right there; he signed for me. And so I went up and listened to Saul Bellow—very intriguing and interesting talk. I was just enthused and went up, and he said, oh, sure, sure, sure. My collector knew him personally, and so he had to sign three books for me. So I gave a couple away, and I kept two.

So I'm going from Saul Bellow.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. REITZ: Is that it or not? No, this is not it. I'm sorry. Just give me a second.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. REITZ: So Edward Hopper tells me—just give me a minute; it's important.

MS. RIEDEL: Edward Hopper?

MR. REITZ: They gave me the key for my 70th birthday to the Edward Hopper house, and so it was kind of, we'd make a joke out of it. So, well, this is your house. And I'd go up there, and I'd sail by myself—it's very close—and sit out on the beach on a big sand dune and stay all by myself in Edward Hopper's house. It's very spiritual, and just because of clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. REITZ: I mean, I have had the damnedest life, which goes back to the value of the workshops where I met all these people, and I've read Sam Bellow's books, which I didn't think I would ever—or Saul Bellow—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: —which I would never thought I would ever do.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the Henry Miller quote? What did he say on tape that was so compelling to you that you kept it all these years?

MR. REITZ: Well, what was that? I forget now.

MS. RIEDEL: That may come back.

MR. REITZ: It was about, I don't know, aesthetics or something. I forget.

MS. RIEDEL: He did wonderful watercolors. Have you ever seen them? When he wasn't writing, he did watercolors.

MR. REITZ: No. I didn't know that.

MS. RIEDEL: There's a book of his watercolors. They're really pretty wonderful.

MR. REITZ: Wow. That's fantastic! Yes, and if it wasn't for—he would have not gotten the fame—it was for Tropic of Cancer [Henry Miller. Paris: Obelisk Press, 1934; New York: Grove Press, 1961] and all that, and the problem that he had with that and everything, and people would have published it, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: And—hang on, and he was a publisher, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Saul Bellow?

MR. REITZ: I don't mean Saul Bellow. What the hell is the matter with me?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah?

MR. REITZ: Yeah, Saul Bellow. I did mean Saul Bellow. But there was a publishing firm in [New] York about that time. Oh, I forget now. But anyhow, Henry Miller had to do some things for him so they could publish him, because he had to make some money, because he's afraid all these things were too controversial. So he wrote the one book they like—[inaudible]—I Am an Echo. And he has Echo—and this band was an echo, and it was really a steal from a Yiddish writer who was bed bound. He says on his tape, I really stole it, but I needed something for money right there, you know. [They laugh.]

His talk is so much exactly what I say, like when he traveled, or when I traveled—we're sponges. I'm just a sponge, I soak everything up that's around me, knowing that—it goes back to Charlie, right? Your eyes are windows. It goes down to your heart and comes out to your hands and your heart. The same thing. Most people who I admire say the same thing, but in a different way, a different way. They interpret their emotions, so therefore, simplifying it, birds of a feather flock together, and it kind of registers. Some people register it like that and that skill—I'll be right back, okay?

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Let's talk about change—the evolution of your work and how your work has come full circle, repeatedly. Pitchers, which you first made 20, 30 years ago, and platters, a lot of the tea stacks started early on, and you come back to these forms, and change them.

MR. REITZ: Well, first of all, I go on the premise that the only constant we have in life is change. Change is the real, only thing that you can count on, it seems to me, and so, therefore, I'm not handicapped by change. I welcome it. I welcome it, but I don't change because someone suggests I change. I don't change because I read Ceramics Monthly last month and saw this piece, so I should be doing this now.

The works just do change if you do it. So real change is very slow. It's not an immediate thing. And you don't realize you're changing; it just happens because if you are applying your creative energies, it does. It just happens. I've changed from, let's say, pottery forms in the beginning to, say, punch-out forms.

This all evolved—the punch-out forms became a bag of clay, which I thrust a two-by-four down and punched them out. And I don't know why I did that. I had no idea why I did that the first time. I just did that, you see, and the images on there, the Xs and Os and things, they designate the spots and stuff like that.

I don't know quite where to, how to start that discourse here on change in work.

MS. RIEDEL: Certain things started earlier. The paintings have been ongoing but then certain new forms emerged—the punch-outs, the—

MR. REITZ: Yeah. Like the casserole form developed into basically big columns, because the foot of—being outside of the casserole and not being under the casserole. The plates went from dinnerware to Abstract Expressionist, 60-pound platters. And I love the plate because it gave me a vehicle on which to draw, in which to paint and bringing out my painting, what I love to paint, and color—I love color; that's why salt—I would never have been interested in salt if I didn't think I could get color in it. I'm not big on gray and brown, and it's only because I was able to add colors to it that it was exciting, and I could paint under it.

And so painting has been a basis of much of my understanding of things. The first plates were—my dinner plates were painting, which I'll show you later—were painted with the salt itself, putting different frit on so it melts and gives you a big, round circle and stuff. So it's spraying, and over-spraying, with oxides and carbon on the

greenware, and then this gives different colors in the salt. So painting on the clay right away.

Then it went to larger platters, which became, 18-inch platters or, I don't know, something of that nature, and I would paint. It would give me a bigger place to do bigger brushes, because sometimes it borders on the profound. You've got to change your brushes, you know, and that's the way it is. And so I started painting with the bigger brushes. It went back to house painting; I made a living in the off-season of teaching. I could cut in a window with a four-inch brush. That's how good I was as a painter, you see. I know that craft pretty well.

So, anyhow, the painting, I could incise a line, dipping a stick in color and incising that line, and the color would be left on the edge of that line, and so you had a line in the clay. So then I would combine a brush and incising, which took it out of the functional realm, because that's not very tactile to do it, and these were the very surface scratchings and so forth. So then the platter evolved into this—well, as I show on the plate there, a bunch of clay that I just padded out, and like that edge, I like that edge; it's a nice edge.

MS. RIEDEL: Almost volcanic.

MR. REITZ: Then I was throwing a bowl one time, and the bowl would collapse. Well, I never—when they would collapse, I would never let it just be collapsed. I always had to make it into something.

So it would collapse. I'd fold the edges over and form a—pull it out and re-center and redo it, and that's how the edge on these platters came, because of a collapsed bowl.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. REITZ: Which I re-fold up and just—[makes swishing sound]—you see, so then, obviously, I consider myself painting and drawing with the larger pieces of clay. Like the Voulkos piece here, the Xs and the slabs and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: The piece you collaborated on with him?

MR. REITZ: Right. On the surface, you see, that's still drawing, to me, and putting other clays together on a piece so we'd get different colors. You're still painting, a sense of coordination of one thing: color or texture, surface, mass, relating to the other.

So that's been through all of my work, whether it was functional or nonfunctional, but I guess the point I was trying to make is that because I got more vigorous, more abstract, in my means of expression, it took me out of the functional realm. Because it just doesn't function. And I wanted to talk about purely abstract thoughts in my head, but yet was still using the vessel as a metaphor, but five feet tall. And it was in celebration of the vessel, and the spirit, stuff like that, because I love to throw large. There's just something about working on a piece that's the same size as you—[it] is really a lot of fun. That little bottle—you get away with murder in that little bottle, but a big piece, you sign it, and it's there for everybody to see. Good or bad, it's there, see.

And so I like that scale, to work at that size. Something big doesn't necessarily have scale. But it could have scale, size. And working at that size, at a larger size, I found that I could use bigger pieces of clay, which I really related to, and chunk them together, and smack them harder, and throw an inch thick, or two inches thick, whatever, sometimes. And just making these things—and that fit right into my Abstract Expressionist way of life, actually, you might say, you know, or the abstract way of life, I guess, because you express it with Abstract Expressionism, and, yeah, right. But then I would go back and do some pots to re-center myself.

The tea bowl was a great—I love to do little tea bowls for a little while. When I was doing functional ware, I would work, and six was about my limit of anything. And they would be different. The shapes would be different. There would be six pitchers, six plates, six cups, six—that's about what I could handle, and then I was out of that, because what happened was, by the time I reached the sixth image, it was already leading into the seventh, which had nothing to do with the sixth.

See, so forms led themselves into forms, and through the process of all these 50 years, forms have generated other forms. Other forms. Other resources. Progression. But it all had its roots back there, and it had its roots back in the root cellar. In Mom, it had the roots. When I was covering myself with mud as a kid swimming in the Delaware River. It's this great chain of events which progresses if you let it progress. And I think of all the other jobs that I had—as a salvage diver, truck driver, lumberjack, whatever—was just putting off the fact that I wanted to do art. Finally, nothing else was left—[they laugh]—so I did—I've got to be an artist. Well, that's the one thing that Henry Miller did say, that in Europe, once they are declared an artist—it's judging the man, the person—you become an artist, and you are always, forever, considered an artist.

So it gives you the privilege of the experimentation. And so we see here in this country, you rise and fall on one piece of work, on one critic's thing. So the freedom to express is not as [much] freedom, because some of you

want to be known as an artist, and I don't know how quite how to finish it up, but there's a difference between European concepts and American. And that was one of the points that he made.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think of yourself as part of a particularly American tradition, or more international?

MR. REITZ: I'm a conglomerate of things. I'm a conglomerate of Eastern and Mediterranean and Asian and American, and I think that, well, isn't that what America is? It's a melting pot. That's what we are. We're a conglomerate of all these other things.

My art, I guess, expresses that. That's kind of overreaching, I guess, to say that, but I am not influenced by a specific form; now, I'm influenced more by the person and how the person has reacted to things. And I may not know the person, but I look at the reaction in a form or in a painting or in something, and I'll react to that. I won't make it, but it affects me in such a way that I evolved with my own—

MS. RIEDEL: It inspires an idea.

MR. REITZ: —way of saying something. You see? I say it in my way. We're all talking about the same thing. Pete is talking about plates. Marie is talking plates. I'm talking that we express it in different ways. Our individual talents have led us to do that. It seems to be a natural progression for me to go from the utilitarian to more abstract because my nature is more abstract; it's more that way. But I still go back to the same thing. My pots were always unique; they were never the same. I always experimented with them.

But the tea stack simply came about by throwing—one time I said, well, I'm just going to make big units of something. I'll pull a five-foot handle. You don't have to do the rest of the form because they probably will know what the rest of it must look like. So these became shards, see. A few people know about those shards. I would do a big half of a form or something, and they say, oh, that must be a huge thing. So these shards led to other imagery. And I don't know where I was going with that. Oh, the tea stack.

MS. RIEDEL: The tea stacks?

MR. REITZ: And so I figured, well, if I made these units, they must be okay. I made them, and however I put them together is okay. And I put them again. So I started stacking it as Voulkos was doing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah?

MR. REITZ: But I didn't think about that part of stacks, tea stacks and so forth, or stacks, you know, because I was doing some tea pots—very abstract tea pots—which were solid pieces of clay that were non-usable at all. Their function was an aesthetic function. And so I put these together, and then I turn the bottle upside down and put a skirt over top of it. I just took a big piece of clay and squeezed it together and put it on top, and I said that, oh, there's a spout. Tea—it's a tea stack. They became tea stacks, you see. And then, I kind of remember, yeah, I do remember that first punch-out, almost the first punch-out I did, and it is actually on the cover of—Craft Horizons actually put it on there—one of the better ones I've done. It was that first instant thing, you know. It was a piece of clay, like one piece of clay that was for a sculptural piece, and they were wedged up.

It was a block piece sitting there, and—oh, I know— I had put a big dowel into a piece I was rolling out there, a cylinder. And so I put this—it was a square. I didn't have a square piece. I had put it in there, and it came too high, and the skin started to punch up. And I said, God, look at that. I ought to be stretching from the inside out. So I took it out, and I put a two-by-four down in that hole. And the two-by-four spread the clay out, and you could see the veins and so forth. The clay spread, and I put my hand in and started gouging it from inside. And it was the punch-out because I punched it out with the two-by-fours.

So they were born out, again, not [from] the conscious attempt of making a new form; it just arose. So I'm never worried about making something new. There will always be something new that changes rapidly. And then this last one, when I was sick and I couldn't do anything, I started taking the old pieces, which were broken up and didn't make it in the fire, cracked it, and making them into still lifes, gluing together with the PC-7 [epoxy]. I mean, PC-7 and oxide. You can't believe what I can do with PC-7, boy, I'll tell you.

Anyhow, yes, I thought, wow, it's so much fun making these; these are still lifes, basically. I said, why don't I make some still lifes? So now my helpers are coming, and I'm going to make some five-foot still lifes. Large pieces. Put together the piece, kind of like I'm making now, but putting them together and merge them into one piece. Push one into the other and fire them in one big unit. So I'll have to hire a four-foot guy to come—but that's okay—and pick them out and put them into the kiln. But I need to do it, and so I'll find a way to do it.

And you asked me, are there limitations for the clay? I'm not going to let that size be a limitation to me. The kiln will be limited. But if they are too big, I'll lay them down. So it's not really limited either. But it's going to be a technical problem and a test to see if I can do these.

MS. RIEDEL: Struggle, which you like.

MR. REITZ: I welcome that. So that's kind of the lineage of the way things go.

MS. RIEDEL: You've always considered both the inside and the outside.

MR. REITZ: And I'm always concerned about the inside, I think, because the inside—the outside is only there because of the inside. And that's why I probably tell people I'm only doing a vessel, a rounded form—a bulbous form—something that's that inside that you're capturing. The outside will take care of itself. Just think of the inside of that vessel and not the outside—the outside, well, of course, you think of the outside.

But I find that a lot of pieces I don't care for, the person is watching them, thinking about the profile. Think so much about the profile, not about what's happening inside. And that profile will be there. I'm not worried about that; whatever happens, happens, and that's just my way of thinking. The inside is so important to bowls.

And a bowl, my preference to bowls; I'm doing a bowl. I like to psychologically just be able to swing in and slide through the bowl and slide back up out again. I like that transitional bowl. I don't like the little hump in there. I can't throw. I always throw this little hump at the bottom [of the] bowl, and so tool it out. A tool on the inside of a bowl? What's the difference? If you tool the outside, tool it out. It doesn't matter to me if you hollow it with a spoon, you know? I'm not judging it. It's not like the Olympics. There's no degree of difficulty here. It's however you get the object, so I don't care how you get the—

But I have certain requirements for my pitchers and my bowls and jars. Lids that are supposed to fit are supposed to fit. Lids which obviously aren't supposed to fit, aren't supposed to fit. But if something is supposed to do it, then it better do it. And one thing I always used to be a bug about is that these people are making cups and mugs and so forth like that, and they don't smooth the bottoms; they grind the bottoms.

So you're ruining a $500 coffee table with a three dollar mug. That's just part of craftsmanship, and craftsmanship is not the same as knowing your craft. But craftsmanship is being able to understand, oh, let's finish this whole thing, because the inside, outside, top, bottom are all the same. This piece exists in space, you see, and that's very important—exists in space, and most of these things are not mine. I mean, my dinnerware and how it got—I don't know where it all has gone. But this young lady at a galley, I found, and I can't read her name. What's her name?

MS. RIEDEL: Anna Stoysich? Yeah.

MR. REITZ: Stoysich, is it? She was at the Bray when I was up there doing a show at Bray. And I looked at her pieces and said, God, Anna, I need some of those dinner plates. So she made these for me.

MS. RIEDEL: They're beautiful.

MR. REITZ: And I purchased them from her. Look at that. The drawing is just good, just beautiful.

MS. RIEDEL: They are beautiful.

MR. REITZ: And they remind me right away of the French slipware, you know, from Paul Ranson, glazes like that, the red clay, and the slipware, working on that and working on colored slips and that. So it just has that feeling of Provence [France] to me and very nice. She's a really, really good person. I ended up giving her a prize, actually, I believe. Yeah, I did. And the gal that makes this hanging goat—I gave her a prize, too. She's really great. A lot of good people come to the Bray.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you done any workshops there at the Bray?

MR. REITZ: Yeah, I did a workshop at Bray. I visited, and I've worked, but I've never been an artist in residence. Although with the award that I've gotten, the Peter Voulkos award, I was supposed to go work for a month in the Shaner studio [David and Ann Shaner Resident Artist Studio] as part of the reward, but I was too sick to do that. But I will go back now. Matter of fact, I'm going at the end of this month to the Bray reunion. There will be a lot of good people there.

MS. RIEDEL: You did 20 years on and off at Penland, right? You've had workshops there in the summers?

MR. REITZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Sixties to the '80s.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, I think the first was '62, something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Anyplace else? Anderson Ranch [Arts Center, Snowmass Village, CO]?

MR. REITZ: Anderson Ranch. There's been so many of them. Most all the clay studios are someplace in Denver [CO]. But I've done workshops, long workshops, some at Castle Hill up in—where is—in [Ipswich] Massachusetts. And longer workshops, like, say, for a period of a week or two weeks at—

MS. RIEDEL: Haystack?

MR. REITZ: You know, that's very funny. I have never done a workshop at Haystack.

MS. RIEDEL: That is interesting.

MR. REITZ: I've visited and loved it. It's a beautiful place, and I went to clambakes and ate lobster, but, no, I never have. I can't think now. There's been so many places. Yeah, but I think the ones that stick out most are the most recent.

Well, Penland sticks out because we were going through this for so many years and saw so many people evolve. And it was a great place because Penland was created—first of all, it was created for the mountain women to have a place to make their quilts and to make some money, and that's when it was first started. And then Francis from Haystack came down and started making it into a crafts school, and then we hired Bill and Jenny Brown. I could go down the history, and it's up on top of the mountains. So you have to go up and up and up and up. You get on top of the mountains, and it's very spiritual.

So Bill's philosophy was, you come up on this mountain, and you left your kids down there; you left your husband down there; you left your wife down there. This is your time, and I don't want anybody else up here. That's why he never developed it into bus tours and gift shops and everything else. Now it's a lot of bus tours and gift shops, and it's very big now, but Bill said, I don't care if we have six students. You've got to come up here, a place where you can find out who you are, not a place for an ego trip. This is not the normal crafts school situation.

So I really admired that; I really admired that. So, yeah, that's why we stayed there for so long, I think. It was good, and I like to go to Anderson Ranch. I can't go to Anderson Ranch now because it's 8,000 feet, and I can't go that far anymore for long periods of time. Oh, and I can't remember—Arrowmont [School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN].

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. REITZ: I mean, there are so many art leagues and things and workshops, Pittsburgh [PA] and all those opportunities, and I can't really remember all of them actually, just a few of them.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk a little bit about NCECA, the World Crafts Council, and the ACC [American Craft Council]. You were President of NCECA in '73.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, when NCECA was started, by about 30 people who got together, it was in reaction to the Ceramic Engineers Society. We would go to Ted Randall. He took me personally to Washington, D.C., to the Engineers Ceramic Conference. And it was so far out of my realm of understanding, and mostly they were breaking plates with fractional things and this and that types of clay. I mean, engineers, all of this stuff we've been doing. They know it all. You've just got to read the damned books.

And so, at Louie Rayner's [sp] house, about—I don't know—about 20 [people] dreamed up NCECA. Ted Randall, Val Cushing—it was a National Council of Education on Ceramic Art, and it was a big C and small E, but it's educational. We founded it so we could go to a resort that was off-season, and you can go there cheap, because these others were at big hotels in Washington, D.C., and all that stuff, and everybody bring a pot. We have a potlatch [ceremonial Indian feast], and you know, here this beginning student would have Bob Turner, and Bob would have this student. We'd put the names in the hat. It started with about 50, 40 people at the first one. And then it grew. Now, it's like over three, four thousand people.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, six thousand at the last one.

MR. REITZ: It's too big now.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. REITZ: But, yeah, then I was always involved with [inaudible], and I became president at one time and so forth. I've always been involved with NCECA because I thought it was a good—it was a place where people had something in common to come together to talk things over.

I'm afraid right now it is so large that you don't get—it's a job market. And that's not what it was meant for. It wasn't meant for a job market; it was for the dissemination of knowledge about your craft and who you were and so forth.

No, I think one of the things that I enjoy about NCECA now is that I was just seeing my friends, as a way to meet friends. So that works good. And the displays of what's new in machinery and stuff downstairs, commercial displays—there is some fantastic stuff. But I must confess I don't go to many lectures; it's so big; it's so big now.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you gone regularly for 30 years?

MR. REITZ: Yeah. I'm there every year. See, when I started, when I would go, I started to go to NCECA, and teaching at Madison, we'd always raise money to take our graduate students. And so when I say we raise money, I would rent three rooms. I had a room, and my students had the other two rooms—and so I kind of financed a lot of their travel, which was okay because it was worthwhile.

It used to cost me a couple grand to go to NCECA. It still does now, but you spend it on other things. NCECA is so expensive now; your hotel room is 100 bucks a night—[inaudible]—but anyhow, that's beside the point.

I liked going to NCECA all those years, and I've been going steady as a member and so forth through the years. I'm an honorary member now, so it doesn't cost me anything, and that's nice to know. They've given me different awards and stuff; it's nice. One of my better talks, I must say—as a matter of fact, it's on tape, and I have it; somebody sent me a tape of it—was two years ago; I gave a closing speech. And so I said, oh, sure, I'll do that, no problem. And I got driving, got as far as Yuma [AZ], and said, oh, I've left all my slides at home. Goddamn, well, it will work out, and I'll just go. It'll work out.

So we got there, and I didn't know what I was going to talk about. I really did not know at all, and so then I went to go up in the audience, and there's over 3,000 people in this huge auditorium, with four television screens, and other people were doing their slides and stuff. And I said that's nice, that's nice, but you haven't said anything yet about things. So I got up, and I said, well, I left all my slides at home and, thank God, everybody applauded. And I said, so here is what it's about: What are you doing here? What the hell do you want to get out of this meeting? Are you getting anything out of it at all, and what are you getting out of it? Have you gone to the exhibits? Is this a meaningful thing for you? I went on and on, about this is your time, and what do you care about what's going on at home? Forget it.

Your refrigerator can look like a chemical experiment when you get home; that's okay, you don't give a damn. This is your time. So my emphasis was, it's your time. It's your place. If you want it, you can have it. I went on and on.

I got a standing ovation, and everybody was clapping. That was one of the better unprepared speeches that I've done, so that was kind of fun.

So then—but now I'm on the board of the American Craft Council. Here's Sam Maloof and Soldner and so forth. And Mrs. [Aileen] Webb had this idea, as everybody knows, of giving the American craftsperson a face in New York City, because that was, no matter what you say, the Big Apple is still the Big Apple, and it will always be the Big Apple. You can go to San Francisco or whatever, but New York is New York; that's just the way it is.

So she is a great, great, great lady. I admire her. I didn't talk about her [yet]; I admire her so much, and she has a penthouse up on top, so it was kind of good. We'd go and take the elevator up to get to her penthouse, and the door would open up, and her butler would come in and take us in—so we could check out [Auguste] Renoirs and [Edgar] Degases and all of this fantastic—in the kitchen, she had a potter's wheel, and we showed her how to make pots in her kitchen.

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

MR. REITZ: And she'd always dress in these house dresses, work dresses. And I called her a model. She did not care; why did she have to care, you see? And so it was founded on a good, good reason, to give a craftsman a face in New York City, and it's been a good organization. It really has been. It's gotten so big that—that's what all organizations do. You become a dragon eating your own tail after a while, but it has helped so many people. This helped me, and the magazines published—Craft Horizons—and I'll never forget the ones we have. Mrs. Webb. She is such a kind, I mean, just a wonderful lady, just a wonderful lady, and with all the money that she had, you would never know it. Well, old money is that way, don't you think? New money, you can tell. Old money is a whole different story.

So, anyhow, I went up by myself, and I went up to the penthouse that evening to talk to Mrs. Webb and so forth and so forth, and I was in for a board meeting. So I went to bed, and I got up, my clothes were laid out and pressed over the chair. So I said to the butler—I can't think now—a wonderful man—and I said to him, listen, I've

got to catch a bus down to the Port Authority, and he says, oh, no, we don't take buses; Mrs. Webb left you a $20 bill for a cab. I said, oh, thank you very much, and he called a cab. We don't go by buses. So I said, okay, that's cool. I'm getting dressed, and I'm looking at the Rembrandt [van Rijn].

What a wonderful surrounding. And then Lois Moran and Rose Slivka, and I think Rose Slivka was one of their better writers. They did get a little irritated with me, and she talked about things that had nothing to do with Crafts Horizons; it had to do with art, you know. It was a little bit sticky in those early years about that, and I must say, now, I mean, Pat Dandignac, who I heard just died recently—

MS. RIEDEL: She did?

MR. REITZ: Yes. Lois sent me a note. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear, that's awful.

MR. REITZ: Yeah, just recently she did, and I was really—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, she's been wonderful.

MR. REITZ: I had to call Lois and say, what happened? Yeah, really, but Lois and I go way back with that. And I'm in the gallery, in the Thirteen Moons Gallery in Santa Fe [NM].

MS. RIEDEL: Thirteen Moons Gallery.

MR. REITZ: Right. And the only reason I went there [was] because we were—what's her name? Oh, darn, I don't remember; I don't really know. Anyhow, we were on the board together at one time, and we used to argue all the time about something, and she always won. I thought, well, I think I'm coming to her gallery, you know what I mean?

She's a fine lady; you know where you stand with her at most times. She's a very good lady. Anyhow—and a fine weaver, a fine weaver—but anyhow, I think that ACC serves a great purpose, and her magazine now is good to look at, to see what people are doing. Not a lot of information in it, I don't feel. Sometimes the articles aren't like what they used to be, but maybe I've just grown. So many magazines—maybe I've just grown, you know, not really looking at that as a new person or something. I'm not quite sure, but it's a good organization. Now the Worlds Craft Council is on board—

MS. RIEDEL: Did you go to those conferences? Did you go to any of the—

MR. REITZ: And then you have the little organizations within it, like the goldsmiths and woodworkers and so forth, and ACC has helped all of them. They have been a focal point for—a lot of wood has been big, actually, too, and jewelry, fiber. It's all American craft, and that's why it's such a good organization.

It's hard to run because it's so big and now—I still don't quite understand the split with the museum and the council and the new museum [Museum of Arts and Design, as of 2002], which had a big uproar over the name of it and all of that stuff. So I don't need any of that. I just want to do my work here and let other people think about what they think about, but, yeah, I think that it's a good organization anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you go to any of those World Crafts Council meetings?

MR. REITZ: I forget; one was in—

MS. RIEDEL: Tokyo and Ireland.

MR. REITZ: And I'm trying to remember now where it was. It was in—

MS. RIEDEL: Mexico?

MR. REITZ: I think it was Mexico. It wasn't far away. I think it was Mexico, and I met some great, great people. Gee, as a matter of fact, I've done workshops now with many of the people I had met from Spain and so forth, from France. That's how I got to France, through meeting this gal. No, I didn't meet her there; I met her at a different meeting. But through these organizations, I have met people, and I've even been invited to their country. So you have to think of art as international; you can't think of it as your own little province or something. It is an international thing, the world thing, the world thing.

And I have never been to China, which I want to go to someday. I've never been to China. I never had an urge to go to China, and I've never been to Spain, which is ridiculous, but I really want to go to Spain. When I [inaudible] in my later years, I will spend my money wisely and go to Spain or something.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. REITZ: I had, two years ago, a great three weeks or so in Provence, France, down in southern France. It was wonderful—Bandol. Wonderful people; wonderful time; had a great time there. And so it's very hard to—I mean, I have a problem with France, many times with their government and so forth, but the arts are different. The arts are different; potters are potters, and were speaking about pottery. It doesn't matter. It's the same all over.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned Rose Slivka in particular. Are there other writers that you have admired?

MR. REITZ: I'm so embarrassed because I read things, and I don't know who wrote them. Rose I just know because we used to pal around together, so I knew Rose. I must confess I don't read many articles. I like Jack Troy; writes very well, very well. I like to read what Jack writes. I can't think now, but I'm not a reader, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: I'm just not a reader.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, you mentioned Rose, so I thought we'd just see if there was anyone else.

MR. REITZ: I get my information in different ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I didn't think you would be citing countless articles.

In terms of the university, you've done so many workshops, what do you see as the future relationship of university and craft, and clay in particular? Do you think that partnership is still viable and fruitful?

MR. REITZ: Oh, yeah, very viable. I think it's making its full circle. I think the pendulum always swings. I went back to Madison twice, and I go back in there, and they weren't doing any reduction fire. They're doing all low-fire, doing china dolls and things, which we did back in the '70s. [Inaudible.] The problem that happens is the university system—and it's a natural thing to happen—your courses are structured so that the important thing is not so much the object, but who you are in relationship to—how well you can get known. You have courses now on how to do slides. You have courses on how to write grants. You have courses on all these things, and there's not that much emphasis sometimes on the—and there are many good places, many good universities around, but sometimes art and the education gets confusing to me at some of the places where I do workshops, because, well, it can be any school, but the painting, the printmaking, the sculptures are so advanced, and they're making little pots, which are not very good.

And that just bothers me. Why can't you interact more with the painters and the sculptors and so forth?

MS. RIEDEL: So you're less isolated.

MR. REITZ: But now I think most of the kids, the young people—because of the diversities of the art—are more astute, more well known, more well read than ever before. I really like talking to young people, and they are so vibrant, but, boy, well, what do you have against professors? And I think by the time you become a professor, you're half-dead for Christ's sakes. You have nothing to say.

That's not really true, but they are, though, much more—although much of the art is rhetorical. Much of the art is taken from something else. I don't find as much of themselves in their art as what they think other people want to be in their art, in how to make them become successful because of the object, not that they have to trust in their own vision, who am I—which I expect.

There are more people doing clay now than ever in history, so there's more better people, and there's more bad people. And in the same way, you don't kid yourself, if you think you're going to have more than one good art student a year. There are not that many artists in the world, really, when you get right down to it, and that's okay. Sure. Sure. Sure.

As far as the young person's sales go, they want to come out of the university with top dollar, [the same] as I'm charging, let's say, for example or something. It's not the way it is; you sort of earn your way up. However, some galleries—and I won't mention some of the people, but we all know—have taken some young students and made them so popular so that when then didn't do other images, they then just dropped them. And where would they go, see, in New York City? And that would have been my big gripe with some of the promoters. But also, they have nothing of themselves to give you. They are too young. That sounds like an old person talking, and it is, but what have you given yet? What have you explored yet? So this is a good piece, but you don't rise and fall on one piece of art. It's a total schema of who you become.

Many times, they'll go for 60 percent or 80 percent for the gallery if they have to just so they get out to a gallery. So a lot of galleries are very unethical in that way. And I find that the ethics thing has come to a low point, I

think, in the arts sometimes. It's fighting for the top, being king of the hill, and if you've got to walk over somebody, you walk over somebody. You screw your gallery, and that attitude is just pervasive in our culture. So you can't blame the artist or young people for it; it's a collective of what I see wrong with our culture at this time. I want more and more and more and more and more, and I'll show you how I get it, you know?

Anyhow.

[END DISC 3.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Don Reitz at the artist's home in Clarkdale, Arizona, on June 7, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number four.

Okay. I think we've done a really good job of covering just about everything. A couple of loose ends here that we're going to address.

MR. REITZ: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: And one would be the difference between the commissions that you've done and the work that you do in the studio or at workshops.

MR. REITZ: Right. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Any difference in the process?

MR. REITZ: No. The process is the same. The reasons are different. Dimensions of it and requirements are different; like the commission, they have a certain size, and it's going to a certain building and something like that. You've got to sort of work with that, but the way I work is the same.

At the workshops, they are much more spontaneous. But then when I get in my studio, my own work is just as spontaneous as the workshop. And people at the workshop—I'm talking all the time, because it's important, talking all the time. They don't realize, when I'm here, nobody talks in the studio. Because, one, when he first started here, the one lad, he was throwing. He said—no, no, no. I said, talk later; right now, you just point. And one guy—I was really, really irritated, this one guy I fired. I said, you know what? I only need one friend, and I already have him; you're out of here.

I very seldom do that, but getting back to the spontaneity of the pieces, it's just as spontaneous working on all of them, actually, except for the planning up if they have to fit a certain area, a certain size—they have to go in a certain alcove, or you know that you have to be specific on that, or how you're going to hang them, and what the units are, and what's hanging behind them. And for the commissions like this one wall, it weighs about a ton and a half, I guess, and it hangs in the Chandler Art Center. I had to figure out what the wall was behind it and had to hit those structural studs, what kind of hanging units I could put on, how to distribute the weight, and all that, and that's a different concern; that's a different concern, but it's a real concern.

It's just as much a concern as grinding the bottom of a coffee cup so you're not ruining a $500 coffee table for a two dollar cup.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: So there are concerns you have to look for. Anyhow, yeah, commissions and my own work. I think work in my studio and workshops are pretty much the same, but in a workshop, I must say, you have a tendency—because you're showing off, and you're in front of the public—to take chances. You don't care if it falls or not, because everybody claps, and that's fine. It doesn't matter a bit, you see.

So much of that energy is transferred to me when I work in my studio, but I can never repeat it because the situations are different; the climate is different; the people are different. You can't repeat anything. That's why I don't draw, because I already did it. I did it once, so why should I do it again?

MS. RIEDEL: You talked about doing a sketch on the floor in water, and then it was gone.

MR. REITZ: It's important that it disappeared. So I have a concept. That's all I worry about—the concept of the bowl, the concept of the picture, the concept of the sculpture—the concept. That's all I'd be interested in; that visual imagery will take care of itself if you don't worry about it so much. If you don't worry about it, if anybody else knows what you're doing or not, it doesn't matter.

All of my pieces, all my pottery was made for me. It wasn't made for anyone else and I was fortunate in the early years of pottery that people liked it. They also found out that they wanted part of me on their table; the uniqueness of Don is imbued in the body of this piece. That's what made my pots special. They weren't just

viscous, you see, and that's what everybody wants. If you're a potter, they want a piece of you in their kitchen on their table. They get Buffalo China or whatever, Taylor pots anywhere they want to, so the difference in the workshop and mine is simply a little more chance-taking at the workshops and at the studio, but pretty close to the same kinds of clay, same tools and stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Have the commissions mostly been murals?

MR. REITZ: No. I've had three mural commissions. The other commissions have been standing pieces, tea stacks, columns, one large—well, I have a piece out there that the guy is going to buy, I think. I'm not sure.

MS. RIEDEL: It's sitting out in the yard?

MR. REITZ: That huge—I made that at Jun Kaneko's studio, and so there are individual pieces, too, that they want. And they'll say, Don, I really want one of your tea stacks, and that's the limitation. So, great—so I can't have—if you want color or anything, no. I will make something special for you.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. REITZ: But it's for you. You may not like it, but you don't have to keep it, but I'm not making six so that you can choose. This is it. So that's the way the commissions go. You might call in a commission and say, well, we're going to have a tea bowl show. So I might say, well, I think I'll make something special for that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. A suggestion more than anything else.

MR. REITZ: They're all totally personal, totally mine, very subjective, very positive, I think, anyhow. I think I'm really good. If you don't think you're good, what the hell is the point?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: See, your condition is voluntary. If you want to be a loser, you can be a loser. You want to be a winner, you can be a winner. It's totally up to you. You want to be sick, you can be sick. I just choose to get better. I don't choose to be sick, but it's my choice. It's quite an oversimplification, but that's the way I think about it anyhow.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's worked well over the years.

MR. REITZ: So far, I'm living.

MS. RIEDEL: What about photo transfers that you did, briefly, after the accident?

MR. REITZ: Yeah. I've only done a few of them. That's when photo transfers were first coming out. We were actually taking a piece of clay, putting photo emulsion on it and projecting it with a projector in the darkroom and developing it. But this one that's hanging in the living room here, I did to put me back together, because fragments of me, from my eyes, my leg, fragments which are put together, and that's why that one was made. And many of the pieces, if we look at them, I guess, are healing pieces, because you're putting out so you can better understand it in a visual form, you know? That's about the way it is. It could have been made something else, but the fact that it's so personal—because the image is me, life there—and the cracks and putting it back together with epoxies and so forth is healing and putting me back [together].

The same kind of another dimension of visualization, and I do believe very much in visualization. It's helped me so much with pain and with other things. It has. I don't like pain. I really don't like pain.

MS. RIEDEL: You talk about visualization and a variety of spiritual ideas. Do you affiliate yourself with any particular religion?

MR. REITZ: No. When people ask me that, what do I do? Well, here's a good example, okay. When my son was born years ago in the Reading, Pennsylvania, hospital, we had to have a name for him, and I said, well, we didn't name him; so he needs a name to get out of the hospital. I just wanted to call him "boy," and when he decides to get a good name, we'll get a name. My wife is getting irritated, you know, and I said, "Brent Alan Reitz," all right, "Brent," all right. What religions? I said, all, all, and I truly am all. They're all talking about the same thing and getting to the same place, whatever you call it, nirvana, heaven, or whatever; they're all talking about the same thing.

I was raised in a Christian family. I am Christian. I am. I believe in like—tell me one of the commandments you don't really like? Which one? See, if they would have just put them up at a courthouse that these are rules to live by, I would be fine with it. As soon as they said Ten Commandments, which one is not good, you know?

They're all talking about the same stuff, and so I am of no particular religion because I respect them all, the Jewish community, the Hindu, whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: What sort of changes have you seen in the craft market since you first started?

MR. REITZ: The market itself?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. The way craft is marketed.

MR. REITZ: Yeah. Yeah. It seems like the craft now is super-marketed. It's not so much the individual who has done it; it's the product-oriented markets now. Well, it still falls in separate categories; it still falls in pottery-type form, utility forms. And I find most of all your utility forms now are—you've got to really work to use them now. They are really difficult to deal with. But if I see one more teapot show, I want to throw up, you know what I mean?

But the pottery market, as such, is pretty much the same. The public publicizing and the—what do you call that?

MS. RIEDEL: Marketing?

MR. REITZ: Marketing is much more pointed towards specific areas, places, Seagrove [NC], all these places, but the marketing is what's different. The pots aren't any different, that I can see. Well, I shouldn't say that because it seems like the potters have followed, or the artists have followed—I don't know who went first, the chicken or the egg—but there will be this surge of wood, soft glazing, and so then the potters do the soft glazing and some salt firing. And then there's the wood firing, so the potters do some wood firing, and the sculptors have done wood firing.

Pottery has followed the process forms as they have developed, not necessarily the visual object forms, you see. But if I'm buying pottery, like, for-the-table pottery, I really want to use it to service me. I want it to function; I really want it to function. I want the pitcher to pour. I want it light enough that I can fill it up with something and pour it out. That it doesn't mean it can't be altered; that's fine; as long as the altering is true to the form, it's fine.

I see that the price scale hasn't changed all that much, basically; it really has not.

MS. RIEDEL: In 30 or 40 years.

MR. REITZ: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. REITZ: It's been something, although if you alter it, you can see me getting more, because it becomes, kind of, art, and I love art, but the definition of art, I don't know how to define art. I really don't know. It defies my definition so much. But I think the marketing is the biggest difference; I don't see much difference in the pots, although, no, no, no, I do see it.

There's much more skill now in pottery, much more technical knowledge, much more variety in glazes, because you get them through a computer, and bing, bing, bing, bing, you don't have to experiment anymore. The forms are much more clearly thrown. There is much more to facilitate, and I think this is part of the—you asked me about the value of the university system, and many of these have come out of the university system, potters this way and so forth. And, yeah, I think there is so much more available technically and so much more—I mean, now you put the pot in the electric kiln and turn the thing on and go to bed, and it's done the next day. You don't worry about turning it up or not turning it up or so. You buy glazes, which are reduction glazes, without putting any reduction on and put them in the electric kiln, you know, and so you don't have to know how to make crystals; there's a glaze that will make it for you, anyway.

So there's much more of that type of ware on the market, which is very beautiful, actually. Yeah, it's the technical—they're keeping up with the advances in the technical world. Their kilns are running by computerization and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you detect any difference between reduction glaze that's fired in an electric kiln versus gas? Do you think anything is lost?

MR. REITZ: Oh, sure. Yeah. Sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. REITZ: It's much more cool. It's not as in-depth; it doesn't have the depth that you're really looking for. It's a

glaze, yeah. It's different than total oxidation, so it has its own quality. And there is so much more literature, and so many more young people are educated into how to publicize their work, how to get into shows, how to take slides, how to make pamphlets, how to publicize where they're going to be.

This thing is so much more available to you now. Before, you would fly by the seat of your pants; you never took slides. That's why I don't have slides that really work. We never took slides, but it's much more, which goes with our culture, doesn't it? Recording—and there are no slides now; it's all digital, so it's another whole thing. I feel naked without slides, but still no: well, how do you want the PowerPoint? I said, I don't have PowerPoint. You don't? Well, I have slides; you want them or not? So now Lisa knows how to make PowerPoint, so I guess I'll go with it now. I am fascinated by the computerization of things; I don't like it, but I'm fascinated by it.

MS. RIEDEL: Has technology affected your work at all?

MR. REITZ: You know what? It hasn't. I'm still firing by the seat of my pants. I'm still looking at the spy hole. I'm still burning my shirt off. I'm still—it has not, which is either good or bad, I'm not sure, or maybe I'm just too lazy. I work with what I know, and I don't like to spend my time—like with glaze calculation. We had to memorize how to calculate a glaze in molecular form in the seminar exam, right? I memorized it. Val probably taught me how to memorize the thing, and I've never used it. I've never used it. I go by feel. I teach my students by the kitchen method. I have a board, and each person gets five darts. Throw five darts, okay, those materials, and everybody will make a glaze. Any five of those materials in any combination will make a glaze. So I said, work with these glazes and see what you get.

It takes the mystery out. It takes the chemistry out of it. Obviously, I was never much for chemistry.

MS. RIEDEL: Very much hands-on. Experimentation.

MR. REITZ: Yeah. Hands-on. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And I guess, really, the final question is about your collection, which is amazing.

MR. REITZ: Okay, first of all, tell you what, I want to put the shade down.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

You have an amazing collection of saddles, of beaded work, some African work, a lot of contemporary ceramics, great cowboy boots.

MR. REITZ: Yeah. Well, they are all pieces that I just related to, and I think all of them have one thing in common—the human element. Most of them were made for a specific purpose, or they were made because they just had to make an imprint. All my Indian stuff is basically all pawn, old pawn. As a matter of fact, that one beaded piece there, done in 1929, was done for the tourists on trains, but it was done in 1929. And it's my birthday, so that's why I have that one.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MR. REITZ: It's amazing. Yeah. It's amazing. The African pots, I just love the uneducated person making these beautiful—quote, unquote, uneducated, you know—beautiful forms. Like the African pottery and carvings just really drove me away, and the baskets. I love the baskets. I love the Navajo. I love that they're all different kinds of baskets. And there's something about that pottery is—I don't have a piece of it, actually, which I want, Mimbres. I love the Mimbres because you get the hole in the pot, because, you know, it's my pieces, and the edges and the pinches are all right there.

MS. RIEDEL: You were talking about that.

MR. REITZ: I was at my studio one day on a farm and had this piece, and it just seemed like the energy wanted to get out, and I just pinched a red one.

[Audio break.]

And it just fell apart beautiful. All right. And then I started pinching everything after that. And later on, a year or so later, a friend of mine said, well, you're doing the same thing like the Navajo do with their rugs. And I said, what? There's always a part of the salvage that they let open to let the spirit out, like this bowl I showed you; it's always a part of the spirit of this place, and I said, that's what, I guess, I was doing, and I didn't know that.

Oddly enough, as much as Voulkos and I really have worked together, we have not traded, ever. We just knew each other enough, I guess. We never did trade, because we never thought about that. I have a yellow piece of—Anderson piece—and most of the pieces—and I have Frances Senska, and she's still working. To this day, she's

digging her own clay. She's a fantastic, fantastic person. And [Bernard] Leach, I had a chance to buy a Leach piece to respect what he has done for pottery. And I have a really nice piece that [Michael] Cardew had made for me on the farm, a really nice stool. I'll show it to you. And in my bedroom—I appreciate Tony Prieto. I did a workshop there, and I have a piece from Tony when Tony was still alive. And his wife and his whole family have been wonderful, wonderful family and just have been great. And then I have some, what do they—a cup thing. Whatever melts your cup. We have cups that—

MS. RIEDEL: And you have that great bowl collection. Yes.

MR. REITZ: Pond, you know the Pond [Pond Farm Workshops, Guerneville, CA]. She's married to the guy up at Rochester Art Institute [Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY].

MS. RIEDEL: Marguerite Wildenhain.

MR. REITZ: Marguerite and Frans [divorced after 1947; Frans married potter Marjorie McIlroy in the late '40s]. They always sold at American Craftsman. And some other local people, like Clydeburgh [ph] and so forth, who I really respect as potters and so forth. Chuck Hines and Dan Anderson and kind of a few people don't realize that I have their work. I like that, just because I like something and how I relate to it. And I like a lot of the Day of the Dead stuff. And it's just how I like something, how I really—Chinese thing—my coffee table is a birthing table from Africa. It's just—I love them. The headboard, they were using that to display work on, and I said, you know, I don't like the work, but I sure like that, what do you call it?

MS. RIEDEL: It's a sideboard?

MR. REITZ: Sideboard. Sideboard. I'd trade it for that and the bowls.

MS. RIEDEL: And the beautiful African milk pitcher, the beer.

MR. REITZ: The platter, I like the scarifications; see, they become the decorative element with their borders and with their pots, a direct relationship between the two of them, and this last beaded rope that I just got from Nigeria. And the thing is [like] a chifforobe; it weighs a ton. And I didn't know where to hang it to see both sides, so I hang it in the middle of my living room. So we have to walk around the damned thing.

MS. RIEDEL: What is it—a bull's horn couch? Steer's horns?

MR. REITZ: Oh, the cow horn couch. Yeah. Cow horns. It's great. I guess that one horn must be five feet long from the back of it; it was in the cowboy shop. I go to antiques shops, and I find a pair of boots, and I just buy them and stuff like that. I have eight pairs of boots. When I used to ride a lot, I'd change them every day. I'd put cedar chips in, absorbs the moisture, so that's why I have boots there that—oh, that one pair, 30-some years old, you know what I mean? I just had them re-soled.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you make any connections between the work you collect and your ceramics or your prints?

MR. REITZ: I'm not quite sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Anything you look at that inspires work? Not really?

MR. REITZ: Well, actually, in a collective way, like whatever it was that made me gravitate towards that piece—obviously have done in my prints.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: There's nothing specific, because of this piece—like that set of spurs up there. This guy is 80 years old. They are all made out of one piece of metal, and he's not an artist. I say he's an artist; he's a horseshoer—he was a horseshoer—and so this lamp, that was his. He's doing decorative now. He did all my horseshoeing. I said, you've got to do something to make more money, so he does all this now.

So, yeah, I like folk art. I like the older thing. This piece here, it's done in what do you call it, the native or naïve? That goes on there.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, a little hummingbird before a flower. W. L. Burton-Union. Yeah.

MR. REITZ: Yeah. I like that; I don't know, I just like it. I have so many things in my bedroom; I have a lot of stuff. If I like something, that's all I worry about. Somehow, it jogs something in me, like the fish scaler there from Dawson [Douglas Dawson Gallery, Chicago, IL]. Dawson is really neat. I think he's one of the better, true, honest, I guess you say, [dealers]. They are really African art; they're not made in Hong Kong. You have to be careful with African art; half of it is made in Taiwan or something. It's very hard to find original art, so you have to trust

your dealers.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. REITZ: And I have Jimmy Lee and some pieces and—[inaudible]—just all things that I enjoy, and I love, and I surround myself, and my house is just cluttered. Actually, you look around, and you think there is no more space; well, the two paintings, the prints I like are the—

MS. RIEDEL: [Marc] Chagalls?

MR. REITZ: Chagalls, you know, and I got those way back when I first started, and as a matter of fact, I traded for them, actually, and I thought I traded too much—I thought, oh, my God, this guy wants a lot of my pieces, until I finally realized it was a pretty cheap trade—I'm not sure, that [René] Magritte is a replica. I don't think it's an original Magritte because I would have gotten it an antique shop for 50 bucks.

MS. RIEDEL: The image is wonderful, the hand.

MR. REITZ: Good image of the hand. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: The face on the wrist.

MR. REITZ: I love the trains and fireplaces.

MS. RIEDEL: So perfect for you.

MR. REITZ: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I have a lot. Children sent me a lot of things. This one class, kindergarten class, they all sent me get well cards. I have piles that a group from Aspen [CO] sent that they made for me, and I've got to put those up. I just have so much. The mayor of Magi [ph] sent me things from Japan, and one time, John Neeley, who we were talking about before who is so versed in Japanese. The Japanese look at him and just can't believe he's not Japanese, he's so good. His studio was in Japan, in Tokyo, for 12 years, and he's a great teacher, a wonderful teacher up at—in Utah—Logan, Utah—wonderful teacher.

And so his wife is Japanese, a wonderful lady, and their daughter, oh, she's such a beautiful young lady—and I marvel at the young Japanese girls. They have rosy cheeks, no rouge; they are just rosy cheeks, and the lips are red, no lipstick. They are beautiful.

So, anyhow, the mayor had sent me this one huge bottle of sake, like this—it has been up in the corner for a long time—he looked and said—whoa, whoa, wait! He says something in Japanese to his wife, whoa, very expensive. They are very good wines. The bottle is about a $400 bottle of sake. Sake is a trash drink, you know. They have gold chips in it and stuff. So the three of us—somebody else was here—four of us drank the whole damned thing. It was so smooth, and a good cup of sake you drink cold. If it's not so good, you'll heat it up. I like good sake. Yesterday, the other night, I had a Pinot Grigio wine, a light wine. I can't drink red wine; it gives me a hell of a headache, except in France. I drink gallons of wine in France because there's no, what do you call it?

MS. RIEDEL: Sulfites?

MR. REITZ: Things, preservatives basically.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MR. REITZ: You know, and I had not had one. They can't export to America because it doesn't have the preservatives and stuff like that, whatever they are, but—last night, since my illness, that was the second Manhattan that I had. And I had a Jack Daniels Manhattan—up, twist, bitters—second one I've had since my operation.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. REITZ: But I had two last night, and I feel fine. And all right, I'm back, man. I'm back. It was very good. I remember this stuff.

But, yeah, I didn't mean to get off the track, but I don't consider myself a collector. I just get a collection, I like most collections that way. If somebody buys a collection, that's different. Like this one collector we all know, buys this one collection. Bought it, and each piece was collected by her for a reason, so that means much more to me than purchasing a collection of work.

MS. RIEDEL: Personal vision—what speaks to the artist, as well as the collector.

MR. REITZ: Yeah. And if somebody had to ask me what is the true judgment that you feel of good art, I said, it depends on how it speaks to me. I don't care how it speaks to you, and I don't know what the value it has to you or me or to the cosmos or what place it fits into the history of art. I have no idea. Who knows? Who knows if it will fit anyplace? Who knows about the future at all? That's what is so wonderful about it, see, but I know what speaks to me, and that's very selfish, but that's what's really important to me.

Art is very personal and very private, as we said before. It's a very personal thing. It is. And as an artist, if you're dealing with your heart, you have enough guts to lay yourself out naked in front of the universe. That's what you're doing with your work, and that's just it. You do not care what other people think.

I must say that when somebody compliments you on something, it feels pretty nice; it really does, and if a piece is going to the Smithsonian or the Archives, then I'm really honored, and that means a lot to me. I've got a lot of honors that way, and they mean a lot to me. They don't have to be big. I like the key to the city in Henderson; doesn't open anything, but they gave me the key. That was very cool.

Yeah, I suppose the key to living, I guess: nothing in too excess and be passionate about what you do and love people, and it will come back to you. And don't hurt too many on the way; you're going to hurt some, but not too hard. Quite simple, nothing too involved.

Thank you very much.

MS. RIEDEL: It's been wonderful.

MR. REITZ: I've just enjoyed working with you over these two days.

MS. RIEDEL: It's been wonderful, Don. Thank you so much.

MR. REITZ: Just a real, real pleasure.

MS. RIEDEL: It's been a real pleasure here. Thank you so much.

MR. REITZ: Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]