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Oral history interview with Merryll Saylan, 2006 May 20-June 5

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Merryll Saylan on May 20, June 1, and June 5, 2006. The interview took place at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and was conducted by Glenn Adamson for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Merryll Saylan 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

GLENN ADAMSON: So, hello. I'm Glenn Adamson and I'm going to be the interviewer today with Merryll Saylan, who is a woodturner and artist from — well, now in Marin County, California, San Rafael. And we are here at the Victoria and Albert Museum [London], on May 20, 2006.

So, Merryll, would you like to say hi?

MERRYLL SAYLAN: [Laughs] It's good to see you, Glenn.

MR. ADAMSON: I thought we might start just by going over some biographical details; so maybe you could tell me where and when you were born. You're from New York City, right, originally?

MS. SAYLAN: Born [1936] in the Bronx of New York City, Pelham Parkway, I think, is the area. I think Bronx Hospital. I don't really remember any of it. The only part I remember of my childhood is when my brother was born, very clearly; I guess I was three. And I remember our apartment had a fire in it. I remember waking up and the—my memory was that I woke up my grandfather, and he then woke up the family; his memory is that he woke us all up and saved us. [They laugh.] Which one is correct? Who knows? [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: So were you the oldest in the family?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And how many siblings did you have, ultimately?

MS. SAYLAN: Ultimately, three other children in the family; so there are two boys, two girls.

MR. ADAMSON: Are any of them artists?

MS. SAYLAN: None. But my aunt's family—my mother's sister—my aunt was a painter. Her son, who was more like my brother than my brother, was an incredibly talented artist. And my cousin Leslie is a designer, but she actually was in a wood program before I was in a wood program at Cal State Northridge [California State University, Northridge]. I don't know that I followed her because of that; I just wanted to do wood. But it was interesting that that side of the family has always been the side I related to.

MR. ADAMSON: But you didn't necessarily get the idea from her.

MS. SAYLAN: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, we'll get back to that.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: So what about your parents? Did they have any artistic bones in their bodies?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, my mom, when I was a kid, took adult high school ceramics. And it's sort of funny—I always loved her ceramics. It was very dated, like that '40s —the green and red glazes—very, very typical of that period. But that was about it.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So she never had any professional interest in it.

MS. SAYLAN: No. But my grandfather was a tailor and made women's clothing, fine women's clothing, but he wasn't a good businessman. So I had heard stories of him over the years, that he had his own store. But he did some funny things; one story was—in fact, he told me that story—was a woman came in with a picture of this

French fashion and that she wanted him to make this dress for her. But he said she was very, very fat—[they laugh]—and that when she came in for the first fitting, she got mad at him and said to him, this doesn't look like that picture. And he said, well, you don't look like the picture either. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: So was he an immigrant, your grandfather?

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: From where?

MS. SAYLAN: From Poland.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, right. And are you entirely Polish on both sides?

MS. SAYLAN: No. My father's family is from Vienna. I don't know as much about that family because we left New York when I was five, and I think my grandfather died just—I think he died like the day we were moving, on purpose maybe.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you were leaving him behind.

MS. SAYLAN: Because we were leaving him behind. So then we had to stay longer to have the funeral. But I knew my aunts, and I would visit them when I would go to New York, but that was all I knew of the family.

There was a cousin in the family who was a designer, and she used to send my children—she would make their dolls' clothing and made them blankets and things that were gorgeous. But I didn't know her that well. I never quite could figure out that connection.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So it sounds like you didn't have anybody who was a, sort of, professional artist, craftsman, in the background of your family.

MS. SAYLAN: No. In fact, I think I was probably the first—well, my cousin Michael studied art. In high school I took my first painting class, and I remember I wanted to paint trees and they were really difficult—[they laugh]—because I was a music major.

Music was more a part of my family. We would go to all the concerts and ballets. And I had one aunt—my mom was from a family of five girls, and I don't remember this of course, but my grandfather gave them each an instrument, so they each played something else. My mom played the violin, and one aunt played the piano, and someone else, the cello. He wanted his own little quartet there. Except one was much younger, so I guess she was not part of the quartet. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: She was drums.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah. [They laugh.]

So I always went to the philharmonic, and I used to have even this wonderful aunt who would call me up and say, you want to go with me to a concert tonight? And in L.A. you would just get on a bus, and I'd meet her - in those days kids could do that - and go to concerts. And then my brother at one point wanted to be a ballet dancer, because we went to so many performances. But I'd say more in music, and I was a music major in high school.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really? What was your instrument?

MS. SAYLAN: Piano. But in junior high they had too many piano players, so I, to get out of sewing—you know, you had to take sewing class.

MR. ADAMSON: Why didn't you want to take sewing class?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, because I hated it, and it was just boring—beneath me. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: But you didn't know how to sew. It wasn't that you already—

MS. SAYLAN: No, I had my grandfather who sewed. [They laugh.] He made clothing for us. And so I took orchestra to get out of—

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And anyway, the sewing class, what did they make? They made a gym bag. I may have been forced to do it at some point, and I think my grandfather helped me pass that class. I think I took things home—

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: —and left them home, and he would work on them, and then I'd bring them back and I'd do the final details.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: So we both got an A. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: Was that the only kind of vocational educational classes you had?

MS. SAYLAN: Mm-hmm, yeah. It was cooking. Maybe it was more cooking that I wanted to do. I cooked at home. I had younger siblings. I have a sister—I have one brother who was—he died a few years ago. He was three years younger than I was. Then there was a break, and my sister was almost 10 years younger, and then another brother who's 14 years younger than I am. And so when my mom had my sister, my dad and I started cooking, and I really loved that, and I loved working with my dad. That was really special.

So I always cooked, but why take a cooking class from school? Uh, boring.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: So I joined the orchestra and I took up viola.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh.

MS. SAYLAN: And—I think I was just telling this story to someone the other day. We actually won — our little junior high orchestra won all-city, L.A. city, for the best orchestra. And our teacher - we even did original compositions with just plucking strings, just staccato or whatever. Our teacher made a recording for us so we could all hear ourselves. And we, in our minds, sounded like the philharmonic.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And then when he played us the recording—[they laugh]—oh, my God, we sounded like a junior high orchestra. It was so sad.

MR. ADAMSON: But you must have been fairly good then.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, when I went to high school—I was called in because they had heard I'd been three years in this orchestra, and when he heard me play, he said, I think we have a little work here. [They laugh.] And that was actually my problem with piano, too, and maybe it's the same problem with wood—it's sort of all the same—is I just hated all the real, practice stuff. I practiced a lot, but I really wanted to get into the music. I took composition at school and I loved that.

And recently I found out—when I was in high school, we had a composition club. Someone just contacted me. I have missed every reunion ever. No one ever knew where I was, but somehow they found me just recently, like last year. And so they asked me if there was anybody I was curious about, and there was one man in my class. His name was Joel Schnee [ph], and we were just good friends, and he got to go to Julliard. I really wanted to go to Julliard, but my parents couldn't afford to get me into those schools. But Joel went to Julliard, and so I always wondered what happened to him, because he was so—we were really good friends. And it turns out he's a well-known choreographer in Germany, of all places. So I have to get more information. If I go back to visit my friend in Germany I'm going to call Joel.

MR. ADAMSON: So did you have any musical career after high school?

MS. SAYLAN: No, and that is sad, in a way. My piano teacher and my mom had my career planned, and they wanted me to go to a musical college. And, I don't know, I guess my rebellion was I just quit. I just—it felt like they were directing my whole life and I just quit cold. And no one could—Ed never—my husband could never understand how I could do that after years of piano.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And our high school—I had a fabulous music high school, which I've heard more about recently. You know how you don't pay attention, but that it was the music school of L.A. city, and I always thought all high schools had this, but we had, like, performances ourselves, our piano club. Every semester—and the whole school had to attend these performances, and my grandfather, of course, made me outfits to wear. [They laugh.] Pretty spectacular outfits. My friends were jealous I had such gorgeous clothes. But we would get performers through the school, which I thought was just normal, like Benny Goodman—

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. SAYLAN: —and the New Orleans Jazz Band, Preservation Hall Band, people like this. And we would all attend these assemblies. And I just assumed every high school was like this, but apparently not. And the other thing, our composition club, which I'd love to have a recording of now—we had a swim team like Esther Williams at our school. We wrote all the music and they performed it. Can you imagine?

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. SAYLAN: I just wish I had that stuff, because that would be so fun to see.

MR. ADAMSON: Absolutely. So you moved right to L.A. then—we sort of skipped that, but you moved right to L.A. when you were five? Was there—

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, five years old, and that was a very wonderful trip. My dad got a van, and there were—the seats were the—my father driver and my mother passenger, and you know, the rest is open van.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And so my mom had two wing chairs, and they set them up behind the driver and passenger, and my brother and I went all the way to California in two wing chairs. [They laugh.] I still have a love for wing chairs. [They laugh.] Even though my house is so contemporary, there's something about wing chairs that I just adore. And whatever fit in the van or on top of the van moved with us to California.

MR. ADAMSON: And that was it.

MS. SAYLAN: And that was it. And I have images in my brain, and I know my sister had photographs. I remember driving some mountain somewhere where we went round and round and round. And somebody told me there is a place, in Tennessee, that there are some mountains like that. And then I remember going through the southwest, and I know we had photographs of Indians sitting on the side of the road selling blankets in dirt.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. SAYLAN: And for a long time I had those images in my brain, but as I get older, there's just too much else there; it just disappears.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes. Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: You know, you just lose these things. There's just—

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: —only so much room, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: The file cabinet is full, or something like that.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, your whole family is Jewish, right, on both sides?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Mm-hmm. Both sides.

MR. ADAMSON: So were you in a Jewish neighborhood when you moved to L.A.?

MS. SAYLAN: Mm-hmm, yeah, all Jewish. In fact, in my second grade—the teachers started asking us where we were all from in second grade, like, and they—I think in those days—you know, people complain about the size of the classes, but I remember we had 35 students in our class, and all but two of us were from New York City.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. SAYLAN: And then those two were left out. I felt so sorry for them, because we all clung together.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: There was this huge migration, I think for work. That's why my father moved out there.

MR. ADAMSON: What was his job?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, it's sort of complicated. I don't know, really. He was studying pharmacy in New York. He was at Fordham University. And then, this was the mystery of my life, but he quit college, and my mom was pregnant. And they used to tell stories about my aunt that, like whisper, my aunt got pregnant before she was married, but I always wondered if my mom got pregnant before she was married. Why did my dad quit school his last year of pharmacy school? But I'll never know. [They laugh.]

And then my aunt—one aunt left, and sometimes she'd tell me stories about my cousin and I. There was always the story about my cousin bit me and it made me cry. And I do remember us both having our tonsils out at the same time. But my aunt tells the story that I tormented him so much that the only way he could defend himself was to bite me. [They laugh.] And then as I laugh and I tell her, Rosie, you have no one left to argue with you. [They laugh.] Your version is "the" version, but it's not the version I heard growing up.

I just like family stories. And that's part of a difference with me than my cousin, is I always loved the family. I loved the stories and I loved hanging with them. And I find a lot of it amusing, where my cousin just remembers my grandfather as this crotchety old man, and I remember him as my favorite relative — somebody that I could yell and scream at, and we did sometimes, and we'd cry, the two of us, then we'd hug and we'd make up and it's all over with. I loved that about him, that—I just had that special relationship with him. I still like that kind of whole family. I love getting my family together and listening to the kids argue or tell their tales or seeing how their little minds work. Sometimes they just say the funniest things.

MR. ADAMSON: That's their job.

MS. SAYLAN: That's their job. I enjoy it because I can remove myself from it.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Right. So what part of L.A. did you land in then?

MS. SAYLAN: Fairfax, but lower Fairfax; there's a difference.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, is there?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, yes. Yes. In upper Fairfax, towards Santa Monica and Melrose, Third Street was really Jewish. [They laugh.] And it still is, although it's changing. And lower Fairfax was more sedate Jewish, whatever that means, but it wasn't as intense a neighborhood.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: I don't know what would be comparable in the east, because I don't really know.

MR. ADAMSON: How religious are your family?

MS. SAYLAN: Not at all.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And I heard tales, like my grandfather would make them—his daughters—sit outside on holidays, Jewish holidays, because he was a modern American man and he wasn't going to participate in that. And even once, when I lived in Berkeley, we had a Passover, and a friend of mine, Edward Gottesman—he was a furniture maker. Edward died of AIDS. He was a good friend of Gail Fredell's and mine. Edward couldn't believe that we just had Passover and ate and never did the ceremony. And I told him I never, never did. Only until I went back to—when I lived in Virginia, someone invited me to a Passover. It was the first one that ever had any of the ritual with it. We had the matzah and we had the wine for Elijah, but that was it. [They laugh.] He argues with me that my memory was wrong, so we called my aunt and she said, no, we never did anything. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: And did you go to synagogue or anything?

MS. SAYLAN: My grandfather started going later in life because—I think he had lost a daughter when—somehow lost a daughter when I was three years old—a young woman, 19—and he turned to religion, but I always thought his religion was funny. When he lived in L.A., depending on which temple was having a bar mitzvah, whether it was Reformed or Orthodox, that's kind of where he went, because the food was good. [They laugh.] So I always met him—even after I was married; I only moved a mile west—I would sometimes meet him afterwards. I loved living near him. I'd run into him at a grocery store and I just enjoyed that. It was kind of neat to run into your granddad—

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: —and he was a lively, very lively guy.

MR. ADAMSON: So one reason I asked is that it seems to me like a lot of your work has a kind of ceremonial quality, you know?

MS. SAYLAN: I know, but I think that's probably more a connection with my love of family. Sort of getting everyone together and sharing a meal. Right now I live where I have no family. And once in a while I freak out about it, actually. And then I'll call my son—[they laugh]—well, I have two sons, so I alternate who I call. [They laugh.] You don't want to bother them.

And recently I had a really lovely conversation with my oldest son. I called him—I was really freaking out. I don't know what set me off, but, you know, a little fear of aging and being alone after Ed's death. And so I said, you know, I still think about this, like maybe, if I'm moving, I should just move. I know this is not going to be in order, but—and I should just bite the bullet—just bite the bullet and move near one of you and just do it. And we've talked about this before.

So he's really cute; he said, now, Mom, before we go any further, do you want me just to listen to you, or do you want some advice? [They laugh.] And then he goes, I have learned to ask this question. [They laugh.] That's an important question. And I said, well, I want both, dammit. [They laugh.] Listen to me and talk it over with me. And so he was really cute. He's really good at that, and so we discussed that I should do what I'm doing and that I—I am making preparations for old age, and then if I feel, you know, in a couple of years or a few years down the line, then we'll discuss it and move then. What do I have to lose?

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: That was his advice; so I went, okay.

MR. ADAMSON: Do what you're told, right?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, that's what I told my daughter-in-law recently, because she's been dealing with her aged parents and how difficult they are, and I said, I realize that I have two very strong sons, and when the time comes, they'll just tell me what to do. [They laugh.] I won't have to even think about it. They are very, very self-possessed, and they'll tell me what to do, for sure.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, let's get back—

MS. SAYLAN: Okay, let's go back.

MR. ADAMSON: —before we get ahead ourselves, let's get back to high school.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. High school.

MR. ADAMSON: So one thing that I guess that happened in high school was World War II, right?

MS. SAYLAN: No, actually in grade school.

MR. ADAMSON: That was grade school. You were born in—

MS. SAYLAN: In '36.

MR. ADAMSON: Thrity-six. Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: When I first moved to California, I think I was—I don't know whether it was first or second grade, someone came to our school, a military person, to tell us we were at war. It was really strange. I can still—that one I can still sort of remember; like, was does this mean? But the big thing that the war, for me, and it still is, I think because I was the oldest grandchild, even though I was so young—my grandfather had a lot of family in Warsaw, and he would get letters from them and what was going on. And, you know, his concern about his relatives, and he had — his father had married a second time. There was a huge number of children, and he lost all but one sister, except ones that might have come to the States when he came, and which was 1890s or something, really early. When you think about it now, it just seems so long ago.

And so I heard all these stories, and even after the war when my—this one aunt, he brought her over; she told the stories about her husband and kids, her daughter, and camp, and what she went through. And for some reason they included me in those. I don't know why they selected me to hear these stories. And so I do feel like my children don't have—you know, that they should hear these stories, some of them, some who might not know, but I never quite understood why.

I mean, I was young, and even growing up in California, because there was this fear of the Japanese, of course. And it's interesting, when I met my husband, his—you know, because he's older, he has a whole different take.

But out on the beaches they had these blimps flying all the time, and when you went to kids' movies—you know, every Saturday kids went to movies in those days; there was no TV, so you went to Saturday matinees. They would have newsreels. And I knew a cousin of mine was in the tank corps and fighting across Europe, and then the Japanese thing, so I was—I felt like I was terrified all the time. I remember feeling terrified constantly of some attack. They were going to attack us.

And I think maybe hearing my grandfather worry, and worry about his relatives, you know, so that was always a very scary time. And that Japanese flag was such an impression on me that when I went to Japan, early '60s, I had to gear myself to looking at that flag. And I was still close enough until—it was early—early like '60, '61, so, you know how that gets ingrained in you.

MR. ADAMSON: Absolutely.

MS. SAYLAN: And then there were some neighbors—that was also funny. There were some neighbors—I guess a German couple, and one day they got arrested and hauled away, and there was a story that they were sending radio things. But when you think about it in hindsight, like, what could they have been—what could they have really been doing?

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And then after the war, that was another sort of terrifying time in my family, because I have this aunt and uncle who were registered Communists, and I know the FBI came to our house. And my parents—the first election I even remember was just so funny, is that they voted for Henry Wallace, the Socialist. They did not vote for Roosevelt; they voted for Wallace, so that in high school, in history classes or - there was so much Cold War being hit over the head, I never would open my mouth, because I'd hear the opposite stories at home from this left-leaning family.

I just had this memory. I dated this guy who—I thought my family was bad, but I dated this guy, and his family invited me for dinner one time in high school. And after dinner they closed all the curtains in the dining room, and they get out a movie camera and a screen, and they start showing Russian Army pictures and singing songs. I thought my family was bad. [They laugh.] This is spooky.

MR. ADAMSON: That's quite a date.

MS. SAYLAN: Isn't it? [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: So did your own politics stay left?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Pretty much?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, but I think I'm probably more moderate than—I have some friends or even my husband—it's almost like an automatic left, and I find sometimes it's as narrow-minded as the right, and so I don't think I'm as left. And I find sometimes with my children—well, two of my children are very liberal, and one isn't. But I do find their takes on things are very interesting to talk about—their take on the '60s - and it's interesting to see how young people—

MR. ADAMSON: You mean, what they think happened?

MS. SAYLAN: What they think happened and how they relate to it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: But I find, a couple of friends—just automatically without thinking, it's like, this can't be right; this is right, you know. I have a brother who's very—my youngest brother is conservative. One time he was watching Fox News and my cousin said to him, how can you watch that stuff? And he said to me, if you watched the proper news, you might change your—you know, you might learn the truth. And I said, you know I'm a liberal Democrat—[they laugh]—and he goes, I know; most Jews are. And I'm thinking, we have the same parents. [They laugh.] Wait a minute here.

MR. ADAMSON: Alright, so—

MS. SAYLAN: Okay, so back to high school.

MR. ADAMSON: So the war ends and you're 19, right?

MS. SAYLAN: No, the war ends, I must be—

MR. ADAMSON: You're nine when the war ends.

MS. SAYLAN: I'm nine.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes, of course. And so then what happens?

MS. SAYLAN: And my sister was born right at the end of the war.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: I guess I was just involved in school. I was in my own little world.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: I loved junior high; it was just a great time for me, except for I was always on a diet. I have a skinny brother, and I was always on the heavy side. So I was always on a diet. I think I starved myself to death in junior high. But junior high I joined this orchestra and it was just you—it gives you a group, and it was really fun and I really liked that.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: I mean, high school was harder. In junior high—what's that book about Ophelia and learning [Reviving Ophelia]? It's this book about women and learning; girls and learning? Because in junior high I was a crack, straight-A student and tops in math. And there was some state testing and I was the highest score you can get in math. And then in high school I just lost it, and I hear this is not uncommon. And now I can barely add and subtract. And they say it has to do with boys; that it's all this thing. And my mother certainly was—she was bad that way, really. It was like, you can't be smarter than a boy.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, wow.

MS. SAYLAN: You never want to look certain ways, you now, the whole idea—like she loved my boyfriend. My father hated Ken Tabachnick and used to do awful things, like if he pulled in the driveway to pick me up to go out on a date, my dad all of sudden had to leave to run an errand and would just roll his car into the street. My dad was awful, really strict. Really strict—you know, drag you out of a car kind of thing if you were sitting in a car with a boy too long. And, like mother loved my first husband because his family had money.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: She was into that, little getting in—my mother used to even talk about Jews that were "too Jewish," like, what the hell is that? What does that mean? It's sort of like that anti-Semitism amongst—

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: —within cultures. I think you see it in the black culture, too. It's a problem. Maybe it's true for groups that are on the way up, or struggling, because, certainly when I was kid, it was clear that you lived in certain neighborhoods, and some of that stays with you. I always knew Pasadena was not a place in Southern California where Jews went, and certain neighborhoods, San Marino, Pasadena, certain beaches that we went to, not where the goyish gentile beach is; then there were the Jewish beaches and then the, kind of, open beaches, but there were always these demarcations. Certain colleges you didn't apply to in those days. It was just understood there would be no chance.

MR. ADAMSON: You only dated Jewish boys, presumably?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, because I lived in such a Jewish environment.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Although in college I started dating these Latin guys, when I first started university.

MR. ADAMSON: Which university did you go to initially?

MS. SAYLAN: UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles].

MR. ADAMSON: UCLA. Okay, and you went right out of high school?

MS. SAYLAN: Right out of high school.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: And I did awful. I was just shocked. In my high school I was a straight-A student. At UCLA you were up against all these straight-A students. And I think I was unhappy because—well, one, I rebelled against my parents, my mom and my piano teacher, about this music, so that was a big argument in my life. Now, I really wanted to go away to college in the worst way.

MR. ADAMSON: Like far away?

MS. SAYLAN: Far away.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And then at one - a friend and I got accepted at Cal Berkeley. We had our room and everything, and my mom took me out to buy me some clothes because it's colder in Northern California, and the level of guilt that I had about them spending money to send me to college was so intense that I decided I couldn't do it, because there was always this money thing with my parents. My parents had a funny thing about money, which was when they had it, they spent it, and when they didn't have it, we couldn't even answer the doorbell, because she couldn't pay the gardener.

And I remember as a kid, especially because I was the oldest, the first TV came out, and my dad had to have this first TV. And I remember sitting in the store—I must have been eight or nine, crying, telling them they shouldn't be spending their money this way, and they're thinking I was so cute; you know, so adorable, she's worried about our money. But they included us—and somehow I always was included. I knew too much about their problems. I hated that. I knew way too much about their problems. So the level of guilt about going away was just too much and—

MR. ADAMSON: Can I ask—

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Would you have said that you were middle class growing up? What would you have said at the time? Or would this not have occurred to you?

MS. SAYLAN: My family is sort of a cross—well, I used to think working class, but—because my dad drove trucks.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: But I don't know that we were, maybe—I'd say middle class.

MR. ADAMSON: And your mom didn't—

MS. SAYLAN: But I don't even know if we were.

MR. ADAMSON: Your mother didn't work?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, she worked for my dad. No, my mom always worked.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, my dad wouldn't have run his business without my mom. And my brother, my youngest brother, I think—I'd feel so sorry for him. He was so neglected. One of my sister's things about—she has jealousy towards me—and part of it's based on that I had my parents when they were young and wonderful, and got to go to all these concerts. And by that time my parents were just totally disintegrating. And so she got them at their worst; but my brother is the one who really got the brunt of it.

I would come home, he was—first of all, I would babysit constantly. I'd come home and my mom had put him on a toilet seat and forgot about him and—because she's on the phone running the business, and there he'd be, stuck. It was horrible. He had a horrible temper and he wasn't doing well in school. And I felt like nobody paid ever paid attention to him. But then I just guess I wanted to get out of there, and my way of getting out of there was to get married at 19. You know, I didn't go away to college, so I got married.

MR. ADAMSON: Married.

MS. SAYLAN: Got out of there.

MR. ADAMSON: This is your first husband—

MS. SAYLAN: My first husband.

MR. ADAMSON: What was his name?

MS. SAYLAN: Joel Goldman.

MR. ADAMSON: By the way, what was your birth name, last name?

MS. SAYLAN: Meiselman.

MR. ADAMSON: How do you spell that?

MS. SAYLAN: M-e-i-s-e-l-m-a-n.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So this was the guy you met at UCLA?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Tell me about that. How did you meet him?

MS. SAYLAN: In the library. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: Really? [They laugh.]

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, really, in the library. We'd hang out—it's where you studied.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: You'd study in the library. And I'm still friends with some of his friends from those days, still very good friends with some of those friends. Well, that's a whole other lifetime. It's a whole lifetime.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: But so, then he got in—you know, in those days everybody went into the military.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: So he was—I guess he was in the ROTC; I don't remember.

MR. ADAMSON: Was he another New York kid that was displaced, like you were?

MS. SAYLAN: No, not at all. He was from Chicago, and his parents worked for Household Finance, and they were very wealthy, new wealth, which my mother adored. But they were also mean, because—my family wasn't good enough for her [Saylan's first mother-in-law]. And I overheard her one time saying we would never amount to anything, my family. And I could never do anything right by her, and she would criticize how I cooked, how I did everything.

MR. ADAMSON: They lived in L.A. as well?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, in Beverly Hills.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, Beverly Hills. A lot of Jews moved into Beverly Hills. When we got married, she was afraid my parents couldn't give us a good enough wedding for her friends, so she had to have her own sort of pre-wedding party. I have one friend; we're still friends; we both—she turns 70 in December, and I turn 70 now - our mother-in-laws—we were saying we don't think girls today—women today - would put up with what we put up with with our mother-in-laws in those days. They were awful to us. My friend was poor also.

I guess I wasn't—I never thought of myself as poor, but I guess compared to them we were poor. And her mother-in-law would take her shopping because she couldn't buy good enough clothes, and mine would want to furnish my house because I had sheets hanging on the windows.

You know, speaking of poor, this is sort of how you don't know when you're poor when you're young. When I was growing up, my cousin Michael and I couldn't wait until summer, because our parents cut our school shoes, the toes, out, so we'd have sandals, and it never occurred to us that the reason that they did that was to save money on buying you more shoes until school started again. But we just thought it was the greatest thing in the world—[they laugh]—that this was going to happen in the summertime, you know, that it was cool. It's funny

how kids just see things in an interesting way.

MR. ADAMSON: So, when you got married, did you stay in college until you graduated?

MS. SAYLAN: No, I dropped out—and that was another one. I had one really good friend in high school, and when she started college, her whole goal, you know the '50s, was to get married. My goal was to finish college. I got married, and she finished college. [They laugh.] That always hung over my head. I always felt like I let myself down. And so I started back taking classes when we moved to—we lived in Georgia—Virginia and then Georgia. I was married—

MR. ADAMSON: Well, first—did you have a house together in L.A. first?

MS. SAYLAN: No, immediately took off and went to Virginia.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you were still trying to get away from the—

MS. SAYLAN: No, because he got into the military. It's sort of like when you finish college in the '50s, you went right into service.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: We'd get Virginia and Georgia. One of our friends got Germany. I was always so damned jealous. [They laugh.] How can he get Germany and we get that? But, oh, well. One friend got sent to Korea; that wasn't fun. Georgia was a whole other experience.

MR. ADAMSON: I bet.

MS. SAYLAN: One, it was before desegregation, and I was a little bit stunned by that. Two, I found out I was Jewish in a different way than I knew living in a Jewish L.A. environment, never practicing, where you heard a lot of anti-Semitism.

Odd things, when my husband was a lieutenant at the time—I tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, but it's pretty tough, you know, in that small environment. A fellow lieutenant was sort of apologizing to us that he would love to have us at their party, but we're Jewish. His wife just couldn't allow it, just couldn't allow it. And then somebody came, when they knew I was going to move, to look about renting, because housing was hard to come by—I said, well, there's a house down the street that's going to be available long before our house is available; why don't you go there? Oh, I couldn't live there; they're a Jewish couple. And my neighbor, who knew I was Jewish, was really embarrassed and said something about my being Jewish. I mean, imagine not being able to move into a house that a Jew had lived in.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. SAYLAN: It was shocking. And then, worst of all, my grandfather came to visit me one time. It was really fun. We went into Atlanta. He had relatives who lived in Charleston, South Carolina, and we went to see them for the weekend. And so here were his relatives - I don't know if it was his brother or cousin, somebody - with a Yiddish accent and the kids with southern accents. But then the worst was—for me—was they drove us around Charleston and showed us different schools —the black schools and the white—like, well, these are good, look how beautiful, black schools. And I'm thinking, how, being Jewish, can you be racist?

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: I just didn't understand it. And yet I grew to love the South in many ways. Well, I think I didn't want to go home to that mother-in-law—I wanted to stay in Atlanta and not go home to that mother-in-law.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you live in the outskirts in Atlanta, then?

MS. SAYLAN: I lived in Augusta, Georgia.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And we used to go down into town because Eisenhower—God, it's so long ago, isn't it? Eisenhower used to come down to play golf at Augusta, Georgia, with Air Force One, a prop plane. [They laugh.] And we used to go look at the plane. I even took golf lessons there, but that was a failure. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: And were you working at all?

MS. SAYLAN: I tried to get a job, but it was really hard, and then I just gave up. And then I decided I wanted a

baby, because what else would I do with my time? So I had a baby, born in Georgia.

MR. ADAMSON: And this is your oldest son?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, my oldest son, Seth. Yes. He said when he moved to Colorado, he said it was actually rather helpful not to have California on his — he doesn't have to say he was born in California, because they're not well loved; it's better to say Georgia. [They laugh.] But other places it might be bad to say you were born in Georgia. I don't know, but he was born in Georgia.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So you were living in a very, kind of, traditional family arrangement then, for a while at least?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, and then when we moved back to California, I think I had my daughter shortly thereafter, which my mother-in-law was angry about.

MR. ADAMSON: What's her name?

MS. SAYLAN: Rose. Rose Goldman.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And I decided to go back to school, but then my ex-husband started a business, and somehow it was expected that I would work in the business and help.

MR. ADAMSON: So you moved back to California because he got out of the service?

MS. SAYLAN: He got out of the service and he wanted to go home. And I sort of adjusted to moving. At first it was really hard and I missed my family a lot because I was very close to them. But, well, especially Virginia—I loved Virginia, because we lived a half hour from Williamsburg.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, wow.

MS. SAYLAN: And there used to be a ferry you could take over to Jamestown and I frequently did that. I spent a lot of time at Williamsburg.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. I just thought it was so—the history was so fascinating. And my landlady—oh, my God, I was 19 years old; she was so nice to me. You know, they taught me how to iron and—I mean, just, they were just nice. And I just thought it was, you know, interesting, that old history.

MR. ADAMSON: What do you remember about visiting Williamsburg?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, just, you know — it isn't as developed as it is now.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: I think it was just sort of starting to be developed, but I just loved the architecture. In fact, one of the courses I took at UCLA later was American architecture, because it just fascinated me. And actually, going through my papers for the Archives of American Art, I still—certain notebooks in school I kept, like that one, American architecture, because to learn all the slides, you draw every building that you see, and I always thought, it's handy if I go on a trip; I can sort of go through my notes.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And there they are.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: You know, it's very nice. It was just fascinating to me.

MR. ADAMSON: So did you start taking classes again at UCLA as soon as you got to L.A.?

MS. SAYLAN: No. I took community college classes—

MR. ADAMSON: Which college?

MS. SAYLAN: I think I went to Santa Monica City College, and then I took some extension at UCLA. I took an Asian

art history class, which was a quite intensive class. They started—it was a three—was it around a quarter, three quarters—this community, not the regular school. And you had to read books on Asian religion, and he started with India and I just loved it. It was fascinating to me.

MR. ADAMSON: Was that your first exposure to the idea of art history?

MS. SAYLAN: I try and remember when I took my first art—I may have taken art history when I first went there, because I remember being blown away, the art—I loved architecture. I think I really related more to architecture than anything else. And I just couldn't believe all this stuff existed. I was never really exposed to it at all, so it was in college. But I can't remember if I took it when I went there in the '50s or when I went back in '69. That I can't remember. I might have taken one before, which might have intrigued me so that I went back to it.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: I got pregnant with my third kid, and by that time my marriage was really pretty bad, and my husband was so angry at me, like it was my fault for getting pregnant. And his partner, his business partner, was angry at me. Like I shouldn't be having this baby. It was interfering in their business.

MR. ADAMSON: Sorry; what business did you say it was?

MS. SAYLAN: He started an export/import business, which was nice because I did travel. That one part I was really strong about. He had this goal: he was going to travel six months out of the year, and I'm like, I got married and have these kids, and you're going to travel six months out of the year—

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: —there was no way. [They laugh.] But, so I did go to Japan with him on business, and I went to France. I worked, which was fun - I worked an international food show. He sold some interesting things, some American food products, to Fauchon [Paris, France], and so there was this international food show, and I went and set up the booth and did the trade show. That was fun. I enjoyed it.

MR. ADAMSON: That was your first trip to Europe?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. And then he had this grandiose idea; he opened an office in The Hague. He lost all this money.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. He really wasn't a good businessman, and I think he had this rich mom who bailed him out a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: I left my kids to travel. My kids even now are like, Mom - [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: It's amazing to me, because I don't think I could do it today.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, who did you leave them with?

MS. SAYLAN: I mean, I had somebody who came in. When he wanted me to start working for his business, he wanted me there two or three days a week. And I was already taking a class, and I said, there's no way I'm going to do this unless I get some help at home. I think my whole life has been like that: I'll stand my ground for a certain amount, and then I'll shrink back or something like that. Dammit, this is not going to work this way.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: But I think his attitude and his partner's about my getting pregnant just really upset me. And my youngest son actually was such a charmer.

My oldest son had very bad speech problems, very intense. I had a very difficult delivery with him, and we were living in Georgia and the medical was not good. And so he started speech therapy at age four, but trying to first just find out whether it was brain damage or what it was. I mean, it was horrible, because they're so mean to you. They wouldn't treat parents the way they did then. Even when he was in school, I got cornered at a PTA meeting right in front of him, and the psychologist says, you know, your son is retarded. Can you imagine some of them doing that today? And I was just so young, and I had no support from my husband. He was so embarrassed by his son's speech.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, man.

MS. SAYLAN: I mean, he couldn't stand it, because he did sound retarded, so I had him privately tested. And I was lucky; I had a pediatrician for my kids who, actually, I was his first patient when I was 12, and he was very, very kindly. And so he's actually exceptionally bright, my son—you know, very, very high IQ. And so he helped me stand my ground with the school and fight them. But it was really tough. And then I guess I decided at some point I'm—I got a job somewhere else and—

MR. ADAMSON: Doing what?

MS. SAYLAN: I worked for a psychiatrist.

MR. ADAMSON: As a kind of assistant/receptionist job?

MS. SAYLAN: Locked in a little dark room, because he didn't want his patients to know he had anybody in the office. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, my.

MS. SAYLAN: You don't want your patients to know somebody's there. But I talked to them on the phone. I got to know them by making appointments for them.

I remember when I was in high school, I got—finally got an outside job. My parents always wanted me to work for them as sort—I don't know if that was a tradition with families, that if you were going to work, you worked for your family. My ex-husband: If you're going to work, you work for your family. Well, I finally went out and said, dammit, I'm going to get my own job.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: It was really freeing.

MR. ADAMSON: I'm sure.

MS. SAYLAN: Then I had my own money, without feeling guilty if I was spending my parents' money. It was my money, and I could spend it how I wanted to spend it.

MR. ADAMSON: And the same deal with your husband?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Before we go on further, can you tell me a little bit more about visiting Japan, because that was very early to be there.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes; oh, I loved it. It was terrifying in a way, because there were no—nothing in English. So I'm one of those people; I don't ever want to walk the same way twice. I want to make a loop; it's just the way I am. I'm not—

MR. ADAMSON: Just to explore, you mean?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: So, but in Japan I found this was not going to work. I got lost. I finally even joined a tour, which somehow I didn't want to do, but it actually helped — joined a group, because he was working, and the Japanese—I got to go to dinner a couple of times, but wives were just not part of the scene, so I really had to learn how to entertain myself.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: We had gone to Guatemala before Japan. I went there with him and—where you entertain yourself—which is fine. I've realized, it's been good for me. So, I had the hotel write out the name of the hotel—[they laugh]—in Japanese, so that if I got lost on the streets, I could show someone—

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: —you know, and they could direct me.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And the other one that was really an interesting experience in Japan, especially in those days—because I was really red-headed in those days, with lots and lots of freckles, which are disappearing. And so I would walk on the streets, and young women would—mostly young women - would turn around and walk backwards and point at me. I mean, I was such an anomaly.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And so that was an interesting experience, just feel, you were this outsider. But I got into the rhythm of it and—

MR. ADAMSON: How long were you there?

MS. SAYLAN: I think a week, just a—

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, just a week.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Just a week.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: You know, not that long. And then we went to Hong Kong and the Philippines. And Hong Kong in those days—it was so depressing. It was when all the Chinese were escaping—very poor, poverty everywhere. And, at first I couldn't even go out. It was just overwhelming to see this poverty. I saw this series when I was living in Britain on Hong Kong, and oh, my God. But I've never gone back, which is sad. I'm not sure why, because I really liked Japan, and I always felt, like in L.A., the whole Japanese influence is really a big part of what I do.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: One of Ed's best friends was Japanese, and somehow Masamori, when he found out—first I had read a lot of Japanese literature, and this trip to Japan—Mas said, oh, you like Japan; you know about Japan. And he started giving me more and more and more to read. He taught me how to cook, and we would go down to little Tokyo in L.A., you know—

MR. ADAMSON: Was this still in '60s?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. And we would shop and—'60s early '70s, I guess—and cook. The Japanese, that's a whole interesting culture. But the more I read, the less I understood. That's very odd about them. Their culture is so different. We'd always go to movies with Mas, Japanese movies, constantly. There was a theater in L.A. on La Brea that only showed Japanese films.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And Mas was interesting; he's a brilliant guy. He was put into the internment camps. He went to high school with Ed and other friends, and was pulled out to go to these internment camps. But Mas was so brilliant that the Americans took two—Mas and a woman - and they traveled around the United States educating Americans about the Japanese.

MR. ADAMSON: During the war?

MS. SAYLAN: During the war. And he also was friends with famous Japanese like the man who took all the secret pictures, who actually—oh, that's another story I'll tell you about—in college. Mas, from that, got a scholarship to Haverford and then went to Harvard. He was brilliant, worked for [five-term Los Angeles] Mayor [Tom] Bradley—he was Mayor Bradley's main assistant even when he was a councilman. His connection with the Japanese community in those days—and him trying to find his Japanese heritage by going to Japan, and we spent a lot of time talking about it.

Mas and I had another interesting friendship, was that he couldn't understand—he was a bachelor, and he used to come over—he did this with a lot of friends. He loves to cook. He had a restaurant at one time. He would cook at your house and cook for my kids, and then point out that he could go home and be a bachelor and leave us with all these noisy kids. [They laugh.] But our friendship was based on that he didn't realize someone could grow up with a big family and love the family and love my kids, but need my privacy.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: I needed my space a lot. And that really started our friendship, this need for privacy, and the interest in Japan, and we became really dear friends.

MR. ADAMSON: I think we have to back up and figure out—

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: —how Ed—

MS. SAYLAN: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: —got into the picture.

MS. SAYLAN: How Ed comes into the picture.

MR. ADAMSON: So, you got divorced.

MS. SAYLAN: I got divorced and—

MR. ADAMSON: What year?

MS. SAYLAN: I don't know, '69?

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: I guess, yes, right around then, and that was a bad year.

MR. ADAMSON: Was that shortly after you got the job at the psychiatrist's office?

MS. SAYLAN: No. I had quit the psychiatrist and went back to school. I was in therapy, and to be honest, I had an affair with the doctor I was working with.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. SAYLAN: And my psychiatrist that I was going to for myself was furious at me. I couldn't quite understand why. [They laugh.]

But—and psychiatry in those days was very different, because my cousin Michael was gay, and one of his friends was gay. Somehow the subject came up that one of them was in therapy. You know, this is the Freudian kind of therapy that—he got married, and so it was sort of, well, the psychiatrist saved him from being gay. I mean, it was so different.

And so a wife having an affair was a bad, bad thing. It was actually helpful for me because I just—my ex-husband was—I just needed to feel like someone cared about me. And I think my kids had decided he might have been having an affair with his secretary, whom he married years later, but maybe he was at the time. I don't know. When somebody brought it up one time, I said to a friend, was he having an affair? And they were—like I didn't know? And I was, God, I wish I had known, you know, because I just blamed myself for the whole divorce. You know, I just wasn't good enough; I wasn't a good enough wife, wasn't good enough mother; I didn't cook right, who knows.

But I had gone back to school just before that. So then I was getting divorced. Then my father got really sick and died. Oh, what a year. I don't even want to think about it.

My sister got mad at me. I don't know why. Actually I've never known why. But at my father's funeral—why am I even remembering these things? My father's funeral, because I was living in Beverly Hills at the time—she told me and my rich Beverly Hills friends to leave.

MR. ADAMSON: Your own father's funeral?

MS. SAYLAN: My own father's funeral. Yes, at the thing at my mom's house after. So the rest of the week, my friends came to my house, and we had our own little—

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: —memorial. And I don't think I've ever really been close with my sister since. I don't know what her problem is. I don't know.

I was at UCLA, and that was a really smart thing I did. UCLA had a policy that if you withdrew, but you did it

properly, you could go back in. And thank God, I did that; they had to accept me when I returned.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So at that point you were kind of an older student.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I thought I was. Now, in hindsight, it was just in my early 30s.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: I felt old. And I even had a crush on this one teacher, but I thought I was just too old and then—[laughs]—and I thought he was so fabulous. Now, I think, Jesus, what was I thinking? [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: How old was he?

MS. SAYLAN: I don't know, in his 40s. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, well.

MS. SAYLAN: He was one of the minimalist sculptors, and I loved him.

MR. ADAMSON: So what was his name?

MS. SAYLAN: Vasa [Mihich]? Do you know Vasa?

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, what was his first name?

MS. SAYLAN: I forget.

MR. ADAMSON: Can't remember?

MS. SAYLAN: And he did acrylic sculptures, but he was the best and toughest teacher. I had him for two classes.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were now taking studio art classes.

MS. SAYLAN: I was taking studio art classes, but—part of my thing was I felt I had to have a major. You know, sometimes you look back and you wonder, what were you thinking? I had to declare a major. I don't know why I felt like I had to declare a major. And so, when I went through all the lists of majors, nothing appealed to me. But, I thought, well, design sounded promising. I had no idea what it was. [They laugh.] None. But it sounded interesting.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And it turned out it was—at UCLA, it was a cross between many fields.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: It encompassed crafts, not that I did a lot of that, and it encompassed environmental design, and that's really where I was—my leaning was. And product design and - because it was the height, or the beginning, of the rebellion against the Vietnam War, a lot of it was geared towards antiwar stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, right, like poster design stuff.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, even in anthropology. I took cultural anthropology, which I thought was really interesting, but I guess I didn't take it seriously enough, and so my final paper for the class, I wrote: "Anthropological Look at Anthropologists." And a friend of mine, who was majoring in it, told me she was surprised I didn't flunk. [They laugh.] Because I thought they were too serious. [They laugh.] You know, I mean, they were kind of funny.

And I took cultural geography, which I did love. I really loved that. And at one time, toyed with city planning, because I was fascinated by cities and cultures and how they developed. But after spending quite a lot of time with Masamori down at the city, and another friend of Ed's published—yes, we have to get back to Ed - ut he published a magazine called League of Western Cities [Western City, League of California Cities]. I found out what a frustrating, frustrating field that was.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And I didn't think I had the nature for it. It was just—it made me too sad all the time.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: You know, Mas telling you, you have two—you have two evils. You take the best of the two evils; neither one of them might be what you want, but this is what you have in city government—or in government. And I just didn't think I could do it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: So, back to Ed. When I got divorced, I had this new neighbor move in, a really nice woman and her husband, and they moved there because of the Beverly Hills school, which is fascinating in itself. There were four schools in Beverly Hills, and we lived in what was jokingly referred to as Baja—my neighbor and I dubbed it Baja Beverly. And it was the poor school of Beverly Hills at the time. There would be articles about if somebody accidentally came to our neighborhood in Beverly Hills, they wouldn't know they were in Beverly Hills.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: They might think they were on Fairfax or the Jewish District or something, and that the kids at that school had to work harder because they had to succeed more. But it was a nice place to raise kids, in a way, because it was neighborhood, and the kids could walk to school and—

MR. ADAMSON: So your kids just stayed with you when you got divorced?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. At one point my son—my ex-husband went into this severe depression, sort of, woe is me. I mean, he even got my grandfather to feel sorry for him and would claim that I wouldn't let him see the kids. He played games. My oldest son decided that maybe he should go live with his dad because he was so lonely and miserable and I seemed to be doing just fine. And, you know, it's one of those things, as a parent, you don't really know what you should say; you have to wing it. You have this instant thought, and I went, I'm sorry, I have custody and you just have to stay here with me and you'll have to see your father on his visits. And I swear I saw this look of relief on my son's face, that he really didn't want to do it.

It was—Seth is sort of a take-care-of —actually, a lot of my kids—all my kids are take-care-of personalities. That's my one regret. I used to joke—there's some curator I used to talk to, John Parrault. I said one time, I really messed up. All my kids have gone to nonprofits. Where did I go wrong? [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: So you were talking about how you met Ed.

MS. SAYLAN: My neighbor moved in and she had two kids. She was a designer, and was a customer - Ed had a photo lab that was in Hollywood. He started with the movie studios, and he had a lot of artists who went to him, a lot of famous artists used his lab. Ed would trade them, which artists love—run up a bill, and I'll get a piece, and you'd get all your prints done for free. And he would do that quite a lot with artists. And she said, I have a guy for you. And I said, I don't really want anybody.

MR. ADAMSON: How long had you been divorced?

MS. SAYLAN: Not that long, like, a year and a half, two years. And she told Ed the same thing, and he felt the same way. She was really cute. She said, well, I'll tell you what, let's do this: I'll have you for dinner. and she made reservations to go to this architecture lecture at UCLA, so if we can't stand each other we have this lecture to go to and you don't have to talk to each other, and that that would be safe. But I think Ed, I must admit, took to me more than I took to him at first. And we dated on and off for a year. I just was terrified about getting involved again. I don't know what made me change my mind at some point. And then we got married.

And it was great for me, because it really changed my whole life. Ed came from the hippie, Laurel Canyon [Los Angeles, CA], left leaning—like his friends, the Torns, really good friends of Ed's that I'm still friends with—I mean, they had Timothy Leary stay at their house, and the Freedom Singers stayed with Ed. And he was involved in the Unitarian Church in L.A. civil rights.

And so he really, actively, did the things I might have believed in, because my life was my son going to speech therapy twice a week and—for 10 years Seth went. I dragged these kids. I didn't have time. I just didn't have time to pay attention to what was going on. And that was, as I would say, even when I went to UCLA. I really had to choose classes that I could do the studio work at home, because I had to go home at night. And so there were a couple of classes that intrigued me, like weaving. I thought were interesting, because they really had good people at UCLA. They had Bernie Kester.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: He was my first design teacher.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. SAYLAN: And who was the other guy who taught there? I forget. But they had really strong weaving programs.

MR. ADAMSON: And Laura Andreson was the potter.

MS. SAYLAN: Laura Andreson was the potter. And the architect who did my house, he was my design teacher at UCLA.

MR. ADAMSON: What was his name?

MS. SAYLAN: George Foy. He taught at Art Center [Anderson Ranch Art Center, Snowmass Village, CO] also. And George, we became friends. He was having an evening. He had lived in Japan, and UCLA sent him when that big expo was on in Japan, and he was having a slide presentation. I was married to Ed at this time; we were invited. And I just—first of all, I love—as I say, I love architecture. He lived in an area of L.A. called Mount Washington, gorgeous architecture there. You know, it's all—it was just different than what I grew up with. His slides were just so spectacular. I don't think I've ever seen anybody's slides of Japan as good as George's.

He had two screens—or actually, it was a white wall that he designed for showing slides, of course. And because of his eye as an architect, he would show you a building on one screen and then walk you around the building on the other. He had Japanese music on—and he was a great chef. I was blown away.

Ed, of course, admired his photography, and we became friends, and we never stopped being friends from that day on. It was like a whole new world opened up to me.

MR. ADAMSON: Tell me about the weaving class with Bernie Kester.

MS. SAYLAN: I took Bernie Kester, not for weaving; I took him for beginning foundation.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And I immediately loved all that stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: What does foundation mean—color theory and that sort of thing?

MS. SAYLAN: It was more looking at products and design and forms, and seeing how people used it. There were certain classes that I just related to really well, because I did do environmental design. There was a class where the faculty decided that they would have team teaching. It was a quarter class, so you had four teachers in a 10-week class, and each one was like a full course. It was killer work, but they approached things interestingly.

One class we made this sculpture in wood, and then that sculpture became a centerpiece for an urban park that we designed. That sort of backwards thinking I was fascinated with. I loved problems, where they gave you a problem that—maybe it was part of that—you had to solve this problem. How could you solve this problem? It turned out George, because I was complaining to him once years later about this four-teacher class that—when you're carrying other classes and they're expecting all this work, each teacher has his little program; he wants the best out of you.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: I said, who the hell thought that up? [They laugh.] And he goes, I did. [They laugh.] And I go, what? He said he gets bored. He got bored as a teacher, so he would come up with interesting projects.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you have sense of what the pedagogical background of UCLA was? I mean, did they refer specifically to Bauhaus or any other—

MS. SAYLAN: No. Certainly Vasa was trained Bauhaus.

MR. ADAMSON: In Chicago or—

MS. SAYLAN: No, in Europe.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. He was Hungarian.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And he clearly was the kind of teacher you felt like he was going to take the ruler out and rap your knuckles. I had him first for a drawing class, visualization, all done in 2-D drawings. And I could never draw a

straight line. My lines all arced. And he, with his accent, said, Merryll, something must have gone wrong in your development growing up. [They laugh.] Why can you not draw a straight line? And he'd give me these sheets—the sheets were huge, drawing-size paper that had double lines maybe a half-inch apart, grids. And I was supposed to draw a straight line in between them as practice, practice, practice. I mean, it was really intense.

And then what was the other class I had with him? I had two class—I had color theory with him, but when I had color theory was the year I got divorced, my father died, and all this protest stuff on campus; it was just a—

[END DISC 1.]

—lost class for me, color theory.

But the visualization class, I think, was the most brilliant class I ever had; we built grids, lots and lots and lots of grids. You would break down the grids and place figures in the grids. One of them we drew, the grids got more and more complicated, deeper and deeper into two-dimensional drawing. And then we had to draw flags into these grids, going at angles.

Then the next part of it was to draw this from all the other three sides. If you were to go to the side of this grid, what would that look like, and what would it look like from the back? I always wanted to pursue those drawings more, because I thought they were fantastic. You know, the results you got were spectacular. But, of course, I haven't. I still have them, mind you. I still have the photographs of them. And I still have the pictures, but I think I'm ready to get rid of them. [They laugh.] It's time to get rid of them.

I loved UCLA. I loved it because it was so intense. It worked you like a dog. The quarter system I liked because it was so tough. But you weren't in it—if you hated something, you were out of it in a hurry. I always thought I was going to accomplish all these things in the semester breaks, but you'd be exhausted. Plus I had three kids at home. Every summer I had this list—I was going to paint a room or I was going to do this or I'd do that. Maybe I'd get some of it done— [they laugh]—but, you know, with children, you do summer things.

MR. ADAMSON: So tell me more about the art classes then at UCLA. Were you exposed to any crafts processes, such as weaving?

MS. SAYLAN: I took ceramics.

MR. ADAMSON: You did?

MS. SAYLAN: I did, with—I can't remember the guy's name. But he set up the glass studio at UCLA, too, and it was all hand building. It was all based on design exercises. We started with a geometric form—and I still have those pieces I made, because I really loved them—you would develop that through a series of very traditional, sort of, design exercises, how you would change that form one step at a time, and you wouldn't be able to make the connection from the last one to the first one unless you saw them laid out. And I thought that—I really liked doing that kind of stuff.

We designed—let's see, what else did we do—urban parks. We designed structures. That was another interesting class, which was dealing with personal space. We had to map our personal space and then build a structure around that.

Years later, one of Ed's customers was this artist, Tony DeLap. For a graduate class, I interviewed him about his work. One of the things I also interviewed him about was—he was teaching at Irvine at the time, and I think Scott Burton was one of his students, and I was telling him that what I saw happening in the arts field then, the conceptual work that I saw happening, was what we did just for exercises, in terms of thinking, to break you out of your mold of how you would approach design. So that unless you broke and made yourself really look at what you were doing, how could you be a good designer? You wouldn't come up with new things. And it was interesting talking to him because he said, it's really the same thing. But now, I guess the artists want to present that, that concept, where we were using that concept solely—

MR. ADAMSON: As training.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, yeah. And it's always sort of been curious for me.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you aware of what was happening in L.A., in terms of avant-garde art, at all in the late '60s?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I used to go to the galleries all the time. You know, they used to have the La Cienega walk at one point, where galleries were. But I think, well, yeah, because I used to hang out at the L.A. County Museum. I lived near there. I grew up near L.A. County, the park—La Brea Tar Pits [Hancock Park]? We played there as kids.

When they built the museum, I joined. In fact, when you first joined that museum, they were so anxious to get members that they gave you a catalogue for every show they had. I have these catalogues still. I have that one on industrial or technical, which I hear has become valuable, that catalogue, a couple of really good painting shows. And then my kids, I enrolled them all in art classes.

Every Saturday we were there, and while they took art classes, I hung out in the museum. But you told me once—which is really funny, because I have thought about that a lot—that my art stopped in the '70s. [They laugh.] But my art learning—and I think there is a lot of truth to that, because that's when I went to the museums, you know. And when I was in school after that, I just did my crafts. I go to museums, but I haven't really followed art in the same way.

MR. ADAMSON: But you had a very deep interest in what was going on, on a contemporary basis, at the time.

MS. SAYLAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It is funny to reach my age—like this modernism show, I was reading that *New York Times* article about introducing modernism to the Brits, to look at it in hindsight and some of its developments, how still that is the style I like.

MR. ADAMSON: Modernism.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Mm-hmm. And is it because—and then you start wondering if every culture, every generation, the comfort level—it's people and their comfort foods; it's cultural. I have this Chinese friend, and we both had hysterectomies within two months of each other, and we're the same age. And so when Feelie was in—this is in L.A.; I met her through Masamori—and Feelie had her family bring her Chinese chicken soup in the hospital—[they laugh]—her comfort food, a special Chinese soup. I was joking with her, so what do I have now? Do I get corned beef sandwiches or what? [They laugh.]

But there is this strange thing. And I wonder about design also, where people go back to their roots when they retire. If they grow up in urban areas like me, I am more comfortable in urban areas, and if they grow up in farmlands, they want to get away from the city. It's fascinating.

I was so relieved when modernism appeared in the '50s. My aunt and my mom's house had these heavy, heavy drapes, and they always felt dark and heavy and miserable. And all of a sudden this wonderful lightness came. And I wish I had some of the stuff I had then. The couch on wood—the foam on the wood. Even my first set of flatware—I bought Gio Ponti—there was a store called von Keppel and Green in L.A. It became famous. I think it's where the architecture school opened at some point out on Santa Monica Boulevard. There was a show at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Logan collection. There was our stainless. And my sons came with me. They were in town and we went. And they said, Mom, look. And then I heard from someone else that someone sold this set - I paid $100 - for $20,000. And I thought, I used that set. I'm down to nothing.

[END OF DISC 2.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, we're back.

MS. SAYLAN: We're back. So what do you want to know more about? UCLA? Another course at UCLA I can talk about because—and the comparison when I went to Northridge [California State University, Northridge]—was this instructor came to UCLA. They hired him—I can't even remember his name now, but he worked for [Raymond] Loewy in France.

MR. ADAMSON: Raymond Loewy?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. And they hired him at UCLA; he put together this class called History of Design. And now that I've taught, I just can't imagine the amount of work this guy did for this class. I mean, it's just boggling to me.

It was on the quarter system; there were three quarters. They worked you hard at that school. This class, he did all comparison studies. He was friends with Carlos Castaneda, who I think was at UCLA at the time, and he brought him to our classroom. And he worked—he was friends with Desmond Morris— *The Naked Ape*. So he was very into these theories.

There was this feeling later on—you didn't get this right away—that he was showing us, everything has been done before; if you're going to be a designer, you need to really know this, and you need to come up with your own thing. But unless you know this, you can't do it.

He showed you pottery from—ancient Chinese pottery, Peruvian pottery, Afghanistan - and architecture. We just went through tons and tons and tons of stuff, and you start seeing connections. Because of his friendship with Desmond Morris was this theory—what your body, eyes, and hands are capable of. And it's always made sense to me; there was similarity in these potteries. I mean, you look at all these different cultures' pottery; they're

very similar. And patterns—even today, in this one talk today, the fiber—

MR. ADAMSON: Sue Lawty?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, no, the woman who did the history here. I forget her name.

MR. ADAMSON: Sue Pritchard?

MS. SAYLAN: I don't know, whoever the first speaker was. The V&A [Victoria and Albert Museum], Helen Person, the curator at Asian—where the patterns that I hadn't seen, actually, in some of these tapestries, how similar they are to what I've seen in Mexico or American Indian rugs.

And so the theory—this guy's theory was that our arms only move—we have movements we do that limit you; your eyes see certain things, and this limits what you take in, what you can produce. To break away from that is like a whole other thing. It was fascinating.

But on top of that, we had to write—besides his exams and drawing pictures—I really got good at drawing the slides I saw. As fast as they show them, you drew them and then wrote something, so you could pass these exams. But we wrote papers, research topics. I compared, for one paper, three Mesoamerican sites, the different architecture.

But he so intrigued us that - Ed and I were going to Mexico one time—we used to go down there—we found out where these weird potteries are. Because most people go down there looking for magic mushrooms; we went down there looking for pots. But I was so caught up in this. We had to take this class if you were in the design department. And the students complained.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, I used to think I was an anomaly because I loved it. And I think there's an element of me - I used to think I should go into research. I do love the library and I love doing that; it was just so much work. Unbelievable amount of work, and if you were in—studio classes were long. They were four hours twice a week, so you couldn't take too many studio classes, unless maybe, I guess, if you were young and could stay at school all day and all night, or something like that. I just couldn't do it.

But I found it fascinating. It was like it combined all of the things I loved into one class. And I always felt that it did me good, because when I approached my own work, you have all these images in your brain, hundreds and hundreds of images. And then I still have my notebooks. I kept these notebooks. I can just flip through if I—I don't very often, but once every 10 years, maybe.

MR. ADAMSON: But you could.

MS. SAYLAN: But I could, I could. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: So who were some of the other students at UCLA?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, I don't even remember. I made very good friends with this one woman, Susan Kelleher. Because it was programmed into different ways, Susan and I were in the same program, took a lot of the same classes, and she became a landscape architect and worked for the Army Corps of Engineers designing parks. I don't know if I had that many friends, really, that I'm still friends with.

One hard part I had in that era was the attitude of students. I don't know if that was common during the Vietnam War, this anti-system. So if you stole from the bookstore or you cheated on this, that was all right because it was against the system. I don't really remember people from there as well, I think maybe because I went to school, I did my work, I went home and then immediately cooked dinner kind of thing, and because it was so intense, too. But really, I loved it. I loved every minute of it.

MR. ADAMSON: And would you say that you felt that the other students regarded you just as another student, rather than as—

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, I think so. I remember this one student. I can't remember his name at all. I really liked him. It must have been crowded then; there weren't enough classes, so sometimes to get into one, you know, you had to rush. Was that what they called it? You'd have to show up and try to get a class. People would sleep out almost overnight till they got a new system in. It was really hard sometimes to get into classes, and there were certain requirements you had to have before you graduated. Beginning drawing was one of the ones that was impossible to get in.

Some of the classes that were required had this deal: if you were a graduating senior, you had first choice,

because you had to have that class. One semester I was fed up; I hadn't gotten into drawing for three times. So I said I was a graduating senior. [They laugh.]

And then this friend of mine that we had a couple classes together came in; there was no more place, and he said he was a graduating senior. I just felt awful because I lied. [They laugh.] So I said, okay, I'll leave. You can have the place. You can have my place. I'm not a graduating senior. Big drama. And I left. And then at lunch he comes racing over to me, and he said, oh, my God, Merryll, did you put me on the spot; I was lying also. [They laugh.] And then we realized what we had become at UCLA. This is what you become.

One summer I took a ceramics class.

MR. ADAMSON: Who with, do you remember?

MS. SAYLAN: No, I don't. And it was only for graduating seniors, and I was by this time. Well, as the class went on, we found out two-thirds of the class lied. [They laugh.] Oh, it was so funny. I mean, they force you to become—you have to protect yourself.

MR. ADAMSON: So what did you think you were going to be after you graduated?

MS. SAYLAN: I had no idea. I guess a designer. I wanted to go to architecture school. And this is where my personality gets in my own way. I went four years, three years full-time. And I tried to limit it. I tried to balance it because of my family. I was divorced; how am I going to manage this? I got remarried also during this period. That was like—I don't know what I was thinking, trying to do all this. I guess I was young and energetic. But what was I going to say? I don't know.

MR. ADAMSON: Why didn't you go to architecture school?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, the architecture school wanted me. They particularly wanted students who had art backgrounds.

MR. ADAMSON: This was also UCLA?

MS. SAYLAN: UCLA. And there was no question that I could get in, but it was 16 units, and you were supposed to do your studio work at school. There were certainly no reentry programs in those days. And UCLA was mean; their office—art office - had signs: "You have questions? We don't have the answers." [They laugh.] You need a phone? We don't have phones. I mean, there's no exception. You're going to go to our school; you're going to go full-time. You have family at home? Too bad. They don't care. You're in the program. That's it. That's it; you're going to do it.

And I remember one time I had an emergency phone call. And my kids frequently—I hear this is not uncommon—frequently would get sick when it was class—trying to get classtime and finals, where you're just, I mean, you've got this pressure for a final. And I got called out of a final that my son, with a babysitter, riding a tricycle, rolled down a hill and was at UCLA Emergency. And so what do you do?

One time in the office, can't I use your phone? [They laugh.] Please, can I use your goddamn phone? Or my kids would do things. I remember once just wanting to buy a cup of coffee before a final, and I opened my wallet and there was nothing in it, nothing. And I knew those kids had helped themselves. [They laugh.] I couldn't even buy myself a cup of coffee. And so some other student felt sorry for me and gave me the money to buy a cup of coffee. But it seemed like that would happen pretty regularly. I think if they feel the tension—there's a lot of tension going on. It got easier when I married Ed, because then I could stay away longer and knew somebody would be home.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, and so Ed was supportive of the whole idea of you doing art school stuff?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, he was fine. And also I think once you get divorced, you grow up a little bit. I sort of grew up with my kids because I had to grow up with them, and especially because Seth had severe speech problems and—but I was lucky. In some ways, I see it now as lucky, because he was going to speech therapy for 10 years, and the therapist became—I had an adviser the whole time they were growing up, because he taught me this thing, which I thought it was wonderful. We joke about it. Kids are always in collusion. So if somebody does something really bad, they're not going to confess on each other, but they all know who did it, so just punish them all. [They laugh.] No point in trying to figure out who did what.

And we used to have—I don't know who wrote the poem "Mr. Nobody." "Mr. Nobody" was a frequent visitor to my house. Nobody knew who did it. Nobody knew who broke it. Nobody. And they still talk about it as an adult.

I remember telling my daughter-in-law a couple of my favorite evenings in the whole world were where they were all being punished into their rooms at 6:00. I don't really care. [They laugh.] And I had the evening to

myself.

MR. ADAMSON: There you go. [They laugh.]

MS. SAYLAN: And so I had this person there advising me because one of the things with Seth's speech was learning that I can't help my child everywhere. He is going to have to make it in the world on his own, and it's not going to be an easy world, and that somehow he had to learn this. And that was not easy as a parent. You want to protect your children. And even, like, exercises; have him set the table—if we were working the F sound, to leave the forks out, make him ask me for a fork and not respond until he said it. Oh, it was horrible. It really wasn't easy. It was very, very difficult.

But it helped having this guidance counselor telling me. When I saw sometimes families, or even my grandfather had this younger daughter, and out of guilt or what, whenever she was in trouble, he'd bail her out. Or my ex-husband always being bailed out when something went wrong. I just didn't want my kids to end up that way. I wanted them to be independent.

That friend of mine, Susan Kelleher, came from this really amazing family of nine children. Her dad was an architect, and she was telling me her parents' philosophy of raising children was, at 18 they're independent. And that's what you want; that's your job, is to teach your children how to make it in the world.

MR. ADAMSON: So, sorry, did she become an artist, as well, after school?

MS. SAYLAN: No, she did landscape architecture, but eventually was working at Beverly Hills High teaching English as a second language. Beverly Hills at one point became 45 percent Iranian Jews. And that was what she taught there. I would never have believed that. I wasn't living there anymore. I was really happy to get out of there.

MR. ADAMSON: Out of Beverly Hills, you mean?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So let's now think about going to Cal State-Northridge. That was the next big step, right? But there were a couple years in between?

MS. SAYLAN: No, not even a couple years; maybe one semester. And then I—I don't know what propelled me to go. I guess I wanted to take a furniture class.

MR. ADAMSON: Why?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I used to refinish furniture with the kids a lot, because that was all I could afford, unfinished furniture. And so I don't know—and I had that one - I did have that materials class at UCLA with this architect friend, George Foy, where the idea—we worked with plastic, metal, and wood. I guess I enjoyed it, and so I wanted to take the wood class. That's when I also took the cooking classes. I took a French class, French cooking, and Chinese.

MR. ADAMSON: Where did you take those?

MS. SAYLAN: I think at Beverly Hills High School, adult ed. And then I enrolled in the woodworking class at Cal State-Northridge.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, which was a master's program?

MS. SAYLAN: I wasn't in the master's program yet. Maybe the state college system is easier, but I could enroll in one class.

MR. ADAMSON: Who was teaching it?

MS. SAYLAN: There was Ralph Evans and Tom Tramel. You see their work in some of those early California Design things [series of furniture exhibitions at the Pasadena Art Museum, now Norton Simon Museum, 1962-76]—both Mormons. Actually, at one point when they were hiring teachers, I felt that being an older Jewish woman was not good. They went for the blonde, Martha Rising. [They laugh.] Wendy and I had a long discussion—

MR. ADAMSON: Wendy Maruyama?

MS. SAYLAN: —about Martha. Yes, she shared a room with her once, so we were like, what's with Martha Rising?

MR. ADAMSON: I've always been curious about Martha Rising, because you only ever see that one amazing

chair.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, she did an apprenticeship with Michael Cooper and taught his class when he won the Prix de Rome. I took it one semester, taught his class.

And the Susan Kelleher I mentioned, Susan and her husband moved to Rome. It was when Michael had the Prix de Rome, and so we went over and stayed with them, God, for weeks. I don't know how they put up with us. Ed and I stayed with them for weeks, and then we would go elsewhere. We met Michael there because I had known him already. We all had Thanksgiving together in Rome. And it was great fun. It was a great time.

But, so Northridge, you want to go to Northridge or Martha Rising?

MR. ADAMSON: To Northridge, yes.

MS. SAYLAN: When I transferred to Northridge, I guess I just took that class. And one of the first things I learned was the pace is totally different. First of all, it was a 15-week semester. At UCLA, if you didn't start the first week on a 10-week course, you're lost. It's just hopeless to catch up, even in literature classes, because the pace is so intense.

So there I am at Northridge. You pay a class fee and you got a certain amount of supplies. The first week, I'm ready to go. They weren't ready. [They laugh.] And they were nowhere near ready. And the other thing, just like a much slower, easier pace. People could work on piece the whole semester, where, like, in that materials class, we made three complete, functioning pieces in 10 weeks, and photographed everything. And so a lot of the classes were like that. I mean, you made a lot of stuff in one semester. And here it's like, wow.

MR. ADAMSON: So tell me more about Tom Tramel.

MS. SAYLAN: I like Tom a lot. Actually, I like them both. They were very—Tom is very fatherlike. I think in some ways, especially after I met Wendy and Gail Fredell, and their East Coast training—we got no training, not in traditional, technical woodworking, because I did some early mistakes, but no one ever told me it was wrong. The pieces fell apart. But they did do something that I've always admired greatly. We were—it was a whole, big, functioning program. All of us were different—totally different. There's Martha's work, and my work was so strange, and none of us looked alike.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: When I first met Gail and Wendy, or I saw work from RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY], it all looked damned alike. And I just—there was this sort of, this is the way you do it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And there—what was the way to do it?

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: I mean, they gave you assignments, but within those assignments it was really pretty loose. So the first semester I think we had to do a joint—do something that would incorporate one sort of joint someplace. It could be anything.

MR. ADAMSON: Like a mortise-and-tenon joint.

MS. SAYLAN: Like a mortise-and-tenon or a finger joint; it didn't matter what it was. And something then, that you also played with the grain—you know, what happens to wood grain, which I always find fascinating when people talk about how they follow the grain. Well, the grain follows your shape.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And that's what they taught us in the semester. So we'd take something and start playing with it.

And then the other thing I thought that they did that was really fabulous - I mean, the whole time I was in program, every semester we had a problem—a two-week problem that was like training you to do bread-and-butter work.

They gave you an assignment. One time it was a folding table, and we had to come up with something. One was a magazine rack. One was to design our logo out of wood that would be—you know, if we had a shop, we would hang it outside our shop.

And you had to do your drawing, build it, present it, done in two weeks. That part they pushed you on. After that, then, if you wanted to work one piece the whole semester, you could. But that whole concept of the bread and butter I thought was really good.

Another thing I thought they did that was really nice was a lot of the students did get apprenticeships in working shops, and they helped you do that. I could not do that with a family at home.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And maybe if I had switched away from furniture, I don't think that—I'm not good at it. I mean, it's still a struggle. I don't feel that comfortable. I worked on the table saw and I still do. And I did some interesting boxes and projects, but I don't think it's my bent. I do like making boxes. Now that I see all the band saw boxes that people like Wendy and other people do, without all that complicated joinery, I go, uh, my style.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: They've come around to my style—[they laugh]—because Gail Fredell one time was doing this—I used to go over sometimes to Wendy and Gail and use a machine that they had that I didn't own. That always goes on. And Gail had this complicated, complicated joinery. She's into that. And she's showing me this blind joint that is finger jointed, blind, and it's at an angle. And she goes, why don't you get back to furniture, Merryll? I'm looking at this thing and I go, that's why. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: That's why I'm never going back.

MR. ADAMSON: So when you were taking furniture classes, did you know about furniture makers who were in the area besides the teachers? Like, did you know about Sam Maloof?

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, I knew about Sam because he came to our school. In fact, one of the things I did - I don't know how I got into this, but I organized a student art forum, a program of bringing speakers to the school.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. SAYLAN: And so Sam was one, and when I first met Michael — how did that come about?

There was this show, one of the California Design shows, I think the one I got into. Ed and I were taking a trip up north to visit his friends who had moved there. As part of my trip, I decided I wanted to visit all these furniture people. And so we visited Michael. I think that's where I met him. And I visited a guy named Morris Shepherd—he was really nice. He's still working. I met him at the furniture conference. And J.B. Blunk, I visited him. And I don't know, I think our teachers—I know we had seen Art Carpenter, so I don't know, but I went separately.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you know to go and find these people?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, seeing their work, and then I just tracked them down.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, in the California Design show.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, I just fell in love with Michael's peg-legged chair and his music stand. I mean, that thing vibrates. You breathe on it and it vibrates. And I thought, who is this guy who does peg-legged chairs? I just thought it was so great. And J.B. had a show at The Egg and The Eye [Gallery, Los Angeles, CA].

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. SAYLAN: And this just blew me away. And I think Northridge also encouraged—they were very connected to the community. They took us to this woodworker's house named Jan De Swart, but so did George Foy, take us from UCLA. I went to his house twice. Ed and I became very good friend with him also.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, talk about him a little bit. I think he's very interesting.

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, I have tons of stuff of his. In fact, Jo Lauria and I have talked about that, because I still have a magazine article that was in the *L.A. Times*—I have saved stuff. It's kind of scary in a way. Yet I don't want to let it go.

MR. ADAMSON: No, don't let it go.

MS. SAYLAN: I just sent Jo Lauria a bunch of stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: On Jan De Swart?

MS. SAYLAN: No, I don't know if I sent her Jan's, but I sent her—I found—she just redid that book on California Design, she and Susan Baizerman. I'm doing all this cleaning up for the Smithsonian and find I have Architectural Pottery catalogues from the '70s; I have Herman Miller from the '70s; and I have Stendig posters of chairs. So I just sent them to Jo. And she said that if she can't use them, she'll make sure a library gets them. I felt better. At least if they're going to go—I just hate getting rid of some of that stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: So Jan De Swart—

MS. SAYLAN: So Jan De Swart was such an amazing character. And one of the things that happened with Jan—I thought he was also one of these geniuses, like because Jan's whole thing: every day he went to his studio and he made something. And he didn't even think about it; he just went and did it. And he was so charming and childlike.

At one time the L.A. Barnsdale Museum wanted to recreate his house. You can't believe his house. It was fantasyland. Jan would find a piece of wood and thought it was beautiful, and he'd make a door, and eventually he'd make the cabinet, who knew? He had plastic sitting on balconies and out in the gardens; he poured aluminum into castings, and someone said he invented the screw bottle cap and that's why he could do these things, but who knows?

Do you know about his dining room table? It was a three-level dining room table and he made the chairs for it. The dining room table had a low side so if you felt you were a child that day, you would sit in a low chair and sit on the low side. And if you felt like an adult, you sat at the normal dining room table side. And then the middle was this really low section and if you felt like it, you could just go sit in the middle of the table and look out. That was his approach.

On top of that, there were things that moved all over the table. If you were going to sit and read, there was something that went into a plug and it had a bookstand on it, or a box went somewhere and it might hold your silverware for that meal. There wasn't anything in that house that he didn't make. And sometimes he would forget; he'd have all these mystery drawers.

In fact, at first, I just emulated Jan. I wanted to do Jan before boxes. I have one of his boxes. But I don't know what happened to his stuff. I got some calls: you have to save Jan's house full of furniture. He'd have a box and he would forget how it opened. I can't remember how this opened—one thing had to open, and another thing had to open, and another, before you could get to the inside.

He was charming. A friend's of Ed's was a documentary filmmaker. Ed had a lot of really talented customers, you know, famous designers. Like Saul Bass was a customer. This guy did this film—we saw it at art school—called Paint. It was somebody reading from a text on the chemical properties of paint. And the film is the model showing up at an artist's studio, and he undresses her, and he starts painting her. Periodically you would hear the voice talking about paint. But you were really transfixed on this artist painting the model's body, not the canvas.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MS. SAYLAN: Painting the model's body. At some point, they go to bed together, and he opens the sheets, and the sheets are painted exactly like the model. It was just a charming film. We saw a lot of films at UCLA. That was one—another nice part of UCLA, I think because there was a film department there, but even in the design department, we saw tons and tons of films.

I had a class with this guy John Neuhart, who worked with [Charles and Ray] Eames, and he and his wife just did this giant, giant book on Eames—really great book [John Neuhart, Marilyn Neuhart, and Ray Eames. *Eames Design: The Work of the Offices of Charles and Ray Eames*. New York: Harry A. Abrams, 1989].We saw every film Eames made in this class. It was a seminar class. It was a brilliant little class, and Mas came—Masamori came - and gave a lecture on the Japanese camps and brought us the photographs to see that were taken by that friend of his in the internment camps.

But Northridge was good in that sense; Jerry Glaser came and demonstrated—

MR. ADAMSON: Was he already making tools then?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, he was not quite, but he was selling—he sold—were flat bar stock. He still remembers it.

We've talked about it. It was 15 inches long; none of us knew what the hell to do with it. But it was great steel, and so we developed this handle, our students as a group, where we routed out pieces of wood that this bar stock would fit into. You used some sort of screw to hold it in; you could make a tool at either end. So we felt we were getting our money's worth. You would have a different cut on either end. And I used those—that's all I ever turned with, and they were, of course, all scraping tools, but I used those. I still use them once in a while.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. SAYLAN: The steel was so good, or maybe it's the way I grind or something, but they never seemed like they've worn out or that they've gotten smaller. I still have them. And I still have them in those stupid handles we made, you know. But they worked.

Northridge was so laid-back, and by that time, being married to Ed, we could work 24 hours if we wanted. Final times we would organize group dinners. Everybody would bring something, and we would stay and work late into the night.

MR. ADAMSON: So about this time, you already had started getting an M.F.A. there.

MS. SAYLAN: They didn't offer M.F.A.s; they offered M.A.s, so that's what I got.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: One of my reasons for going there, once I decided to go to the graduate program, was the other program that I was interested in was Long Beach, but it was just too far for me to commute to with a family at home, and because, in a way, the traditional family still meant something. Ed went to work. He came home. I cooked dinner. I went to school. I came home. I cooked dinner. That's the way it was.

MR. ADAMSON: So were you aware of the other—you must have been aware of the other departments at Northridge, not just furniture making, right?

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, I love jewelry. I took jewelry there, and there was a guy, Richard Dehr. I somehow became friends with all of my professors, but he—I've got to think of his name, because his parents—Ed took guitar lessons, it turned out, from his father, who lived in Topanga Canyon, this really left-leaning, hippie kind of environment. And this—there were two jewelry teachers. One was named Fred Lauritzen. And he had us reading books like Art and the Art of Archery—

MR. ADAMSON: Zen and the—okay.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, Zen and the Art of Archery [Eugen Herriger. New York: Pantheon Books, 1953], the whole concept. I loved his class. I took casting and fabricating. He taught me a project that I try to make students do, in a way. I took him for casting, and he knew we all would get hung up on being artists, and he wanted us to do this process. We had to do 12 castings, and there was a time limit to it. And it had to be 12, and if you didn't turn in 12 pieces, it went against your grade. He melted the pieces you turned in.

MR. ADAMSON: What metal was this from?

MS. SAYLAN: Bronze. And so, of course, I fell in love with pieces. So I'd do—I think I did 15 castings—[they laugh]—because you had to turn them in.

MR. ADAMSON: And were these abstract forms of some kind?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, from carved wax. I still have two of them at home, because I loved it. My things had a tendency to get too big. He told me I was in the wrong class sometimes: I should be over in sculpture and not in jewelry.

But I really liked casting. I think there was something about the flame that I liked. Maybe it was—I have a fear of fire. Partly from this fire when I was a kid. When I first moved to Virginia, a matchbook went off in my hand, and I burnt my hand really badly. I really have a fear of —I still have trouble lighting matches, but somehow that torch—I grew to love that torch—[they laugh]—and the darkness, the romantic thing about that. The centrifugal thing, and the metal reaches melting point, and it just goes. It's magic.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were using a whole bunch of different kinds of material courses.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, schools do not accept all your grades, so in order for me to get into the graduate program, I had to make up some things. So—

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, but the actual grad program was all woodworking.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Well, no, I guess I took metal during that because I liked metal. I don't think I took ceramics, but I really liked metal. I took three or four semesters of metal.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, and how did it come about that you started turning?

MS. SAYLAN: That was required.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. SAYLAN: The second semester of wood, you had to turn something. And, I mean, the concept makes sense, that you use all the machines in the shop. You try this, you try that, and then eventually you have vocabulary and you have skills.

MR. ADAMSON: The idea isn't that you might want to be a woodturner, but that you would know how to you use a lathe.

MS. SAYLAN: Right, that you know how to use a lathe.

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of lathe was it?

MS. SAYLAN: They had Powermatics. They had six of them actually.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. SAYLAN: And they had funny things like—they had windows right behind them, and so many students threw pieces through the windows that they put a wire grill on the windows. [They laugh]. Students did some of the stupidest things. One student—I don't know if I was shop assistant by that time, but he had a piece of rosewood and it blew off the lathe, and he didn't want the rosewood to break, so he tried to catch it. Well, of course, he hurt himself; I never could understand that.

Well I never could understand students, I guess because I was poor, who knows? But they always had more stuff than I did, even at UCLA. For drawing classes, I'd go to this store—what was it—Standard Brand Paint. I think eventually it became the Art Store. It was inexpensive art supplies, and that's what I bought. And I still have to force myself sometimes to spend extra money. It's left over—like, this is awful expensive. But then students had everything. I mean, they had—I don't who paid for it, their parents maybe?

But I would just buy what I needed, but they had the best of everything: the best rulers, the best everything. And it always impressed me to no end. And I always bought inexpensive wood. Why would I spend money on rosewood when I'm learning or something? But I think part of it was I just didn't have the money.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: They would spend that kind of money. Even when I started working—but I think it's left over from just growing up without—you just have to be careful, have to be careful with your money.

MR. ADAMSON: So when you were at Northridge, did it occur to you that you might be an artist yet?

MS. SAYLAN: Uh-uh. [Negative.] When did that occur to me? I don't know. But I started making these strange things at Northridge, which—I don't know; I used to joke it's because I couldn't draw. [They laugh.] So I made things that were geometric because I could draw that with my drafting equipment. You had to draw that kind of stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you make that so-called jelly donut at Northridge?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, it was part of my graduate thesis.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: And I started with—they had a visiting teacher, Joe Bavaro. I've met him in L.A. He's still teaching, at a different school. I don't know where he studied, but he came with a whole new concept of how he approached teaching. And that was the collector's cabinet that I did, and it was more based on a project like we would have done at UCLA, which was, he gave us a problem, and the problem was to design - on our pathway to school, whichever way we came - something that intrigued you from that environment. Then we would build something that represented that, somehow was that. And my thing, I don't know, left over from when I was a kid, were the signal boxes. I've always been fascinated with the signals. I don't think they have them anymore.

MR. ADAMSON: What's a signal box now?

MS. SAYLAN: It was like a post that held this mechanical box and was attached to the pavement. It controlled when the lights changed. You could hear them click. I tried to guess exactly—you know, beat that system. They just fascinated me, the mechanics in there. Now they have sensors in the roads and they don't have these things anymore. But then, this was the controlling factor for lights. I always walked to school, even into high school. So guessing when you could beat that traffic light. And so I built this cabinet based on it. And that's where the wheels came from, the mechanical connections to the pavement.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: I built that piece based on that. That piece took me a long time to make, because the whole top is all hand shaped. And I did acrylic interior and drawers that opened.

MR. ADAMSON: Was that—the use of plastic—was that because of your exposure to that guy at UCLA—[inaudible]?

MS. SAYLAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And also George Foy, in that class where we had to work with plastic, we learned how to heat it there and form it. And I think I poured resin in that class. [Laughs.] I enjoyed bending plastics.

L.A. had all of those '60s artists and plastic cubes. There was a place called Hastings Plastics that helped all of these artists.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, they have really developed the polyester resins. And who was that female—woman - artist? I used to go listen to her lectures. She worked in acrylic and metal. She was famous in L.A.

They used to run Saturday workshops for artists where you could go and they would answer your questions. I mean, it was really smart, because they developed — who is the guy that did the big glass circles?

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, yeah, those amazing Op things.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, they developed those plastics working with him through that.

I think it was that environment, that I was just interested in those same forms, although I was using them differently. Like, I have made plastic cubes and polished plastic and all of that stuff, but it was part of that L.A.—

MR. ADAMSON: And conversely, there was no sense at Northridge that you might want to be using precious wood that—

MS. SAYLAN: Not for me.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: I think—no, I don't know, maybe it's that leftover Depression—although I'm not really part of the Depression era; I am after the Depression, but that sort of caution with how you spend your money. You're just not going to be frivolous with it.

MR. ADAMSON: So at what point, then, did you start to become aware of woodturning as something you might do as a specific—

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I think it was almost accidental, because I made this set of rice bowls. And that partly—the first assignment, we had to turn something; I did not have to turn a whole set. But I decided—I came from design school. Well, what was I going to turn? I might as well do something functional, something I can use.

MR. ADAMSON: And so a lot of people in the woodworking class were actually making nonfunctional things.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I don't know what they were making—maybe a spindle. Some people turned eggs. Some just used the lathe—maybe to make bowls. I think people made bowls definitely—because we all knew about Bob Stocksdale.

MR. ADAMSON: You did? I was going to ask you about that.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, he was friends with Glaser, because he came and demonstrated turning to us. And he brought this beautiful piece, you know, that one that is carved with the three legs, for us to look at. They showed pictures. And I think Tom turned bowls. It was probably more geared towards bowls than anything else. But I decided to turn a whole set of bowls.

MR. ADAMSON: Can I just ask, before you talk about that, what did you think of Stocksdale's work when you first saw it?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I knew that it was beautiful. And then two guys—I was friends with one of them for ages. He was a painter, and he won an NEA [National Education Association grant] at Irvine [University of California, Irvine]. And built furniture for a lot of the famous artists, like Billy Al Bengston. He dropped in—you know, people would drop in, like the guys from San Diego—what is his—Larry Hunter.

MR. ADAMSON: Larry Hunter.

MS. SAYLAN: And what is the other guy [Jack Hopkins], the one who did the stacked laminations?

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: He came to our school—they came to our school. I became friendly with Larry Hunter. I heard he kind of got weird in his old age, but I liked him a lot. There was this friendship between all of these schools and artisans. People came through all of the time. And I think Tom Tramel and Ralph were very connected with—like Kay [Sekimachi] is still friends with a couple of people that they were friends with, Alan Boardman in L.A. There was this group. I was out of some of this, because I always had to go home.

These two guys I remember showing up at our school. I don't remember who the second one was, and—I was just thinking—his name was Erickson, somebody Erickson. Not Bob Erickson.

MR. ADAMSON: Not Bob Erickson.

MS. SAYLAN: No, it's another Erickson. Greg Erickson. So they brought down these bowls that they said they turned that were Bob Stocksdale's shapes. They used to just come hang out in school. I don't know. People just did that. Just hang out.

MR. ADAMSON: So Stocksdale did have a certain degree of influence about—you know, on people that were kind of playing around with turning.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, he was the ultimate. If you were going to turn a bowl, you were going to turn a Bob Stocksdale bowl. No one knew [James] Prestini; he didn't exist.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: I don't know—well, that is a whole other—I mean—

MR. ADAMSON: I think he had given up by then.

MS. SAYLAN: He had given up. And that is another story to tell you about. He really was nasty about turners—really nasty.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you ever meet him?

MS. SAYLAN: I did. Too bad Ed can't describe meeting him to you.

MR. ADAMSON: Why, what happened?

MS. SAYLAN: Ed described—I went over to—because I did a conference in '82. I gave one at CCAC [California College of Arts and Crafts]. And I kept hearing about Prestini; he lived there right in Berkeley, and so I thought maybe he would come talk at our conference. And he kept making me come back, kind of—come back. And he decided turners, there is just no future in turning; it's just beneath him. I mean, it's boring. And what was interesting was some of the sculptures he did were exactly—some very similar forms to Jan De Swart—really similar, where he's cutting curves on the band saw.

He told me he would send me one of his post-docs to give a talk. And after spending a little time with him and listening to him talk, I didn't think the turning conference would really relish hearing a post-doc talk esoteric art-speak.

So Ed came. I think—was I not driving at that time? I had this back thing that would plague me periodically. I think Ed dropped me off—I couldn't drive—to go see him and came to pick me up. Prestini came out and shook Ed's hand. And Ed said it was like a limp rag. It was just like that, kind of, you know, why are you even shaking my hand?

He had this attitude. He was the professor emeritus. He had an ego a mile wide. And then I heard other stories

about him. Gail Fredell had just the worst experience with him, in which she was asked to make a stand for a sculpture of his. His sculpture was in two parts. So she made a stand that was two parts, and they came together—split a triangle so it would fit together. He yelled at her that her stand was taking away from his sculpture, and how dare she do that. She said he was just—it was more than just rude; he was just really awful. She said it really got to her.

And then Marvin—

MR. ADAMSON: Lipofsky.

MS. SAYLAN: It was just—at one point—when I moved north—I used to teach through the UC [University of California] extension, and I taught a furniture design class. The first class I taught, this guy came and he taught furniture design at UC Berkeley. Oh, that was scary, because what did I know? [They laugh.] He was a nice guy, an Asian guy. He was working in that lab that supposedly Prestini built. Marvin said it was Prestini's lab. It was the school's lab, but no one was allowed to go into Prestini's lab. And anybody knew him in the Berkeley area did not like that man. And so when he became this folk hero to the woodturners, I never quite got it.

Oh, the other thing he offered me. I loved that. We could use his work that just happened to be at the Metropolitan Museum of Art if we wanted it—our conference. He would help me do that. I said, no, thank you.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. I think it's just because he was the first, so everyone always identified—

MS. SAYLAN: I don't know. But I do know a guy that works at Mies van der Rohe's studio in Chicago, a woodturner, and he knew Prestini from this other way, and—

MR. ADAMSON: What do you mean, a woodturner working at Mies van der Rohe's studio?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, one of the woodturners—you know how woodturners all come from someplace else?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. SAYLAN: He was an architect with Skidmore Owings, but started with Mies.

MR. ADAMSON: Who is this?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, God, why do you ask me these questions? He actually designed the Cor-Ten Steel building when working in Chicago.

They asked me to demonstrate once for them, and asked me what I wanted to see in Chicago. And I said architecture. So they arranged that I stay with this architect, and he took me on an architectural tour of Chicago. And it was really fun, and he was a woodturner.

MR. ADAMSON: Can we get back to the San Diego guys?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Larry Hunter—

MR. ADAMSON: And Jack Hopkins.

MS. SAYLAN: That is it. Right.

MR. ADAMSON: So did you have a sense that they were up to something completely different down there? How did they relate to the L.A. scene?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, in a way, I think what we were doing at that stage—if you see Wendy's early work, because she studied, I think, with Larry Hunter, it was all sort of the same, all that organic—

MR. ADAMSON: Did you have the so-called California roundover, that term?

MS. SAYLAN: No, I think—yeah, oh, yeah. I mean, that existed, but it was more organic. I think maybe even work I've seen from the East Coast guys in those days—you know—almost Art Nouveau-y or something. Now, maybe my work was different because of my background from UCLA. I took Italian design. George introduced us to *Abitare magazine*, which I fell madly in love with. When I got married—I know people find that so hard to believe today, but in the '50s there was a design magazine from France that was in English and French, and also had cooking recipes in the back. And only recently, though, I threw out the last of those recipes. But, I mean, they were good, and they were top notch.

But, you know, it's like people—especially the foodies in Berkeley today - yeah, we were into that then. [They

laugh.] You know, I learned how to cook from *Gourmet* books. I had trained myself how to cook. So those design magazines existed even in the '50s—really good stuff.

When I learned about Abitare, wow—because of some of the projects we had to do at UCLA—one of the projects George had us do is we designed an underwater habitat for oceanographers. And he took us down to the Scripps [Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California, San Diego], one, to see the [Louis] Kahn building and critique it. George is great. I love—if he goes to a new museum, sometimes to his really close friends, he'll send out a critique. [They laugh.] It does help. It makes you look at it differently. And he is kind of mean sometimes.

Like Italian design. There was that great design show at—I think—was the big craft—Museum of Modern Art? And that book—I gave that book away, and then it went out of print. It broke my heart. Colombo and all of those designers.

MR. ADAMSON: Joe Colombo, yeah.

MS. SAYLAN: It was that era. We had these Italian designers visiting us at UCLA. If there was anything I could have done, it was to become an Italian designer in those days, really, really. [They laugh.] And I studied Italian in college, too.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, well, that was—

MR. ADAMSON: Were you aware of the American Craft Museum at that point already, do you think?

MS. SAYLAN: I don't think so. When did I become aware of it? Maybe once—maybe at Northridge, or after I graduated or something.

MR. ADAMSON: And what about the California Design shows? Had you been going to those before you got into—

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, I did actually.

MR. ADAMSON: You did.

MS. SAYLAN: What am I saying? Yes, of course, I did because it was—I think, didn't everybody go? I don't know; that was my feeling.

I remember going with a friend to see the new Eames design. But I was thinking - even before I was into design, I used to have a bicycle, and I would—because I lived near Robertson Boulevard—not quite—not where I lived, but a little further east was the design places. There was the Eames place. I used to ride my bike down there—[laughs]—and I'd bike up there and wander into these studios, unless they were really snooty and kicked you out, because sometimes they did.

And I used to love the Herman Miller showroom, in particular. I don't know what it was about that place. Maybe I was in the furniture program then, because there was a table that I fell madly in love with that was glass topped with—and when I think about my glass trays, wow, it cantilevered off this base. It just fascinated me how they got that balance. It was so interesting looking.

MR. ADAMSON: So we are going to have break because—

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, because we have got to go meet them. And we have got to be careful. I could go on. I have a long life. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: So let me ask you one last question.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Arnold's [Schwarzenegger]—you know, the weights?

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

MR. ADAMSON: When did you make those?

MS. SAYLAN: Part of my graduate program. It was partly—yeah, when we moved, I was still in graduate school, and George moved up to Santa Cruz. And when Ed and I took that big trip and visited woodworkers and friends, we stopped and visited George, because he had just moved up there and was building his house. And, man, that

was beautiful in Santa Cruz. I think [Robert] Strini lived there. I don't know if I visited him then or later after I moved, because I visited Michael Cooper.

He invited us to move up there. Ed, by that time, was ready to close his—he just wanted to get out of his business. And George offered Ed the opportunity to—why don't they build spec houses together? In the '70s it was a building boom, and so why don't they do that, and that way we can make a living.

And so we moved up—and I hadn't finished graduate school yet. And Northridge, laid-back that it was—[laughs]—I said, fine, I would just come down—I could do the work there. I got the equipment and would show up.

And then I was on the trek north. I had Tom and Ralph, and all of the students crashed in our house, and then they go visit Art. We were on the trek. Every semester I would have them visiting us. We'd go see George's house; he is a good furniture designer, and built all of the furniture in his house, but he never sanded anything. And so here are these wood students, and he would always apologize—[they laugh]—they are not sanded. But his designs were brilliant. He was really a good designer.

MR. ADAMSON: So then how about—so what about the weights piece?

MS. SAYLAN: The weights piece was—I had moved north and I was starting on—because I had done that one piece when I was at Northridge, collector's cabinet with those rings like Tinker Toys. I got intrigued with them, and making other forms. I had three forms, all vertical with the wheels around—I went to Michael Cooper—enrolled in his class, not for his class, but because he had a vacuum form for plastic. Which he let me do. [Laughs.]

I would drive over the hill and use his equipment; somehow all of these wheels lying around and talking to Michael about why all of the forms are vertical, friends accusing me of phallic symbols and who knows what, somehow a horizontal form came out. And then I had seen that movie also, Pumping Iron, when I was in Santa Cruz.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, you did?

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, I loved that movie. Ed used to have a couple of—the other guy that was the main competitor to Arnold, if you know the movie at all.

MR. ADAMSON: Lou Ferrigno?

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, was Ed's customer.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MS. SAYLAN: Ed used to do all the prints for one of the weightlifting magazines.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: Actually, at UCLA we drew—the design teacher, I took a drawing class with him also, and we were drawing nudes; we were supposed to draw from photographs. We did all kinds of things.

[Off-mike conversation.]

We better go.

MR. ADAMSON: Better wrap it up.

MS. SAYLAN: Anyway, so Ed would get me photographs of these weightlifters, and I would draw them in class.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: It was kind of cool. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: I guess the next time we will pick it up with San Francisco.

MS. SAYLAN: Okay. Yes, that is a good spot.

MR. ADAMSON: Thank you.

[END OF DISC 3.]

Okay. We are back and it is now June 1 [2006], a little bit more than a week from our last interview with Merryll

Saylan. I'm Glenn Adamson and I'm the interviewer and we are again here in my office at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

And, Merryll, when we last left you, you were just finishing up graduate school at Northridge. And I think you had said that you wanted to make a few more remarks about that experience before we moved on.

MS. SAYLAN: I did. One of the things I wanted to talk about was the women issue, because when I first met Wendy Maruyama and Gail Fredell, and some of the people from the East Coast, there was this talk that RIT was the first graduate program that had women. And I remember thinking, how could that be, because my school always had women, even before I was there; they had women that had taken the course and been out in the field. My cousin took woodworking there, and a friend of hers, who I've just made contact with, she was like my idol. I just thought she was so amazing. Pamela Weir-Quiton, who 20th century—you know, what's that gallery in Philadelphia who just gave her a show of her work—

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, right.

MS. SAYLAN: —because it sort of, of that era, you know, that '70s era.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And there were other women that I'd hear about who were out in the field. While I was in graduate school, at one point, there were several of us who became teaching assistants. At one point we had only women in our graduate program. All women. Five women. And I remained friends with them for quite a long time, and I probably still could see some of them, where they'd visit me and come and stay. We used to joke that we just scared the guys away. [They laugh.]

But the school and the two teachers were Mormon, and there was this amazing nurturing of women, including getting the younger women assistantships or internship jobs so that they could go out and work in the field. And so when I heard that Gail and Wendy were these first women in the graduate program, it seemed strange. And I'm not sure about—[inaudible]—but I always assumed it would be just like Northridge—

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: —in which there were certainly women who took these classes.

MR. ADAMSON: What do you think accounted for the difference between those campuses and elsewhere, like RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] or RIT?

MS. SAYLAN: Maybe it was the freedom in the west. I mean, there wasn't this sort of—the same way approaching, this is how you have to make things, you know. Wendy and Gail first visited me when I moved up north, and they were looking at a piece—a box I made - and talking about why it hadn't fallen apart. And I could never understand what was wrong with the joinery. It seemed perfectly fine to me, and it never has fallen apart.

MR. ADAMSON: There you go.

MS. SAYLAN: There you go. And I mean, there was all that criticism about West Coast makers. I never did quite understand. And this thing about how these were the first women. I mean, was that really so, and what would the difference be? Is it just the freedom in the West Coast?

MR. ADAMSON: Was there any kind of home economics background to the curriculum at Northridge?

MS. SAYLAN: You know, there may have been, but I don't know. There were certainly women—more women in fiber, like the woman who—she became one of my graduate studies or advisers, and she was in fiber.

MR. ADAMSON: Who was that?

MS. SAYLAN: Mary Ann Glantz.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, yes. Right.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, she was a good friend, and then her cousin Bernice Colman, who worked there and at UCLA. And actually, that's an interesting connection, is Bea got her M.F.A. at UCLA under the guy who is my friend and architect, George Foy.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: So this funny little Southern California connection.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me a little more about Mary Ann Glantz?

MS. SAYLAN: I just liked her. It was just her whole living. She lived in a warehouse in Venice and was married to a man who is now married to a gallery owner up north, Claudine Chapman. I think the problem for me was I needed someone outside of the two graduate wood people. I needed other people. And I think coming from UCLA, the sort of intellectual background that I had didn't seem apparent in the wood department; like, our crits were never crits. And we—some of the students used to complain a lot. It was more like show-and-tell.

And in a way, maybe that wasn't bad, because when I first met RIT graduates, it used to be that all of their furniture had a somewhat similar look. I think Wendy broke away from it more, but even Gail's early work, compared to Bill Keyser. I thought I could see this connection to the teachers; sort of, this is how you learned how to build. They didn't teach us how to make, and we sort of went in all different directions.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. Can you also tell me a little bit more about Pamela Weir-Quiton? Is that her name?

MS. SAYLAN: Pamela Weir-Quiton.

MR. ADAMSON: How do you spell her last name?

MS. SAYLAN: W-E-I-R —I always knew her as Pamela Weir.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MS. SAYLAN: Her married name now is Quiton. She came to this last Philadelphia thing because she's intrigued by what—she wants to come back into the field. I think she was away from it for a long time.

But at the time, Pamela was making exotic wood dolls and cabinets. There was another man who did it. I think it was Mike Nevelson, Louise Nevelson's son. They're tall, anthropomorphic cabinets with drawers. Hers all have these doll-like things to them, things that held clothing, a tree. She also got commissions. There was Orbach's department store in L.A. that had—I guess it was a discount store. It's now where this auto museum is on Fairfax and Wilshire, across the street from the Modern Art Museum. Was it that? —LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA].

MR. ADAMSON: Where the Petersen Auto Museum is. Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. But that was Orbach's department store. In the children's section, they had this whole wall of her animals in these exotic woods. And they just had a quality about them. I always liked this, the sort of freedom she approached it, and that she was able to go out and get work like that, that she's just continued. She and my cousin, they're both probably about 10 years younger than I am. They're still best friends. They're still really close, from Northridge days.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And I think that's nice, too. I like that, that that has continued. But I did feel, when I first met some of the East Coast people, that there was, uh, you graduated a West Coast school.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, yes. And my school didn't give an M.F.A., which was a problem, because I would have liked one, and I wanted to teach. Maybe we already talked about that, but because of my family situation, it was just too far for me to go anywhere else, so—

MR. ADAMSON: Are there other friendships from Northridge that you've maintained?

MS. SAYLAN: For a long time I was friends with a woman named Karen Hazama [sp], who I thought was amazingly talented. I think about her often; I mean, we kept a friendship for a long, long time. She did metalwork and woodwork, and could combine them in the most beautiful forms. She went on to teach and she—I think she taught more jewelry than wood. And then there was Martha Rising.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes. Tell me about Martha Rising.

MS. SAYLAN: She was in my grad program, and there was a film someone made once during final week, because you know how—well, students are bad. They're still the same. You don't do the work until that last week. Then there's this madness, with the shop full of people and people running around.

Somebody took a video of this, I guess of this last week, and then speeded it up and showed it at our final crit. It was just hilarious. Martha - I remember, every few minutes there would be Martha running across the room and

then drinking a Coke. [They laugh.] And it was just such a funny scene, and it really wasn't—I could never have stayed like I did, until I married Ed. So I could just disappear and sleep at this school.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: Martha, I think she must have met Michael Cooper, because I did that—I think I told you - I put up together a student art forum, and I brought Sam Maloof and Michael Cooper, and I don't know, there was somebody else, to school, to do a weekend workshop. Now it was Martha, and I remember Sam Maloof.

Sam was—there was so much sexism in those days. Not everywhere; Northridge somehow felt free of it, but Sam was talking about gang sawing on the table saw, using multiple blades and making multiple cuts, like it was something. And he turns, and Martha and I were standing there, and he said, do you ladies understand what I'm talking about?

Then when I met him several years later, I reminded him of who I was; by that time I was really turning and trying to do craft shows. First he had trouble putting together who I was, but when he did, then it was like, oh, you're making small things; that was okay, but not the big stuff. I think now that would change, certainly, because there are so many women making furniture, more women making furniture than woodturning, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: But it sounds like at Northridge you didn't think it was remarkable.

MS. SAYLAN: No. No, and that's the thing I felt was important to talk about, because it wasn't remarkable.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And it was just an interesting place. There were some things missing, but in some ways it was just a wonderful place, because they allowed us this freedom, and we could work late at night. And in our little corner, we had jewelry next door, wood, then ceramics, and then, down the hallway, fiber. One of the students from the wood program took fiber classes, and he came back to talk to us about - whoa, talk about sexism, he said, I'm the only guy in the fiber class.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MS. SAYLAN: He said, they just don't know what I'm about. But jewelry and wood never had that feeling.

And the guy who—Richard Dehr—I couldn't remember his name last time. Ed, my husband, took guitar lessons from his parents. They lived up in Topanga Canyon in this hippie sort of place. Richard was wonderful. I guess when you take classes over and over with people, you become lifelong friends.

I mentioned that when we moved up to Santa Cruz, Ed was going to build spec houses. Bob Strini was living in Santa Cruz at the time. Michael Cooper. There was all this connection, and maybe that's how Martha met—no, Martha met Michael at school. I had all these people, including Richard Dehr and his wife, come stay with us. Our house was a hotel.

MR. ADAMSON: So what was Martha making in graduate school before she started doing the bentwood stuff with Michael?

MS. SAYLAN: She was really creative. I remember we had these bread-and-butter assignments every semester and to learn how to work quickly. She made this box that was like a zipper. And it was really clever how she did it. I think what happened to Martha—this is what I heard - was she was the youngest child with much older siblings; her mom was really sick, and Martha got stuck taking care of her. She was very, very talented.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And then the tour de force was that chair which she made with Michael Cooper's help. He comes from sculpture, which you need to figure out how to do something. It doesn't have to be a proper technique in a book; you just figure out how to do it. One of the things he showed us when he demonstrated at our school was bentwood? You clamp one end here, you twist it, and you clamp it on the other end, and you don't have to have all these fancy forms. You can just sort of make it do whatever you want.

Martha, when she was making that chair, I remember she went through—she had some dowels in.

They used to teach us to dowel. That was one thing they taught us that turned out to be a plague, because you didn't have to dowel the way they taught us. Sometimes the dowels—if you were shaping something, whoops, you'd hit a dowel.

Martha hit several dowels. She learned how to plug; we used to joke that somebody should write a book on how

to save your mistakes [they laugh], because that was the art. In a way, it became clear that the art was saving something.

MR. ADAMSON: You know, there's this argument that Ned Cooke [Edward S. Cooke, Jr.] has made that the '70s was the period where woodworking technique was really fetishized. It's like technique became an independent self in some way. And I've always wondered—

MS. SAYLAN: That's east.

MR. ADAMSON: And that's usually said about the East Coast. Then you have, particularly Michael's work, obviously, but then Martha's rocking chair that was in the "Maker's Hand" exhibition ["The Maker's Hand: American Studio Furniture, 1940-1990," Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, 2004], which, I think, is the one you're talking about.

MS. SAYLAN: Right, or even Sam Maloof. My God, he was so criticized because - and it's only from the East Coast people; west people, we thought, what's wrong with this—is he screwed in the back and plugs his stuff? That was like, whoa, that's totally wrong. I remember him once defending himself that his chairs at the Boston Museum have been sat on a million times over how many years, and nothing's ever come apart.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. But that bentwood stuff wasn't seen by either Michael or Martha, or anyone else, as being sort of about technique per se. It was much more about achieving the forms, you think?

MS. SAYLAN: I think because she did a couple of—we had to do some trays, and I think she made some wild trays, just wrapping things around. It was more about freedom. How could she make this chair—because it seems to me it was really kind of scarily unstable, that if you sat on it, you always felt very uneasy, because it vibrated. Because there were no joints, I don't know. I know when I started doing some other stuff, I'd call those East Coast furniture makers, like, why is my table wobbly? What do I do about that?

Or one time I made a bamboo table, and Gail Fredell stopped in on me. This friend was over and we were tying Japanese knots on my bamboo table, and Gail—Gail used comments under her breath, "Well, the Philippine furniture industry has no threat from you." [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: So a minute ago you had mentioned Bob Strini. Can you tell me more about him, because he's not that well documented as a maker.

MS. SAYLAN: I know. He and Michael were best friends and studio partners. Bob lived in Santa Cruz at the time. I think he eventually moved to Montana. There was — I actually have slides of—they used to have this thing called the Artist Soapbox Derby in San Francisco and it was wild. I mean, wild as only San Francisco could have it, you know, with people coming down this hill on a toilet seat, or they had this Wagnerian team and this huge fat woman naked on the front with a flag.

There was this funny competition with Bob and Michael, in that Michael's more like me, which is putting the oil on, putting it on top of his car, and hope it dries by the time he gets to the race. Strini's always done a week in advance [they laugh], and that was always funny. Ed loved Michael Cooper. Strini was more aloof, more serious.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: The soapbox he made was amazing. He had to lie in it, stretched out, and somehow he could handle the wheels, but it looked terrifying. There were two reasons. The reason they stopped was the artists ended up spending a whole year making this thing, and they don't get anything else done. And two, it's rather dangerous. They had no guards, nothing, and people ran off the road and into people, but it was also fantastic.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: I loved San Francisco. I mean, there was just something about the city. It still has that feeling, that it's just a fun city to live in, and people love it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And this feeling, this is great here.

MR. ADAMSON: Who were the organizers of the soapbox derby—

MS. SAYLAN: That I don't know.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. But it was all artists.

MS. SAYLAN: All artists. Michael taught at De Anza College [Cupertino, CA] and maybe at the time Strini was teaching at—there's another college in the peninsula, Foothill [Foothill College, Los Altos Hills, CA]. A lot of artists have come through Michael that I didn't realize. I keep finding out, like Kim Kelzer, and she's really good friends with him. And Tina Chin, and I think there's a whole bunch more, of people who started with Michael—

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: —and then moved on to other places. And I didn't know that, because I wasn't part of that group and they're younger than I am.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. I thought we should turn to the—that you moved pretty much right after you got out of graduate school.

MS. SAYLAN: I wasn't even done with graduate school; only Northridge would let you do this. I used to go down a few times a year, and we were going down anyway because of Ed's business, which was a nightmare. That's a whole other nightmare in my life. But I would go down to Northridge, and then they all came to see me anyway, and it was this constant moving. I would go back and had my graduate show in Northridge.

My work was just so strange really, compared to Martha's. Martha's doing bentwood. There was a guy named Rob Splane in our group, who has become an industrial designer. I think I contacted him recently for something. I had these strange barbell pieces, and wheels. And people used to tease me that I should do plastics. Why am I doing wood because I—this is from Jan De Swart.

He introduced me to this jelutong wood, and he made this comment, which stuck with me for years, which was he didn't want the wood to interfere in what he was trying to say. And so he would choose his wood accordingly. And wood that is as plain as jelutong, no grain, I thought was very appropriate for some of those things I was doing. I didn't want wildwood grain on these pieces; I just wanted forms. And it's funny how people say things as you go along in your career, and it just stays in your head forever.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes. Were you aware at all at that point that wood grain, like Bob Stocksdale with exotic woods, that that was sort of a thing in woodturning, or did you—

MS. SAYLAN: Bob was about the only turner, and Jerry Glaser, that I knew. And it wasn't until I moved to San Francisco that my shop partners handed me a brochure about woodturning conferences. That's after Santa Cruz.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes. Well, let's do Santa Cruz first.

MS. SAYLAN: I lived in Santa Cruz for about three years. I did my work there and—

MR. ADAMSON: So what years are we in here? The '70s?

MS. SAYLAN: Seventy-six, '79, maybe. It was—I was ready to move after two months, but we had sold our house. Ed's business deal he had made was going bad, and my son moved — one son moved with me and he was miserable. He and I hated Santa Cruz. It's gorgeous, but I realized I'm really urban. In fact, I remember reading, at the time I was there, S. J. Perelman. I don't know if you've ever read him.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: His Acres and Pains [New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947] was this little novel that he wrote. It was hilarious, about his weekend home in Bucks County [PA] and how all the people—because that's how I felt. I remember two months where I didn't have a day without a houseguest—everybody came. He was writing about everybody at [Grand] Central Station in New York, with their tennis rackets over their shoulders, were coming to his house in Bucks County. And that he ended up thinking, there's nothing that could equal the smell of a Jewish delicatessen in Manhattan. I thought, that is me.

When we first moved there, somebody invited us for dinner with our architect friend. He still loves it. Sometimes he points out to me all the good things that are there, because I left. This woman is telling us this wonderful thing, how her job is to drive her children to their games and because everything was—I was not used to that. I walked to the store. I was really urban. And here I have to drive everywhere, and I did have to drive my son places, and where I lived in L.A., they took the bus. And she's telling me how wonderful this is, this is her job, and I'm thinking, oh, my God, I'm in the wrong place. [They laugh.] This is awful. I can't imagine me ever saying that; I mean, my kids tease me a lot about—like, as soon as they were old enough, I put them on a bus.

MR. ADAMSON: Now did you have a studio space?

MS. SAYLAN: Garage. Garage. This was a temporary house that turned into three years. Ed and I were going to build a house, so we never quite unpacked. We got into a fight about where these boxes were going to be

stored, and they were being stored in my shop. Ed was more forceful than I was, and I was complaining. Then a friend visited, old, old dear friend, and he said, Merryll, whose shop is it anyhow? I went, well, it's mine, and he said, well, then get those boxes out of here. [They laugh.] And I did it.

But the worst was we stored stuff for so long that when we were in the middle of moving from Santa Cruz to San Francisco—Ed and I, we lived a funny life. We took a little trip to Rome in between because friends of ours were living there and—a little trip, it must have been five weeks' worth. While we were away, our stuff was burglarized in the boxes. And we had been very neat, so it said "silver," and it said "cameras." And my son—I think he had already moved out, but he'd come home. He was like, they didn't take anything of mine; I'm insulted. [They laugh.] They had time; they took a Tony DeLap painting. I don't know if they knew what they took or what, but there were some really good things, and we had to fight for the insurance. We did get some insurance, but who could remember, when you store stuff for three years, what are in those boxes?

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: Later I remembered I had some stuff that I bought in Japan in the '60s and probably were pretty valuable now. And somebody had given me a Paul Revere, hard to believe, silver little dish, and what that'd be worth?

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: But they come and go, over the years. It's just the way it is.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: Ed loves Santa Cruz. I feel like I forced him to move several times. Although I think before we left L.A., I realized that this was a very scary move for me, moving there. I think it was really hard on both of us. I went into a severe depression there for a while, where I just almost couldn't stop crying; I was so miserable. There just wasn't enough to keep me happy. But eventually, I just got to work. I had no choice. I mean, I wanted to finish my degree, and so I just got to work, and you just do it.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Is there anything else about your degree show that seems significant to you, looking back on it?

MS. SAYLAN: I think one of the things for me personally, was installing the show. That's always been important, which is sometimes why I love doing the Smithsonian Craft Show. It's—because I have this background in design and I like beautiful spaces or clean spaces. I can install the shows the way I want. Sometimes I get—I don't make a scene, because it's just not my nature, but sometimes when I see my work in a gallery, and there's all, you know, cast of thousands of pieces, it can be really depressing. But if I install my own show when I do the Smithsonian, I can really make a clean, special space so that people can see it.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And that's always been important to me. And I think that's from that aesthetic, that Japanese aesthetic. Did I get that at UCLA, that how to wrap five eggs? I don't know. That whole thing of presentation so that what you make has to be presented and not just be a piece.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And whether from that trip to Japan, I was just—I was only there for a week, but it just so impressed me. I think in Southern California, you're surrounded by the wood-and-glass architecture that I've always adored. I just love that stuff, which is all based on similar things to Japanese houses. Ed and I were surprised once on a trip to Mexico, some area, Tarascan - it was Tarascan pottery, and the architecture - how it was so Japaneselike. It just must be ways of building that solves the problem.

MR. ADAMSON: This seems like a good time to bring up the rice bowl set that you made.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, I did that at Northridge.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And because we had to turn—I think there were two things—we had to turn, and this friend of Ed's—Masamori and I, we would cook together. I decided I wanted to make bowls that we could eat out of, as long I was turning—what was I going to make? Just something that set on a table? No, it had to be practical. We had to use it. I had them on faceplates. That was so funny. I had Mas for dinner, and we had several bowls—I think I had three bowls, still attached to their faceplates, and we ate rice in them. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: Like they were platters.

MS. SAYLAN: They're just—no, the little bowls.

MR. ADAMSON: No, I know, but the faceplate was some kind of—

MS. SAYLAN: I didn't know from chucks, and maybe they didn't even—who knew from equipment, the easiest way to screw right into the wood? One of them, after putting the hot, hot, steaming rice in it, cracked. So that one went, and the others held up. I made six bowls originally. I have this one photograph of it that Ed took, with six bowls and the server. The rice paddle was just based on the bamboo rice paddle. The sixth bowl cracked with food. I made another, had it in the house, in a cabinet, and it fell out and it broke.

When this competition came up for California Design, all the other students had decided they would enter things.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And that's where I made the box. I made this box because how could you deliver five bowls or six bowls and a server—I just couldn't figure out how to carry it there. All the Japanese stuff that I had seen or had - I made a Japanese box out of pine, with a sliding lid and spots for all the bowls, separate little compartments, and a compartment for the big one. And of course, the sixth bowl; there was no sixth bowl, so I put yellow tissues that looked good in the empty space. And I was told that that's the proper way. I didn't know that, that you can't have a sixth bowl, and that that is a bad word in Japanese.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: I thought, well, okay, see, there was a reason to this. But because I think about my behavior still today. When we entered this competition and we got our letters at Northridge, people—I mean we got them in our home—I got in, and I was stunned. I got to school and everyone is complaining, as young people complain and whine, they didn't get in. And I did not tell anyone I got in. Not for a while, because I was embarrassed that I got in and they didn't.

MR. ADAMSON: That's strange.

MS. SAYLAN: It is. I still—I don't know. I think about that part of my behavior a lot, because it still comes out. It's just—don't want to offend anybody. And yet I get into trouble all the time.

MR. ADAMSON: Can I just ask you one other question, technical, about that?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you carve the paddle by hand?

MS. SAYLAN: I think part by hand and part by sander.

MR. ADAMSON: Sander?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Tell me about that.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, in fact, I have one now. We had these drum sanders like tires; they're maybe 12 inches long and come in different diameters, so you can do a lot with a band saw and a sander, you know. You can cut away the whole side; you can cut practically the whole shape out on a band saw. In my younger days, especially after seeing Sam Maloof freehand carve, and also Jan De Stuart, free handcarve on a band saw. I didn't even think about that. Now, I'd be nervous doing it. These drum sanders have air in it and just do the most beautiful job. In fact, at the time, these guys came to our school who had visited Bob, and we were so proud that we had made Bob Stocksdale bowls.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, right.

MS. SAYLAN: He moved up north of Santa Barbara. It's a beautiful area—I always think of Bob Erickson, I think Greg Erickson, together with some other people, got five machines made that had these sanders, because it's the most amazing way to shape and carve. One time in Berkeley, Wendy came over and used it. You couldn't beat it. It's just beautiful.

MR. ADAMSON: So I take it you've always looked for a means of making things that were as expedient as

possible.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. That's the California way. [They laugh.] My way. A tool, a machine to make your life easier? Absolutely. I don't know, maybe it is a philosophy out there. In fact, we used to kid between ourselves, all of those New Englanders, they build furniture to last for a lifetime. We don't care; let's hope it lasts our lifetime. That's all we want.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: There isn't that same—well, there's nothing historic out there. The Mexican stuff, the old history of the Spaniards out there, that's our history.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. That's not really your history.

MS. SAYLAN: No.

MR. ADAMSON: So you don't feel that you're within it in some way, maybe.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I did a whole report when I was in college on—for one of those history classes. I did a whole history of that Spanish background. I got into reading these books. There was a writer I fell in love with, and he wrote all these fantastic history books with all the old California stuff, and I really got into it. The old missions—I still love missions. I have a great fondness of them. They were so gorgeous, and part of California history, because you learn that. When you're in school and you learn—I guess every state has their history. I guess I was shocked that my grandkids are probably learning Colorado history. I learned California history.

MR. ADAMSON: So maybe we should go back to Santa Cruz.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: While we're on the subject of tools, I'm curious to know how you wound up fitting out your garage/studio.

MS. SAYLAN: In L.A.—somehow I got a band saw. That was the first piece of equipment. And then there's my husband, known as Auction Eddie. He always was headed to auctions. And I think Ed was the kind of guy, you need something? He'll go find it.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: So he started scrounging, and we went to auctions together a lot. That's sort of how we got some of our furniture also.

MR. ADAMSON: And what would you say your—what were the most important tools to you?

MS. SAYLAN: I did buy a brand new table saw when I moved to Santa Cruz. That was a big expense. My lathe I had bought in L.A.— a customer of Ed's who was a furniture maker—he must have made stuff for Hollywood - had this old lathe and an old jointer. I mean old. I don't know how—I mean, they were old when I bought them, and I still—I had them for years—a Wallace. They're out of business. I think they came out of Chicago.

I bought them from him, and I bought—he was—I don't know, was he retiring? But I bought a bunch of his equipment, all used. I still have quite a bit of it. And so I bought this strange old lathe that was really pretty flimsy, but I turned a lot of my big stuff on it. It had a half-horse motor, and the head turned and wobbled. I always feel—I try to teach people that that you don't have to have the best. It does make your life easier. I think that's one thing school taught you. It was that attitude of, you wanted to make something, then you make it.

Well, Martha—who was it? Martha and this other student, and Ed and I took this class at this other community college on maintaining tools. It was an industrial design program, and we four, including my husband, were the artists. There was always this repartee about how artists just ruin machines; all we care about is making something, and we don't care about taking care of the machines. We would tease them that they don't care about anything but maintaining the machine. They never do anything with it. Martha and I, I remember trying to learn how to sharpen a drill. That was hopeless. Our drills got shorter and shorter—[they laugh]—but it was really fun. I learned a lot. I kind of wish I could take the class again now, because it was just so much to learn. Every single tool in the shop we took apart and put back together.

MR. ADAMSON: When it comes to turning things big—first of all, what do you mean by big?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, when I started doing the barbells and stuff, the only way I could see how to manage it was construction. Because the program was geared for furniture, you just glue up whatever you need. As big as you

want, you just add a piece on. And so I could make big just by doing it that way. It's becoming a problem now, which is that I can't get these things on and off the machines.

But I never wanted to do certain things in the turning field, ever. I don't know why. I've never had any interest in hollowing out a vessel. It just seems utterly boring to me. I mean, the shapes on the outside I could see doing, but spending all that time cleaning out the insides just, I don't know.

Some of my attitudes, I know, have changed over the years, because certainly in those days it was all about making something and how you made it, or practice, practice, practice just was boring. I was that way with my piano, too; I just wanted to make music. I didn't want to spend hours practicing scales, which just seems to have no purpose to it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: That's me. But now I do realize, when I started doing my multiples, that when you do something multiple times, you get better and better at it. And that there is—I don't know that that could be my primary motive. It just would be impossible. I mean, I even cook the same. My kids used to complain to me, or my husband complained to me that, couldn't I make the same dinner twice? Please, Mom. We liked that dish; couldn't we have that dish? So I think it's just who I am.

MR. ADAMSON: I guess I wonder, given the Sam Maloof comments though, whether turning something large or making something large, whether that seemed to you to be an achievement of some kind of professional nature?

MS. SAYLAN: Sometimes. In fact, the piece you'll see tonight, I did that as a statement, because I'm going to be in the show with the guys, and so there is—but historically, like if you read—who's that woman? Whitney Chadwick. The woman from San Francisco State who did a really good book on women's art history. This whole issue of women and small things has always been with us. She talks about in that book from the Renaissance time, that it works against women. Historically women did small things, because they just didn't have the places to do it. That probably is a big issue for women.

MR. ADAMSON: So obviously here we are in the '70s, and we're talking about this stuff, and so I have to ask, since you're saying that it wasn't really a big deal, gender dynamics weren't a big deal at Northridge—

MS. SAYLAN: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: —how much did you know about the feminist movement, and consider yourself to be a part of it, in the '70s?

MS. SAYLAN: I never really considered myself to be a part of it, in a way, because of my family structure. But certainly, one of my friends, that Ed and I were best friends with, and I used to crash with them whenever I went down to Northridge - my friend discovered feminism in a big way and in an annoying way. And that sort of surprised me, because I always thought she was the most liberal person I knew already. Her parents were anarchists, and she went to nudist camps in the '30s, and so why did she need to discover feminism in that way? But certainly, for me, it's—I mean, I was never out there fighting for it, but certainly my friend Claire was, and she went to the conference in Mexico.

But in graduate school, we had to take art theory. We read [Herschel] Chipp's book [Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968] and then—what was the other one? Reading art criticism, and got into political criticism. Certainly, at that time, with feminism—that's one thing I saw yesterday at the Tate [Tate Modern, London]. I've always been intrigued with the Guerrilla Girl[s]. But interesting, at Northridge, there was a group of people called Guerrilla Graphics. I think it existed before the Guerrilla Girl[s], so it's just a term. They used to come out with fabulous stuff, like fake diplomas. I have a fake diploma in my shop that said I was capable of artistic expression. It's just meaningless stuff; they used to do this, give people these. They'd just appear. You'd get this diploma. And so I've always loved the Guerrilla Girl[s'] stuff, and the display of all their posters was really interesting.

I never really thought about it until you start—maybe when I first went to the first turning thing - and you start reading about the numbers in galleries, because Northridge, it just didn't seem to exist. I had these women graduate advisors that I talked to, and UCLA, too, was really free. UCLA, when I was there, was more about Vietnam, much more focused on antiwar stuff than feminism. I'm not quite sure, but I do know when I really started working and trying to show my work, if there was going to be an all-women show, some of the furniture friends, like, just rebelled. They don't want to be in an all-women show, and this whole argument: Can you tell a woman's work from a man's work?

So you never wanted your work—you always wanted your work to stand on its own, and now I find it really interesting that women—I'm thinking of the book I read. All of a sudden—it's a complete side.

I did get a book in the '70s, which I still read once in a while, called Working it Out [New York: Pantheon Books, 1977]. It was all women who were artists—Miriam Schapiro wrote in there—and scientists, and writers. It was all about women's issues in working, but I never thought of it in terms of—like being out fighting for feminism, for rights. It was more about the constant conflict, which I still have, which is the woman's role in the house and raising three kids. It was, Ed went off to work and he came home, and I went off to school and I was working part-time for a while, but I always made the dinner, you know, that kind of thing.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: Those kind of issues, or even training yourself to work. I still think women have those problems. Maybe not so much. I see women today—not so much younger women. But who does this—who does the work? And so those are the kinds of things in that book. There were some wonderful things in that book. This one woman who just couldn't—because that, sort of, getting to work was always difficult for me; it still is difficult for me. So ways of giving yourself permission.

And then later I got more and more into it. When I had my back surgery, I read all of May Sarton's stuff. Another writer who I love was Carolyn Heilbrun, who writes about these issues. I do remember, when I first moved north, this awful thing, which was sent out to all of us who subscribed to Fine Woodworking, about their new publication called Threads. And they referred to it as "for that more delicate part of the family," those who would rather sit and sew than work at the table saw. It was very, very sexist. And Gail had it up in her shop so they could throw darts at it.

I decided to write a letter. See, that's how I get into trouble. I wrote a letter to Fine Woodworking and told them they made a terrible mistake with that thing; that they hadn't looked around to see how many women were working in wood. Of course, I knew [the editor, John] Kelsey from these conferences, which we haven't talked about, in Northern California.

Kelsey—this whole East Coast thing. I told them that I came from a family—maybe that is part of why I never really think about it in the same way. My grandfather was a tailor; he had five daughters, and he made women's clothing. And he made all our clothing growing up. It wasn't like my mom did it. My grandfather made me clothing. And I never thought about it that, wow, this is strange; my grandfather sews for me, and he sewed for my daughter. Sometimes we would sew together, because he stopped sewing. I had to learn how to—I got so spoiled having good clothes; I had to learn how to sew.

So I don't know whether that's strange, and you don't even—I never thought about it.

MR. ADAMSON: Can I ask, when did you start subscribing to Fine Woodworking?

MS. SAYLAN: When it first came out.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you quite pleased to get your hands on it?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes and no. Some of it, even then, had a feeling that it was a hobbyist magazine. This friend of Ed that I bought some of my machinery from, oh, my God, you should have heard him. Who are they writing this magazine for? he said. It was such a beautiful magazine, but he said half the stuff was written by people who don't work in the field and don't know what they're doing, which was sort of interesting.

MR. ADAMSON: You mean their advice was technically unsound?

MS. SAYLAN: According to him, yes. For me, it was, I was learning and it was interesting. I don't get it anymore because it gets boring. I guess I get bored easily. [Laughs.] You know, it just becomes the same old thing all the time. But if I need to refer to something or I feel unsure, I might go to the library or—but now with online, you just look everything up online.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you think of it as an East Coast publication?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, that's the thing with Kelsey. I met Kelsey in the '70s at UC-Berkeley. They had a good extension program in wood. I taught there for six or seven years.

This guy loves wood, so he started putting on these conferences. I thought they were the best conferences. They were weekend conferences. I would drive up from Santa Cruz. They would have a day of talks, all kinds of talks. And the second day was in a big gymnasium, different demos going on. I know that Bob turned once. And they'd have all these different makers. There was this Japanese guy who did Japanese temples in the Bay Area. I think he built Green's Restaurant temple. He was there demonstrating, and this guy who now makes a fortune on his dovetail joint jig was just developing it then. And so Kelsey was there. That was where I met Albert [Lecoff, director of the Wood Turning Center, Philadelphia, PA] first, and I also met Stephen Hogbin.

I thought they were really lively, and there was no separation between the turners and the furniture makers. That seemed to come a little bit later. Maybe it existed, because Albert probably was having his conferences already. I always enjoyed those. It was clear John Kelsey was there to provoke. That's what it felt like, to put the California roundovers and our lack of joinery skills—and that he enjoyed this. Somehow—I don't know how I became friends with—but I somehow became friends with all of them at the time. And I think—no, I met Richard Raffan somewhere else.

But it was very exciting. And one time, it must have been—because I think I had moved by that time—in the early '80s. The economy was tanking, and one guy, he used to make these beautiful little boxes, very typical of that time. There was another guy who used to do big discs, which Albert and I have talked about—he says, are you crossing over into his discs? Beautiful carved discs—lived up Mendocino [CA] and died really young.

This guy was so concerned about, how would you make money? What would you do to survive?

MR. ADAMSON: You mean, the box maker?

MS. SAYLAN: The box maker. He was panicked. Somehow—how I got on this panel, I have no idea, but I was on this panel with Stephen Hogbin. There were four of us, and we gave our answers as to how we'd survive this. Nothing was selling. [They laugh.] I always liked Stephen. He always has this quiet, sort of, deep something about him. You know, there's more there—just this lovely man.

MR. ADAMSON: I just want to stop this track so it doesn't get too long, and then we'll start right up again.

[END OF DISC 4.]

Okay. We're back, and I was just going to ask you, Merryll, about the J.B. Blunk installation at UC-Santa Cruz.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah. I did see it. He had told me about some of his installations. When Ed and I did this trip up to Northern California and visited these artists as part of my trip, when we went to see J.B. Blunk, he lived in Inverness, California, and my friends lived in another town near there, Woodacre, and there was some connection with Ed's friend Masamori and a Japanese actress—I think she married [Isamu] Noguchi.

There was some connection between all of them that I wasn't a part of. They wanted to come visit J.B. They owned a store in San Rafael, where I live now, that was an institution in Marin. It was a nut store called Torn Ranch [ph]. I mean, the Grateful Dead used to shop there.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you say it was a nut store?

MS. SAYLAN: A nut store. Their family had a walnut ranch, and when they retired from their job—or they didn't, they just quit their job and moved to a new life in Northern California, the Northern California life. They were looking around for something to do and opened a nut store. It became a gourmet store. They sold coffee and international candies, and was wonderful. I used to work there sometimes at Christmas, and some of the Grateful Dead—I mean, there were lines of people waiting to come in that store, including Blunk. It was where you went to buy these things.

They wanted to come when I went to see J.B., and I had asked him if I could take slides and interview him. I don't know how I did this; I just did it. We all went out there, and he told me other places that I could see work of his. I had fallen in love with his work from the show at The Egg and The I. There was once this show called—well, there was a cradle-to-coffin show, and then they had a whole J.B. Blunk show, and I just was blown away by his pieces, these giant redwood pieces.

The one at UC he talked about was that he expected people—I think he wanted people to relate to it or participate or do something to it, like textures, carve something, and that he felt it wasn't used in the way that it should be. But the thing that was amazing was that he had these redwood trunks out in this open garden area, sort of arranged like I always pictured the wagons in those wagon train days, and carved into the end of one huge—I mean, it must be six-foot diameter or more—is "J.B. Blunk." And then his chainsaws I just couldn't get over— [inaudible]—hanging on the wall. He had his chainsaws, and they went from this monster one down to this little teeny one. And I thought those were phenomenal. And he had all the African stools that he did that were so beautiful.

There was a discussion—because my friend June was always involved with dance in L.A. and—was it Shirley Yamaguchi? —famous old actress, because he had lived in Japan and studied ceramics in Japan, and I think he had been to L.A. They all knew these—there's another dancer who now lives in Northern California—of course, I can't remember her name—and her husband was a landscape architect, Lawrence Halprin. Anna somebody—but I think she performs. She's probably in her 80s now, but still performs.

But it was also this whole philosophy, this liberal—not quite—certainly not the—[inaudible]—show here at the V&A, but there was movement, and he was very active in that. They had a lot to talk about, and I was just listening. I was probably more interested in looking at these fabulous African stools he did.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So did that whole drop out, go off on your own and do crafts and the wood thing, exert any appeal for you at all?

MS. SAYLAN: I think it did; that's probably why I moved to Santa Cruz. But when I got there, I realized it wasn't me, you know. I'm sure it did, in a way.

MR. ADAMSON: But I thought that the scene in Santa Cruz was more suburban for you.

MS. SAYLAN: It was suburban and it was removed. It took me - the road over the hills, even if I was going to Michael Cooper's to work at the school there, that road would close. It still closes from weather and trees falling on it, and I felt isolated.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: Just like—I guess I get nervous. I don't know what that is. When Ed and I were moving from San Francisco to Berkeley and I'd drive up in the hills, I get nervous, like, oops, no, it's a little too—I have to have people near me. I don't know what that is. I lived in Georgia once with my ex-husband, and we lived on the edge of a forest, and, man, I hated that. [They laugh.] I wondered, if something happened to me and I yelled, if somebody would hear me.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: That's my feeling. I don't think it's growing up surrounded by family.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, let me ask you another thing about the Santa Cruz period, because it seems like this must have been the period where you decided you were a professional artist.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, you know, I thought about that. When I was in school, and when I graduated school, and even when I moved to San Francisco, and when you think you want to sell your work or show your work, I decided that my work was of the caliber that somehow I wanted to only show it at good places, and that, forget this other stuff, and that design background.

I mean, even when I moved to San Francisco, or before I moved to San Francisco, there used to be a gallery called Signature. I don't remember quite where it was in the city, but it showed a lot of the Baulines [Craft] Guild stuff, and my architect friend George and I, because he built furniture and we had similar tastes, we'd sometimes look at the stuff and go, God, don't they think about what they're doing? It would be over the top, some of it. Some of it is beautiful, but some of it, it was clear, like, where is the design? There isn't any. Not everybody—I mean, I think there are some really good, talented people, like I've always loved Art's work or Garry's work, but some of it's horrible.

MR.ADAMSON: Well, where did you decide you were going to sell your work?

MS. SAYLAN: So I think I thought I was better than everybody else. [Laughs.] Maybe that's it, because I was looking at this, thinking about and—this is in San Francisco. At that time I still—I mean, I played with wood. Maybe I should talk about that after San Francisco. Maybe because of Northridge, maybe getting into this competition at the California Design—I don't think that was anything that made me think I was so great, but you somehow get braver about submitting slides.

And I did have an advantage, there is no question; I had my husband with a photo lab. If I needed pictures, he took my pictures, and they never cost me a penny, and I could get them printed. I have gorgeous, color, 8 by 10s, and I don't know quite—I guess I'll put them in this box with stuff because what am I going to do with it? I don't know. I really have hundreds of photographs. Ed just wouldn't print one; he'd print lots.

MR. ADAMSON: So where did you wind up going, in terms of commercial venues?

MS. SAYLAN: In the beginning, the first piece was the rice bowl set. I had trouble selling my work, and I still have trouble selling my work, because it's not quite the norm, but Joanne Rapp from the California Design show bought my work.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. SAYLAN: She bought that piece. They owned that piece.

MR. ADAMSON: Right out of the California Design show?

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah. And I thought I had priced it good. I priced it a whole $400. I didn't think it would sell for that price, but, of course, it did. And then she wanted to carry my work, but I think that my life has been plagued with things that have worked against it in a way, which is, one, I moved and wasn't really set up; I wasn't able to get into the rhythm of constant making.

I think that life syndrome is really hard to get rid of, so that everybody else's life—family, work—comes first, and then when all that's taken care of, when everybody else is taken care of, then you go and work. And that's—it took me years to shake that, and still I think if push comes to shove—if my kids need me to babysit, I'm babysitting. And that, I think, is a woman thing. I don't think a man stops his whole career when something happens in the family, and maybe young women, I hope they don't do it today, but women my age certainly, and maybe even a little younger than me; or if you have family, you get into that. Somebody has got to do it, and you're the one that does it.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Now, you said Joanne Rapp wanted to show your work.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah. She kept writing me, and so I did start selling with her.

MR. ADAMSON: Would this have already been in the late '70s, or was it —

MS. SAYLAN: Probably the early '80s.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So when you were in Santa Cruz, were you able to sell your work at all?

MS. SAYLAN: No, I never even tried.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: When I had my graduate show, a gallery did call me about some of my pieces, and a friend of mine said to me, Merryll, you've got to charge prices for it. And he said, I don't think you should charge less than $3,000 for some of these large sculptures. Well, I told the gallery that, and that was the last I heard from them. [They laugh.] It's a thing—even now, and here I am, 70 - that I still have to work on, is I'll—I don't think I'll ever get it right—is I go out there, put myself out there. I work really hard. I get my stuff out, and then I sort of disappear again, and I have to force myself, okay, come on, get out there, get out there, because you have to keep at it all the time.

And so —and I think also as soon as we moved to San Francisco, I wasn't there very long - Ed got really, really sick.

MR. ADAMSON: Let's not talk about that—

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Okay.

MR. ADAMSON: —San Francisco, because you just got out of Santa Cruz, finally.

MS. SAYLAN: Right. Yeah. Okay. The reason—I just was unhappy in Santa Cruz, and I thought—because I had talked to Tom Tramel at Northridge. We were all friends. It seemed he had a concept of opening a school and thought I would be good at it, some sort of woodworking school. And I felt maybe I could pursue that with him, or move it along, and I think—I used to visit Mary Ann Glantz every time I went down to L.A.

I felt like I could have some—that I have a better chance of surviving there, and I really did want to teach. Also I like to organize, and I like to put projects together, like the student art forum, and I'm good at that; so this seemed like a better choice for me. I'm not good—because I'm not that fast a worker; I could never just produce tons of work; it's just not who I am. I don't think I'm good enough even for that, but Ed did not want to move back to L.A. in the worst way. The compromise was San Francisco.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And because we took a lot of trips up north and it is beautiful, that was our compromise. Sometimes I regretted not going back to L.A. I have friends, family, but San Francisco wasn't a bad choice. But it's really hard, even in those days, because I always thought I was much older than I was because—I think because I had children so young. I used to tell my oldest son he aged me. You know, if I'm 40, he's 20. That ages you quickly.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And rebellious teenagers—during grad school my daughter was like, God, what a nightmare, and into trouble, and I remember sitting in class one time weeping, and Richard Dehr came over to talk to me about parents' guilt, and somehow the kids survive; they somehow come through it.

So some of those things were really hard. Anyway, to move to San Francisco, I did do a couple of things. One were these conferences. I guess I had made sure I got to know people. And I went to the ACC [American Craft Council] crafts show and introduced myself to woodworkers there. One of them was Mark Lindquist, and these people used to do these shows all the time, including David Ellsworth.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: David always stood out from the rest of the woodworkers. I got accepted—what happened? Yes, I must have applied when I first moved up, I'm not sure, but I got accepted with my weird barbells to ACC, and I set up my booth; I thought it looked great. Somewhere I must have pictures of this. And there were a lot of woodworkers who really didn't seem to want to talk to me. But there were some who did, like Hap Sakwa. Hap and I—I've always loved Hap—ever since then, because he was so open and accepted me and thought what I was doing was kind of wild and strange and wonderful. And the Grew-Sheridans [John and Carolyn Grew-Sheridan] were so nice. I think I had talked to them before and told them that I was moving up and I needed studio space.

I came to visit them—they invited me to see where they were and that they were looking for some new space. It turned out the three of us rented new space together, which was good because they had been in the Bay Area for so long that that got me connected and got me into the show at the Oakland Museum [of California] . Otherwise I don't think I would have gotten into that show.

MR. ADAMSON: This was the show that was done in '81?

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, the "California Woodworking" show, because the guy—these things make a difference. Because I was in their shop, they had been teaching for years, so they were well known—

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: —the curator visited studios looking for work, and I had just moved in with them. He saw my work and he invited me in. But I think if I had just moved up and had been on my own, that would have even been harder. There is something about networking, which is not my best—well, I guess I'm better at it, but sometimes it's hard for me.

That was a huge help. I met Garry [Knox] Bennett through them. They used to teach a class on chair making and had this strange contraption they did that you fit people to their chair. And Garry wanted some information on chair making and was going to come over. I think it might have been one of my birthdays, something, and he came over, and Garry wouldn't come get free advice without bringing a gift, and the gift was lots of red wine. [They laugh.]

Seeing the ACC, show I would always talk to other woodworkers, you know, this little connection. Hap was great; the Lindquists were there and—

MR. ADAMSON: Both Mel and Mark?

MS. SAYLAN: Mel was nice; Mark was very, very aloof. It was like he couldn't be bothered with the rest of us. And who else was there?

MR. ADAMSON: What about Ellsworth? Did you strike up a relationship with—

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, Ellsworth, over the years, he has funny things at the shows, because he was definitely at that time—Ed used to tease and say, are there any woodworkers who don't wear plaid shirts or —or have beards—and Ellsworth did not, absolutely did not. He always had a leather jacket on and a gorgeous portfolio, and he always presented his work in a way, in those days, that nobody else did.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: You know, he was always a cut above.

MR. ADAMSON: Was there any woodworker besides Lindquist and Ellsworth that you would say took themselves seriously in that way?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Who was that guy did that the swirly kind of things?

MR. ADAMSON: William Hunter?

MS. SAYLAN: No, not — yes, Bill Hunter was there, but Bill—Albert's had him in a couple of shows. What is his name? He made cabinets in one show—people did weird things in those days. He built a booth that you had to climb around the spiral and look down in to see his work. I mean, it was wild.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Yes. A couple of people used to build the most amazing—Bennett Bean—his booths were—and Lindquist always had some fascinating booths in those days. Mine was just a pedestal, and I did—my booth was always so minimal. I'm a minimalist. One year—it was always white, and I had natural columns; everything was natural, very Japanese, one flower in a vase, you know. Oh, it's pure.

MR. ADAMSON: And by this time you were making things besides barbells. Obviously. you were making functional—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SAYLAN: When I moved in with the Grew-Sheridans and I did this ACC show, that all sort of happened around the same time. It was clear I would never sell those barbells. [They laugh.] I still have all the pieces, the lamps and stuff.

And the Grew-Sheridans helped me a lot. One thing was they introduced me to this guy from UC. I got a design class going, because I really did feel—I felt very strongly that, man, some of these people have lots of skills, but are their designs awful. UC ran a really good extension program and so I taught a furniture design class for them for a long time. They introduced me to this person.

And what was the other thing? Well, the show at the Oakland Museum—oh, and then John just muttered something—it's the way he does it; sometimes it's not always nice, but he mutters, well, you know how to turn. [They laugh.] Turn bowls. They'll sell. Turn some bowls and sell bowls. I thought, well, that's true. [They laugh.]

Because the other thing was—oh, my gosh, those were hard times, because Ed's business—he sold his business and it just—we lost our income. We were really on minimal, minimal income, and I had this new studio, which I never had in my life before; how was I going to pay for it? I was always having a scheme: There must be some way I can make money. You know, how can I make money at this?

The Grew-Sheridans taught two or three classes a week, and that brought in quite a good income. The problem with teaching in your studio is you've got to clean it all up after the classes, because the classes were held in our place, not at school, because the school, UC, didn't have anything. It was a big help for me, and through that I met more people.

My first semester of teaching, talk about intimidation—the guy who taught a furniture class from the regular Berkeley campus came. That really was intimidating because I didn't know what the hell I was doing, really. I was nervous. You're teaching things you are learning as you're teaching them.

I have these amazing slides out of books and collections of the history of furniture. I must have hundreds of slides from Egyptian times to whenever it was in the '70s, '80s, art furniture, everything. I don't know what to do with this, probably dump them, I guess, but I don't know.

And then I did a lot of things. I knew there were things I didn't know, so I would bring in visiting lecturers and through—just through the Grew-Sheridans and other shops—in fact, that's how I met this woman, Gail Redman. I think it was also, yeah, John, who said, you know, there is this woman in the neighborhood—their neighborhood in San Francisco—who is a production turner; why don't you guys put together—I'll introduce you to her and line up—put together a training workshop and get it through UC?

I call her, and it turns out Gail grew up with my sister and my cousin and went to the same high school they did. She was 10 years younger than I am. I think one of my cousin's friends remembers me only as that pregnant older sister. [They laugh.] And we hit it off right away, and I've been friends with her ever since.

And we taught this workshop, and I was—as Gail used to tell those people—the artsy-fartsy person, and she was the time-is-money turner. It was a funny class because Fine Woodworking was so big. We'd get these guys who would say to Gail, now, what about the angle on your bevel and the micro-bevel, and she'd say, who has time for that? Who has time? You just sharpen your tools and you go.

MR. ADAMSON: What was her background?

MS. SAYLAN: Gail was a schoolteacher at one point—she loved to travel and hated teaching and wanted

something. I don't know she got into turning, but she went and studied in New Zealand for two years and became—it was an English turner who she always referred to as her master, The Master.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. SAYLAN: That kind of turning, and Gail was phenomenal. She did these San Francisco restorations, all of Oakland, all Victorian turning.

MR. ADAMSON: So she was doing architectural turning?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, my God, so good, and for artists. She turned for Garry sometimes. I once had her turn something for me. The artist at the time was named Alan Adams [sp]. He was in San Francisco, and he did all these trompe l'oeil things out of wood, the whole wood shop. Fabulous, and moved to New York, who knows what happened to him. But Gail did all his turning. People would hire her out; she could do anything. Just bring her a picture and she could do it, and—but I'll tell you about something that happened with her and the turners that was interesting later.

When I moved to San Francisco, John really introduced—one was the suggestion that I turn bowls. They were doing the ACC shows at the time. And also, he's the one who introduced me to—he handed me a brochure, which was the Provo [UT], the Dale Nish conferences. And I'm trying to think; I'm sure I met Albert before that, but maybe that was where I first met him. I'm not sure of all that timing.

That was such a strange period in my life, because of the double move and Ed's business failure and just trying to survive. We rented a house. We sold my house and we lived on that money, and we rented a place in San Francisco. I hadn't been a renter in a long time, and because Ed had his Porsche and we had this old dog left by my kids—try to rent in San Francisco and want a garage and the dog.

Finally we solved the garage problem, but we lied about the dog. [They laugh.] It was just a tough time. It was sort of hazy and—with kids, Ed's son was creating a lot of problems in our lives, and it was like this dual life, this misery on one end and then the woodturning, which was great, because they helped me so much, the Grew-Sheridans.

I think the other thing I did at that time was I must have looked up other furniture makers. I looked up—did something and called Gail Fredell out of the blue.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MS. SAYLAN: And said that I had just moved up and was looking for some other women to talk to, and could I come over? She invited me over one day, and we just ended up talking the whole day and remained friends all those years, and then became even tighter friends later, because we lived next door to each other for seven or eight years.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you talk to me a little bit about the earliest turnings that you were making to sort of form a new professional identity in a way—you were going from being this kind of wild artist to someone who made bowls, but then what did you think about your bowls?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, because I had gone to that turning thing at Provo; I did go.

MR. ADAMSON: You did.

MS. SAYLAN: I took my money and I went. And Albert was there, and who else was there? Well, Dale Nish and Giles Gilson, and Stephen Hogbin, maybe.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember Del Stubbs being there?

MS. SAYLAN: Maybe Del, yeah, because I saw Del a lot in the Bay Area after that. I brought—you know, they have a show and tell. I must have turned a bowl by then because I brought a bowl that had—was made out of segments like I did my big sculptures, like the barbells, because I liked that grain pattern.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: But the glue joint was really a bad one because it's end-grain gluing.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. SAYLAN: It sometimes fell apart. And I developed this bowl that had openings—had a hole on top and a hole on the bottom, and was held together with plastic butterflies to hold the two joints open. I brought that and my

jelly doughnut to this Dale Nish thing. And while I was there, I met this other woman—maybe Richard Raffan was there. I don't know—no, he wasn't there. There was this other woman who I met who turned bowls at that conference, and it turned out she was from Santa Cruz. We met at this conference, and for a long time people thought we were like sisters or something, because we both had curly hair.

MR. ADAMSON: What's her name? Do you remember?

MS. SAYLAN: Felicia somebody or other. I have a bowl of hers, and she became a little groupie and even tracked Richard Raffan down in Australia, and then she disappeared. I don't know what happened to her.

At the conference, this little shyness part of me kicks in, and so I heard people talking about this work, like, whose work is this—[laughs]— of course, it was mine.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: Who would bring a jelly doughnut? Albert was really intrigued, and he thought it was kind of cool. He told me then about this competition for "A Gallery of Turned Objects" [exhibition held at the 10th Woodturning Symposium, Philadelphia , PA, September 11-13, 1981], and why don't I enter that, because otherwise—I mean, I didn't even know—maybe it was in Fine Woodworking, I'm not sure,. I don't know how you knew about these things. Because the Grew-Sheridans ran this little school, they got notices for everything.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: I did do that. That's when I first encountered the Snydermans, because they held the exhibition, and that's where I started a relationship with them.

MR. ADAMSON: And so the jelly doughnut went to that show?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, the jelly doughnut and the barbells went to that show. And that was also—that's a famous—apparently a famous photograph from Albert's conference in Fine Woodworking—I think it's in this book—where I was cornered—what's his name who was on Albert's board, who moved to the South, the couple who loved Giles [George Peter Lamb and Lucy Scardino]? They had Giles's piece in this show. It was from their collection.

MR. ADAMSON: I don't remember.

MS. SAYLAN: I forget their name, but he told me that he always remembers that I was cornered as to why anybody in the whole world would turn a jelly doughnut.

MR. ADAMSON: You're not talking about the Breslers [Fleur and Charlie Bresler]?

MS. SAYLAN: No.

MR. ADAMSON: No.

MS. SAYLAN: We'll get back to it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. SAYLAN: So that was—it was interesting because, for me, there was this turning world, and I came out of art school, and also, at that first conference in Provo I realized—I mean, I saw Alan Stirt demonstrating, all about tools and angles. I had no clue what they were talking about. None. And that's where it became where people would tell me I just wasn't a turner, because I scraped everything, but I had Jerry Glaser's tools. He sold it to us.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: How could that be bad? And I could do—I have some bowls that I found recently that are paper thin from that era, all done scraping. I can't turn this thin now; I'd be scared to turn this thin now, but yet I did it all scraping. And I remember getting curls off it. Plus the other thing that was different in my turning, even then and still now, is that I turn dry—

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, okay.

MS. SAYLAN: —dry wood. And now I'm starting to feel maybe that's why I have this elbow, tennis elbow. It's much harder work—

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: —than turning wet wood.

MR. ADAMSON: Why did you always turn dry wood?

MS. SAYLAN: I didn't know there was anything else.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And then when I learned about something else, I thought, there's no way I'm going out and chopping wood and taking chainsaws. [Laughs.] None. I'm going to a lumberyard for dry lumber.

When I first met Del Stubbs — that was so funny. That became this thing. First of all, Del wanted to teach me how to turn, because I don't turn.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: He sent me some things to read about—I forget what it's called - and I didn't understand a word of it, about angles and all this stuff. He tried to explain it to me, and he even came—when I bought my one old—my first old lathe, it had a whole chest of old tools, and some of them were handmade. I still have some of them, and there were a couple of gouges—homemade gouges. Del said, you have everything here.

And I remember he could not—he could not get over my strange pieces, with polyester resin in it. He would go, I've just never seen anything like this, never, ever seen anything like this. He was amused, but he wanted to also teach me how to turn, and it was hopeless—I really couldn't understand what he was talking—I think there's something, when all the guys start talking technical, that my brain turns off. I mean, I can feel it go—[makes sound].

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: I don't know what that is. I have to have people show me sometimes because there are a couple of things I need to learn, but I feel like it's like a learning disability. There is something missing up there. Like I never—somehow I was able to get all through school without ever taking sciences because I was a music major, and I feel like I missed out, but I guess not enough that I care to learn it. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: I never worried that much; it's just once in a while I realized, oh, maybe there is some basic education that might have been helpful to understand, but I never wanted to take them. I got out of sewing by playing the viola, and I somehow always come up with something else to get me out of these classes that I didn't want to take. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Did you feel like at some point you were a turner, as it were?

MS. SAYLAN: I don't know if I've ever felt that way. Maybe now I do. Now I do. But I think maybe England gave me that, but I think for years I always said I was a woodworker. I was not a turner. It was just too limiting.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. And yet you were making almost exclusively turned work at this point, in the early '80s, right?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Basically, for expedience.

MS. SAYLAN: I made trays, though; I did a lot of—that's when I did the sushi trays. For me, I can do a production run, or a limited production run of, you know, 20 maybe, and by—setting up on a table saw makes more sense to me, because once I have a piece of wood and I cut it, I could just keep running them through and—so I did a lot of trays and small boxes. To me, that's easier than doing lots and lots and lots of bowls. I'm not sure why that is.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So, I would say, looking back at your work from this period, that there's also the emergence of this kind of aesthetic that maybe is anticipated in the rice bowls to some extent, this very kind of reductive, quiet, Japanese-inflected perhaps kind of formal aesthetic.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I think, yes—well, one, certainly growing up when the '50s came about, modernism, my mom had — I remember heavy drapes in my aunt's house. It was so nice to have clean space. I think I related to it even then.

MR. ADAMSON: I guess what I'm wondering, though, is when you were making something that was fundamentally production work, like trays or bowls—

MS. SAYLAN: They were still very modernistic.

MR. ADAMSON: And you thought of them that way at the time?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. In fact, a couple of times—because I was doing the ACC shows with—I saw them as sushi trays, and that's something that's funny today, because we were eating sushi then in L.A. all the time —[inaudible]—a couple of favorite Japanese restaurants all the time, but when I used to do shows back east - I did a show in Massachusetts and people would say, sushi? You Californians; we don't eat sushi here. And then I'd go, well, how about chips and dips? It's a bowl with a tray. [They laugh.] Because I was always thinking functional.

I never thought of—somehow there was always this element of function, and then, of course, I'm dyeing black bowls, and people would say to me, could you really use them as a rice bowl? And I thought, hmm, I wonder. I called the manufacturer, because you can get technical info from them, and they told me that they felt once the finish I put on is dry and sealed, that people could use them. I didn't want to be responsible for killing anybody.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: That was always a thing. That's what used to worry me about - my friends would say, how about—yeah, make a chair and somebody—it collapses? And I thought, ooh.

MR. ADAMSON: I'm interested to hear that you did go through a period of turning thin.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, because there was this push for thin, not like—oh, that was another one I never understood. Del and his friends used to talk about—I'd see them demonstrate, thousandths of an inch, and I'm thinking, how do you know that? I mean, how do they know that they've turned that thin? Really.

And then, what was it? I did a show once in Massachusetts, and Richard Raffan came through, and he and I always had this little something, because he was one of the persons - one time, sitting and just having, like, coffee with some friends at this conference at Albert's, and Richard said, talking over people, what made you think of making a jelly doughnut? Why would you think of something like that?

MR. ADAMSON: So that really—that piece really became like a signature of your sort of weirdness.

MS. SAYLAN: I think so, and I knew Rick. He was really embarrassed because he's much more polite; I guess I used humor to sort of slough this off, and I said to him, well—because I knew he flew over the ocean or took a boat, and I said, you could have used it as a lifesaver if you fell in the ocean. [Laughs.] I don't know. I mean, why does anybody make it?

But that part with me and the turners has always been uncomfortable, and when I really got to know Gail Fredell and Wendy, the furniture people were never like that, never, and Gail would say—because I remember bringing her an article to read, some serious article about woodturning—she'd say, oh, don't hang out with any of them; hang out with us. And I always felt more comfortable with them; like, why was that different?

I think the difference, over the years I've decided, is that academia, and the woodturners, there's a lot of people with chips on their shoulders. It's a resentment. Haley [Smith] and I one time talked that it's almost a mark against you if you've had an art degree in the woodturning field, but that's how we felt; like, oh, you've had an art degree.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think that's changing now?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, now it's kind of funny. I think everybody wants to be an artist.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: There's this big movement; we're all artists.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, before we jump ahead—we have to end this track in a couple of minutes, but I just want to ask you one other quick question—

MS. SAYLAN: How is our time? We're still good.

MR. ADAMSON: —which is, at the same time that you were feeling pressure to turn thin, did you also feel pressure to turn in more interesting woods, like figured woods and that sort of thing? Or were you always turning just bland, relatively grainless—

MS. SAYLAN: I never could bring myself to spend the money for exotic woods, and I think I tried a piece once and I hated it, different turning, but I don't know whether it was the money. In San Francisco—because I had lost a

whole bunch of time there when Ed got sick - I had started dyeing stuff black, and I'm not completely—at the time it was like, whoa, way out there to do that.

MR. ADAMSON: How early would you say you did that?

MS. SAYLAN: Early '80s.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: Early '80s, because I think Ed—yeah, my whole life I gauge by dates of illnesses—isn't that ridiculous? Because they are life changers. Because I know after I sort of got back working again—and I think I was gone probably almost two years between Ed being sick, and then we moved and my back got really bad.

All of a sudden there was color, and before that, I mean, even among furniture people, there wasn't much. Maybe—I don't know if Wendy started it or what. I'm not sure. But before, really, you never saw anybody use anything.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And I know I took some of those dyed pieces when I was doing craft shows, so—and some of that came about—I've always had more friends in other media than the woodturners.

This one friend I met at the craft shows, Aspy Khambatta - Aspy used to do the old Rhinebeck shows [American Craft Council shows, Rhinebeck, NY], and he was doing really innovative work long before a lot of people, but I think his shyness or his Indian gentleman-ness just to compete, and that other world wasn't part of him.

MR. ADAMSON: Let's pick up with him in one second.

[END OF DISC 5.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So color, Merryll. Color in the work.

MS. SAYLAN: Black was the first color; I mean, that was a color. And I almost can't remember why I did it, but part of it was the whole wood issue for me, that—I must have seen—because I own this black iron bowl, a Japanese bowl, and I don't know when I bought it, but there was a big show in San Francisco, and I guess just that simplicity. I know when I was at UCLA, I took a ceramics class and it was all hand building, and I did a couple of these really awful built-up bowls. I have some—a couple pieces I still have from that class that I really loved. They were so simple. We did raku firing.

For Ed's friend Mas, I did a couple of these bowls that I gave him that were black, because we just burnt them in this raku. And it was this joke about Zen, the tea bowls, the perfect little bowl. Because Mas was educating me Japanese-wise, and I have his book of tea. And when we left L.A., he gave us two gorgeous books on Katsura and another place in Japan—with a little note, which I still have.

I just found it interesting doing all this cleanup—but Ed was very good friends with the Serisawas, who was a well-known L.A. Japanese artist. One of them was a printmaker—one brother—and the other one had a place up in Idyllwild [CA], and sold Japanese ceramics. I still have a tea set that I bought from them. I think the black just must have been part of that.

MR. ADAMSON: Can I just interrupt you?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: It's very interesting to hear you say this, because Mark Lindquist and David Ellsworth have both told me that they really thought about ceramics as a kind of touchstone for their work in that same period in the '70s, and that's why they both called their works "pots," or at least Ellsworth did.

MS. SAYLAN: Did he?

MR. ADAMSON: Yes. And he was very much thinking about them as being like ceramics, and he felt that that was partly because ceramics had a much higher reputation than woodturning did. But it sounds like you didn't care about that so much; you were just attracted to the pot aesthetically.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. For me, more, it's form, just the form. And also I think with Mas, this whole ritual of serving meals—I really related to Steven Hogbin's early book on food and ritual, although I will deny, until recently, that I have anything spiritual about me at all. I'm the family atheist kind of thing.

Yet there's this whole family connection and entertaining friends. I still like to have people over for dinner, although I haven't done it that much the last few years. With Ed's friend Mas, just this whole ritual of entertaining, and these bowls are part of that. Maybe it's gifts to people, how you present something, how it looks, and that was always more important.

I still love sets of Japanese bowls. They're just so exquisite to me. And I don't know enough about Chinese ceramics, although I certainly took a course, long before I even thought about doing any of this stuff, in Asian art. And the Chinese bronzes were the things that totally appealed to me. I mean, they were just so fascinating. At the time, I knew; I just loved these things visually.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it also the color of them, the bronzes, that kind of —

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, mm-hmm. Yes, that patina that they have.

MR. ADAMSON: That's one thing—I've often though about the colors that you use. And here I guess we're jumping ahead a little bit, but you often create patinas for your work—

MS. SAYLAN: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: —rather than just making them a color. There's also a surface texture and a kind of richness to the surface.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, it's interesting, last year I taught at Anderson Ranch [Anderson Ranch Art Center, Snowmass Village, CO], and the guy who runs the ceramics program—I guess he had not seen my slides before—and he came over afterwards, and he said, I have one thing to say to you: ceramics. [They laugh.] You're in the wrong field.

And then he introduced me, which I need to do something about this summer, is to—what's the guy who started the ranch, the potter? His girlfriend—

MR. ADAMSON: Shaner? David Shaner? Didn't he start the ranch?

MS. SAYLAN: No, they—a ceramic artist, he and Voulkos.

MR. ADAMSON: Rudy Autio?

MS. SAYLAN: No, geez. The one who does sculpture [Paul Soldner].

MR. ADAMSON: [Inaudible.]

MS. SAYLAN: Well, it will come to me. He's so famous, and he lives in Claremont [CA] part of the time and at the ranch. Doug wanted me to meet the woman who dates him—because she teaches ceramics back east—to show what I did—my forms, the colors, everything about it.

And sometimes I think about that in terms of my color, that, why did I go to wood and not ceramics? I took one ceramics class at UCLA, the one with form building, but I think I had something wrong with my hand, and I wore a glove half the class. I know what happened to my hand. My son accidentally cut my finger trying to learn how to use a chef's knife. [They laugh.] It was horrible. I had to go get stitches.

I started using black, and I used black aniline dye. At first I was lacquering over them and found that would dissolve the dyes, because I was using—one that you used alcohol with. And did I know more of the furniture people at the time? I don't think so. Then there was that lag of time where I lost all the work—lost the time - which was hard. It was. I got back to work—actually, I got back to work thanks to Gail Fredell.

MR. ADAMSON: And the lag was because your back went out?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, Ed got sick and was in and out of the hospital for six months, and then we moved, and he maybe got sick again, and we were building a house—

MR. ADAMSON: This was from—[inaudible]—to Berkeley.

MS. SAYLAN: This was to Berkeley from San Francisco. While we were in San Francisco, we looked at houses and we just couldn't afford anything; it was out of sight. And the way I ended up with the house in Berkeley is I started looking for places to rent.

When I first moved up north, I went to a couple of co-op shops; that was kind of funny. I went to a place called Heartwood [Window & Door Inc.], which was in Berkeley, and I think it still exits, and talked to them about

renting space. It was clear we wouldn't work well together. I'm doing art and they're doing cabinets. So then that's when I found the Grew-Sheridans. And then I found, when I was looking for Berkeley space, that will—I cannot find anything in the city, and probably just through talking to people—people that I knew—Gail Redman rented in the city, but I don't think she had room.

And the Grew-Sheridans and I, by this time, hated each other—

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, no.

MS. SAYLAN: Oh yes, we did. We didn't talk for four years. It was like two against one, was what happened. And John's a funny guy—I hope he never listens to this—but we just ran into problems. Their students twice broke my tool rest. I would come in Monday morning and it would be cracked in half and I couldn't work, or they needed masking tape and I had some on my bench and it would all—I mean, it's silly stuff, silly stuff, but we just grew to resent each other for some reason.

And I started thinking that, well, maybe after sharing a house with kids and growing up with never having my own room, it's time for my own shop. I think that was one reason. I think the other reason really was Ed, was I felt that I needed to be home, working at home, somehow closer access if he's sick and if—I'm not gone for all hours.

Actually, I sort of remember this in school, and maybe even then—there was this strange conflict between my work and my responsibilities as a wife and mother. And I remember once talking to Martha; she never had this conflict. And so it had to be age related or that I had a family: who was I responsible for? So somehow I thought if I had a studio at home, at least I'd be home and I wouldn't be gone, and if I wanted to work at night, I could work at night. I read about a space in Berkeley, and it was Marvin Lipofsky who was renting the space.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you know him previously?

MS. SAYLAN: No, not at all. I went over and met him and I was really going to sign the lease. As I drove home around the corner, there was this place for sale right around the corner. It was a dump, a true dump.

But there was something that happened in between that; that's right: Ed and I were going to build a house and had a house drawn up, and a gorgeous studio planned, in a place called Point Richmond [CA]. We went out of our way to get all the neighbors to approve, and had this monstrous surprise when we went for a neighborhood meeting that they were all against us. And that's such a complicated story. I always thought that might have contributed—that's when Ed got sick - that might have contributed. It was such a jolt.

So we decided—our attorney said—because we had a planning permit—and one of the city planners took a class from me, and he apologized. He was in my shop, took classes there, apologized. He was shocked, too, that the neighbors got so weird. We weren't from the area. We were from—maybe that was before San Francisco. I don't know; it just didn't work.

So Berkeley, we thought it would be fun to have George build a house. I loved his architecture. He lived in Japan and has this gorgeous aesthetic. And so I saw this lot, this dump. It even had a shed in the back, which was even dumpier. And it was only $58,000. Marvin was like, you're not signing the lease? And we bought it.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you have the money to buy the lot and build the house?

MS. SAYLAN: I guess we must have had some money left from selling—oh, selling the Santa Cruz house. I don't know quite what we lived on. [Laughs.] I don't know; it's a miracle sometimes, because Ed got a job, but he only worked for maybe a year, two years, and we had a tiny bit of rent.

Recently, cleaning up the papers because of this Smithsonian thing, I found old papers. Man, I didn't know I had this stuff for so long. I've shredded a lot of that stuff. I don't want anybody to see some of that stuff. But I couldn't believe how little we lived on. I don't know how we managed. I guess between my teaching and selling a few things—my goal was, even if I didn't make a profit, at least cover my expenses. I didn't want that to come out of our expenses.

And plus, that's always an issue for me ego-wise, because in the early days, if I was with John, I would be with woodworkers. And even Gail Redman said this to me: oh, you have a husband. And then I found out years later that a lot of these guys had wives supporting them, but that was never—it was, oh, you have a husband; you have income therefore. And then John said I would just melt. You know, I never stood up to it, because I had my own guilt: oh, I'm not making a profit, you know? And I come from a background of small business. You don't make a profit; you're out of business.

MR. ADAMSON: Was your goal when you were making work at that point to break even, or to make money?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, my main goal was to break even. But I would have liked to have made money, too. And I was always sort of like, are they really selling their pieces for that much? I still wonder that. Are they really? Is that the truth? And sometimes we used to think that I was outselling my friends. Do we really ever know the truth? Who really tells the truth? Nobody. Are they really getting those prices for those pieces? How many pieces are they selling? Nobody will ever know, because part of it is the myth and the marketing.

MR. ADAMSON: So after you—I think we can come back to those kind of commercial questions once we get into the later period, but after you started making black work, you, at some point, started using other paint colors, I assume.

MS. SAYLAN: I did. I think maybe Garry did something. I saw something of Garry's, because I remember trying—he used watercolors. I think I called him up and asked him—I think one time for fun I took these old chairs and redid them for my booth, so it would have these really fun, painted chairs. And I called them—what was that?—"resurrected furniture."

MR. ADAMSON: That doesn't sound very modernist.

MS. SAYLAN: No, I know, but they were kind of modern chairs. [Laughs.] The old wire metal chairs and wood seats and stuff. So I think I called Garry to ask him about—because I think he was using some watercolors. And as I say, the furniture makers were the people I turned to for advice. And so I tried it, but he must have had some skills I did not have, or he sprayed it. I got lap marks where one layer went, if you did a line. I could never conquer it.

Another friend, who is a clothing maker—I knew her from the craft shows—we must have just been talking about this problem, and she said to me, well, why don't you use dyes? I'll give you some dye to use. She says, there's this fiber-reactive dye and it's made for cellulose fibers in clothing. And she says, why don't you just send me some pieces, and I'll do it. But I never had enough work to send away pieces like that. So she gave me some and I tried it, and it stays wet longer or something, but I never had that problem again.

And then - this is a woman named Judy Bird - she was concerned that I wasn't using them properly, because for clothing you have to set them or heat them or leave it on for 24 hours. She wanted me to wrap my bowls in plastic wrap for 24 hours and let the color really set.

There were a couple of places around in Berkeley that sold fabric dyes. I went to try and find out some technical information on it. And it's funny how their technical suggestions have changed. In those days, they told me—sometimes you use salt or soda in fiber-reactive dyes. They thought I should be using soda ash. Now they say I shouldn't be using anything.

Basketmakers use it all the time, because the colors in the wood dyes are pretty awful, like bright blue, bright red, and the fabric dyes were just so beautiful. I could get really pale colors. Because of the attitude to wood I never wanted to paint it in those days. I wanted something transparent, so you could always see the grain through. That was important, that you could see the grain through it.

The first time, I had to glue up a piece. That was horrible because—I mean, in terms of a platter. Gluing up for my other stuff was a different design and that didn't matter, but for a plate was wrong. But it's funny—as I say that to you - because when I did my rice bowls, they were all glued up. So it had to have been after I met the turners that this was a bad thing to do. It had to be a solid piece of wood, and the grain had to show because, woo, couldn't cover up the grain. So I only used transparent dyes.

And then with the fabric dyes, knowing somebody like Judy, with these colors, and always pushing me to really do brighter colors—I was able, which now I seem unable to do, I could dye the inside of a bowl. I did some really beautiful little Japanese bowls where the outside is all maple natural, you open it up and it's this beautiful pink. But now somehow it bleeds. I don't know whether I'm mixing them differently. I did do sample boards, because when I was doing the craft shows, I'd have work to sell and somebody wanted—they'd want that color. I would have a whole little spiel that that's impossible because every piece of wood is different and absorbs the dyes differently. It's not laminate, where I can guarantee you're going to have a color. It just won't work.

But one of the things that happened on some of the woods, depending on what kind of material I was using, the California maples are much softer, and so I was getting these really horrible, muddy colors. And that's when I learned about bleaching, because I went to the place where I bought dye and I asked if they had white. What do I know about color? If you add white, it will brighten it up. And they looked at me like I'm some kind of a nut, because they start with white fabric—a painter starts with white cloth. I'm starting with something that already has color and I'm trying to make a bright, brilliant color. And that was enough to make me realize that bleach—if I made a white piece, then I could get more brilliant colors. And then the bleaching itself sometimes was so beautiful.

By that time, I had gotten into this wood, western figured maple, because I was always scrounging for wood. Must be my either lack of money or what, I don't know. But driving around when we were still in Santa Cruz looking for property, we had come up this hill, and there were trees piled up in the yard, somebody's yard, like you just wouldn't believe. Of course we stopped—whole walnut trees. And this guy came out like—he seemed like somebody who would have a rifle, and he was really very conservative, but he changed. It turned out he was a gunstock maker, and he had more wood than I've ever seen, even at a lumberyard. He had a 40-foot building, maybe bigger, piled with wood, all cut to two and a half inches, for gunstocks. [They laugh.] And some of them—I still have some—shaped thick at one end and narrow at the other.

And so I started buying wood from him. And he had this gorgeous—because gunstocks are supposed to be really fancy—gorgeous walnut and gorgeous maple with all the quilting. And I did love that. That was beautiful.

And then those took dyes like - the maple bleached is like a pearl, really beautiful. He'd just fill up my car or truck, and I'd buy wood from him. He was amazing; he had wood from all over the world and had stuff especially made for him. We became friends just over wood.

MR. ADAMSON: What was his name?

MS. SAYLAN: George Peterson.

MR. ADAMSON: That's interesting, because it sounds like you're describing a sort of change, where you inexorably became more like a turner in some ways; in other words, more interested in the special material, more interested in the color, more interested in the formal effects.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, to a degree, yeah. I think for the little bowls — when I was doing the bowls — this is before I really started painting — the grain was important. It was beautiful. And the figured maple is just so beautiful. And it just made this quilting, this amazing effect. And so I use a lot of that for little — I did tons of little bowls out of that stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Can I ask you a couple of technical questions?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you actually mixing different dye colors to achieve new colors, or were you pretty much putting—

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, because the colors had some limit to them, so, yeah, I would. When the first darker colors started to get—I had that piece that was in ITOS [International Turned Objects Show] that was this almost, like, ocean color, a greeny ocean color, that I'd make out of three—a navy blue and a turquoise and some other. And then I used to have a sky blue dye, but it was kind of awful by itself, and I'd mix it with some other colors.

MR. ADAMSON: And would you keep the mixed colors so that you could reuse them on other pieces, or were they kind of one-off?

MS. SAYLAN: Until they spoiled, which they do spoil. They get a little mold on top of them. But I was—actually because I kept really copious notes. I do sample boards because—to figure out the color, mostly on maple. I did these pieces called—what did I call them, pastilles? Something. Only on light wood.

And actually that's funny because, Judy Bird, a couple of times—there was this fashion industry thing - because she did clothing, I met these people at her house one time who picked the colors for the future. There's this color group that meet, and she invited us. I think I stayed with her during a craft show in Baltimore, and I met all these color people. And Judy would have the most amazing names for her colors. So sometimes I'd call her up and I'd say, reel off a bunch of these new names for me. I did a piece called Shrimp Bisque—[they laugh]—and I'd get this all from Judy. It was really funny. So what are the newest color terms this year?

MR. ADAMSON: So another technical question: how would you actually apply the bleach and the dye to the surface?

MS. SAYLAN: Just brush them on. Just paint them on and let them dry.

MR. ADAMSON: With, like, a paintbrush?

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah. And then I guess I found the sponge brushes at some point. The bleach is a little more problematical because it—if I had a piece, let's say, that had a really deep curve, it pools. It's very wet. All that stuff is very wet.

And the bleach, I had a lot of problems. I had to learn to deal with it, because there's different bleaches. And it's

through all these connections—friends of mine who were furniture makers did bleaching of some pieces. And I was struggling with some problems. They gave me this thing that they got from one of the forest products research on bleaching, and how it's done commercially, and even how to mix up your own, buy the chemicals.

There was a chemical place in Berkeley. Gail and I did a chemical black for a while. We bought the chemicals that we shared from this place in Berkeley. But it was so toxic; it just seemed so strong, I went back to the dyes. But the chemical gave the most gorgeous black you ever want to see. It's really beautiful.

And so you have a connection with other artists all the time. You work back and forth, you discuss things. You're having a problem, and so you call somebody up and go, well, how do you do that? Like one of the things Garry used to do I've never conquered yet. He does those painted checkerboards, but he was using watercolors. And I would try, and it would bleed; how do you do that? And he told me he would score the surface with a knife, but I don't know, mine bled. How could he do it and mine wouldn't work?

That kind of thing—that's one of the things I love about the Bay Area. There are so many artists. I hear that—because I was thinking about moving back to L.A, since Ed died, but I hear they're not connected the way we are up north. There is such a large group of artists and this open exchange with each other. I know I can still—I haven't seen Garry in a long time, but I know if I need something, I could drop in on him and he'd be there to help me or give some advice.

In fact, I think - when I was teaching one time, I used to give students independent things, sometimes based on whether they were stuck on something. I had one student who came from the east, and the only thing he was going to do was hand-cut dovetails. So I gave him a free-form project.

A couple students got into the Frank Gehry material, and they really wanted to research that. Garry gave me something that ran through some forms, because a couple of them were doing bentwood forms that you bolted at either end and they kept all these separate parts together. He gave me this thing he had in his shop that would help my students. There was this constant back-and-forth and learning from each other. And for me, it was more with the furniture people. I think that was who I was the closest with.

MR. ADAMSON: Can I ask, did you think of yourself as being like a painter once you started making these platters that would be hung on the wall, and it was about color much more?

MS. SAYLAN: No, because the early pieces weren't planned to be hung. I don't think I thought through what they were, but that they were just pieces that I made.

A couple of the pieces resulted from—in '84 American Craft came to the West Coast, and they had this big conference, which was wonderful. I don't know why we've never kept that up. It was exciting and some people spoke—Steven De Staebler spoke. There must have been 400 people at this conference, and I don't know anyone that I talked to that felt like he wasn't talking to you directly. I bought the tape of his speech because it was just so profound for me, plus I love his work.

This gallery owner at the time, Elaine Potter—she used to have her gallery in San Francisco—Elaine decided that she wanted the California show— "the" California show. I was dyeing pieces, a lot of platters by that time. But the way she put the California show, like what is California? What is the image of California—cars and hot rods, that's sort of the image. Maybe someone in furniture had used this spray auto body paint that's trunk paint and has all these flecks; it's thick. I must have seen this on a furniture piece.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, Giles Gilson was using that stuff, too, quite early, wasn't he?

MS. SAYLAN: I don't know. Well, he was using the lacquers—those kind of lacquers. This is like what goes under the tire wells and trunk linings.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, so it's not a show color.

MS. SAYLAN: No, it's like grey with white specks, and I think one—for some reason there might have been a black one, which comes in an aerosol can. And through Gail—there was a store that sold this auto body stuff, auto paint, and I went in and I found these spray cans. It was—I didn't spray. Maybe through Wendy, I saw her do something where you took a toothbrush and flicked extra color, and so I found these other enamels, and I did these platters where I dyed the insides shrimp bisque—[they laugh]—and some kind of blue, and then did the rims and the whole bottom with this auto body paint, and sometimes would add lots of layers of slick colors to them. They're really kind of cool, but I did it as a joke.

I even found some other paint that is a hammer-texture paint that's for cars. It's really strange silvery paint. And it was almost too shiny, so I had to rub it out. And so I put them in Elaine Potter's show. This is California. [Laughs.] It's wild.

At the conference, I know the Snydermans and some other gallery that I was working with was there, and they said, love your new work, Merryll. [They laugh.] And I laughed. That's enough for me; I continued doing that new work for a while. I still have two pieces left from that series. There's always a couple of things that don't sell. And I used to joke that the 24 people in the United States that would even be interested in buying them have already bought them and the market is gone—[they laugh]— and I made 26.

MR. ADAMSON: As you were starting to sell to people, did you find that you started having collectors of your work who wanted to keep track of what you were doing?

MS. SAYLAN: Collectors? That was not a word I knew. And I never even knew they existed. And that's a whole long subject that I've only learned in the last few years about, the collectors. I met the Masons [Arthur and Jane Mason] once when I was doing a show in Baltimore, and they told me—I don't think they bought my jelly doughnut yet—that they loved my work but Arthur was not into color. But he did show me the Prestini bowl he bought at the same time, but he just wasn't ready for color yet.

And then at one show in San Francisco, I started hearing this rumor about collectors, and people were saying—there was a guy named Robert Sterba—fabulous turner and lacquer work, but his wife got seriously ill and Bob had to change directions. But he was in a lot of shows in the beginning, unbelievably beautiful forms. There were three of us in the row: Aspy, Bob, and me. And somehow the subject came up of these collectors, and somebody said, you have to give them discounts. And I'm like, huh? And then Bruce Mitchell came by at one point, and I said to him, Bruce, what's this deal with collectors? And how do you know who is a collector? And so he said he asks people who they have in their collection and he can start getting a feeling for it.

But what I learned later was there was this little network. So a collector like the Masons, or it was Irv Lipton who told me this: they would ask one of the guys whose work they liked who they should collect. And they would give them a list of names, and if you weren't in that little group, you didn't get collected.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So you were never inside those groups in the '80s or early '90s?

MS. SAYLAN: No, not at all. There was this little boys' club. Because one time I cornered Albert, I think, at an ACC San Francisco, and I said, I just heard a thing that all of you turners were at Rude Osolnik's, and you're all swimming and having a great time. Because when I first met Todd Hoyer, he was beginning, and all of a sudden he's in this group, too. Like, how does this happen? Who are these people? And Albert is really cute. He said, oh, Merryll, you wouldn't want to be there anyway. I said, why? He said, well, you know, we were swimming nude and drinking. You wouldn't want to be a part of that. And I said, Albert, I would do it. And he said, oh, I forgot, you're a Californian. [They laugh.]

But I never really knew it existed. And I don't think Aspy—I mean, I was friends—I don't think—somehow there was that network. And that was one of my complaints early on. It was Michelle and I were around, and we were in all the same shows as these guys.

MR. ADAMSON: Michelle Holzapfel?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Actually Michelle was really not doing that much when I started. It was more David, and she sometimes. And then she got into the shows more. She started working more. But when I first met her, she was —barely—one or two pieces. But neither one of us were ever asked to be at a conference or to teach or to be part of that, and maybe because of our techniques. We didn't have a technique to offer. I don't know.

Okay, we should go. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: But we will pick this up again on Monday.

[END OF DISC 6.]

Okay, it is now June 5 [2006], and we're back for a last session in the V&A, Merryll Saylan and myself, Glenn Adamson.

And, Merryll, we were going to start off today with the conference that you helped to organize in the early '80s.

MS. SAYLAN: Okay. After I had been to Provo and Dale Nish's, and then to "A Gallery of Turned Objects," I thought California could use a woodturning conference. And I was surprised that, as far as I knew, there weren't any. I approached CCAC through extension, UC Berkeley at the time. The man that I had worked with at the woodworking program had gone by that time. The woman there was very receptive to putting on a conference. And the guy who taught the wood program, I think it was before —it was before Gail and Wendy started—he was open to it. And his—Steve Johnson. He was part of the early Baulines Guild people. I keep thinking Skip, but Skip is the one in Wisconsin.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: So Steve Johnson.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: And so I organized it. And for me, it was a big thing, because I was working with Ellen Jouret. She used to be director of Pacific Basin [Pacific Basin Center of Textile Arts, now Pacific Textile Arts, Fort Bragg, CA], or one of the fiber schools, early on. Very involved in the art community. Ellen made me do fund-raising. It had to break even; we couldn't lose money. I had to put a whole program together and present it to her, calling people. That was a big learning curve for me. But she talked me through it all.

And I invited David Ellsworth. I had asked Bob Stocksdale, and he refused. Then I asked Jerry Glaser, and he said yes. And who else? Gail Redman, me, Del Stubbs. I think there were six people. I can't remember anyone else. At that conference, I met people like Todd Hoyer, who was just starting out and doing thin-walled hollow vessels. Jerry, the day before the conference, hurt his hand, and he got Bob to demonstrate for him, even though Bob had refused to do it. [Laughs.]

And what else happened at that conference? Bob wouldn't accept any money. That was also a learning curve for me, how different turners charge different amounts. Some of them were much fussier than others about what they got paid.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. SAYLAN: The other one was Gail Redman, just blew people away. And then for some reason, she did another conference and she got scared, and everyone thought she was bad. But this one, guys were gasping in their seats at how fast she could turn a spindle, two minutes or something, big architectural ones, 10 minutes.

But Bob was the prize, and he was the prize because it was very informal. I don't know how many people we had. We did break even, so that was good. Because it was a thing where people could just stand around and watch him. And I have fabulous black and whites because Ed took them; my husband took all these great photographs—

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, wow.

MS. SAYLAN: —and they'll be in my collection, because you can see some of the people, how young they were, including me. [They laugh.] Some people look so amazing.

And the sad thing was, I think when the school turned over—I think it could have been a really good conference. I don't think Albert came to that conference. I don't remember him there. But it had a high energy; people walked away really happy. But then, when the school changed and Wendy and Gail came in, they completely converted the shop. And Ellen went back to grad school. aAnd somehow you need only one person at a place to make something happen, so it didn't happen again. And then someone in Southern California, took it on or did other conferences down there, because I've heard about those.

MR. ADAMSON: But you only did the one?

MS. SAYLAN: I only did the one.

MR. ADAMSON: And why was Bob Stocksdale reluctant to demonstrate at first?

MS. SAYLAN: I think he said he was done demonstrating.

And actually—that's right, that's when I met Prestini. I went to interview Prestini, and I thought he was really, you know, brilliant. We sat and talked at his flat. But he refused—and that's when he had told me I could borrow his work from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And he would also send one of his post-docs to make a statement, and I met the post-doc and I'm thinking, I don't think so. So he refused. And that was where I first found out he and Bob live less than a mile from each other, but they were never on speaking terms. They're just so different. Prestini was this intellectual and less woodturning and less craft, and Bob, that's what he did.

MR. ADAMSON: Was Prestini quite disdainful about woodturning?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, very disdainful. It was, what can you do with it? It can only go around. If only he saw what was going on today.

And some of the forms he showed me were sort of interesting, except that I've seen some of them before—these kind of band-saw cuts, sculptures.

And then, I don't know whether I had heard bad things about him. I don't think before I went; it was after I went. And my husband always likes to show—for a long time he liked to show people how you shook hands with Prestini—[laughs]—because I think I wasn't driving. But it was like a limp rag. That was how he shook your hand. It was really odd. And so Ed would say, you want to shake hands like Prestini? [They laugh.] Terrible.

MR. ADAMSON: Could I interrupt—

MS. SAYLAN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Would you say that Bob Stocksdale was well known by the group of hobby turners out there?

MS. SAYLAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Bob was very well known, and everyone was thrilled to have him there.

I met a woman there who was just — she was sort of off-putting in the sense that Ruth always talked loud. This is a woman who, turns out, she was brilliant. She was a professional musician for her whole life, played with San Francisco Symphony, and was asked to leave—she worked under Pierre Monteux—because she got pregnant. That was the old days. She used to make piano keys for her first husband, and got into woodworking. And then at 65, her second husband—he was a musician also—said to her, because she always wanted to do woodworking, told her, Ruth, it's getting later than you think. She took up woodturning, and so she was at this conference.

There was another friend, Steve Johnson, who helped her a lot. And he was brilliant; he and Del Stubbs were best friends. Steve made these amazing miniature tools, but he just couldn't get his act together. When I show people his tools—now he could really make quite a lot of money. They were brilliant, and I was good friends with him also.

This woman Ruth and Bob became best friends, I mean, really best friends. They all went to the symphony together, and when Bob had these—what was it? —the pink ivory set of bowls, and one of them broke, and he needed a hand to have somebody hold it while he glued it. It was Ruth. I mean, they went back and forth all the time.

MR. ADAMSON: What was her last name?

MS. SAYLAN: Hardin. She showed work. When I did a woman's woodturning show, I sort of helped organize it at The Hand and the Spirit [Scottsdale, AZ]—yeah. I think gave Joanne Rapp some name. Ruth was in that show. She sold a lot of work. The collector Forrest Merrill, I'm sure, bought her work. But then arthritis set in from years of playing the cello, and she just couldn't do it anymore.

MR. ADAMSON: By the way, can you just say a few words about Forrest Merrill?

MS. SAYLAN: Forrest, I first got his name from this other turner, Gene Pozessi. I don't think Gene was at this conference. I don't remember him. I met him years later. Gene and I became very, very close. We were exactly the same age. And it was—somehow I was close to him. I was not close to his wife. Gene told me Forrest was very reclusive. Forrest owned something like 50 or 60 pieces of Gene's, but he's \never collected me at all, I think because I paint or color; it's not pure work.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: But we've become friends. At one point—how did I meet Forrest? Maybe Kay—either Kay or Bob introduced me, and I went over to see his collection. But since then—he loves to eat at Chez Panisse [Berkeley, CA]. I kind of like to eat at Chez Panisse, too. I've gone to dinner with him a few times. And I took him and Kay out to dinner recently for my 70th birthday and promised him that I would show him the "before" on my Berkeley house. A couple of times he teases me, when am I coming back? There is no place like Berkeley if you're a Berkeley-ite.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: But Forrest has come out of this little reclusive thing. It seems to me, he's much more sociable. He goes to all the openings at the craft museum. He's gone to some of the woodturning events. I think he even went to the Minneapolis—the Yale show ["Woodturning in North American Since 1930," Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT]. So I'm not sure what made that happen, but I do enjoy going with him, even though he doesn't collect me. Darn.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe someday.

MS. SAYLAN: Someday. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Before we leave Bob Stocksdale, will you tell the bog oak story?

MS. SAYLAN: This was Bob's 80th birthday. I made him this little piece, because it was his birthday, and I was also giving a talk. It was originally scheduled to be about English woodturners, and then they found out—this was the Craft and Folk Art Museum [San Francisco, CA]—that it was Bob's—they had a show of Bert Marsh, who was a British turner, and so they decided, is there some way I could give the talk about British turning and Bob Stocksdale for his birthday? And there was a party at his house afterwards.

But there were two things that happened. One, I mentioned something about this big birthday, this number. At the birthday party, I handed Bob this plate. It was just a small oak plate, and I had burnt it and carved part of it. Bob looks at it and he goes, bog oak? —which is a wood that comes from Ireland and it's down in the bottom of these bogs, and it's really quite beautiful.

And I said, no, Bob. But he didn't quite get it. He didn't hear me. So then later he comes up to me again, and he goes, bog oak? And I go, no, Bob, I made this piece. I burnt it. And he looks at it and looks at me and goes, you mean it's a fake? And he hands it to Kay.

And recently when I was over there, I thought, I wonder if it's still on Kay's side where she had her little collection. Bob had his collection, and it was still there on Kay's side. [They laugh.] And now at Jilly's house, my friend Jilly [Jilly Edwards]'s house, I see she has one also. [Laughs.] The bog oak pieces.

MR. ADAMSON: The reason I asked you to tell that story was that I thought it would be interesting to talk a little bit about the resistance to paint in the woodturning community and how you see that having gone in the past 20 years, now that it's so common to paint your work, really.

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, I know. Well, I know that painting and—I mean, nobody painted their work, and that even I was sort of hung up that it had to be transparent. And I think there's still resistance to it. There's this kind of—I don't how to describe it today. I mean, nobody painted in the beginning, and I think it was—because I wasn't actually even painting. I was just tinting or dyeing in the beginning, because you had to have wood grain. The wood grain had to be apparent.

And then it seems like there's this mix, where it's almost like if you're going to paint, it's sometimes over the top, in my mind. I was a little bit shocked when I saw some of the worshipful turners here in England last week, that there are people who are painting a lot, and it's almost wild when they use it. Subtlety isn't part of it, in some ways. I'm not sure what that is, whether it's not knowing how to use paint or not being comfortable with it.

Even some collectors who told me they never liked painted pieces sometimes will buy pieces. And I'm not quite sure what intrigues them, but I do know some of the work, like Michael's, which is fun and playful, or Mark Sfirri's work, which also has a playful, childlike kind of approach to it, seems accepted. And that there are more people doing rims and things, which when I started, even that wasn't—you just didn't do it, because wood is so beautiful.

And I was thinking, one time I did this craft show, and Art Carpenter came up—I had painted something, and maybe it was with that auto body paint that we talked about - and Art comes into my booth. We know each other from, who knows, all these different events. And he clicked some paint part, and he said, wow, that is really tricky; you can really cover up mistakes. [They laugh.] He wasn't painting, but then later, that "California Woodworking" show, he certainly used paint.

And so I think it's just like you see something, and then it happens. I think style is something—actually, like Bert Marsh. I was looking at his work the other day. He really denied that Bob ever influenced his work. And that might be true, because sometimes you're not aware of what you see, but yet some of his work, the forms are so similar to what Bob's been doing that I'd be hard put to say he didn't have some influence, especially because he comes out of furniture. So, who knows? I think it's like fashion, you know? Did you ever read The Tipping Point [Malcom Gladwell. Boston: Little Brown, 2000]?

MR. ADAMSON: No, I haven't read it, but—

MS. SAYLAN: The first part—I couldn't read the whole thing. My son suggested I read it. They're always educating me, my sons. But there was an interesting part in there about fashion, and how it doesn't take much to, sort of, tip something, and all of a sudden it's the trend. Like when you look at styles of Art Deco or the '50s, you know, how it permeates everything, I think even paintings, in a way, how they, sort of, change in some way. I've never quite understood it, but I know that it happens.

MR. ADAMSON: Looking back at your work in the '80s, would you say that it looks like it was made in the '80s?

MR. ADAMSON: Sometimes I think I've made tremendous changes, but when I look at the work, I really see this

connection, that maybe the change has been minuscule. I think my color is better and more complex today because I've learnt more about layering colors, and from taking some painting classes, or how you build up color and how it makes it much more vibrant than just putting this slapdash out of the tube on a piece.

I know when I first started, I used to think—you'd look at people who have been doing the same things, like maybe Bob or Sam Maloof, and you'd say, well, I'm not going to be like them; I'm going to keep changing and growing. But then when you look back, here I am still doing the same thing. And the changes, I think, sometimes are imperceptible. I'm still doing little bowls. I still like sets of bowls. I still like plates. And now, because I haven't been working, I find myself, what do I want to do now? I don't know.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, one big change, I think, that happened maybe '85, '86, is that you started texturing and carving your works.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. I think maybe it was a little later.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: And it was kind of an accident, really. In fact, people tell me—artists will say sometimes a change comes because something didn't work. And that's exactly what happened then. I dyed this piece. I mean, I had used the textured paint and stuff, but I dyed this big piece—and I always dyed once the piece was completely off the lathe so that I could make sure I do the whole surface and have it even, so it would be completely finished, and really no way to remount it to correct any mistakes.

And I probably was in a rush. And when you put dye on, dye has a tendency to soak into end grain or rough spots. So I put this dye on, and there was these sanding scratches, just, pow, like, oh, my God. And of course, I was standing in my shop feeling sorry for myself—[they laugh]—sort of wanting to whine. And for some reason, Gail Fredell came wandering into my shop, because she lived next door to me. And I always used to joke that she wanted to borrow something. [They laugh.] And she saw me standing there, and she kind of looked at the piece and said, well, can't you put it back on the lathe? Or can't you do something to the inside? There must be something you can do.

And for some reason that was enough to make me think, well, what could I do; what could I do? And one way is to texture the whole surface. And that's I did.

I learned that there's a stroke. It's like hand-carving, even if you're using—I use a Dremel—there's a stroke to it, and that it looks really messy if you don't kind of plan it out. And so this was such a big piece I couldn't reach in the same direction, because, like, it goes in, and you pull it out, and it leaves this stroke, like a pencil-mark drawing. And I couldn't reach the whole piece because of the limitations of the tool and my own body structure, and that if I just changed direction here and there, it looked awful. And so I'd have to go back and then decide that there were grain patterns in the wood and that if I followed these grain patterns and changed direction at those points, then it made sense. Then I re-dyed it and it was beautiful. I really liked it. And it just opens up a whole way of working, like, oh, wow, this is good!

MR. ADAMSON: Where is that piece now, that first one?

MS. SAYLAN: That was the ITOS piece.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And I think, you know, when you talk to artists, I think they'll say that sometimes these accidents, happy accidents, they do force you to solve something, and you might come up with a whole new way of working.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you arrive at using a Dremel?

MS. SAYLAN: I have no idea. I know Gail didn't mention it, because she wouldn't use a Dremel. Gail and Garry Bennett were always in competition with the biggest machines, like who had the biggest jointer. And Gail was funny in those days; she got a job teaching at Davis [University of California, Davis], a class. And one day she said to me, God, Merryll, you just wouldn't believe it; this whole class is in a shop almost as small as yours. [They laugh.] And I'm thinking, I have 900 square feet; what's small about that? [They laugh.] Or, a little machine like yours.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, the Dremel is interesting in that way, because it's about as small and hobby as a tool can get.

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, I know, I know. I remember, when I lived in Santa Cruz, going into a hardware store, and I was doing these floor lamps, and I really needed a big—to get the stem to fit, there was no way I could turn it,

especially the way I constructed it. So I'm looking for a router bit that would be really long, like a two- or three-inch router bit. And the guys always direct you to the hobby section with the Dremels.

And the reason I even had a Dremel—that's right, a friend gave it to me because he said he wasn't using it anymore. I still have that Dremel. It must be—God knows how old it is, with electrical tape around the cord. But I bought a new one recently, an electronic one. But the old one still is really good for some things; it has some use.

And this friend of Gail Fredell's and mine, Edward Gottesman, who built furniture, Edward used a Dremel all the time for inlays. He did a lot of Art Deco kinds of furniture. And so it wasn't this little—demeaning little tool.

But it is strange that, you know, people can accept that; if I go into the store and I'm looking for a Dremel part, they can be nicer to me than if I'm looking for router parts.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, well.

MS. SAYLAN: But in Berkeley you don't get that anymore. And actually I got treated with much more respect after the woodworking or the wood—is it Woodwork magazine? And I was on the cover.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh.

MS. SAYLAN: They recognized me when I came in there. Oh, I got so much more respect. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: So how has, sort of, public acknowledgment of your work happened over the course of the years? Are there certain benchmarks that you would point to as being significant?

MS. SAYLAN: I think the English thing. It was like—who told me that? I forget. One American woodturner said that that was like getting a gold star. I won this grant to go to England, and the guy picked my work out, from being in that ITOS catalogue. I got this application in the mail. And I didn't even know where it was because they didn't put "U.K." It was just "Newcastle" or something, or "Newcastle upon Tyne." And, like, where is that?

Somehow when I won that award, and then I got very involved with the English woodturners in a way I'd never been in the States, because there was a great respect here in England—the Northern Arts Council accepted me and gave me this award. Therefore, I must know what I'm doing.

In the States, I found that we don't have those sort of marks of recognition. And it was harder to get accepted. I had never done a workshop there, ever.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: It wasn't until I came back that they gave me my one chance. It was a combination AAW [American Association of Woodturners] and Dale Nish. And man, that was intimidating, because I was so nervous. I don't think I did a good job.

But every professional turner who I really didn't know, like Stoney Lamar and Christian Burchard—I knew their work, or if we did a crafts show, I might have known them, but I'd never gone to the conferences. I never felt comfortable going to those conferences.

And in a way, I get pretty bored watching people work. I'd just rather call somebody up and say, how could you do this? But to sit and watch somebody work—I don't know. [Laughs.] It's not my thing. There they all came to watch.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: Who is this person?

And Christian told me later that I absolutely fit this kind of—how did he express it? Definitely on the art side and not on the technical side—[laughs]—that I—that's how he was. I don't know—what he expected, somehow—

MR. ADAMSON: Was this event in Utah?

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah, in '92, after I came home. That was it. Never been asked again. That's funny.

And I don't know quite—maybe I'm just a lousy demonstrator. I don't know—[laughs]—because I am so—whatever. I don't speak in a straight line.

One time I was at a conference—I don't think it was '92; it was later—I attended. When I came home from

England, I realized that—I think because of the early—maybe my lack of self-confidence and the fact that I painted work and nobody liked it, I sort of went my own way—I just never—I stayed away.

Actually, when the AAW started, I was asked to submit slides and then got rejected. And so I thought, why am I going to go to this conference? I mean, what's the point? Although Albert LeCoff has always been an amazing supporter. And I think if it wasn't for Albert, who knows what I would have done? I think he's just—well, he likes kind of oddballs, really. And he just was always there.

A couple of times there were exhibitions, and Albert would say something to me like—a couple of those challenge shows—Merryll, I really want you to be in this show, but you better make a piece of furniture kind of thing, or do something—in fact, even [Rich] Snyderman told me that once. His advice to me was, everyone else knows how to turn bowls; I know how to make—turn furniture. Why don't I do that, you know, do something else if I want to be accepted.

But then I went to England, because I got so involved with AWGB [Association of Woodturners of Great Britain] and the fact that I think I would have been incredibly lonely over here without their support, that I thought when I went home, I should get involved.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. SAYLAN: And then they asked me to do that one demo. And for some reason, I ran for the board, because I had such a good experience here in Britain.

I think another thing in Britain that I loved a lot was their egos aren't as big as ours in the States. They just aren't. There's a lot more clowning around when people turn. There's a lot more picking on each other and joking, and it takes that edge off, which is why I like The Furniture Society. When they show slides, it's always slide wars, but it's not in a mean-spirited way. It's more in a kind of—I mean, maybe behind the scenes we might pick on each other's work.

But with turners, I always feel this edge that, man, we are on stage, and we're really performing, and I don't know if maybe that's just me. But you feel like you're being judged in a way.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel like there's a self-consciousness about woodturners wanting to compete with glass artists?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Well, yeah, I think so. And furniture has—in fact, I've always thought that furniture conferences have started because the woodturners were—they were going out there. And I know one time—Alphonse Mattia. I stayed with Alphonse and Rosanne [Somerson] years ago, like `84; we met them and enjoyed them a lot. And Rosanne and I had written to each other a couple of times about early women's issues, with Fine Woodworking and stuff.

And Alphonse says, wow, man, what's happening with these turners? They are going out there, and these conferences, getting their work out there—[inaudible]. I think that that's why they formed together, to help themselves.

There are turners who are competing with the glass people, and I wonder if that's part of the same personality. Like Marvin once told me, what was that with open studio? or something like that. Oh, we glass artists don't need to do that. [Laughs.] We just don't need to do this. And I'd laugh.

MR. ADAMSON: So, getting back to the AAW thing, you ran for the managing board and then—

MS. SAYLAN: I ran for the board, and because I'm such a worker, worker bee, I did the whole conference —I don't know when it was—`95 or something and—it couldn't have been `95 —95's when I quit. So it must have been `93. There was one in New York, and there was one in Colorado. And I organized all the demos. God, I was crazy, because it took so much work and you had these temperamental artists. Some of them were so temperamental. If something isn't right, they are yelling and screaming.

And sometimes when I think about my own career, I kind of wish I was more that way. I'm much more flexible and, like, try to make do with whatever I have. But some of these people, man, they're prima donnas—[they laugh]—just, like, crazy. But maybe that part of the glass is like, we are "the" artists; we are—and then, you know, I live in the real world. I tell people I do woodturning, and they go, what's that? [They laugh.] What is woodturning? And then they say, oh, my uncle had a lathe. Jilly and I, we were talking about that. Like when she said she's a tapestry artist, they say, oh, you know, my mother embroiders. [They laugh.] And I get, oh, my uncle had a lathe in the shop.

Or one time my doctor wanted to know what I do. What is it that you really do? And he said, why don't you bring

pictures in the next time you come? And then he said, could he show them to a friend of his who owns a gallery. And I said, sure, you can keep them. And he comes back—or the next time I see him - and he says, my friend says these are serious and upper-end stuff. [They laugh.] They're not just little woodturnings.

MR. ADAMSON: What do you think about that relationship between the professional and the hobbyist turners?

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I kind of like some of the hobbyist turners, because they're kind of cute, and they've actually—like in the Bay Area, you know, I had started this turning group, and some of these hobbyist turners—I taught this design class. This group was different than the large group. I taught a design class for woodturners. I'm not sure when. I had only six students, and the class was 10 weeks. It became a club, with other people wanting to join the club badly, like these guys had something that they didn't have. They grew to love it, because it was really teaching them to try to be creative.

But these guys have been there for me in other ways. I had a drill press that I was ready to get rid of, and they came and fixed it, because they hated the thought that I would just get rid of it. And when I was sick, they brought me flowers, and one of them wanted to set up my computer so I could be—when I had my surgery - that I could work in bed and send e-mails to them. And at Ed's funeral, they showed up.

And I was impressed; I have just met two turners, two people recently, and they've told me anything I need to move, they'll help me. And, wow, this is rather nice.

But there's another element that bothers me in a way, although I kind of joke—tend to joke about it all—is just the need for the professionals to make money off the hobbyists. There's a lot of that, where they develop tools, sell wood, sell this, sell that, and some of it bothers me. It's like, you have to have this gouge. I mean, I had some students that bought gouges off a couple of famous woodturners, and they tell me that they were told if they use this gouge, they can do everything. And it was too big. They can't do a little tiny bowl with one of those big gouges; they'll kill themselves, or the bowl. And that's annoying.

I've had some assistants who encourage me to develop the Merryll Saylan delicate line of woodturning tools. [They laugh.] Wendy even suggested that we have good, colored handles, not those ugly handles. [They laugh.] That they should be really snappy, fashionable handles. But I just can't bring myself to do that. [Laughs.] And I don't know what difference—maybe because I'm not as hungry. I don't know. There is that element. I mean, the last few years I have—that's not an issue for me, eating.

So they need to do this, because I think if you can't make—it doesn't seem like you can make money on just selling. The market changes.

MR. ADAMSON: How has your work done for you financially since you started to become more well known as a turner and turning has become more of a kind of known thing?

MS. SAYLAN: The last few years, it's actually picked up. I mean, it's strange; the year Ed died, I had my best year, which was really odd. But then this year is awful, but I haven't worked that hard. I mean, I'm not working at all, and I haven't even met some of the gallery's needs. And I feel once in a while like I'm in a sinkhole—I'm not unhappy; I just feel like I need this time for whatever reason.

MR. ADAMSON: You show at del Mano [del Mano Gallery, Los Angeles, CA], right?

MS. SAYLAN: I do shows at del Mano. And sometimes they sell them. They haven't sold recently. As I talk to a couple of people, it feels really quiet lately. But then I don't know, I feel sometimes like I'm really removed.

MR. ADAMSON: How would you assess del Mano's own gallery strategies in trying to promote woodturning?

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, they're the best. I think they've really cornered the market for woodturning. That's why they sort of move more and more into that direction. I mean, like at SOFA [Sculpture Objects and Functional Art, biannual art exposition]—I did SOFA once with another gallery, and they were opposite del Mano. And they had really beautiful—they had some really good people there, and I gave them, I thought, really excellent work. And you could see the collectors walk down the aisle; they didn't even look that direction; they just went right straight into del Mano. And then they sit down and they do - they buy.

Ray's been really good at promoting that, Ray [Leier] and Jan [Peters]. And then they did that whole book, which was their history of woodturning. I don't think it's completely accurate—in fact, not at all. I mean, some of it is. But it does help, and I think they're really good. They have a relationship with these people. And I think over the years that I've know them, they've—their gallery looks better and better all the time. Their booth spaces look better and better.

I went down to L.A. to visit family, and so I stopped in there. That's when I was thinking of moving back to L.A.

Jan and I talked about moving back to L.A. And it sounded like things had been slow, was the impression I got.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think that the formation of this Collectors of Wood Art group has made a huge difference to woodturners financially? Or is it not quite so direct?

MS. SAYLAN: Hmm. I think it has—well, what's happened is these, you know, like the SOFA shows, or this last Collector of Wood Art event in September, when Albert had his conference, it becomes a big selling event; it becomes an event you need to be at. It's fierce in a way, because you had the ITE [International Turning Exchange] people, and you had these French turners, all came in force, who had been on ITE. And you had a couple of new galleries, and everyone sort of fighting.

Del Mano somehow always has the best space. I've never quite understood that, how that works. But when you went into these gallery shows, you have to walk through del Mano's space to get to the other ones. I think some galleries have gotten upset about this. But I don't know how the structure works.

After my working on the board with AAW, I've decided the best thing is to stay away. Once in a while I think about going back on Albert's board—I was on his early board—because I love Albert. But then I'm afraid, ooh, maybe not! [Laughs.] Maybe that would be dangerous, you know.

MR. ADAMSON: So you have been relatively unaffiliated for most of your career from many of these organizations, would you say?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes. Well, I joined Albert's before I went to England. I was on the board, and I was at a meeting with—I think Bill Hunter and I were the two artists on Albert's board. I think Bill Kaiser—in fact, a meeting was held at his place—Arthur Mason. I don't think I knew Fleur [Bresler] then. I don't think she was involved. And who else? There were a couple of other people.

And Albert was really having problems then. When I was abroad—of course, my name was on all the stationery—and I like to be involved. Maybe my life, with Ed being sick, you know, kept me away. And I think the whole competition probably kept me away. It was vying for position. I'm not comfortable with that.

But when I was in England—and then I went to Germany. I met this German artist and woodworker, and she was in this big Frankfurt gift show, and all the artists were there, and lots of the turners. It was where I met what's his name—Hans?

MR. ADAMSON: Weissflog?

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, I met him there. I met all the German turners. And I had my name on Albert's board, and Albert owed some of them money.

MR. ADAMSON: Ah.

MS. SAYLAN: So I got cornered a lot. And what could I say?

When I came home, that's when I called Albert. There were a couple of incidents that were sort of funny, because I told Albert that until he cleaned up this mess, I'm just really upset. And then, of course, he wanted to know who it was, and I said, I'm not going to tell you who talked to me, but you must know who you owe money to. [Laughs.] Clean it up, and I'm through until you do that. I'm just not to going to help you until you clean up.

At one point I guess there was another board trying to get going, including [Ron] Wornick, really trying to get this thing going. I got several calls from people, "Merryll, you have to help Albert." [They laugh.] That was kind of funny, like—and who are these people? Because we're trying to get them—they're trying to straighten this all out.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes.

MS. SAYLAN: And I'm like, oh, my gosh. [Laughs.]

And I mean, the Baulines Guild at one point asked me to be on the board, and I remember, too—what's that furniture maker? I said to him, I don't think you want me. [They laugh.] Even if I wanted to do it, I don't think you want me, because if I'm going to be on it, I'm going to be serious, and I'm going to work, and I'm going to want to get it functioning. And you're not going to want that, so just forget it. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Yes, you had said that that was a problem with you and the AAW as well, that it was just not as professional an organization as you wanted it to be.

MS. SAYLAN: Right. Yes. Like I was thinking—because I just talked about this with my friend Jilly—like, here we're

doing a conference, or I was organizing this conference, and after all these years, how many hats did you sell—just a simple thing like that—how many T-shirts have we ordered? And nobody knew. Or whose job—do we have a job list? There's no job list. And it was sort of that you'd call somebody, and it would work out.

And then because I did—I was learning on the job. I'd have lunch with my son, who has run these nonprofits with limited amount of money for years, and he would have these special—like swim events or camps, get a summer camp going all the time. And so I'd say to him, well, how many people do you need for that? And how long should it take? And what do you think? And then I'd tell him what we were doing, and he would go, hmm. [Laughs.] And he'd give me advice.

The other one is that Ed volunteered for a group called SCORE, which is called Service Corps of Retired Executives. It's all free if you're starting a business.

Well, I get business, because don't tell me how to run my own business; we're married. That's bad. But you know, I would ask him sometimes these things. And then they have specialists in nonprofits, and I went through a workshop on organizing and getting job lists, because it would make it easier. You wouldn't get called every day—got called every single day - if you had some job list. This is all volunteer.

And that just seemed like hitting my head against the wall. And I think they didn't like it. I made a very big mistake. I think this was my fault, which I didn't understand, because I'd never really been involved — is you can't have change that quickly. You have to go slower. And I don't think I fully understood that.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. SAYLAN: And so I came in wanting to make changes, and it just doesn't go over very well.

So I'm not sure—[laughs]—just remembering this lunch with my son—I'd meet him sometimes. I had a scheme, after living in England, to make money. I always had money-making schemes, since the art wasn't always paying. And one was to put together tours with these hobbyist turners. And I knew all the turners here in England and in Germany by this time, and I knew good places to stay and good places to eat.

And so I was sitting there, talking to my son about my plan—you know, how do I put this together? And he's talking to me, and he's telling me how you take people on tours: you're going to get these complainers, and you're going to get this, and you're going to get that. And he leans over and pats me on the shoulder, and he goes, Mom, you're an artist for a reason. [They laugh.] And I said, oh, I get it; Mom needs help. [They laugh.] And it was just so funny, because I just had this image, artists are just too disorganized to do anything. Just stay away from him — my advice, stay away from him. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Well, on that note, maybe we should get back to the work and address that a bit more.

MS. SAYLAN: Okay. The work.

MR. ADAMSON: So you've mentioned being sick a couple of times.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I had back problems.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. SAYLAN: And then Ed was sick. Two times my back went out really bad. This sort of laid me up, and I couldn't stand, is what it was. I just couldn't stand in front of a lathe. I'd be bedridden for a little while, and then I'd take a painting class or a drawing class, and then slowly work my way back into the shop.

And the hard part about that was—this was like restarting your career every single time.

Mel Lindquist once said to me at a craft show, Merryll, you just can't disappear this way and come back. You know, people think you're dead. But what can I say to him, you know? This is my life. And it was hard. In fact, Arthur Mason told me once that he said I was the real comeback kid, because I would disappear.

And then my back just steadily —I have arthritis in there—it got worse and worse, to the point where—they told me they didn't want to operate until there would be a time where we all knew it was right to operate. Man, that time came. I couldn't even go to a grocery store.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. SAYLAN: I couldn't cook dinner. And then my doctor wanted me to wait for this one surgeon—but then he was in an auto accident—because back surgeries are so iffy. And mine was going to be a major, big, big back surgery, because I had two floating vertebras, and if they moved, that's what did me in. The nerve would be

trapped, and I'd be in agony.

So in '95 it was convenient, in a way, because I was scheduled for surgery after—I didn't want to have it before the conference in California, when I was president. And that was partially because I felt these were my local guys—[laughs]—you know, in a way, my local clubs. And we spent the whole year putting this conference together and working with the clubs, and I felt like I needed to stay through it.

But as soon as that conference was over, I was scheduled for surgery. And it was long. I was in bed almost three months. But I was—it was fine. I read. In fact, I developed such a routine that if Ed came in and interrupted my routine, I'd say, I'm very busy. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: And this culminated in the piece of work you called Turning 60 [1996], right?

MS. SAYLAN: Mm-hmm, yes.

MR. ADAMSON: So maybe you can tell us about that.

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah. I think I was drawing, and I was doing this thing called "The Artist's Way," which is—it's this—it's sort of funny. It's like a 12-step program to be creative. And it's kind of dumb, in a way, but it's also good, because it goes through a whole series of exercises. And when else would anybody have time but when I had this kind of time?

And Ed had—we had a—one of these recliner chairs, which has been very useful when Ed had his surgeries, and when I had my back surgery, I could get into that. And he set up a way for me to draw in there, so that I could sit in that chair and have my legs up and draw.

And there was something about that period that made me think—because of the images I saw—I could get up and have meals, but then I had to go back to bed. So I'd stare at the dishes in the kitchen, and it was all these at-home images. Ed would bring me in breakfast, but I'd try to get up for dinner.

And then when I finally was able—I didn't drive for nine months; I had turned 60- I had this 60th birthday party. And I had a monster party, I mean, a monster party. In fact, Bob Stocksdale was really funny at that party, because Ed surprised me and got this band. It was—who's that really good California artist, that blues kind of music?

He hired this band. And I didn't want Ed to cook, and I knew I wasn't physically able yet to do it, so I hired somebody to do the cooking. It was a big party. And Bob Stocksdale arrives at my birthday party, and he goes, this is an awfully big event for such an insignificant number. [They laugh.] That's why I teased him about his 80th: "Is that significant enough?" [Laughs.]

And so I think those pieces came out of it. First of all, I thought 60 was a shock. Now 70 is even worse. It's like, whoa. When you turn 70—I was telling a friend—several friends said, welcome to the 70s. I've started thinking it must be a different kind of club. [They laugh.] Welcome to the 70s, like you're elderly. What can I do? Everything I read, 70, I'm elderly. And 60 I thought was bad.

I thought it would be really good to do—I wanted to do a whole installation of 60 pieces, but I only made it to 18. [They laugh.] But in a way, the 18—I know, it was funny. But then, when I thought about 18, it was like sort of, you know, one of those serendipitous things. But that was a big change in my life—18. I got married at 19. There are certain milestones in your life.

I remember, I used to have these friends—friends of Ed's, who were amazing people. This is Harry Baskerville. He was a photographer with *Arts & Architecture* magazine. He's even mentioned in Maloof's book [Jeremy Adamsom. *The Furniture of Sam Maloof*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001]. This was Ed's photography teacher and friend. And we sat around with Harry talking about when we thought our real age was, just having this dinner. It's an amazing family. The wife's brother was Dalton Trumbo, the blacklisted writer. I loved the family because they'd argue with separate dictionaries. [They laugh.] I loved this family because of that.

So here we were discussing age. And it's always stayed with me, this—what is your age that you think you sort of formed who you were, who you are now? And for me, it was that 18, 19. I was still the same person. Harry thought his was 26, because he was a late bloomer.

So when I only made it to 18 pieces, I thought, well, that was it; that was fine. [Laughs.] That fit. And I wanted quiet work, because my life was so quiet. I was pretty much alone. That's the difference between men and women. When Ed had his knee replacement before my back surgery, Gail Fredell calls us the bionic couple, the year of surgery. But I invited friends over and gave dinner parties and all kinds of things. But not Ed, he went to his—he never missed his YMCA; he never missed his SCORE meetings. I better entertain myself, I realized. If I

wanted people over, I better call them myself. I always thought that's the male-female thing. The wife made sure the guy was taken care of.

In a way, it was a special time, and I know I have this relative now who's sick, and she was complaining about how long she's been in the house. And I said, do you know who you're complaining to? [They laugh.] I don't have any sympathy. I'm sorry. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: Well, the other thing that always strikes me about Turning 60 [1996] is that it's a still life in a way.

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

MR. ADAMSON: I know you can arrange it, but—

MS. SAYLAN: Well, when I think about my early sushi trays, they were still lifes in a way. I never did a tray without a bowl sitting on it, or even my first set of rice bowls. I didn't just bring it to the show and set it on a table; I had to put it into something. It had to be something, and I think this—to me, still life is sort of that. You're sort of arranging things. Although I saw a lot of painting this weekend—because I love to do still lifes - and I thought, I better be careful here. [Laughs.] It can get pretty hokey, but it has to be careful.

MR. ADAMSON: How do you keep it from crossing that line into—

MS. SAYLAN: I don't know.

MR. ADAMSON: Because the teacup that was in the Yale/Woodturning Center show, which you made on that residency that you were on -

MS. SAYLAN: Right. Right.

MR. ADAMSON: But that piece always seemed like it has this magical ability to be very, very mundane, and, sort of, just the teacup, but also this kind of—I don't know, this kind of meditational object or, you know—it certainly seems like it has the power of a very carefully made still life painting. I've always wondered how you do that.

MS. SAYLAN: Well, I think one of those things with that one is it's not—it's slightly out of scale. It's distorted in a way. So it's not real, but yet it's real enough. It's like you have to look at it to see that there's something wrong here; it isn't quite right. I think that adds to it. And then that paint that's on it is really horrible in a way, because it's that rough paint. It feels really rough; it doesn't feel good to hold, and yet here's a teacup. To me, tea represents relaxation and comfort, and yet here's this one that's rough. In fact, I sent Albert a piece through this last show that was two old teacups. One is black and burnt and really rough, and the other one was this maple that I bleached and really delicate. And had two spoons.

I put it on a tray and separated them completely—really a long, skinny tray. So Albert called me to ask me if that was because of Ed's dying. And I said, no, it's more—because I called it Separation [1997]. I said, to me, it was more about those times when you're married and you just don't speak to each other. There's this edge in marriage. It was more that than Ed dying.

When I got divorced and remarried, I used to see that. I always thought sometimes a couple needed a break from each other, but you really have to learn how to separate, but not in the bad kind of separate. You need to have a separate life to keep your identity. I think people today are better at that than my generation, because I still get things from women sometimes or friends, like when I first started leaving Ed — and, man, that took work on my part to go to a conference without Ed—was, oh, my gosh, you've left Ed for a week?

At one point I was so distraught with—I wanted to do this road trip. I had gone to see this counselor, and I was really furious with Ed. He got really cranky there the last couple years, and I was thinking, like, I don't know if I can stand it anymore. And this therapist made this funny comment, like a good therapist would, and said, oh, you could leave him forever, but you can't leave for a two-week road trip? [They laugh.] And I thought, oh, what a thought.

MR. ADAMSON: That's very good.

MS. SAYLAN: That was really helpful.

MR. ADAMSON: I know we're running out of time here, but I—

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, okay.

MR. ADAMSON: —well, I wanted to ask you about one last piece—

MS. SAYLAN: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: —which is the Hans Coper piece that the Museum of Arts & Design [New York City, NY] just bought?

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

MR. ADAMSON: Well, I call it the Hans Coper piece.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, it is. It's a tribute to Hans Coper.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes. The reason I thought it might be an interesting place to end off is, first of all, it's a major museum acquisition, which is unusual for you.

MS. SAYLAN: Very.

MR. ADAMSON: And the other thing is that it seems, to me anyway, to relate to the still life interests, which, as you're saying, has the biographical qualities.

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

MR. ADAMSON: But recently, they've become much more formal, because there's a lot of color study elements that have come into the work.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, because I think that piece—and then I did this Tower of Bowls piece—and in a way, it's like I start with a—it's a formal idea. It's giving myself an exercise, because I can't—I like the form, and I know I want to explore this form, but it's like going to school and somebody says, "Okay, change this form somehow." In ceramics, we took the form, and you change it step by step.

So I'm giving myself that exercise. But what I also give myself—I mean, which is part of the problem—I'm giving myself a problem to solve. The Tower of Bowls was 15 different bowls, and the only limiting factor was that the opening in the boxes were four inches by four inches, so that controlled the bowl.

And the Coper pieces—I don't know what was the limiting factor,because I've started exploring making them bigger and smaller—was to just start changing this piece, and at one point, it's, huh, what can I do next? I might start out, okay, just cut it in half or make the base taller or make the base smaller. But then at some point when you're doing—I think that one, it was 16 pieces—and the tower was 15 pieces—it's—I can't think of anything else. Then all of a sudden, it's, like, as you cross this line and it's total freedom, total play, and then it became, okay, what do I want to do today? Well, how about the pistachio nut finish, or how about—what happens if you do a stacked base and start cutting up the base and moving it different ways? Or what happens if I turn the bowl upside down or—and so it really becomes almost like a game. But it was almost an exercise in freeing myself up.

MR. ADAMSON: That's an idea that seems like it's coming, because it might be a good sort of note to end on, for now anyway. It seems like—well, I notice that you use the word "freedom" a lot in the interview, sort of all through your career—

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

MR. ADAMSON: —both in the shop and outside the shop in your own life and that sort of thing, and I guess I wonder whether, looking back on it all, whether you feel like your work as an artist has been something that ultimately freed you or not.

MS. SAYLAN: Oh, I think my work has freed me. I think England was a major milestone for me, because I still remember waking up one morning there and saying to Ed, oh, my God, I'm free! I feel totally free. And even actually now, I mean, I miss Ed, especially like on this trip. The last time I was here was with Ed. Like going to the Tate, I wanted to say, look what's happened to the Tate. But there's another element for me, which is learning how to live for myself. It's amazing—because I was the oldest kid. My mom worked. I always took care of somebody, and it's still my nature. I have to actually fight it sometimes, like with this sick relative now that, no, I am not going to be there every day; I just can't do it anymore. I've done it and done it and done it.

Once in a while I feel a little sorry for myself, like, Jesus, 70 years old and you're just learning how to do it. But on the other hand, well, I'm 70 years old and so I better do it now, you know.

MR. ADAMSON: And now when you get back to work, you can start your career again.

MS. SAYLAN: Yes, well, I think I'm going to have to, in a way, because I realize I don't really know what I want to do. I mean, do I want to go back to still life? Do I want to do these big disks anymore? Do I want to paint? I

actually realized I don't know. And, of course, then I have this arthritis now, too, which my doctor hasn't said I have to stop. As a matter of fact, I think he was worried that I said I wasn't working. He was like, you're not working? How long has this been going on? [Laughs.] Like, should I be worried about this? So I don't know.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Well, we'll tune in later. [Laughs.]

MS. SAYLAN: Okay. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Thank you very much, Merryll, this has been great.

MS. SAYLAN: Well thanks, Glenn. It's a learning experience, actually.

MR. ADAMSON: Good. Good. Okay.

MS. SAYLAN: Okay.

MR. ADAMSON: Bye for now.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]