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Oral history interview with David Ellsworth,
2007 July 16

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with David Ellsworth on July 16, 2007. The interview took place in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, and was conducted by Josephine Shea 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.

David Ellsworth 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

JOSEPHINE SHEA: This is Josephine Shea. I'm interviewing David Ellsworth at the artist's home and studio in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. On Monday, July 16, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and this is disc one, number one.

And the tradition of these things is to begin at the beginning. [Laughs.]

DAVID ELLSWORTH: Makes it easier for me.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.] So basically we begin I guess it's back in Iowa City.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I was born in Iowa City, Iowa, June 25, 1944, University Hospital. I lived there for 14 years.

MS. SHEA: And —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Go ahead.

MS. SHEA: Tell me about your family, your mother and father.

MR. ELLSWORTH: My father was the director of libraries at the University of Iowa from '43 to '58. And we then in 1958 moved to Boulder, Colorado, where he became director of libraries where he actually resumed the job that he had had there from '37 to '43. And each summer while we were in Iowa one of the conditions of taking that job was that he had three months off in the summer so they could go back to their cabin up in Colorado up in the mountains.

MS. SHEA: Oh, so you spent a lot of time in Colorado?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah.

MS. SHEA: Now, tell me about the rest of your family? Are you the oldest, the only?

MR. ELLSWORTH: I am the youngest of two boys. My brother, Peter, is four-and-a-half years my senior. And he just retired at the University of Wyoming in Laramie running the math science department with his wife [Judith], who is also currently still on the faculty and chairman of the department. And it's basically a department that she and he built with help from a friend there with the intent of helping to learn teachers how to understand themselves so that they could better understand their students so they could do a better job. Primarily in rural areas of the state of Wyoming and some in Colorado.

MS. SHEA: Now, tell me about your mother, what was her name?

MR. ELLSWORTH: My mother's name was Theda — T-H-E-D-A — Chapman, middle name, maiden name. And she was a housewife, never worked. But when she and my father were at Oberlin [Ohio], she was in the Oberlin Symphony there, playing cello.

MS. SHEA: And is that how they met?

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's how they met in Oberlin College, in Ohio.

MS. SHEA: And was she originally from?

MR. ELLSWORTH: She was originally from Olmstead Falls area, in Ohio, which is Cleveland area basically. And our claim to fame is that she is related to John Chapman who was affectionately known as Johnny Appleseed.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And I think that there are a great number of Chapmans around the world that are related to Johnny Appleseed. [They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: But it's also interesting that you ended up involved with, in a sense trees and wood, so maybe there was a —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, yeah. That's true. That's partially true I'm sure.

MS. SHEA: — a little apple seed put there a long time ago. And your father was he from Iowa or was he just ended up there for the job.

MR. ELLSWORTH: He was born in Goldfield, Iowa, which is I think no longer a town. I think it was bulldozed down. It was a small community and as the corporate farms came in, some of the small towns were eliminated and I think Goldfield was one of them.

MS. SHEA: And —

MR. ELLSWORTH: But he was born in Goldfield and grew up in Forest City which is nearby.

MS. SHEA: Okay, there are a lot of German immigrants to Iowa. Is the family —

MR. ELLSWORTH: There was no —

MS. SHEA: - background?

MR. ELLSWORTH: No, there was no German influence in his family. His family was Swedish primarily and with an English father's name.

MS. SHEA: I was going to say that the Ellsworth name sounds English.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And my mother was mostly Swedish so I guess that makes me mostly Swedish also.

MS. SHEA: So the Swedes are winning out in the hereditary — [laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, yeah. Right. At least all the ones that Johnny Appleseed didn't father himself, so —

MS. SHEA: And did he go to Oberlin to study library science or that was just something that kind of transpired?

MR. ELLSWORTH: I'm not sure, no actually I know he didn't because there was a story at some point that he was waiting tables at the faculty club at Oberlin College as an undergraduate, and he spilled soup on the president's wife's dress. And she asked him if he needed a job in the library and he said he did and so that's when he got his first exposure. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: Out of the kitchen into the books.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I don't know what the connection is there, but apparently that was the only job available at the time and they threw him into it.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.] Wreck a little less havoc with the books. So did he move then directly to Iowa to take the job or a few stops along the way?

MR. ELLSWORTH: They — let me see if I can recall now. No, he didn't move directly. From Cleveland they went to Oberlin, and from Oberlin they went to southern Colorado — I'll come up with a name in a minute. Adams College [Adams State College, Alamosa] — Adams — it's a state teachers college.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And he was the librarian. He was the only librarian on staff in the whole library, and he had a master's degree at this point. And he went out there with a master's, became the librarian and was eventually told by the president of the college that he needed to get a Ph.D. So he went to Chicago.

MS. SHEA: Even back then?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah.

MS. SHEA: Wow.

MR. ELLSWORTH: So he went to Chicago and he got his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. And then he went

from there to the University of Colorado [Boulder, CO] in '37.

MS. SHEA: And from there to Iowa City.

MR. ELLSWORTH: From there to Iowa in '43 and then in '58 back to Colorado and then retired in '72.

MS. SHEA: Well, it's interesting; it's quite a bit of moving around for a —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Not uncommon for post-World War II, you know, faculty.

MS. SHEA: Okay, because often now people go to a college and get on the tenure track and they are there forever. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Hang out forever. You can't get rid of them. You'd rather not have them there but you can't get rid of them. Yeah. Yeah.

MS. SHEA: So it sounds to me like you probably grew up with a lot of books.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I grew up with a lot of books in the family, but I was not a good reader. My brother was a great reader and the having the two of them intimidating above me was or above me was intimidating. And I did not really learn how to read until — very well until I went to college. And that slowed me down in college obviously until I picked that part up. But it is odd. I don't think it is uncommon to have a father in a certain profession and have the children go either directly into that like doctors do or totally against it like —

MS. SHEA: Or completely in the other direction.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, sure. Sure.

MS. SHEA: And so did you, because you weren't completely into the whole book realm, work with your hands at all or get involved with Boy Scouts or?

MR. ELLSWORTH: I worked in the Cub Scouts. I worked a little bit in the Boy Scouts, but mostly I was up on the — in the mountains in the summers working with my hands, making implements of play, which means that of all my kid friends, I made all the weapons.

Ms. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSOWRTH: We didn't just play cowboys and Indians; we were cowboys and Indians and we would switch roles, and it was my charge amongst the group to make all the weaponry which meant bows and arrows and spears and throwing knives and tomahawks and whips and slings and quivers and even clothing, moccasins and leggings and stuff like that.

MS. SHEA: Build teepees at all, or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: We did teepees but mostly lean-tos. Much easier.

MS. SHEA: Much quicker. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Much easier. Yeah. I did all the leatherwork and all the woodwork.

MS. SHEA: Really?

MR. ELLSWORTH: So we'd use the cut-offs from the construction boards of the cabins to make the weapons.

MS. SHEA: From the log cabins?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Sure, yeah. And in fact in this case they weren't log cabins; they were framed cabins. And the lumber came from the mill at the bottom of the valley and we hauled things up there and eventually got electricity in there as well, but it was primarily done with a Swedish saw, bow saw, and later a chain saw and — but in my case, for my tools, I had a screwdriver and a hammer and a little handsaw, and that's what I started with.

MS. SHEA: So you were practically back to the Iron Age or whatever. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh, yeah. But I was younger, real little in those days. You know, certainly pre-teen. This is more like four, five, and six stuff. And I had gotten my first pocket knife when I was six I believe, and then learned the chainsaw when I was about 12 even though my father and mother weren't around to know it.

MS. SHEA: Weren't around to supervise. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah. Right.

MS. SHEA: And what were they doing when you were in the mountains? Were you hiking, or camping and fishing.

MR. ELLSWORTH: We were hiking and fishing and reading. That's primarily what we did in the summers up there. And then when we moved back to Boulder in '58, I would soon become driving age. And it's '62, so in that period of time, we were back and forth to the cabin all the time. The distance from Boulder at the university there to where the cabin is near Allenspark is about an hour's drive in those days, a little bit less now, so it was very close.

MS. SHEA: Oh, so you could just really zip up there and spend some time —and then —

MR. ELLSWORTH: It was a 3,000-foot elevation rise but in an hour's distance.

MS. SHEA: Wow. Whoa. So what were you — did you enjoy school at all? Did you have any favorite subjects?

MR. ELLSWORTH: I loved school until I got out of high school because I was doing a lot of music. I was in all the madrigal and quartets and choir stuff and light opera and musicals and things like that, did that from junior high on up. That was basically my — I played a little basketball but my outlet was basically music and art. They had a very good art program when I was in Iowa from a child all the way through my high school.

MS. SHEA: And tell me about that program. Was there —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, at the University of Iowa, the school I went to was actually kind of like a preparatory school for the university.

MS. SHEA: Like, okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It was called University High.

MS. SHEA: Oh, okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It's no longer there, but it was basically K through 12 and it was connected directly to the university and it favored university kids going to the school.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSWORTH: So we had a wonderful art program there based on the department that was at the university which was very strong.

Iowa, of course, is known for its writing department but that evolved out of the Second World War as all the other art departments in the country did — well, not all, but most of them did, gained their strength out of the soldiers that were coming back. And that was very true of Iowa as well. In the Midwest in those days was the true heartland of the birth of a lot of different subject matter, including sciences but primarily the arts. And as a farming community, there was lots of money there so salaries were very good apparently. And when my dad moved back to Boulder in '58 he took a big step down in salary.

MS. SHEA: To go back to the —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Just to be in the mountains again because nobody likes Iowa winters.

MS. SHEA: The wind does come out really impressively. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, it's cold and it's wet and it's not very pretty and it's — [laughs.] I mean, it's a great place to be from, the Midwest. Good nuts-and-bolts background, but it's a great place to be from.

MS. SHEA: So did you typically have different art teachers each year? And —

MR. ELLSWORTH: No, you would carry through art teachers throughout an entire school system. So if you had junior high you had one art teacher and then you get into — into the —

MS. SHEA: Did you by any chance remember was it a woman or a man, or what they were interested in teaching or doing or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: The one in Iowa is a guy named Kowalski. That's all I remember.

MS. SHEA: A good Polish name.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, good Polish name, and — oh, I'm going to have to come up with names now aren't I? I never thought about that. I'll try and do that at some point.

MS. SHEA: So that was — Kowalski was for what time period?

MR. ELLSWORTH: That was in Iowa. I was a little kid, you know, first grade up through the middle of my eighth grade, and then we moved to Colorado from there.

MS. SHEA: But you also said you were very involved in music.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That started in the eighth grade when I went to Colorado.

MS. SHEA: Singing or an instrument or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Vocal.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Vocal music and woodshop also, because it was that experience in 1958 when I moved to Boulder in junior high that I got involved with the lathe for the first time.

MS. SHEA: That you got involved with?

MR. ELLSWORTH: With the lathe for the first time.

MS. SHEA: So they let, I wonder if they would still be doing that now.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh, no. Oh, no, no. That's a thing of the past. They've got kids tracked so accurately today that if you don't make a certain grade-point average or have a certain proclivity in one area they put you right into the vo-tech schools or something other than the intelligence element. I mean they've really separated. It's a huge thing.

MS. SHEA: And so you moved back to Iowa and you had your first — what people call shop class. Do you remember your —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Moved to Colorado and had my first shop class, yeah.

MS. SHEA: And do you remember your teacher for that?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Ken, Ken Stone.

MS. SHEA: Okay and what kind of projects did you do? You said you worked on the lathe.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, we had mechanical drawing. We had —

MS. SHEA: Oh, so drawing.

MR. ELLSWORTH: You did a stool. They made a series of joints in wood so you could learn joinery.

MS. SHEA: Like dovetails and —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Dovetails, that's right; that kind of thing.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And I went through the projects pretty quickly and what was left was the lathe, and the teacher didn't know how to run the lathe. Most woodshop teachers don't actually. And so we plundered through the books and figured it out. And the first project I made, I cut up 24 pieces of walnut and glued them all together into a block of wood and made a 24-inch diameter tray. It was half an inch thick, and I still own it. It's held together with Elmer's Glue. All the joints have held. It's very nice.

MS. SHEA: That's pretty amazing. Twenty-four inches.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah. Yeah, it was a big one.

MS. SHEA: And do you remember your thinking about that project? You just happened to have this walnut laying

around and thought, oh I'll glue this thing.

MR. ELLSWORTH: They had a lot of walnut to work with and maple, and oak. Some — very little cherry. And wood shops were all stocked with this stuff in those days. So I don't know how I came on the idea but the idea was there. Obviously you can't make a big piece out of one piece; you have to make it out of a bunch of little pieces so that was the direction I took.

MS. SHEA: And did you say you were just starting high school when you got back to Boulder, Colorado? Or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Junior high.

MS. SHEA: Junior high.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Eighth grade.

MS. SHEA: And did you take shop kind of consistently through the whole —

MR. ELLSWORTH: I took woodshop every semester I was in school from then on out.

MS. SHEA: And how were your grades? If you're teaching the —

MR. ELLSWORTH: I think I was probably a B-minus student.

MS. SHEA: But for shop? I would think.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh, no, the shop class I got straight A's in all that stuff.

MS. SHEA: I would think if you're teaching the teacher how to work the lathe.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That was easy for me; that and music. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: And music. Any art at that school?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, art classes also, all the way through.

MS. SHEA: Do you remember any of the projects for that.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Painting, just a lot of painting.

MS. SHEA: A lot of painting.

MR. ELLSWORTH: A lot of painting.

MS. SHEA: In water color, oil, acrylic?

MR. ELLSWORTH: No. Water color and acrylics. No oils, takes too long to dry.

MS. SHEA: Okay. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, you get really interesting — you would get pretty interesting projects in those days, but, I mean, even back in grade school you do the classic thing where you — crayon, a piece of paper in multi-colors and then you paint over that with a black tempura paint, and then you scratch through with a little thing, and you come up with your own painting. But we would go — when I was a little kid in Iowa, we would go to the museum and we would draw birds and animals — squirrels, and things — and then take that back to our art class and work. So it was a real easy transfer from Mother Nature right on to the tablet.

MS. SHEA: Wow.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And when I was in high school, in fact, the whole program was much stronger and there was a lot of abstract work going on and different media of course — papier-mâché, whatever you wanted to work with was — it was pretty thorough. I don't have any idea whatsoever what's going in the art programs today. Or if they even exist any more.

MS. SHEA: And if they exist, what they look like.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah.

MS. SHEA: So, you mentioned going and drawing squirrels. That must have been like the natural history museum in —

MR. ELLSWORTH: In Iowa? I don't remember but it would have been at the university because we had access to everything.

MS. SHEA: And then do you remember going to art museums either in Iowa or — often Iowa people go into Chicago.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I actually didn't when I was in Colorado. What I did — or Iowa. What I would do — or I waited until I was in the university, and later on of course and then I would go to university museums and I would go art museums starting on St. Louis and then New York City. So New York City became a playground.

MS. SHEA: I think it still is. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Sure, well, yeah, right. But the progress from high school took me directly into the Army where I spent three years singing in the Army.

MS. SHEA: Singing?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Singing in the Army

MS. SHEA: So was that in Washington, D.C.?

MR. ELLSWORTH: No, this was actually in a choir called the ARADCOM — A-R-A-D-C-O-M, which stood for Army Air Defense Command. And that was based in Colorado Springs.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And my recruiting sergeant — this is in 1962 when I graduated — my recruiting sergeant's daughter was in my class, so he knew that I sang.

MS. SHEA: And he probably knew —

MR. ELLSWORTH: So he said, "If you take the test, and go down, and then take — go through an audition, then come up and sign up, then we'll know exactly where you're going to go when you get out of basic training."

MS. SHEA: So he knew his way through the system?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right.

MS. SHEA: So that was a very fortuitous dating on your part. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Very nice of him. That's right. That's right. I didn't date his daughter.

MS. SHEA: Okay, you just knew his daughter.

MR. ELLSWORTH: [Laughs.] Right. So, I went into the military in September of '62.

MS. SHEA: And where was your basic training at?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Basic training was in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

MS. SHEA: Missouri.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Fort lost-in-the-woods misery.

MS. SHEA: It's supposed to be hot and humid —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Hot and humid.

MS. SHEA: And generally unpleasant is what I've heard. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: I think someone — I think someone said the barracks had been condemned in 1955.

MS. SHEA: And it was —

MR. ELLSWORTH: They were still using them. [They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: Twelve years later.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That could have been a wives' tale, but —

MS. SHEA: So how was the boot camp experience?

MR. ELLSWORTH: I thrived.

MS. SHEA: You were, you were —

MR. ELLSWORTH: I really did. I don't know why, but I — my parents actually visited me near the end of the boot camp experience, and they said that later on they told my older brother they didn't even recognize me. I had become a squad leader. I took over for a guy after a couple of weeks of basic training who got drunk too many times. I took over his position. And he got demoted and I got promoted — [they laugh] — position not in rank. And then, and I — just organizing people and being in charge of people with that kind of responsibility was the first time that had ever happened to me, and it was quite thrilling. I was in very good physical shape at that time, and I could run when everybody else could only walk and so it was pretty easy.

MS. SHEA: Was that because of all your time in the mountains?

MR. ELLSWORTH: All the time in the mountains sure. Yeah.

MS. SHEA: Okay. With the high altitude —

MR. ELLSWORTH: High altitude.

MS. SHEA: And hiking and —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Absolutely, it was easy.

MS. SHEA: I was going to say by the time you get down the — [laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: I was a skinny character, and always have been thin, but it wasn't hard for me. So I got out of there and went to the headquarters in Colorado Springs, got into that choir. And we would travel — we would travel around the country in Trailways buses, singing at colleges and universities and high schools. And we did the Johnny Carson Show once. We did a program at Carnegie Hall [New York City] with the NORAD [North American Air Defense Command] Band one night for Armed Forces Day.

But it was a recruiting group for the Army Air Defense Command. And so we'd pick up people who would audition if we did a program at a base some place, an Air Force or an Army base some place, we would always have people if they wanted to be recruited and be on the Army Air Defense Command, into ARADCOM.

Then they would come up and do an audition after our program, and if they passed the audition and if we needed space for them, then because we were at the headquarters they'd just send a message and the poor guy would come join us. So we lived in apartments instead of barracks. We cooked our own food. We had our own transportation. We rehearsed in a little black church down on Garth [ph] Street in Colorado Springs.

MR. ELLSWORTH: In Colorado Springs.

MS. SHEA: Yup. And then we'd — each year we would take five trips to cover the five zones that the military had scoped out — about four-week trips on the road — and do these singing tours.

MS. SHEA: So it was like being in a band.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It was like being in a — yep, just like being in the army band —

MS. SHEA: The whole bus.

MR. ELLSWORTH: — only it was a choir. And then in 1964, I was levied to go to, first, to Vietnam — got off of that levy. I don't know, I think I — I think the only reason I got out of that levy is I was the only baritone soloist in the choir at that time. But at any rate that was out of my hands. And then in the summer, I believe, of '64 I was levied to go to — again, and this time I was levied to go to Germany. And so I went to Germany.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: And I said, well, listen; I've only got a year left. This would be a pretty good deal. I'm not going

to be in a war zone. And because I was a speed typist — that was my Military Operation proficiency, whatever they call it — MOS they call it — specialty, I was sent to the headquarters of USAREUR, which is United States Army of Europe. And that was in Heidelberg. So I spent my last year in Heidelberg.

MS. SHEA: And Heidelberg would be a wonderfully charming —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Not bad. Yeah, gorgeous place, wonderful university; plenty of women, you know — international university.

MS. SHEA: And good beer. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Terrific. Great beer. Gained 28 pounds in nine months.

MS. SHEA: Not quite so skinny after that. [They laugh.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right.

MS. SHEA: Now, my one question — when you were traveling around on the band bus, I assume you had some free time. Did you go to museums at all?

MR. ELLSWORTH: No, no, no. Not at that time. No, these were 18- to 22-year-old guys.

MS. SHEA: I was going to say — and did you want to and then did you feel like you would be —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Seeing the sites.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Sure, all the tourist stuff.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: The things that you do and see, you know. It was really fun, but we also had a certain amount of discipline. We had a sergeant and a first lieutenant who was in charge of our group. You had to be at a certain places. You had certain time off, but not a lot.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: So we had fun without question. Let me take a quick break and check in on these troops over here. I want to see what stage they're in.

MS. SHEA: Okay and I will try and pause.

[Audio Break.]

MS. SHEA: I think we're back again. So we had you first traveling around on a bus.

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

MS. SHEA: And then after that, spending about a year in Heidelberg, Germany, typing away whatever needed to be typed.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right. I was a secretary.

MS. SHEA: And did you live on a base there?

MR. ELLSWORTH: I lived in a place in Heidelberg called Patton Barracks.

MS. SHEA: Patton, after General Patton.

MR. ELLSWORTH: After General Patton, right. And we would walk to work every morning, over at the USAREUR Headquarters itself. And that's where everybody worked, but we lived in Patton Barracks. And I'm just trying to think if there is anything else in detail that would help. Well, I worked in an office in the USAREUR Headquarters called the Technical Section of the Intelligence Division, which sounds a little bit like an oxymoron, but it was actually — we had a fellow in there who was a government civilian named Arthur Volz, V-O-L-Z. He was a — they called him Dac. And his specialty was — with a Top Secret Security Clearance was keeping an eye on the Russian missiles.

And then one day, I don't remember the date, *Life* magazine came out with a big spread on the Russian missiles. And we set it on his desk. And he came in about 9:30 that morning, and all we could hear were these filing cabinets being pulled out and dumped on the floor because all of his secret stuff was there for everybody to see, at least in the gross shapes of the missiles, the lengths and all that stuff. It was pretty interesting.

But it was a pretty good job and I was playing guitar in the evenings then and performing in the clubs for beer and admittance so we could go into the jazz clubs in Heidelberg. And a friend of mind worked — he played flamenco and I played American folk music and we would go in and entertain, and that would give us free admission to the clubs. That's where we met all the students and it was really quite fun.

MS. SHEA: And were you able to pick up German pretty quickly?

MR. ELLSWORTH: I had studied German in high school. I was not very good at it, but I had a good conversational handle on the language when I was there, so I had an advantage over a lot of the other people.

Ms. SHEA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: And it wasn't very — certainly, grammatically, it was not what it should be but we had a lot of fun with the language and people accepted us because — or me, because I was trying. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: Right. And did you hike in that area? Or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: No. No. No.

MS. SHEA: And/or go into the art at all?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Nope, none of it.

MS. SHEA: Just stay focused on?

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's it. Stay focused on the music, and that kept — you know, and playing pool. That kept me out of trouble and — well, mostly out of trouble.

MS. SHEA: So that was your four years in the Army was it?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Three.

MS. SHEA: Three. Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And I got a three-month early discharge to go to the university, and was admitted to Washington University in St. Louis in the architecture department.

MS. SHEA: And how did you choose that to apply to?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, my father thought that as an artist, I ought to be able to make a living.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: So architecture was a pretty good solution to that from his perspective.

MS. SHEA: So was he thinking of you as an artist as a visual artist or as an artist, as a singing artist?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, he didn't really know.

MS. SHEA: He just knew it wasn't in math and sciences. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: He just knew that I wasn't following a normal track and he had also had a connection with Washington University because he worked with a firm, an architectural firm there called Murphy and Mackey.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And they designed together — he being the library consultant and they being the architect, they designed and built the library at the Washington University campus there.

MS. SHEA: And I was wondering if this time period at all, you know, when [Eero] Saarinen did the [Gateway] Arch in St. Louis, was that —

MR. ELLSWORTH: I was there when they were putting the keystone piece in that.

MS. SHEA: Wow. That must have been quite exciting to see that happen.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It was very exciting, very exciting.

MS. SHEA: I would think that if you were in the architecture department, there would be a lot of —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh, big deal.

MS. SHEA: — chatter about that.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Big deal. Murphy and Mackey was in the bidding for that monument.

MS. SHEA: For the —

MR. ELLSWORTH: But they did not get the monument, of course. But I was able to see the model that they made for their entrance to it, which is quite spectacular, but nothing like the arch.

MS. SHEA: Nothing like the —

MR. ELLSWORTH: The Arch was the perfect solution

MS. SHEA: Nothing like what Saarinen came up with.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's right, and at the time that I was at Washington University, I was a 21 year old freshman; I had a big chip on my shoulder. I was very good at music and playing and entertaining. I was playing pool like mad. And basically it took me three semesters to flunk out, right. [They laugh.] It was really an exciting time, but it was a very tragic time in that respect for probably more for my parents than it was for me. They were obviously very disappointed.

So I left Washington U. in — that would have been about '66 or '67 I guess — and went back to Boulder, got — I was not a matriculated student but I got into the Modern Choir, which is a contemporary choir they had had for many, many years at the university there, through my connections in the music field, and spent a semester there, and recouped.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: Fell in love with a woman. She moved to New York City. I moved to New York City later, when — and started in the art department, working in art in New York City.

But what had happened significantly to me at Washington University was there was a professor in the — a design professor in the architecture department named Les Laskey — L-A-S-K-E-Y I believe. And I had done a group of drawings with a figure model in charcoal along with the rest of the class and he hauled me into his office to give me a critique of my drawings like each of the students did. And he looked at the drawings and he looked at the drawings, and he finally walked over to me. And the only thing he said was why don't you get out of architecture and go into the fine arts where you belong.

MS. SHEA: So that is really interesting that he gave you a critique that sounds like it was really valuable input.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's right. Absolutely. It was the first kick in the ass I had and it was the right one in the right direction. So when I went to New York I went to New York first to follow this woman, but also to study art. And I started out — I couldn't get into any of the universities, matriculated because of my grades at Washington U, but I could get into The New School for Social Research.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: And I thrived on it.

MS. SHEA: And where is that school?

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's down on 12th Street down in the Village, West Village.

MS. SHEA: Okay. And I hadn't heard of it. It's called The New School for Social Research.

MR. ELLSWORTH: The New School for Social Research was established in the '30s by primarily Jewish refugees from Europe who were kicked out of there. And it was a very controversial school, but basically what its purpose was, outside of the obvious, was to take the talents of individuals and let them develop courses that were of their interest, and then provide those classes for people in New York City, and of course get paid for it. So you had one side — one side.

MS. SHEA: And that was back in the '30s, they came up with this program.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah. There was one side of The New School that I worked in where you could take classes for credit but you didn't have to be a matriculated student, and then later on it evolves so that you could be under a degree program also.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: And I wouldn't have been able to get into that part but I could build up my grades, you see.

MS. SHEA: Right.

MR. ELLSWORTH: So I was taking like 18 and 20, 22 hours a semester for four years in the late '60s, right at the height of the Vietnam War. And it was a vital period of course. Columbia — well, first Queens College blew up and then Columbia blew up. And about that time, in 1970 my wife and I, then, the woman I went out to see, we moved back to Boulder. I had now enough grades to pull me back up so that I could get matriculated at the University of Colorado. So I finished my undergraduate work in Boulder and then went on to two more years in graduate work and did two degrees in sculpture. Sculpture and drawing.

MS. SHEA: And tell me a little bit about — more about your New York experience. Were you — it sounds like you kind of just completely changed your focus from music to art. So were you going from gallery to gallery looking at the museums?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Absolutely. Galleries, museums, private studios, more classes, working with more artists and virtually stopped playing music.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Which was a mistake, but —

MS. SHEA: Well, it's hard to — it's probably hard to do everything and it's probably hard to do a lot of that if you're taking 18 and 20 credits.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, I didn't have a whole lot of time. I had a favorite chair at home. My wife was teaching vocal music at the grade schools, two of them out in Port Washington, out on the Island. So she was commuting — we lived in Flushing, Queens. She was commuting east out of the island, every day; I was commuting into the City every day to go to school.

MS. SHEA: Interesting, and any — does any particular or group of exhibitions or any particular experiences in that time really stick out in your mind? Or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: In Manhattan? Well, yeah.

MS. SHEA: Did you meet any artists that particularly influenced you?

MR. ELLSWORTH: I recall a really powerful exhibition of Isamu Noguchi's work at the —

MS. SHEA: That's so interesting you mention that.

MR. ELLSWORTH: — Whitney Museum [of American Art], I think it was.

MS. SHEA: Yeah. Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I think it was the Whitney, because at that time, he was doing fairly thin slabs of marble that were joined together in almost, well, beautiful sculptural pieces, but joined together at 90 degrees through slotted joints.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And it was a period that was really exciting. Of course there was so much going on in New York at the time.

MS. SHEA: I would think it would be almost —

MR. ELLSWORTH: The whole development of the conceptual art thing was going on. Towson Byreck [ph] was making videos, and all sorts of stuff was going on. And of course New York was the place everything was happening. And I would have stayed in New York because I loved New York, but at the end of that four-year period I realized that I needed to be back West. I was too — the city — in other words you could work with it but

it took a terrific toll on you.

MS. SHEA: Right.

MR. ELLSWORTH: The pace was far too frenetic for me. I worked very hard for four years and loved it, but at the very end of it, I had to get out; I just had to get out. My bubble burst, you see, you know. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: Your energy.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I needed to go back West, that's right.

MS. SHEA: And recharge.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, sure. Yeah

MS. SHEA: And this is kind of a more of a big-picture question. Do you think — and it's something I've been thinking about — that there is a difference, East Coast, West Coast, Midwest? I mean, do you see that in art at all, or, or not, I'm just kind of always musing over that.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I'm not certain about that. I think that the difference is that there's a greater emphasis on academic art throughout the Midwest than there is on the two coasts for obvious reasons. There's always been this struggle between New York and Los Angeles in terms of the development of art. And certainly L.A. got away, 180 degrees from the classical foundations in art that you found in Manhattan, but you had the [Andy] Warhols in Manhattan and that's pretty far away from classical work, too, so. [Laughs.]

But the painting, the whole painting industry of contemporary painting in New York, that's where you went to paint, that's where you went to become known and be shown, and that's where the system of making and selling really was the largest in the world. And Los Angeles was, like, screw you; we'll do what we want to do, and you see this in automobile design in particular. Especially look at the designs of cars that came out in the '50s, my God — fins and all this stuff, Edsels and whatever.

But whereas in New York and Los Angeles you still had the academic foundation, you also had private studios going on that were influenced by everything from academe to museums to just crazy people who were just extraordinarily creative who for some reason one way or another could live on the economy. Most of them are waiters and waitresses, which I'm sure still goes on today.

MS. SHEA: Right.

MR. ELLSWORTH: In many cases ganging up in groups of people to afford an apartment or a loft in order to be able to make their art and do their thing. The difference today of course is that you find this everywhere throughout the country now, from Seattle all the way to Florida and back.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: Crisscrossing.

MS. SHEA: So you needed to recharge your batteries and you went back to Colorado. And at least according to your résumé, if I'm reading it correctly, you enrolled in the sculpture department or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: I finished up in sculpture both as undergraduate and then continued on in graduate school doing graduate work there. And the reason I stayed there was that there was a fellow named Roland Reese who was professor of sculpture there. And I want — I had done all the bronze and aluminum casting. I wasn't working in wood, by the way, but I had done all the other media that one does as a classic sculptural background. I had taken a couple of semesters of ceramics which I really enjoyed. I didn't do any jewelry or printmaking but I stayed within the sculptural and drawing area.

MS. SHEA: and I was going to say, and drawing.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And then my wife and I and took off for — I was going to start graduate school and my wife and I took off for a summer in Europe with backpacks and Eurorail pass, and we came back to do graduate work and Reese had moved to California so —

MS. SHEA: So you lost your —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, so I lost a professor but I stay in the department. And I had — his influence on me was working in flexible or cast polyester resin. So I did two years of work in cast polyester resins.

MS. SHEA: And how did he get interested in that, and how did you get interested in that?

MR. ELLSWORTH: He was inspired as a sculptor and a drawer from a guy named Dwayne Valentine [?] who developed some of the resins himself in California and was doing massive castings in resin. Big sculptural pieces.

MS. SHEA: So, you know, kind of talking about influences, it sounds like for that teacher at least and maybe for the department it was kind of coming from the West Coast.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's right, exactly, exactly.

MS. SHEA: So that's interesting.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Very avant-garde work, and I picked up on that from Reese. And then even though he wasn't there as a senior, as an undergraduate, I picked up on it. And that's what got me started into resins. And then I did extensive work in plastics. I cast seven-and-a-half 55-gallon barrels of resin in two years as a graduate student.

MS. SHEA: That's a lot.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's a lot of liquid.

MS. SHEA: Yes. And those resins to tell people about them is that the kind of thing that comes in the little pellets that you melt or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: No, this comes as a liquid.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And you add certain drops of catalysts to it and it hardens up.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It's somewhat difficult to control. There are three basic kinds of resin. There's a surfacing resin which you see in bars on countertops. There's casting resin, which can well, be huge. And then there's flexible resin casting and that's what I specialized in because I would cast sheets of this stuff.

MS. SHEA: I think we have to pause.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Want to take a break?

[Audio Break.]

MS. SHEA: Okay, I think we're back. So you were doing some — what kinds of shapes and things — was it abstract. Or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, there was all abstract. I did mostly installation work with the resin. I would cast long strips, 20-foot long strips.

MS. SHEA: Twenty feet?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah.

MS. SHEA: Wow, that is long.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I could cast one piece 20 feet long, four-feet wide, and probably up to an inch or two thick, but I never did one huge piece that large. It was all a series of strips. I've casted two-by-fours. And when you get done with this stuff, you can warm it up in a room to 85 or so degrees and you can roll it up into a coil and then I would take it and unroll it and create an installation in a gallery in a museum, and that was actually my first museum show at Metropolitan State in Denver was out of cast flexible polyester resin strips. It was really quite something especially since I was still a graduate student and my professors were a little pissed off because they didn't have a show there.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha. Ah-ha. So that, yes that was one of my questions. Did you remember your first exhibition. Or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah. Well there were always a series of exhibitions while you're a graduate student that you can have at the university and there was your graduate thesis show also, but my first independent show was at

Metro State College in Denver.

MS. SHEA: And how did that come about? Had the — [inaudible] — of your work or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: I honestly don't know what the connection to that was. I don't know where that came about.

MS. SHEA: They must have been intrigued.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah. It was providence of some kind, I don't know.

MS. SHEA: So tell me about your senior thesis exhibition. What did that look like?

MR. ELLSWORTH: I had one piece that was 50-feet long made out of strips like a big bow tie, on the wall, full eight-foot height to the wall. It came out on the floor — lots of colored strips wound and woven together. And most of the work that I did on the resin was about weaving elements together.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSWORTH: So it was like exploding a piece of fabric, for instance, so that the threads were six-inches wide and X-whatever long and gaps between them. So it was based on color and surface, in effect, but in a 3-D event.

MS. SHEA: And what kinds of colors, were they bright colors, or muted colors?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Bright colors. I was using Nasdar silkscreen inks as color in them, so you could get any color you want. The resin itself would dry somewhat clear.

MS. SHEA: Clear.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Almost like a slight amber color to it, but I could get reds and greens and oranges and blacks and whatever I wanted out of it. And I think the heaviest piece that I did in one piece was a six-foot square painting of stones and gravel and sand that had different sizes of grades of the grit up to about an inch in diameter in the stones and down to fine sand. And those elements of aggregate were laid out in lines as one matrix, so-to-speak. And then the resin was poured in the opposite matrix with colored strips so that you had this woven effect within the finished painting. It was quite stunning actually. I only saw it once however. [Laughs.]

I finally got it finished, got it cured out, leaned it up against the back wall of my studio, which was in an industrial area east of Boulder proper, and was watching it, looking at it. And on the other side of that wall was a storage facility for Lay's Potato Chips. And a driver brought in I don't know how many crates on a dolly.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: And he got to that wall and he obviously was going to stand them up. And he pushed with his shoulder, and this whole group of crates of Lay's Potato Chips hit that wall from the backside.

And I watched that painting slowly come at me and crashed face-down on the floor from the flexible wall that it was leaning up against. I had about two months' work in that, and I don't know what he thought, and I wasn't about ready to go around and test him on it because what could we do? It was done. He didn't know and it shattered. The resin was rigid enough at that point that it shattered. So it all went into the dump.

Everything I did in graduate school went to the dump. It was a horrible ecological process; I mean, just absolutely awful. But none of it was for sale, and I think that one of the things that is so different about academic art as opposed to being out on your own is that most art done as a student is never for sale. You're learning to become an artist, to hone your ideas, develop your ideas through one or more media and any number of processes, but it's a growth process. As a student, you're not there to sell.

MS. SHEA: And I was wondering how you afforded these materials. Were they expensive?

MR. ELLSWORTH: It's fairly expensive. I was on a G.I. Bill for one. I worked for an architect, dollar per hour. My wife was employed at the time but I took all my materials out of my G.I. Bill.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha. And did you just order them from some industrial supply and they had arrived on the pallet.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I was ordering the resin directly from Dwayne Valentine's company in California.

MS. SHEA: Oh, okay, okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, it was exciting getting a barrel of resin. I mean it's very, very heavy — trying to figure out how to move that stuff. [Laughs.] Just to get it from your truck to your studio door is —

MS. SHEA: I was going to say, was it a first-floor studio. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, it's a good thing barrels are round, that's all I can — well, truthfully, I mean, it's gravity. Gravity is a wonderful thing, you know. What we'd do actually is we would — this was before lift-gate trucks — these were real semi- — is we would stack up a series of tires on top of one another, old tire. And then we'd get the barrel and roll it to the lip of the truck and roll it off onto the top of the tires and it would just go squish. [They laugh.] It was brilliant, and then you'd take that and you'd roll it off. You learned.

MS. SHEA: So none of that early work survives? It's all —

MR. ELLSWORTH: No. Only in slides.

MS. SHEA: Just gone.

MR. ELLSWORTH: [Laughs.] We've got to wait for the — I think what's significant from there. Let's take a break for a few minutes.

MS. SHEA: I was going to say, I think this might be a little bit of a challenge.

[END MD 01 TR 01.]

MS. SHEA: And once again this is Josephine Shea interviewing David Ellsworth at the artist's home and studio in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, July 16, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and this is disc number two.

Now, we've just finished, basically, getting you graduated from —

MR. ELLSWORTH: The University of Colorado.

MS. SHEA: The University of Colorado.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right. And that's 1973, so I'm armed with a master of fine arts, and it's the height of affirmative action, and I'm the wrong everything.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha. Too tall?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Probably including that.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: And with no job — jobs available. I took a job with a, as a designer for a stainless steel food services equipment, manufacturing equipment in Denver.

MS. SHEA: So that architecture and drawing —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, it was easy for me to deal with that. And that lasted about six months. Hi, Blue. Did you have a good time outside? Why don't you go lay down, boy. Yeah, that's a good boy. You go lay down.

Green Brothers was what that was called. And they made stainless steel sinks and things for restaurants like Shakeys and that type of stuff. And near the end of that period, I heard about an opening at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass, Colorado. They were looking for a woodworker in residence and I knew how to make furniture. I had run the — I had a job at the University of Colorado during graduate school of running the woodshop there, so I knew how to make furniture, and I knew how to repair the machines and everything else.

So I interviewed from Paul Soldner who was the then-director of the Anderson Ranch. We met at an airport hotel in Denver, and he and his wife, Ginny talked about it. And what he was really looking for was young energetic crafts persons, artists, that were interested in starting a program from scratch. The end result is, is that my wife at that time — my first wife, took a leave of absence from her job teaching in Boulder — again, teaching elementary school music and we went to the Anderson Ranch in the summer, actually May I believe it was of 1974. And using their money, I bought all the equipment and designed the interior of this old log structure that had once been a horse barn.

MS. SHEA: Oh, so you were really just starting up from scratch.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh yeah. And we added the wood program as a furniture/turning, what became turning, to what was already existing and had existed from the early '70s as a ceramics program. We became a 501(c)(3) and we also added photography. So it was now called Center of the Hand and Center of the Eye. And that job

lasted for a year. And then my wife went back to her position in Boulder and I opened up a private studio in Boulder.

MS. SHEA: In Boulder.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And by that time I had refined my turning skills by myself to the point where I was doing small bowls, candle holders, the usual things and a line of salt and pepper and sugar shaker sets that I designed. If you, Blue, yeah — he stuck his paw right underneath the runner of that rocker. I'll keep my eye on it — and that was my production item. And I made in the next two and a half years, about 5,000 sets of these salt and pepper and sugar shakers.

MS. SHEA: And did you sell them — did you do the craft fair thing?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, I did the craft show scene, craft fair scene, crafts store scene, anybody that would take them.

MS. SHEA: Anyone that would take —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Absolutely.

MS. SHEA: — put them on the shelf.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Absolutely. And I started out — my wife and I had a home in Boulder west of campus. And it started out — I was working in this little room that was 16-feet-by-16-feet. It was on the end of a barn that was owned by a friend of ours, a physics professor there in Boulder, and he said if you can make it nicer when you leave than when you came in you can have it for rent free.

MS. SHEA: Ah, perfect. Perfect studio rental.

MR. ELLSWORTH: So I wired it, insulated it, and then within a year, got a divorce and moved into it, which was only a little bit illegal but what are you going to do?

MS. SHEA: Now, I'm just a little curious why only one year at the Anderson Ranch [Snowmass Village]. You felt like you had done what you could do, or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: I did what I needed to do and the ranch suddenly went very broke.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And the reason they went broke was that, A, we couldn't get as many students as we needed and charge them enough money to do the work.

MS. SHEA: To make it.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And, they, the students were the ones that were doing all the work to refurbish these old buildings on the campus there. And, C, we had a wonderful opportunity to put a sewer line into the ranch and have a central sewer connected to the Snowmass sewer line, so that all of the sinks and stools and everything could be on — this went right through the old cattle ranch, the Anderson ranch. And it was on absolutely imperative that this happen because otherwise we wouldn't have been able to accommodate that many — these people, you see. And then the next spring would have been '75. Snowmass hit us with tap fees — \$1400 per sink, stool, tub, whatever, and it wiped us out.

MS. SHEA: Wow. Yikes.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Now, fortunately the year after that, they got a new Board of Directors and a new president, and they brought in a lot of money into the ranch and decided that this was a cultural phenom — within that Valley, and they needed to keep it and push it, and they did, with the end result that today, the condominiums keep creeping down the hillside, but they can only go so far. And the golf course keeps coming up from below but it can only go so far, and the ranch is a very well established institution now.

MS. SHEA: So you're down in the studio in Boulder.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I'm down in the studio in Boulder. I'm making sugar shaker sets by the day. I'm working about 18, 20 hours a day. And then in the evenings I would put all that away and started playing with designs of bowls, which somewhere right around early '76 — by June of '76, I had finally perfected it to the point where I made my first — sorry — first hollow turning with a bent tool.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And the reason for the hollow turnings was that, first of all, I got bored making bowls. But with the year, year and a half experience in throwing clay at the university when I was an undergraduate, the whole concept of what a vessel was all about became pretty important to me. I had studied it, the history of ceramics and other media — other cultures and other eras, and I made coarse clay pieces that were closed in, but the other inspiration for it was Native American ceramics, which I had grown up around within our family and other people up in the mountains where they sold it and going down to New Mexico, in particular, and seeing these pieces, learning the different artists of the Native American tribes, various tribes.

So it was a combination of inspirations and the synchronicity of timing and the need to make money.

MS. SHEA: All came together. [They laugh.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right. I went back to shooting a lot of pool, to pay off child support, gasoline, groceries, whatever, did more of the craft shows. And each month the work became more demanding, more refined, tools got better, and the designs got better as well, and the skill got better. Until July of '77, I was doing a crafts show in Carbondale, Colorado, which is just up the valley from Aspen. And a couple came by who owned the Gargoyle Gallery in Aspen, and said, we have always wanted Bob Stocksdale's bowls because of their thin wall and beautiful lines, but we can't get them, and we'd like to try yours.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: So I gave them 18 of my little hollow forms, which were like \$35 to \$300 in price range, and went home. They took them to Aspen. I didn't hear a thing until mid-December, and I got a check for \$850, which was more money than I had ever seen in any one lump sum in all the craft shows that I had done. I could sell out at a craft show and not make half of that — [laugh] — it seemed like, and I never made another set of salt and pepper and sugar shakers again.

MS. SHEA: That was the end of the salt and pepper line. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: That was the end of the production item. I said, look, if I can make these pieces and show these pieces and if people will accept these pieces in Aspen, then I need to go elsewhere and show. So the following year, in '78, I applied for my first national crafts show in San Francisco, and it's called the *Pacific States Crafts Show*; it's out on Fort Mason Center.

MS. SHEA: And does that still exist?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh yeah.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It's run by the American Crafts Council, as are all the other five shows around the country. And I no longer do the shows. I got out in '84 but from that point on, '78 until 1984, I did craft shows on both coasts, national shows, got out of the local market totally because it was too much work to try and sell objects whose price was going up and objects that were totally useless in terms of function and utility —

MS. SHEA: Right.

MR. ELLSWORTH: — to a fairly provincial, but certainly just simply inexperienced and uneducated marketplace.

MS. SHEA: And were you focused just strictly on the craft show.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yep.

MS. SHEA: Or then did you get your — at some point you must have gotten your first gallery.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right, right. And that's what you do when you do these crafts shows is it introduces you to gallery owners who come to the craft shows to look for work to supply in their galleries. And the first year in '78 from the San Francisco show I picked up 16 galleries who wanted to handle my work — 16 — all on consignment, of course.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: You just send me your work free and we'll try and sell it, which was understandable because nobody had ever seen anything like what I was doing. So it was incumbent upon me, like everybody else, to send your work out and let them show it, do an exhibition to introduce it to their customers and go on from

there. Within —

MS. SHEA: And so did you start out with all 16 at once?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh yeah. Oh absolutely. I was a turning machine. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: We're recording this in 2007 when there's about nine presidential candidates, so that would be like —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Just pairing them out. I was going to say, within two years I was down to eight.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Shuffling work from one gallery to another became a nightmare in logistics, just keeping track of things.

MS. SHEA: Right.

MR. ELLSWORTH: This was before digital. You had to photograph everything and catalogue everything in your own records and send it out here. And then a year later or six months later if it didn't sell, you'd send it over there, hoping that nobody had seen it in the other place, right. And it wasn't for another decade before buyers started becoming collectors and actually traveling around to the different facilities, galleries, museums to see the work and say, oh, I saw that piece. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: So, are you still with any of those initial eight galleries?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yes, one.

MS. SHEA: And which gallery is that?

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's Del Mano in Los Angeles.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: All the others are closed now.

MS. SHEA: Oh, really?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh, yeah.

MS. SHEA: Well, I thought —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, actually that's not quite true.

MS. SHEA: Bellas Artes.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's not quite true.

MS. SHEA: Did you just show at —

MR. ELLSWORTH: The Hand and the Spirit Gallery in Scottsdale, which was run by JoAnn Rapp.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: Changed hands, became Materia Gallery and then became Wendy Hass's gallery and I still work with her.

MS. SHEA: So it's still a gallery that's —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, it's still in the same facility.

MS. SHEA: Evolved over — time.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah. But Belles Artes in Santa Fe stopped handling my work but the Belles Artes in New York, which was my best gallery of all in the late '80s, early '90s, was only — it's a clay and fiber gallery, so people would come in with that type of an aesthetic and language and they'd see my pieces, these vessels, and it translated directly.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: They didn't have to be wood turners. I was the only woodworker in the whole gallery so it was a wonderful exposure for my work — sold beautifully out of there for four years — instantly sold — big pieces, up to \$8500 in those days, which in that case was probably a two-foot high piece that today would go for \$30,000, but at that time that was a lot of money.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: Especially for a wood turner, and got me to some very good private collections and public collections, and, da, da, da, da — just doing what a gallery is supposed to do. Well, they closed after four years. [Laughs.] That was '92, anyway — '91 or '92.

MS. SHEA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I was curious, have you done any of either Penland [Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC] or Haystack [Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME] or any of the — I don't know how you'd categorize those exactly but —

MR. ELLSWORTH: The crafts show, or crafts school circuit.

MS. SHEA: Right.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yes, I've done them all. I've been in Arrowmont [Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN] for 25 years.

MS. SHEA: As a student or a teacher?

MR. ELLSWORTH: As a teacher.

MS. SHEA: Okay. Now, did you ever go as a student at all?

MR. ELLSWORTH: No. No.

MS. SHEA: You didn't ever feel the need?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, by the time I started into the field that I helped develop, I didn't know that those schools existed until I started exhibiting my work, and when people would contact me from the schools and say would you be interested in coming and teaching it, I was already a teacher.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: There were no turning programs in those days. Arrowmont was the first one to develop a turning program and then Penland and Haystack in the early '80s.

MS. SHEA: Did you find it was similar to your experience in the Anderson Ranch where you had to go in and set up shop, or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: No, they already had wood shops, they didn't have very good wood turning shops. You'd have to borrow lathes from a local high school or take your own, or both, or all three.

MS. SHEA: Or borrow and steal.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Students, meaning students bring their lathes, too. And as recently as 10 — about 10 years ago — maybe not even that long — maybe it would have been right around — the late '90s, let's call it, we did a workshop up at Haystack, and I think nine of the ten students brought their own lathes.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It was terrific. Including me; I brought two of them in my truck. [They laugh.] So we were covered.

MS. SHEA: So, as you travel on the freeways, you never know if someone maybe — [laughs] — driving their lathes from here to there.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh. Oh, yeah. It's hysterical.

MS. SHEA: You mentioned the influences of the Native American traditions that you were exposed to very young. Have you traveled a lot? And has that impacted your work?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Traveled in the Southwest you mean?

MS. SHEA: Or in the internationally or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh, well, let me back up a little bit, in terms of the influences of those — it's not just the influences of the shapes themselves, but it's also the influence of the architecture and the landscape of the Southwest, the light in particular and the adobe and the — I mean the openings, the dropped openings that I do in my pots, like that one over there on the floor is a direct inspiration from the smoke holes of a Navaho bread oven.

MS. SHEA: Okay, I didn't realize that the architecture —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah.

MS. SHEA: Okay. Was part of it.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, and the natural surfaces that I do on spalted materials, and the textural surfaces that I put in my work, the black pieces, for instance, and using burls, are all about that organic relationship of man to nature and architecture. And growing up in the Southwest, you're surrounded by it, more so in New Mexico than in Colorado, but my parents didn't live in New Mexico. We visited there and we camped there and we went to the reservations there and we went to the Chaco Canyon, and Canyon de Chelly, and Mesa Verde. And you're dealing with an organic inspiration without question, not just from the landscape but the architecture within the landscape. And that's what has inspired me all these years as I get more mature with my work. I see more and more of the inspiration of the Southwest in my work.

MS. SHEA: Right, as we sit here, I'm looking across to what I assume is — are black-and-white photographs of the Southwest.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right. Right. And it's interesting to me that as I gravitate more towards that inspiration, the marketplace for woodturnings is going more to the slick surfaced, poly type surfaces —

MS. SHEA: Isn't that interesting.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And painting and surface penetration, all this stuff — very, very interesting, directions — all new for woodturning; not necessarily new for woodworking or other media, but certainly for woodturning. The collectors are really gravitating towards these smooth slick surfaces. They look very much like blown glass —

MS. SHEA: That's an interesting comparison, isn't it.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Many of which already have fairly substantial blown glass collections. This is why Ed Moulthrop's work was always so powerful is that, A, he had these beautiful architectural scale objects. These were big pieces; I mean, they command a room around one of these pieces. And, two, it looked just like blown glass. You could buy wood and get it to look like glass. [They laugh.] So it was perfect. It didn't matter how big it was or how expensive it was, that was what — a collector didn't have to think about organic surfaces. It's no longer really popular — fashionable is a better term. And fashion always controls the craft of arts, always, from decade to decade, era to era.

So I — there isn't a gallery in New York today that could handle my work. It's not fashionable for that market. [They laugh.] And Doug Heller, bless his heart — he and Michael — brothers that own the Heller Gallery in SoHo — handled Moulthrop for many years, including his son, Phillip, and now his grandson Matt and they've done very well with him. And they've tried handling other turnings and just couldn't sell it as fast as they can sell glass. I mean you'd spend an hour trying to sell a woodturning and five minutes, you know, for \$2,000 and five minutes selling a \$20,000 piece of glass. Start counting.

MS. SHEA: Time is money. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Exactly, especially in New York. You have to watch his feet because I can't tell where they are.

MS. SHEA: Okay, I'll try to be still here.

This is just one of their standard questions. Do you think of yourself as part of an international tradition or one that is particularly American. Or maybe you don't think of yourself in either of those categories.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, it's a very good question. I think that contemporary woodturning as we know it today from an international perspective of the Western world is an American phenomenon. The inspirations, the design ideas and the inspirations that have come from our country have dominated, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, not so much Germany, but to a certain extent, the inspiration has. It's inspired either the ideas, the design ideas directly, or the inspiration for making work as an independent artist, following your dream, the way the Americans — [laughs] — classic American — is now even in France. I mean some of the best work coming out

today is coming out of France — not very many people but certainly coming out there.

And five years ago, well seven years ago, France was still right down the old track of guilds and this and that and the other — straight arrow stuff, boring as hell, poorly made, and very high prices. But they would not — we met this wonderful young man — he's probably 35 or so — in a castle. He was working — showing in a castle with his little store in this castle at the top of — and he lived down and worked in the valley in his own shop, but he sold out of this little room. The work was dreadful, just dreadful. But — and my wife speaks French so she was talking with him — and perfectly delightful guy, and very handsome of course — [they laugh] — especially in this wonderful castle in — so they got along really famously.

But what was interesting about it is I was over there for a conference in St. Gerome. And he had heard of the conference but he would never go to a conference. He was a wood turning savage, a *saváge* [ph].

MS. SHEA: Oh he's a -

MR. ELLSWORTH: He's an independent. He doesn't even go to other people's workshops. People come to me to buy. I don't go out to learn.

MS. SHEA: Self-taught. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, today the big guys, the good guys, you know, the Escoulen, and the others, were so heavily inspired by the work that's come out of America, that they're staying in France and making in France and they show their smaller objects in France, but the work sells in the United States. The same for the Australian turners. Now, they're obviously over the decades beginning to — and have, developed some fairly substantial markets in their own countries, but nothing, nothing of what it's like here.

MS. SHEA: Like the U.S.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Absolutely.

MS. SHEA: Hmm, that's interesting.

MR. ELLSWORTH: So I think to more answer your question I feel much more comfortable now within an effective and reasonably thorough international marketplace than ever before, because it's growing internationally more so than ever before.

MS. SHEA: It's becoming just more international itself.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, right. And I said Western because Japan does wonderful wood turnings, has for centuries — I mean, millennia — 2,000 years, at least — of a very traditional nature. And yet, they're coming over here — their master turners are coming over here, some of the younger ones, in particular, the real hot dog guys. And they're demonstrating over here and becoming exposed to what's happening over here. And we don't know what the fallout of this is yet.

MS. SHEA: It's still evolving and brewing and —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right. I know some of them are working on Western design lathes, which is very unique.

MS. SHEA: Because in the past they would have used traditional Japanese —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Traditional lathes, traditional tools. They make all the tools, they make the lathes, it's really — and each village would do one style of turning and then the next village would do another style of turning, but you didn't cross, and that's I think changing now also. Quite wonderful.

MS. SHEA: Well that's interesting. — So we mentioned, like, your first museum type of exhibition. Do you remember maybe your first solo one-man gallery exhibition?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, I had one at the Gargoyle Gallery in Aspen. I, then, on a national basis, the first one was in New York City, and I should know the name of that place, but I don't. I'll have to try and find it.

MS. SHEA: Your list here — because it must not have been Heller.

MR. ELLSWORTH: No, no, no, no. I've never been with Heller Gallery.

MS. SHEA: There's Belles Artes. Cooper Lynn.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, it could have been Cooper Lynn. I think it was even before then.

MS. SHEA: Because that was 1985.

MR. ELLSWORTH: No, this was even before then. This was in the late '70s. I was still living in Colorado and we moved out here in '79, no, '80. At any rate, it's terrible I can't remember that off the top of my head. I'll have to look it up. But I had this show and this woman who headed the gallery wanted to have a painter do the show with me. She said it would be more effective if you had a painter with you because then we can get a review in the *Times*.

MS. SHEA: Which might be a valid point actually.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Which was a very good point. I said, "Wow; that would be really something." I said, "Sure." So I did the show. We sold one piece to the gallery owner for \$350 and we did get — that was it — and we did get a review in the *New York Times* and it didn't mention me. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: Oh, my goodness.

MR. ELLSWORTH: — because the reviewer had no language for crafts

MS. SHEA: To even start talking about that.

MR. ELLSWORTH: She didn't even mention me. She couldn't; she had no way of addressing the subject. So she reviewed the paintings.

MS. SHEA: So not a very wonderful start in New York. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, it was a good one.

MS. SHEA: It was a learning — I'm sure it was the learning experience.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It was a great lesson. It was a great lesson. And I've done a lot of shows where I've never sold anything because it was new locations, people were getting used to something they hadn't expected before. It didn't function and it cost more than a Bic lighter.

MS. SHEA: So that has been the challenge.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It's always a challenge when you're educating your public and trying to sell to them at the same time. Generally in business that would be kind of a stupid thing to do.

MS. SHEA: You do one or the other. [They laugh.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: You do one or the other, right.

MS. SHEA: So you kind of talked about your first series, shall we say — Bowls [1976-1980], is your title at least on your web site.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, I called them Bowls. Didn't know what else to call them.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.] That would be an interesting challenge,

MR. ELLSWORTH: Sure, especially since Ed Moulthrop always called his objects bowls, whereas I think Lindquist and I and the other gang, in the '80s gravitated toward the vessel as a terminology.

MS. SHEA: Right and that is a series that you've given kind of the next piece of your work.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's right. And then I moved from there in 1990 to making POTS [1990-present] which basically kicks me right back to the Indian.

MS. SHEA: Circular motion.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Sure. Right back to the Indian influences in the Southwest.

MS. SHEA: So tell me about the '80s. Did you, were you starting to feel that your work was getting more acceptance and recognition? Did you feel that you were able to educate?

MR. ELLSWORTH: It was a very impacting period. In our field, by 1982, I can look back and see that all the primary design motifs had been established and were mature, and mine was the last, the thin-wall hollow form. Moulthrop did thick-walled hollow forms of great architectural scale work. Lindquist did great thick — not hollow forms but open bowls, although his father, Melvin, did hollow forms, but focusing on textures and

sculpture — and then totems from Mark also, a natural-edged burl, raw, woody, real wood, you know, stuff, beautiful work. And Steven Hogbin had taken the object and dissected it and reassembled it in a design concept.

And then of course we had Stocksdale who did bowls and more bowls, and more bowls. And there was platters in there too, a few. And James Prestini started it all out from '33 to '53, stopped doing in '53.

MS. SHEA: And I was wondering. Did you hear of him at all? It didn't sound like your paths really crossed.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I had heard of him through Albert LeCoff in Philadelphia when I was living up in the mountains in Colorado in '77, and I had never seen any of his work nor he mine. But he was living in Berkeley. And Albert connected us by sending my address to him, and he wrote me a letter, one of his great, famous typewriter letters — [laughs] — when I was living in the mountains, and we connected that way. And then over the years we ended up sharing many bottles of wine and wonderful conversations.

He was a pure intellect; a monstrous ego; a great sculptor, I feel; and had worked really more in Italy than he had in the United States for his important pieces. But from '33 to '53 he turned wood in New York City and they became known as Prestini's "pure forms" because they were absolutely elegant, simple, post-Bauhaus style objects. It could have been a simple cigarette holder, cup shape, or a salad tray with salad bowls and a single salad bowl, and then four or six I guess it was, individuals, a platter. But they were absolutely spectacular in their simplicity. So this took us into the modern era, if you wish, on his shoulders.

And then by, as your original question, by the early '80s, this had pretty much exploded because he stopped in '55, was rediscovered in '77 — '76 actually I found out about it in '77 — and then you came with Moulthrop's work and the Lindquists' work, which preceded mine of course by about five years, and then my work came in as the very thin-walled hollow form. So all the stuff was there, it was just a question of getting more people to do it so it would expand its dimension and become a broader more mature field. And that's what we're working on now, and we're doing pretty well. [They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: So the vessels. — I am quoting here from your web site here: "It was a period of great exploration and discovery within all craft media and wood turning in particular." And that's when it sounds like you say that you felt that you really discovered your own voice as a designer and craftsman.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right.

MS. SHEA: I'm kind of interested about the wood. Do you find yourself choosing woods for what you're able to do with them or what they say to you? Or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: The two points are related directly. When I was at, working up in the mountains from the first little barn room I was in, everything was pretty hard line designs, dry material. It's like color photography; you see what you get. It wasn't until '77 that I discovered green wood, meaning trees. [They laugh.] In other words, I had been working with wood that furniture makers wouldn't use. So everything was real hard lined. Is he stinking up? Blue? Boy you are really awful. Come on. Here.

MS. SHEA: Only a little bit.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh man. Yeah, he can be wicked. Come on! Get in here. Yeah, that'll melt paint, that dog. — I was working with hard edged designs. And also during that period it was this very uprooted period emotionally in my time with a 4-year-old kid and a divorce and everything else, and me living in a barn now without running water. When I was traveling back and forth across the country to the craft shows driving coast to coast —

MS. SHEA: And what did you use to drive in just out of curiosity?

MR. ELLSWORTH: When my wife and I divorced for one reason or another — circumstances and politics in Boulder — the price of everything doubled. We sold our house, split the profit and went, adios. [Laughs.] So I made 15,000 off of that — so did she — and spent five-and-a-half of it on my first pick up truck in '77 and hit the road. That's what got me the mobility to show my work outside of the local area.

MS. SHEA: So if you were going to a bank for a microloan that would have been what you would have needed to purchase — would be this truck to get you.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's right. I had to haul my stuff to do the crafts shows like everybody else in those days, and still do. Well, the end result is I became exposed to a lot of new materials

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Including trees and burls, and all sorts of wonderful stuff, some of which were pretty decomposed, or hollow, rotted, whatever, oftentimes things that other woodworkers didn't want and couldn't

use. But I could use them, and subsequently — oops.

[END MD 01 TR 02.]

MS. SHEA: Okay. We're back. Once again this is Josephine Shea. I am sitting on the porch of David Ellsworth's home in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, on Monday, July 16, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution and this is disc number three.

We were just talking about the choices of wood and wood's ability to — did you choose wood for its ability of what you could do with it or its ability what it was saying to you. And you said, I believe, that it's was a combination of both.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right. Where I was going with that was that when I started working with green wood and wood that was distressed, I started also, in the designs that I was making, opening up to more warm and wholesome forms, more curvilinear, more spherical, also exposing the interior of my pieces for the first time to the viewer. And in effect it was like a coming out in some form. And I look back at that period also as a time when my personal life was beginning to resolve from recovery of the divorce, which was now two years I think. And so the sync in that was — the synchronicity of that was all really quite tidy if you look back from — at it from what has occurred since.

And there's no question that as a designer I was inspired by the material as I'm working with it, but also evolving into a greater understanding of the vessel form through my process, through the process of turning, which would be similar as if you were throwing clay and learning about your voice beginning to evolve within the maelstrom of all the huge number of shapes that have already been developed in clay.

And all of my shapes, all of woodturning shapes are actually clay shapes, somewhere some culture some era. So to say that any of this is new is partially true in that they were new designs to me and they were new to woodturning and the method that I was using was new to woodturning, but in effect what I was also doing was joining a pantheon of wonderful shapes that were very similar in other media by other people.

So there was a sense of comfort in that actually. [Laughs.] When people say you're doing something new, it's a pretty heavy-duty responsibility, and in fact I don't know that there is anything really true and new, or if there were, I don't know that it would really make any difference. You're just basically adding on to a huge legacy and that gave me cause to really celebrate what I was doing, and it also, with the support and encouragement of my other woodworker and potter and other type friends in the arts, really was what helped to keep me going. I've always been a very determined person once I've carried something out, but having that support, getting the strokes, if you wish, from people that you trust and respect was terrific.

I mean you have to remember that I would travel in the summer. But when I holed up in the winter in the mountains I would have only visitors that I could get up there on the mountain. And if I was plowing that week, then we could have visitors, but if I wasn't — [laughs] — there was nobody who could get or would want to come up where I was. So the winters were a time for work and contemplation and growth; the summer was time for inspiration and selling and reconnecting with people. So the growth of the work was sympathetic to the growth of the field, as we developed it later, and the other people that I met within the field, and the inspiration that I got from them both personally and professionally through the objects that they were making.

MS. SHEA: And that is one of the — the other questions, is — were any particular community of artists most helpful and supportive and I guess the other part of the question is the more formal, say, people writing about your work, was that helpful or was any particular input the most helpful. Or, like, where do you go to look for kind of feedback on your work that you actually value?

MR. ELLSWORTH: I think there are many questions there. Let me start from the writing part. Basically the only person that has written about my work with any effectiveness is a fellow up in New Hampshire called Rick Mastelli who wrote a review of which I had a small paragraph, a review of a show at Arizona State University in Tempe years ago. All the rest of the writings about my work, I've written.

MS. SHEA: Okay. And it seems to me —

MR. ELLSWORTH: And it — go ahead.

MS. SHEA: — that you're a pretty eloquent writer. I mean I've only been able to judge it —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, I write very well. And but I think that there is some kind of a resistance to writing about woodturners' works, not just my own, but other woodturners' work, in part because there are very few decent writers in the woodturning field who are also makers.

Second of all, there have not been a great number of reviews on any of the woodturning exhibitions or the woodturners themselves, particularly because woodturning is not a very big field yet and the reviews that we have had have not been reviews at all; they've been reports —

MS. SHEA: About this is the different —

MR. ELLSWORTH: About what they saw, and what the writer saw and what it looked like it, and who was there, and all this bullshit. It was not about a critical review, in other words.

I think the only critical review that we have had is probably the best one and that's *Woodturning in North America Since 1930*, that the two curators wrote the book and designed the collection and built the collection to substantiate the text by giving examples of what they were trying to express. And they took the field from the early 1900s, which basically was Prestini, up to about '75, '77, and then a second curator and writer took it from there to the present.

And they researched a gazillion people, myself included, to get the story about this shift, this growth, and then found the objects in different people's works to support the story. And it was very well done. There are obviously a couple of boners in there, but it was very, very well done. And it's really the only critical text we have on contemporary woodturning that I've ever seen that's any good.

MS. SHEA: And do you have any ideas on why writers seem to feel, who aren't makers, seem to be uncomfortable — with —

MR. ELLSWORTH: I think it's a lack of language.

MS. SHEA: Okay, like, not — I mean.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah. It's a lack of critical language. Effective language. There's always been a difficulty in writing about the crafts in general because of the lack — from a critical point of view because of a lack of language as a carryover from the fine arts. Very rarely does it get reviewed, do objects get reviewed. I don't remember reading a review of the [Dale] Chihuly exhibition, or Harvey Littleton exhibition.

A lot of curators writing, or museum people writing about — not curators, but museum people writing about some statement in a catalogue for an exhibition and applauding how wonderful the person's work is, but very rarely do we get construct — well, not — just critical review within the crafts much less within woodturning. And also it's part of — part of the problem is that woodturners themselves don't write about their work. Michelle Holzapfel is the only one that I know that does this avidly, and Clay Foster documents everything he does in sketchbooks, which is very, very helpful of course, but very few makers and woodturners are also writers and don't know how to write about their work.

MS. SHEA: And what, do you have any ideas of how to address that on either end, either from the people involved making it or, the people —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Time and encouragement is going to be the factor. I think in part it will come from a new breed of woodturners that are out there, younger people who are now working in university and college programs in woodturning. I think it will come from curators as they become more and more involved with turning who are going to request from artists to write about their work. It's got to come from both ends; it can't just come from one.

MS. SHEA: Right.

MR. ELLSWORTH: And also as the field matures — I mean I look at woodturning in 2007 as basically in early-to-middle adolescence.

MS. SHEA: Okay, so the gangly teenager stage? [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yep, that's it. And you can't expect a field, if you think of it in its total scope from people who are just starting out to people who have been at it for a while to yet be mature enough from a professional point of view to understand what the nature of that scope is. And oddly enough, as I say that I must admit that I understand the scope. I participated in it. I have helped develop it as much as I possibly can, but I'm often remiss in documenting my own past — [laughs] — accurately the way I should. I think Mark Lindquist is probably the best of that of anybody I know of. And I'll often — a few months ago, I was trying to figure out whether it was 1977 or 1978 that we first did the PSE show in San Francisco and I emailed him and he came back — oh, you weren't listed in the '77 catalogue, but — [laughs] — but you were in '78 so it must be '78. And I said, thanks. Catalogue? I don't remember that catalogue even being made much less saving one. He's got it all.

MS. SHEA: And I guess maybe related to that is when we came back from lunch you got in your mailbox the new

issue of *Craft* magazine, which, is that for you the most important currently read magazine and what is your thinking of that and its coverage of the field?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, it's the only act in town, when it comes to dealing with the entire scene, of American craft today, is it thorough enough? It can't be. It's only one magazine. When you get into turning per se then you go to the *American Woodturner* which is the document that my organization puts out which is a quarterly. *American Craft* has been very valuable to the entire field, but it's not been very kind to woodturning over the last decade — a few exceptions, but not on a regular basis the way you have with clay and glass.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: And yet we, and that's not a reflection on Lois Moran. She was a fabulous editor, and there for 38 years, I think if not more, maybe 43, but whatever, long time, and she did an excellent job and yet, there's the other media fields are so much more mature than we are, they're so much more longevic and there are so many more people within their fields than there is in woodturning that it possibly only warrant an occasional article.

But I feel today that with our new editor, Andrew is going to take it to another level. He's re-designing the magazine totally which will be in this next month's, October, issue. He's a bright guy. And I am on the Board of Trustees so maybe there's some influence there. [Laughs.] And then of course, as I indicated the whole maturity of the field, once it gains greater strength, will gain more attention. In part, we have — that also includes the professional side of it. We only have five major galleries in the country who exhibit and advertise on a national basis that handle woodturners. That's just five, and you look at clay and glass, I mean, they've been around for another 25, 30 years longer than we have and they're pretty well represented.

MS. SHEA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Do you do commissions? Have you done?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Nope.

MS. SHEA: Okay, well then I won't ask you which one was the most important commission. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Nope, don't do commissions. Don't do commissions. I went down to Philadelphia one time on a phone call with my tractor guy who was taking down a map — an elm tree that was covered with burls, in the Bryn-Mawr section — wealthy section of Philly — and I got my truck loaded, and we had talked about payment and stuff, and he said, "You know what I'd really like is a pair of really tall salt and pepper grinders." And almost unloaded the truck. I would have paid him plenty in cash. [They laugh.] I don't do commissions. Take it, take what you see.

Now, it's an interesting subject actually because I have always felt, because I'm not a furniture maker, I've always felt very limited or constricted by the responsibility to do something that is to me, very spontaneous but to a client I can't do a drawing or you know an architectural drawing, if you wish, a rendering that they could approve and I'd go ahead and make it, because I don't plug pretty pieces of wood into drawings. I do the drawing with a gouge on the material while I'm working with it. I need that sense of spontaneity. And if I take a commission I know going in that the person is not going to like what they get, even though they would have agreed on the wood, the shape, and all the other stuff. Once they see it they're not going to like it because they have something different in their mind than I have in mine.

MS. SHEA: I follow you.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Furniture maker, piece of cake, sketches, drawings and examples from photographs, sure.

MS. SHEA: You talked just a little bit about — you see this particular field as kind of in its adolescence. Do you feel that you can really see what direction it's going in, or moving in? Or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh yeah, sure.

MS. SHEA: — the younger generation, and what —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well it's based on its own history over the last 30 years in comparison to the history of other craft media that have preceded it, like in particular clay and glass, because each of the media fields follows the same fundamental pattern in evolving. What is different meaning that you have a certain number of individuals who are making work under a certain number of influences, who then engage in established market places the way they are, battle that out for a while, form a national organization to support themselves, and then go on a parallel with that into exhibition spaces, galleries, craft shows whatever that might be.

As the work progresses, it shifts, certain people linger in the production area, doing the same thing over and over and over again because that's what they're interested in, and that's where they make the money. Others

venture out but in very small numbers into making one-of-a-kind objects at much higher prices which narrows your market down and puts you into a museum category of representation through galleries and private collection and et cetera, and it's somewhat elitist but not really that bad.

Woodturning took a different route than all the other media with the possible exception of basketry, and that is that we went not to the universities from high school but with an industrial background that we had, we stayed in the high schools. We were never exposed to the fine-arts departments in the universities. There was no growth concept development of the artist — find your own voice, study art history et cetera, et cetera. Instead we stuck within the craft, the industrial nature of the craft of woodturning throughout and then as things did start to evolve because in most cases, it was artists like myself coming from other fields into woodturning which would include Merryl Saylan, Mark Sfirri, Mark Lindquist, myself, all of which have M.F.A.s [Master of Fine Arts] in some field — coming to woodturning vicariously and engaging woodturning in our own minds as an art form.

And where do we fit? What can we do to make it into a legitimate art form, independent of its industrial background, independent of its high school kind of formative training program? And the way we did it was to form an organization and to go doing craft school teaching.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: So we then took that background, produced, as I said, by '82 really exceptional work both in concept and in quality and charged into the marketplace, it was already set up for us by the other crafts media — [laughs] — and crafts organizations — and said look at me. See what we do.

And eventually we evolved in our price structure competitively to them, because conceptually we were as good as they are, and side-stepped the university. Now we're coming back to the university to get that tail-end of professionalism with now eight programs in the country.

MS. SHEA: Are there are eight?

MR. ELLSWORTH: That provide you with at least a B.F.A. if not an M.F.A. in woodturning. I'm not sure what you do with it.

MS. SHEA: But at least you're —

MR. ELLSWORTH: You could start another program — [they laugh] — in another college but the point is that that level of professionalism, and that's what I talked about or what I meant when I talked about woodturning being in early-to-middle adolescence. Ninety-nine or so percent woodturners today are hobbyists. Most of those are retirees; it's one of the greatest ways that men going post-job in their work lives can satisfy the needs that they have for creative energies that they in most cases never knew they had, or had no way of expressing them.

They can do that in a moderate space with a modest amount of money compared to say being a furniture maker, where you have to buy a lot of machines — and at their own pace, and it gets them off the bottle, it gets them off the television. Their wives love it. It gets them out from underneath them. It makes them happy, they can join a local club and be social you know; it's like a bridge club or whatever. And they can go to a national convention and show off their stuff, and get it seen by gallery owners and professionals like myself and get it critiqued and talked about. You can have a personal critique by a known person, someone who you respect and like. It opens up a huge, huge room for them that they've never had before, and when I started the AAW [American Association of Woodturning] with a board of directors of nine people in '85 we started at a conference with 230 people. Now we've got 13,000 people around the world and 270 chapters in North America. I mean if you want to turn wood, you can turn wood and you're probably going to find your neighbor turns wood too, and you may not know anything about it.

MS. SHEA: And you brought up one thing that it seems to be pretty much with a few exceptions male-dominated. I think that's — is that fair to say?

MR. ELLSWORTH: It is by numbers for sure.

MS. SHEA: And I also wonder if, you know, some of the same things that you were talking about, the hobbyist and maybe the lack of maybe respect or looking at related in some ways to how women sometimes I think might feel that way in the textiles in you know where things that have been traditionally women's work — I don't know. Anyway shop I think traditionally in high school was pretty much all —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Women's territory, sure. Boys took wood shop, girls took, what is it?

MS. SHEA: Home Ec.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Home Ec. Thank you.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.] I remember that.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It's been so long ago I've forgotten the term. But what's — well, yes, and interestingly you look at the fiber field today in the arts in fiber there are a huge number of well-known men in the fiber field, maybe even more well-known men than well-known women, but I'd have to really sit down and balance that out.

MS. SHEA: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] And look at that.

MR. ELLSWORTH: But in the numbers there are more women. In woodturning you've got many, many, many more men doing woodturning and, yet, you have a lot of professional women woodturners who are doing very well, both for themselves and for the field, by exposing their work, teaching their stuff and being ambassadors for women and woodturning. You could go back to the Victorian era, there were huge number of women turning on lathes in the Victorian era.

MS. SHEA: I didn't know that.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh yeah, I mean what are you going to do with all these women in their fancy skirts, they don't do anything all day, sit in the castle you know and turn wood, sure.

MS. SHEA: I thought they were supposed to be — I thought they were supposed to paint China or embroider. [They laugh.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Absolutely, but you've got women like Virginia Dodson in Arizona that's doing really lyrically beautiful sculptural style or sculptural approaches in woodturning in simple materials. You've got Merryl Saylan who's doing sculptural work also with an oriental influence in color and pattern and texture, neither of which work in functional stuff. You've got Betty Scarpino in Indianapolis who's working with really exciting, really sculptural forms, developing larger and larger pieces, some of which is turned, all of it which is carved.

You got Bonnie Klein in Seattle area and Washington State who's not really known so much for her art work in woodturning, although she does really wonderful pieces, but more — very small objects. She also produces a line of lathes and tools. She teaches a lot. I mean, she's made a powerful impact in the field as a teacher, in particular, and a great ambassador.

And today she and a friend of mine up in Maine, Jacques Vesery collaborate once a year and make a very tiny precious item for the auction at the American Association of Woodturner's Conference. So you have a collaboration between a man and a woman, working with different styles, completely different styles, and yet bringing those styles together and this year the piece they auctioned off was only about five-inches high. It was a lidded box, sold for 40,000 bucks. It was quite a lidded box, too.

MS. SHEA: I was just going to say, it must have been an amazing piece.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Absolutely gorgeous. So I don't think today there's much of a distinction really in terms of gender in relationship to the kinds of ideas that are coming out in woodturning, but no question in numbers, yes. Guys and their tools, you can't get away from it, right? [They laugh.] Yeah, boys and their toys.

MS. SHEA: You mentioned — speaking of tools, it sounds like you've been involved with designing and improving some of your lathes. And how has that impacted your work?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, my initial tools I made by myself with a mallet and a propane torch because I didn't have acetylene gas and I didn't know how to bend steel any better than that to get to reach the areas I needed to cut inside of these forms. Then I went to a machinist and he brazed one type of steel to another type of steel so that I could cut better and reach the areas I needed to. — Since then I've designed my own line of tools which I make and the whole thing, and I sell those to my students and I sell them to catalogue companies who in turn sell them to people that I haven't met before.

And it's become a small source of income for me. It's consistent, which is very nice. And the more hobbyists that come in to woodturning the better, because they buy my tools, and there are lots of different kinds of tools around today, very, very exotic wonderful tools for doing hollow turning and I think everyone who makes tools today is probably doing okay with those tools in terms of sales, because the field is really blossoming.

MS. SHEA: It's really — expanding.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Sure. And then parallel to that, I have a line of five tutorial video tapes that I've made up that I filmed myself of myself, which meant I had to learn a new craft, and then had them transferred into masters and then into VHS tapes and now nobody buys VHS tapes any more so now they're in the DVDs.

MS. SHEA: You'll have to make the next leap.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, who knows what the next format will be, but they're pretty consistent sellers, too. So that's the business side of my business is selling tools that I've designed for doing hollow turnings and video tapes and there's, that's become my production item; it's taken the place of the salt-and-pepper-and-sugar shaker sets. So a couple of days a month I'll go to my workshop and I'll make tools and the rest of the time I go to my studio and make art, and it just happens to be the same room. Very simple.

MS. SHEA: And then you talked briefly about technology. Have you seen other impacts on your, either you're the business of art or art itself in terms of maybe the Internet or any other aspects are rapidly increasingly technological —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Like a shifting marketplace maybe or —

MS. SHEA: Or — are different people finding out about your work through the Internet or I wonder if you've seen any impacts?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh. Oh yeah, in fact my school is a good example of that, because I have a little questionnaire and one of those questions is where did you find out about my school and almost everyone today is from the Internet.

MS. SHEA: Even more so than the Wood Journ —

MR. ELLSWORTH: I stopped advertising in the woodworking journals because of the cost and the inefficiency of it. As soon as the Internet came out, I said "Whoa! That's me baby. I want there, I want to be here, I want to be there." [They laugh.] So I had a local man, who develops artists' web sites, build a web site for Wendy, my wife and I, and on that web site when you go to Google, you type in David Ellsworth and you hit enter and my name comes up first, and that's wonderful. So you find out about the school you find out about the tapes, the tools, the art work, the different categories of the artwork, different styles that I've done, a couple of interviews I've done.

It's a fairly — by the time a student comes here, they know more about me than I know myself, because I've forgotten a lot of the stuff that I've said. I don't sell my work on the Internet.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Because there's no providence, there's no history of it. It's just a sale that pays the bills. The providence comes through selling through a gallery. So when someone looks on the Internet that they've heard my name for something or they go to woodturning and my name comes up, and then they go to our web site, I'm using the web site as a means of education, and even when I advertise my school as part of my web pages on the website, I don't give the dates.

MS. SHEA: So people have to —

MR. ELLSWORTH: They have to contact me like a real human being. And when they do, they'll oftentimes say — I'll get this sentence, there's no capital letters, no period and no name on it. "Send me information on your school." And I email them back and I said "I will email the information and I hope when you send in the information you put your name on it so I know who I'm talking to." And I get these really strange responses. "Gosh! Sorry! I didn't know that it was a person I was talking to."

MS. SHEA: Well, I think speaking for myself, I think people are sometimes surprised that when you call a person answers the phone. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Oh yeah. Oh, I sent him tools. Can I order some tools? Sure. I'll send them. How do I pay for it? Wait till you get them, take the postage off the box and send me a check. Horrors upon horrors.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: That doesn't happen any more, that's nineteenth-century stuff. Well, that's okay I'm a little old fashioned.

MS. SHEA: Now, how did you really continued, it seems like a lot of your career has been about now teaching.

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

MS. SHEA: And how did you end up in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, with a studio where you also teach?

MR. ELLSWORTH: When Wendy and I got married in 1980, I realized I had been showing on both coasts — excuse me, I'm watching birds while we're talking — I've been showing on both coasts of course for a while. And it was very easy to recognize as my work was becoming collectible that I couldn't any longer be a cowboy; I had

to be part of the establishment in some form, in order to be part of that market. Plus, I wanted to get back to the East Coast in some way where I could access the museums and the collectors and the things that were going on in the American Crafts Council and space in New York City and all this stuff in Philadelphia, at the Woodturning Center.

And the only way to do it was to be more — at least give the impression of being more visibly present. So I looked for property here and found this place that 20 acres of trees that nobody wanted, in the middle of Bucks County — actually it's in the top end of Bucks County. And Bucks County has a reputation throughout the country — it's kind of like Gross Point [Michigan]. It has a reputation of artists and artist's community, New Hope in particular. Of course the artists left as soon as people found out about it, but that was back in the early '50s. [Laughs.] But the impression was still there.

And when I went to the "Rhinebeck Show" [Rhinebeck Craft Show, NY] in '81 — or actually '80 I told people that I was planning on moving to the East Coast. Where are you moving to? Bucks County. "Oh! You'll be our neighbor. We'll come and see you. Great, buy a piece." And here these are people who I have known for years, who buy clay, glass — who knows whatever — but don't buy woodturnings, and all of a sudden they'll buy a woodturning from me.

And I'm saying that's a pretty good deal you know — snootiness works. [They laugh.] But I didn't want to be, as I said earlier, in the face. I couldn't live in the city any longer. I had been too much in the wild myself to give that up, but I wanted to be accessible to it. So being here gives me an hour-and-a-half to Manhattan — three hours to Washington, five hours to Boston, although I don't know anybody in Boston who owns my work except my daughter. And I am now a measure of establishment in that respect. I'm not so far out, especially west of the Hudson, which is Indian country to a New Yorker — I'm not so far out that I'm not available in some form or another.

MS. SHEA: And you also mentioned ease of access for people to come in to your school too.

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's the other thing. I've got three major airports — Newark, Philadelphia and Allentown, all three are international airports. The largest percentage of the population lives on the East Coast, up and down the East Coast. And you can get to me. And most of the classes that I run, which are late October through late July, are winters classes all throughout the winter you see. I plow the driveway, bring them in; they have a great time.

MS. SHEA: Okay. Tell us a little bit about the sequence and the setting of the classes. Is it a three-day workshop?

MR. ELLSWORTH: It's a three-day workshop for five people. There is no — categorizing for skill level.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: People don't know what skill level they're at anyway and the style of turning that I do is bass-ackward to most type traditional turning, including bent tool hollow turning and my methodology is different, it's very simple, very logical very efficient and extremely versatile, so when they leave here, they can turn almost any style of work, not just my style.

MS. SHEA: So you aren't turning out. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: I'm not turning out little clones, you see. [They laugh.] I wish I could clone myself, then I could have one here teaching and another person working and selling. But we do, Wendy and I, do three meals a day, for the three days, for the five people and mealtime is a time to get away from woodturning but to keep the momentum going and for me to be able to find out who these people are because they in most cases don't know me from Adam, but certainly by reputation or maybe even not.

MS. SHEA: Right.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Some people come here cold, it's terrific. They have no baggage, you know, none of the expectations, just a lot of anticipations, which is the best way to teach.

I teach on a, what I call a balance between behaviorist and constructivist methodology, which simply means that there's a certain amount of memorization that needs to be acquired.

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

MR. ELLSWORTH: And we do it in conjunction with a learning style that I have a communication style that puts them in charge of the process so that they can come in with no experience at woodturning but a lot of experience in, say, design or engineering or music or bird watching or law or medicine, or whatever, and we use that basis as a foundation of self-confidence vis-à-vis you're a skilled person in your area. Do you remember

what it was like to be a student when you didn't feel so skillful? Well, here you are as a student where you don't feel so skillful, but with a little time standing at the lathe and playing with this process, you can develop skills as well, and over three days here's how you do it.

That puts the whole relationship between the student and the teacher on a parallel plane instead of a hierarchy slope where the teacher is up above knowing "everything," quote, unquote, and the students down at the bottom knowing nothing, so a lot of times we will spend meals talking about other people — not me and woodturning. Or we'll talk about other woodturnings in my private collection which I have a little bit of everybody which I think is important — and how they as makers came upon this particular design in this particular stage in their career and where did they start and where are they at now, or why did they choose this kind of finish to make it look like this, or why did they you know — anything that will open up this student's vista of what they have just walked into and that is a room with a lot of doors — [they laugh] — my dog — with a lot of doors in it, anyone of which that they would choose is going to be a good choice for them, as long as they don't go back.

It's the old intersection-in-the-road philosophy basically. You come to a T, take a turn. It doesn't matter which direction; you just don't go backwards, and we not only end up making great friendships over a period of years, but we also are developing really thoughtful students as they go on with their lives.

Oddly enough, when I first came up with the idea we talked about it, and this is a pretty private space we've got back here. I mean there are a few noises from a highway way over there, but you can't see it. And we didn't know if we wanted to bring all these strangers into our lives or not, and it turns out of course it's the best thing we ever did. It complements our lives; it expands our vistas. I don't know of a major city in this country that I couldn't drive to today and spend the night with somebody that hasn't been here and offered the invitation. That's pretty nice.

MS. SHEA: That is.

MR. ELLSWORTH: A few close personal friends and a huge number of acquaintances, really wonderful people.

MS. SHEA: And it sounds like you've thought quite a bit about the teaching process. Where did you —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right. Well, my brother teaches math science at the University of Wyoming [Colorado], just retired. And his wife is still there in the department, as I said earlier. And he teaches people to find out who they are as teachers so that they can better understand their relationship to their students and breakdown that traditional behaviorist pattern that we all grew up under.

His problem is he wants to be able — has always wanted and continues to work to bring in a constructivist motif into his classroom but he couldn't define creativity.

MS. SHEA: Ah-ha.

MR. ELLSWORTH: So I got to talking about it years ago about what I was trying to do and he said, "Well you're a natural constructivist; you just don't know it." And I said, "Yeah, but I've got all this other stuff that I got to do. I've got the ABCs; I got the order they have to go through." And he said, "That's all right." He says, "If you can blend it together, without anybody knowing about it at the time, they won't feel like they're a, you know, a subject in a project, and you'll get greater personal satisfaction out of it which will mean that they in turn will get greater satisfaction out of the efforts that they have gone through to come here."

So sure enough, last year as a retirement gift to himself, my older brother who's always been the one, of course like all older brothers, has led the way and da-da-da-da-da, and his wife, and her sister and her psychologist husband and the woman that's taken my brother's place at the university all came out, none of whom had ever been on a lathe before and took my woodturning class.

And my brother it turns out is a very good student. They all were good students because they didn't have any bad habits coming in and they came with a purpose. A lot of wine, a few hot tubs and woodturning for three days, what can you do? — So it's been a great transition in our lives. I'm now in the 18th year. We started in 1990, of doing this and it has allowed us to support that side of our income but it has primarily allowed us to grow as individuals, my wife and I, through the experience of communicating with people on a given subject. And that's why I teach, so that I can learn.

The fundamental elements I think of being a good teacher is that you have to remain a student to your craft or your process or whatever it is you're conveying because the schools are filled with teachers who are regurgitating the same shit that they put out and learned themselves and then put out starting 10, 20, 30 years ago. Student knows it. They know it by heart. They also know they don't have to learn anything until they get into the class because they're not expected to know anything until they get into the class. And after they get

done with the class they're not expected to remember anything because the test is over. So then they go to the next class where they can be a dummy starting out and then they can end up and take the test and they'll be fine. You get done with education; you've got a lot of tests and no experience.

MS. SHEA: And it seems like your class is the antidote to that process. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: That's a good term. Antidote is just fine; I can live with that, sure. It's a good shot, and it's legal. I wouldn't exactly call it an addiction but certain people have — [they laugh] — woodturning that is.

MS. SHEA: They could be [inaudible].

MR. ELLSWORTH: You know, I think that in line with that, if you think about what connects woodturning with clay, beadwork, glassblowing it's a centering processes. They're all centering processes and when you think about what happens to us during a centering process it's a 360-degree event. So it's not just an inline ABC straight line if you wish, target from point A to point B; it's an encompassing process that involves the psyche, the personality, and it doesn't matter what you do for a living or what your lean is, right brain, left brains, Type A, Type B, whatever. We can deal with almost everyone. Almost. We've had a few, but not many. [They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: I think we've really covered this question or maybe we haven't: Describe your working process and how has it changed over time?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, the basic process of what woodturning is, you're taking an object and spinning it and cutting away as you're spinning it from one shape to another, so it's fundamentally a power-carving process, whether you're making chairs for a leg or a balustrade, sticks for a balustrade, spindles, or whatever it might be, or open bowls or hollow forms, each of these styles all evolve from a lathe. And a lathe goes back we know at least 5500 years. Celts in 3200 years ago at least, and areas in Syria 3500 years — or 5500 years that I know of.

The problem with that is that wood doesn't last too long — [laughs] — so unless it's under an ideal condition, it would rot out and disappear, unlike clay and glass and metal. But the process that I developed for hollowing out and thinning out a vessel form, a solid form into a hollow form is like a ceramic pot in the end result. And it looks — that's why I often call myself a 'wooden potter,' and today I make pots out of wood instead of clay.

The impact of that on me is to be able to constantly evolve the nature of the forms that I make in relation to my own maturity and growth as a maker, but as a personality in my experience from other people in all the things that I do. And the different styles that I've gone through over the years, as are present on my web site, from bowls to vessels to cylindrical forms, the whole series of Man, and the Forest Architecture [1983-84] for instance, black pots which were burned, and you know, and traumatized through the process of fire, color and then back to pots, just a humble pot, you know, are part of the cycle of growth that I've gone through as a maker and as a personality.

Probably the most dramatic group that I did was the Solstice series from '89 to '91, which is a major departure from anything I had ever done, and was prompted by or inspired at least by the chaos in the world, first Bush recession and the first Bush Gulf War, and — continues to today are as far as I'm concerned. And my reaction was to challenge that relationship between order and chaos. It's an old artist's task you see, I suppose. And the objects themselves were the chaos and the holes tracing the cycle of growth within each object was the order. So for me it was a natural — scared the hell out of my field. People hated them, oh, it was liberating, I just loved it.

MS. SHEA: You do say these pieces have been both loved and despised. What more can I ask for?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, absolutely and despised by some of the best-known woodturners in the world. That made it even better. [They laugh.] But I couldn't make a living doing those pieces. Only if few selected very loyal and I think quite brave collectors acquired them — Irving Lipton, Arthur and Jane Mason, Fleur and Charlie Bressler, Anita and Ron Wornick from California. That's not very many people. [They laugh.] And it took Fleur a while, but, boy, when she caught on she really got after them.

So part of what that series did for me was liberating for growth — you know, challenging the notion of free expression and of creativity within oneself. Part of it was — part of a result of that series was that it helped the field review its own view person by person of what woodturning could be, might be, as opposed to what it should be. And along with other people, including Merryl Saylan and Mark Lindquist, and a few others — Giles Gilson for sure — who were experimenting in rather off-the-wall territory, meaning paint in particular, but also texture, it gave a balance to the field.

It challenged what everybody was doing and it helped other people grow in their respective styles so that they didn't get stuck with what they were doing. Be happy with it, sell a few, sell a few — make a few more just like it, sell a few more. And suddenly everybody is making production items that are actually one of a kind but

they're done one at a time, right. I suppose I could be accused of that today myself. I've been at this so long — [they laugh] — but at any rate, I do tend to recycle upon myself. Well after the Solstice series — after I got that out of my system.

MS. SHEA: And you did, I mean it says on your web site that you did stop that in the 1991, that series.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Right, that's right. I had finished the series. It was done. I didn't need to get into the problem of doing them one at a time forever. I had closed the series. I did the Spheres [1989], then the "Interspheres" [1989-91] then the "Monospheres" [1990-91], and I had gotten to a point where I couldn't physically do the "Monospheres" any larger. They didn't make trees any bigger for this kind of thing that I could do with the equipment that I had. I mean three feet in diameter and four-feet tall, that's a pretty big chunk of wood.

But the point is that the — what I was trying to express had been expressed and I didn't need to carry it any farther. But what it also did is it brought me back to questioning what I had done in my work before the Solstice series and that is that I realized that most of my work was probably sold because of the quality of the wood that was in the pieces, meaning the burl, the beauty of burl wood, and the thin wall of course, the levitated quality that I like to bring to all my work.

Obviously I can't ask of a collector to want any more of than that in an object, but the whole spiritual and philosophical root of my work were not what was selling the pieces. So I would have been asking too much of the market to go that length. But I also wanted to challenge what they really felt about "pretty wood," in quotes. So I started. I was out here one day in the woods cutting firewood, knocked down a white oak tree, and looked at the end grain on that and I said, "Eureka! This stuff is gorgeous and it's growing right here." And I made a head-long plunge into my own woods to turn wood off my own property for almost two years — didn't touch a piece of burl.

And the end result was — well, it started out — I said to myself, well, if I'm a good designer can I design for common materials and get away with it. [Laughs.] I mean, how good am I? Do I just make hollow turnings well if that's what this is all about?

So what I discovered was that suddenly the vessels that I had been making turned into pots. They were based on a sphere now, the whole concept of my designs were based on a sphere, which is the hardest of all shapes to design for because it's too perfect. But a sphere that's slightly not a sphere is very exciting. We take a football shape for granted but it's a pretty challenging shape when you really think about it — kind of hard to catch but — [they laugh] — and it's got texture, you know. I guess if you look at a point of a football, there's a relationship between that and the growth of a tree. But I won't get too far into that.

So by going to the spheres, the foundation of my design future, if you wish, I suddenly realized I can do anything with a sphere. I can squash it, I can stretch it. I can expand and compress it, I can reduce — I mean I can do all sorts of things playing with the sphere.

And if I put the grain going diagonally through the form, through the spherical form, then when it dries naturally from the green and dry and distorts it takes on a wonderfully unusual shape that is purely sculptural because it demands that you see it from all directions. You cannot look at a sphere of this nature from only one side. It's telling you to go to the other side. And it is equal and yet different on the other side.

It's now — the first group was called "Pot Dancing" [1991] that I did that, and it was made of white oak, and it was so dramatic in its movement, lateral movement that if you looked at it from one side and then walked around it, it kept moving around you. It was like a dancer. You were seeing it from different directions. When you were seeing it from different directions you were actually viewing a very different form. It was a form in motion, kinetic as it might have been.

So, this became — I mean, this opened up a door to a room that I could never fully explore it was so large. And that's what I do now, is I'm making pots, and I'm doing them out of a variety of different woods, some of which are in burl woods. I keep, you know, I keep cycling back and forth on a wonderful new textures in the materials. Some are spalted or decomposed materials that have terrific raku textures when you stroke them — [laughs] — it has that wonderful — it's like sandpaper. Color, natural colors and deformities in the material — all those things that we used to think were flaws in the wood, to me, are terrific opportunities for the character of that particular piece.

That's why it's so nice to burn pieces is because it enhances the cracks and they in turn become part of the form. But there's nothing new in that either. I mean look at the Toshiko Takaetsu work in clay. A lot of those spheres that she did, they're all cracked intentionally in the kiln — not sure where they're going to crack but it doesn't matter. As long as they crack they're fine. I've had pieces — a couple of pieces of ash that I've turned and burned, and they didn't crack. I had to whack them up against the side of a tailstock of the lathe just to get a crack so that I could then get some personality into that piece.

MS. SHEA: Work on that.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah. Sure.

MS. SHEA: And there is another series I'm not sure that you've talked about — the Homage [1998-present] series.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Homage, yeah. It is the, in honor of the texture, the architecture — and the influence of Native American ceramics on me, Native American culture. It's opening at the top that drops down inside of the form is based on the — I think we talked about this possibly at lunch —

MS. SHEA: Right, the architecture. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: It's based on the smoke hole of an adobe bread oven [Horno ovens] which is part of the architecture of the Southwest. Most of them [mine] are done with materials where I'm taking the finished surface of the form directly off the tool. There is no sanding, no attempt to try to create a false beauty to the material.

When you stroke them, because of that natural surface which is very highly refined cuts by the way — from a distance it looks like a buffed surface you don't see a bunch of lines on it.

MS. SHEA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. Right.

MR. ELLSWORTH: It's not an intentionally gross texture on it. It looks very refined, but it has a buffed-like look to it, but when you stroke it it's — and because they're thin walled pieces they radiate like a ceramic pot, like a raku pot. They have that same tonality to — you can look at an object like mine, if you didn't know what it was and assume that it's solid, but if you then come up and stroke it and you hear something you realize immediately this is a vessel of some form. It is obviously — then you pick it up and you know it's not solid. But this is in honor of my background, the influences on me, as a child growing up, in the mountains and in the deserts of the Southwest.

MS. SHEA: I think I have just one more question. Do you miss at all — I'm not sure if it's really the academy — but where you started out which is making more — I don't know if this is fair or unfair — art for art-sake, art that is not even with us anymore, art out of a completely different material than you've been using for these many years. Do you ever feel that you just want to go off and experiment with some, I don't know, high-tech material, or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, I certainly don't miss working with polyester resin.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: I had a melanoma, a carcinoma, when I was between my first and second year of graduate school, and everybody was convinced it was because of the resin that I was working with. Who knows? That was a nasty material to work with. I mean you couldn't get it out of your skin, the smell of it, through your hair, you know, you take a shower for 20 minutes. You go to bed. Your wife still peels off the other side of the bed from the odor of the resins.

But no, the answer is no. I've worked with lots of materials over my lifetime, I've been very, very fortunate that I could do that when I didn't have to make a living at it. And that's part of my history. It's not — it's a distant element of the past, but it's not out of memory. It's a resource for me more than anything else.

I regret that I didn't learn how to weld, because I would love at some point to incorporate welding just to make shapes, maybe lawn art something or other — you know, not to sell; just to play with it because it looks like so much fun when I watch it happening. I am going to learn — I just met a fellow this weekend past that was a student at RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology, NY], and he's a specialist in cement and I've always been intrigued with incorporating cement in a much more refined manner from when I first discovered feral cement for making hot tubs and boats and things like that. It wasn't refined but it was pretty cool. Thin shell-like forms are extraordinarily strong.

So how far can you take that? Well, maybe I'll make some vessels that are part-wood and part-cement. That would be pretty neat. I saw a furniture maker years ago out in San Francisco, probably in the late '70s — had to have been — and he was making concrete elements within his tables and chairs, it was really beautiful. And this fellow that I just met, he's making concrete elements and I'm going, man; why didn't I pursue that? I had the idea 25, 30 years ago. I should have taken off on that — [laughs.]

But I'm not afraid of new materials, but I have hard enough time today with the consulting that I do for the AAW and the American Craft Council to explore my own work, so I'm only making about 15 or so substantial pieces per year — a lot of smaller ones, the little spirit vessels that I really love, but not that many more major pieces

— too involved in too many other things.

So maybe I do need to go take a class some place and become that proverbial student again, but I don't miss the things that I have done as if I were to go re-engage them. No, but I'm a reasonably curious person of course so I'm constantly picking up on stuff wherever I go when I can. The question is can I pursue it with enough energy to make it worthwhile. Possibly the difficulty I would have is that I'm so skilled at what I do at in woodturning, I would hope I would pick up the skill of another medium very quickly and if I didn't I might become disappointed in myself. [They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: And advance — you might not be a very good student.

MR. ELLSWORTH: I might not be a very good student, yeah, heaven's forbid. But — I'm still young enough at 63 to be moldable to a degree.

MS. SHEA: Is there anything else that you'd like to add or suggest?

MR. ELLSWORTH: Nothing that we can't pick up at another time.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Give us time to think about it.

MS. SHEA: Or anything in particular that you read, maybe not necessarily specific to wood, or woodturning — I know one of the people that I spoke with — this very interesting artist biographies and I wonder if there was any particular realm of either literature, fiction or non-fiction that you found especially interesting, or that might relate to your work. Or —

MR. ELLSWORTH: No, I think that — I say no and it sounds narrow. I don't mean it that way. I think that certainly the book that shifted our entire consciousness was *The Unknown Craftsman* [Yanagi, Soetsu; Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1972]. It came out in the '60s or '70s, or something like that. We all read it. And in part he was correct and in part, it didn't apply. But the whole impact of the book was life-challenging, and you can't ask for much better than that, especially is it didn't have any — you know, it was written by potters but you didn't have to be a potter to read it. It was quite universal in that respect.

Reading artists' biographies is a complex process because you don't know if they're telling the truth or not. It's easy to fantasize about what one would like to do, and even place yourself in view of that. For instance, in myself I fantasize about doing tai chi from having watched tai chi classes in crafts schools in the morning before we go to breakfast so that I can learn how to move so that I can take that to the lathe and move with my entire body as an energy source, instead of my arms, shoulders, and hands. This does not make me a tai chi master. I'm a vicarious dancer, right, but it has helped me extraordinarily in my own teaching and my own work. So it's a very positive element of it. If I read Van Gogh, or if I read other people who have written about other artists, I find it fascinating, but I don't necessarily know that it's true, or if it's necessary.

MS. SHEA: Or that you've gained that much that relates to what you were in.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, yea. I think what does come through for me, however, is the overall connectedness between a person's inner spirit and their work, however they define that. One could define that work as the process of making rather than the object they've conceived or ended up with.

I did a fellowship from the Pew Foundation about four or five years ago [2000] where I took two months and went to New Zealand and then Australia searching for the connectedness between indigenous peoples the Maori and the Aboriginals, to their work, to their artwork. And I found that their artwork in both cultures was inseparable from their lifestyle and their spiritual oneness and community, that without the artwork, the community was naked. It didn't have the complete cycle of life; it was only partially there.

Now, today, that is very commercialized obviously, but you can get behind those lines just by talking with the artist and finding out how they relate. Well, that goes right back to the work of indigenous peoples within our own country and how that artwork — you could call it craft, whatever you want to call it, but how those creative — how those objects through the creative process, were part and parcel to that person's psyche and their voice. You can't get any more powerful than that. And you may not be able to write about it yourself. Someone else may have to be able to — may have to write it for you. But in that case you're not getting the same sense you're only getting an observation of that sense. To feel it, one has to be of that culture, one has to have gained the lineage.

MS. SHEA: Had those experiences.

MR. ELLSWORTH: You've got to have those experiences. You can not learn it — you can learn it vicariously but

you can't be it.

MS. SHEA: Can't parachute in. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: Yeah, that's right good point. So that was, you know, I can't — when I left people were saying you're going to put dots all over your pieces you know. And that wasn't what I was after. If anything, it gave me — and it certainly did — it reinforced my own feelings about what I do within my work. And that whereas the style of work that I'm doing today may not be as fashionable as it would be for today's market place, but it is definitely me and I'm not going to give that up because then I would be doing other person's works. And I think we need the breadth of the exposure of different styles within a field or it's not a field.

MS. SHEA: Right — well thank you so much. It's been a wonderful —

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well I'm glad you could come, yeah, it's been hot.

MS. SHEA: Afternoon. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLSWORTH: And it's not too hot out here either. [Laughs.] On a muggy day. Good.

MS. SHEA: And lovely experience to visit your home and studio in — a glance.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Well, I'm sorry it's so brief but we could pick that up when it's possible.

MS. SHEA: Right. We can again.

MR. ELLSWORTH: Okay. Very cool.

MS. SHEA: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]