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Oral history interview with Boris Bally, 2009 May 26-27

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Boris Bally on May 26-27, 2009. The interview took place in Providence, RI, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art with Boris Bally in the artist's studio in Providence, Rhode Island, on May 26, 2009, disc number one. Good morning.

BORIS BALLY: Good morning. Cool.

MS. RIEDEL: So we're here in the artist's studio, which is an extraordinary building, surrounded by—including—how tall are these ceilings?

MR. BALLY: Oh, almost 15 feet, I guess. And it's probably just under 3,000 square foot—the floor. Yes, each floor—and there are three floors. And under the roof space, which is amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've been here since—when did you buy it?

MR. BALLY: We bought it in '99, I believe, might have been '98—actually, I think it was '98, but then we were able to do the closing and all that stuff in '99 and get all the permits to do the construction.

MS. RIEDEL: And you gutted the whole thing and turned it into a workspace, and you lived here for a while, too?

MR. BALLY: We did. I found this building while I was interviewing at Rhode Island College to do freshman design, something or other, and on the way back from the interview, I happened to pass this building. And I was real chutzpah-ish and called and they said it was 40,000 bucks they wanted. So I offered them 30 [thousand dollars] and I think they had to pay 80 [thousand] to rip it down. So they were real pleased.

And I was not permitted to get the deed until I got the C of O, which is a certificate of occupancy, which I finally got in, I think it was 2000—2000, I think it was. So it was a pretty fast, kamikaze job. I did—the demolition work, I did myself with Jeff Johnson, who's now my webmaster and photographer, and just the most wonderful human being. He and I suffered through the—I think it was something like 17 rollaway dumpsters of all the old wood and debris. And it's a lot of space for two guys to do.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the building before?

MR. BALLY: It was built in 1898 as a—what I'm told is, it's a school building, but it was built as a school for bad boys, which I think—I just think that's too funny. [Laughs.]

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

MR. BALLY: It is perfect. I loved the bad-boy thing. But that was 1898 and they kept that going—there were three schools in the area. One burned down, the other one was torn down, and this was the remaining one they were about to tear down. So I'm real pleased I saved it.

MS. RIEDEL: It's brick, right?

MR. BALLY: It's all brick. It's just gorgeous, Romanesque, you know, when the arch-light comes in. And in the winter, I barely have to put the heat on because it's such solar heat, and, believe it or not, the bills in this building are very low because I put in high-efficiency furnaces and everything's solarized and insulated, and it's a pretty efficient building.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's an enormous space, so you're really able to do everything you need right here.

MR. BALLY: And that was my dream—this is my dream studio. I'd even like to preface this entire interview by saying I'm the luckiest guy in the whole world. Who could ever have bumped into so many wonderful people and so many opportunities that I was able to even recognize were opportunities? I mean, that's a pretty lucky—I've

had a really good life that way. This is all I've ever dreamed of, most of my life. And part of what I've dreamed of was having a shop that I'd want to come to and something where I can make whatever I want, which means having the tools, having the space, having the storage space, being able to afford it.

And furthermore, there are now three floors here. I really enjoy the community in this building. I love my tenants. We're like family. I've got a jeweler downstairs, and a designer, Heather Guidero, as my tenant. She does the Baltimore shows now. And she's even started to write reviews for *Metalsmith*, which I think is pretty cool. And upstairs, I've got Julian Jetten from Belgium. He speaks, probably, about 12 languages or something like that. And his wife, Pammy Ma—she always teases me when I say "Maloney" because it looks like "baloney"—but [it's] Moloughney.

She used to be a sound engineer for Cirque du Soleil, so really creative. He's a material engineer for Reebok, Adidas—really young, wonderful people. They have a baby—they just had a baby, as of a week ago—another one, so they have two kids. And I love kids, so when I'm not with my kids, I actually get to interact with them and they love my other tenants. And it's just wonderful. And that's—what more could you want?

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like wherever you've gone, you've either found or made a community, or it's been important to you.

MR. BALLY: In an odd sort of way, yes. Although I have to say, I still like having my—this is kind of like my clubhouse, I think I told you before. And I like it. It's kind of anything goes. I can make whatever I want, but I also like to be alone, with my thoughts, and watch, as I start working the material, what's going on without distraction. And that's actually the hard part about hiring somebody in my shop, because that does end up being a bit of a distraction, even though it's a wonderfully helpful thing at the same time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Do you have a full-time assistant? Part-time?

MR. BALLY: I did until recently. He was my favorite guy—unbelievable—Jason Spencer, who came with me—I met him at SNAG during a portfolio review. And about a month later after that, he sent me an e-mail and said, "Hey, I'm thinking of coming to Providence, would you need an assistant?" And having remembered his portfolio, I said, "Sure. You're crazy, but sure. You're coming up here from Dallas to work for me? Okay."

So he came up and he turned out—he and his wife came up. I found them an apartment across the way, so he was very close. Just wonderful—rock musician, so he had great music taste. He was fun to have in the studio, kind and very talented. He helped me develop the new chair design, so it was actually, I think, kind of cool for him to be part of that.

Unfortunately, he left, which was sad because he was my favorite guy. But he said—one day, he said, "You know, Boris, I miss Texas. People are so friendly down there. I wish I could take your shop and move it down there because I love working for you. It's just, I haven't made a lot of friends and my family's all down there." And at first, I was very sad, and I'm still sad, but I love, again, reclaiming my studio.

MS. RIEDEL: So now, you're by yourself? How long ago did he leave?

MR. BALLY: Gosh, what's it been? March or April?

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, so recently—just a couple months ago.

MR. BALLY: Yeah. His contract would have given him until, I think, September. It would have been a year.

MS. RIEDEL: Was he your first assistant or —

MR. BALLY: Oh, no, I had a slew. They're all on the wall over there. I have—an on my new website, the one thing that's been missing to me is to somehow give them credit on my website. So now we've arranged for that. And so I've got a little picture of everybody on the new website. But that's every assistant—he's the guy at the top and I've had assistants since, maybe, 1988, I think, '89, something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: You were mentioning earlier that sometimes they're artists and sometimes they're not.

MR. BALLY: Yes. Well, my favorite ones have not gone to art school.

MS. RIEDEL: Do they have any sort of technical background?

MR. BALLY: If they went to art school, possibly not. [Laughs.] I'm embarrassed to say. That said, some of them don't need art school to have acquired the skills. Some of them do learn it in art school. It depends how seriously they take art school and who they happen to have as a teacher. You can't judge a school by the curriculum; you really have to judge it by the exact person that is dishing out the technical stuff, in the realm of technical

knowledge. But I had a woman here before—the summer before that, I had two interns: Stefan Gougherty from Virginia and Florence—Flo Delgado.

She worked on the National Guard as a helicopter mechanic, and man, did she know her stuff. And she actually just got a scholarship at Haystack to go the last summer. I said, “You have to apply. I’ll gladly give you a glowing reference. You’re going to go places.” And she really had the chutzpah to go get it and she was great in the shop. And she had just started RISD, so I think she was a sophomore when she came in here.

So I thought, that’s somebody who can max out the RISD experience, for instance—somebody who comes from somewhere very technical and can appreciate when they’re giving you some kind of a conceptual lesson, and still can bring what they’ve already learned technically to it. So that was the summer before last, and then the last summer, I asked Stefan again to come and work for me, full-time. And that worked out really well.

But again, just touching on what you said, I always had a little bit of a problem with somebody coming into my shop, entry level, feeling like they owned it. That just doesn’t ride well with me. And every once in a while, I would get that kind of friction from somebody. At one point, the friction got so bad one of my assistants came up to me and said, “You know, I’m thinking of maybe moving on or maybe going on part time with you, but I don’t know what you’d do without me.”

And I said, “Well, I’ll tell you what, let’s find out. You’re fired.” [Laughs.] And that’s the kind of arrogance that I just could do without. And after that one incident, whose name I will not mention, I decided I would not hire any more art students. Since then, I’ve gotten softer because I have met some wonderful ones. But shortly after that, I met one of my longest-term assistants, Curtis Aric, who came to me—he called me cold turkey—“Hey, you metal shop?” And I said, “Uh, yes. Is this a wrong number or something?”

He said, “No, I’m looking for work.” And I said, “What can you do?” And he said, “Well, I fix cars and, heck, I’ve worked in”—he didn’t talk quite that badly, but he was from Foster—kind of the sticks of Rhode Island. And I said, “Alright, why don’t you come by and show me what you’ve got?” And he came by and he was just the nicest guy and really down to earth, humble, young and able. I said, “Well, I’ll give you work, one on condition. Tell me, did you go to art school?” And he looked really sad and he looked down at his feet and he said, “No, I didn’t.” And I said, “Great—you’re hired!” [Laughs.]

He always tells that story. That’s kind of funny. And that’s the guy—the third photograph down, right underneath Al’s photo. But he is—he’s been wonderful. And the cool thing about him is, he has acquired so much knowledge in a non-conventional sense in that he’s worked on automobiles and lawnmowers and just learned how to put stuff together without anybody telling him, just by necessity. And through that, he’s learned how to work efficiently, quickly, carefully, more or less.

And he’s a horse—kind of all the traits I look for when I want somebody in here—somebody that will embrace an opportunity. I started paying him per piece, which was a really brilliant thing. Because he made—the chairs that I designed and I was making before him, he tuned it to the point of being extremely efficient because I paid him per piece. So he was able to knock out chairs a lot quicker, and then the final product—I was able to either accept or not accept. So he knew he had a quality standard to get to, which didn’t always work that perfectly. But it sounds good. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, that’s interesting, because it sounds like you’ve set up with your apprentices or interns almost a similar program to the one you had yourself when you were young.

MR. BALLY: Kind of, maybe.

MS. RIEDEL: Along those lines.

MR. BALLY: Yes, the only difference is, my boss in Switzerland—I still call him my boss, because he will be until he dies. He’s 80 this year, in Basel, Switzerland. Alexander Schaffner did not have a relationship with me. It was a very, very formal relationship. And I’ll tell you, quite honestly, I was terrified of the man. Here I am in a foreign country. I had to learn—my first language was Swiss-German, and because I was such a young kid, I never learned the formal Swiss, which is the—I don’t know how to say it, but there’s *du* and there’s *Sie* —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, the formal and the informal.

MR. BALLY: Right, I guess, so that’s right. And I would always have to call him Mr. Schaffner. And I have to say, that was a good thing because through that came respect, somehow. So I wouldn’t sass him and I wouldn’t talk back to him and I knew my place pretty darn well, even though I couldn’t help myself but occasionally needle him a little bit, which —

MS. RIEDEL: Were you 18 or 19?

MR. BALLY: Nineteen. And you know, I remember one instance where he would say, okay, you're going to have to clean the toilet. It was the toilet thing. And I said, "Okay, I have no problem with that." And I did it a couple of times. And then back in the shop, we had an *atelier chef*, Ralph Düby—D-U-with-an-umlaut-B-Y—who was just the warmest, wonderfulest professional jeweler you ever met. And he knew all the technical stuff.

And I went to him—he was the guy that I could approach. And I still called him Mr. Düby. But still, he loved to hear me curse and loved the dirty American jokes and stuff like that. But I told him about the toilet. I said, "You know, I think the boss should take a shift every once in a while." And they all looked at me like somebody died, and they basically dared me to ask the boss, so I did. And I went up to the boss and said, "Hey, you know, I've done this the last three times. Do you think maybe you could do it once or other people could do it, too?"

And this is what I respected about him. He looked at me, thought about it, and I was, like, oh, God, he's going to fire me, and he said,"Know what? That's a good point. I probably could." And he did it. And I couldn't believe it. And the guys in the shop suddenly couldn't believe—this is unheard of in Swiss culture. You don't dare make waves—no ripples.

And the guys in the shop—the other apprentice that I worked with—Yves Thomann and Andy Caderas, who was sitting around the table—they couldn't believe it. They had worked there, what, three years—I think Yves was there one year before me and Andy Caderas maybe three years. He wouldn't dare ever, ever speak anything about the boss to his face. So it was a new thing. But it was really neat—the dynamic of the shop.

MS. RIEDEL: So you've been changing dynamics in shops all over Europe? [Laughs.]

MR. BALLY: I guess. I don't know about that. But Jason, the guy that came here, after having learned what not to do with hiring people, I kind of set Jason down—my favorite guy that just left—and I said, "You know, I want this to be clear. You're here not as my friend. I'm your boss. I want to be a friendly boss and I'm going to treat you—I'm going to have nothing but your interests at heart. But I will also run my business and you have to produce for it. Otherwise, there's no point.

You're welcome to bring music. You're welcome to go home for lunch—whatever—[aside] but—that's my tenant, Julian. I warned him about you [laughs]." Anyway, so I kind of said, "I'm not going to be hanging out with you at night and I'm probably not going to get a chance to invite you for dinner. And I probably won't have the time to go to your place for dinner or lunch. At one point, I'd love to go out for a beer with you after a while, if I have the time." [That] never happened. And I got the sense that he was kind of sad about it.

And part of me is sad, too, because I do want to be his friend. But I've seen in the past, as soon as I do that, it's an open door to doing whatever you want. Like when Curtis was here, he'd just start being unsafe in the shop, like drinking beer with tools. And I'd have to keep trimming the sails every time I'd catch him doing something that was not right—you know, bringing friends to hang out and smoking cigarettes. And this is my clubhouse, not his. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Have any of them or some of them gone on to continue to continue making metalwork?

MR. BALLY: Yes. As a matter of fact, I'm really, really proud of Curtis [Curtis Aric-BB]. Curtis, I think—and I've had quite a few—James Thurman, one of my early students at Carnegie Mellon University—I think he was my student in 1989, when I moved back to Pittsburgh to teach there—freshman/sophomore design and art core—foundation. He was one of my students. I hired him. And now—then he headed the metals department at Edinboro—I'm sorry, that was not correct—not Edinboro, Penn State—central Pennsylvania.

And now, he just got a job in—I'm not sure where, but somewhere in Texas [Teaches at the University of North Texas in Denton, TX-BB]. And he's really creative, really gifted. That's kind of the most successful anybody that's come out of here, almost. We won't go to that "almost" part yet. [Laughs.] But Curtis—the guy from the country here who never had, really—I think he got a GED for high school and took a couple courses at universities or colleges for technical—putting cars together or something.

But he hasn't turned—he came to me once, and this is how we parted ways. And he said, you know, Boris, I got a job offer to go to Portland, Oregon, and it was, I don't know exactly, something exorbitant—$60 an hour—and I want to go make a lot of money. And I thought, at first, it was kind of a ploy to see if I would match that. I said to him, "Curtis, you're exactly the kind of guy that, if you stay in your hometown of Rhode Island, your friends are going to keep going out, getting you drunk, going out, kind of sabotaging who *you* want to be.

I can't think of a better opportunity for you to go and get the hell out of here and go to Portland. Embrace it and begin your life. You're 30 years old. Go out and become what I know you can do." And we parted ways very happily. He is now setting up—he has set up a hot-iron shop with a gigantic hammer that he made out of a car engine or something. I mean, his brilliance came into creating an alternative iron shop—a hot shop.

And now, he's talking to Christine Clark at OCAC—Oregon School of Arts and Crafts —oh, it's OCAC now and not OSAC; it changed its name. And they've been wonderfully receptive. And I think, as I understand it—I'm not sure 100 percent of it's true. But I think he can offer courses to their students for credit, which is—I can't think of anybody more deserving than Curtis.

He recently came, maybe a month ago, back to Rhode Island to say hi. He was really proud and showed me what he had done and showed me his shop, and said, "You know, Boris, I couldn't have done this without you. I just think it's so cool and I really want to show you what I've done." And he was really, really proud. I can't think of a better story, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: It's extraordinary, because you really have set up an alternative to an apprenticeship program and an alternative to a university program. It's sort of a variation on the two.

MR. BALLY: Kind of. Yeah, and I'll tell you, on that note, I have always wanted to be an alternative to whatever the mainstream is. And I think that's served me well. Because I've always wanted to teach, but not necessarily somebody else's program the way they wanted to. I always saw that to do teaching, you have to have master's or equivalent. And that always intrigued me. I do have to say my parents, as role models, have shown me that, always think outside of the box. My father, who headed a design program —

MS. RIEDEL: Where was he? At Carnegie Mellon?

MR. BALLY: At Carnegie Mellon. He headed the program there and he does not have an MFA. And you know what? They should be so lucky to have him. If any program ever had him, they're the luckiest people because he was so driven, possibly *because* he didn't have an MFA.

So I've always wanted to think out of the box like that, and I've always—that's one of the things that really was interesting about what happened with Switzerland, is when I came back to this country, which I think was 1980 or so, and then I went to Tyler School of Art until '82, defected, and went to Carnegie Mellon, thinking —

MS. RIEDEL: Was your father teaching there then?

MR. BALLY: No, he had quit. And everybody had moved up a notch and they were looking for, you know, the grunt at the bottom and I was—actually, that's a great story. That's a funny story. I guess I'll tell it. But I don't want to lose track of the other thing, which I now have already lost track of. [Laughs.] So knowing that you could —I always was intrigued by that. Or equivalent, I knew that if I could get out there enough to make people want me to teach, they would have no problem whatsoever, because they're selling a product and that product is education.

And whoever it is that can fit the bill that they're—the parents that are paying so much money for, if they're happy, if the students are learning, what more could they want? So that's what I was always kind of aiming at. And I knew that if I didn't want to do a master's, I would have to very carefully allocate my time and teach myself to learn by—and this is kind of my goals on how to be successful Boris Bally. So I actually made myself a five-year plan, a 10-year plan and a 25-year plan, which I still have in my —

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you when you did this?

MR. BALLY: How old was I? Maybe 19 or something like that? Yeah. [Actually 24-BB]

MS. RIEDEL: Had you started school in the States, yet?

MR. BALLY: I had started school in the States and I said, "I want to do something, someday. Reach for the stars and then, okay, come down to Earth a little bit; now, how do I get there?" And one of those was to monitor what other grad programs were doing at the time. And some of the standard mileposts are learn to teach—start teaching stuff—make certain objects that are kind of required as an exercise to apply your design knowledge to.

And one of those is a teapot, set of flatware, learn to make a chair, a piece of furniture, learn how to draw—drafting, drawing—now, we're talking design, not metal. But I taught myself how to draft—this is pre-computer—and then I taught myself how to use CAD on the computer, way before people really had computers.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. What inspired you to do that, then?

MR. BALLY: What inspired me was, I realized that if I wanted to be—I didn't know what I wanted to be, an artist or a designer, but I knew if someday, to be successful, I didn't have the capacity to make everything myself, I would have to learn to delegate. Now, how do you delegate things if you don't speak that person's language, and how are you going to communicate to a designer that you want something this big, about that wide, if you don't have the skills, visually, to communicate that?

It was a driving force. And I have to, again, thank my father, who—I'd make a sketch, a blueprint thing—I never learned that stuff—and he would make very Swiss, austere comments—very careful comments, but very pointed. And so I slowly learned how to draft, using —

MS. RIEDEL: When you were a child.

MR. BALLY: No, it was probably in—just out of art school, I'm guessing, possibly still in art school—maybe '83, '84—definitely around then. So I learned to use a T-square and a triangle—you know, I have all the stuff still. And then Carnegie Mellon, actually, when we graduated, required all graduates to buy a computer. And we got a greatly reduced rate.

I bought my first 128K smiley Mac. And I loved it. It was nothing but a glorified typewriter, but slowly, as it became a 512K Mac SE, and slowly, the programs started coming up, I had a program that I bought called Claris CAD, which I learned how to do drafting online. And I taught myself how to do that and read through the stuff. Then I'd try it out by jobbing out certain components to things that I was starting to produce. It was just really exciting.

MS. RIEDEL: We've mentioned your dad a couple times, so let's circle back and get some of that really great biographical information. You were born in Pittsburgh, 19- —

MR. BALLY: No, I was not born in Pittsburgh. People have erroneously written that. And this is the source, right here. You're hearing it from the horse—1961 in Chicago.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, in Chicago?

MR. BALLY: Yeah, January 22nd. But again, kind of the best fortune I could possibly have is to have parents that are pure Swiss guys—not so much the pure thing, but that kind of mentality, brought to this mentality made for a hell of a mixed-up childhood, but just a wonderful growing-up.

MS. RIEDEL: Say a little bit more about that, would you—when you say the Swiss mentality mixed with the American mentality.

MR. BALLY: Well, I'm going to read off, my parents—this is really something. My father, born in 1938 to Johanna Zollikofer, pretty much Swiss royalty —her forebears—we can trace our relatives back to, like, 1400s or 1300s, to some castle in Thurgau, Switzerland, which I visited periodically [Leonhart Zollikofer, 1585, Märstetten-BB]. That's actually why I have a dragon tattoo, to kind of bind myself to these dragon downspouts that I always, as a kid, used to see on the castle, the metal where the water comes out are dragons.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you would spend summers visiting Switzerland?

MR. BALLY: Yes, all growing up, I'd visit—I think almost once a year, maybe once every couple years, I'd go to Switzerland. So it was very familiar to me. But my father—my grandfather —

MS. RIEDEL: Where in Switzerland? Which part of Switzerland?

MR. BALLY: Did I visit? All over. My relatives—having a name like Bally—all Ballys come from Schönenwerd, Solothurn. But they've gone all over. I have relatives in Uganda. One of my favorite cousins is married in Kampala and has a pizza restaurant [laughs]. He has children by a Ugandan woman—his wife.

MS. RIEDEL: And they live in Switzerland?

MR. BALLY: No, they live in Kampala.

MS. RIEDEL: Where is Kampala?

MR. BALLY: In Uganda in Africa.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, Uganda.

MR. BALLY: Yeah, central Africa. And I have relatives—oh, God, I have relatives in South Africa, I have relatives in Texas, my brother's out West in L.A. and they're all over. But in Switzerland, they're all over Switzerland. Bern, Thurgau, Basel, my grandmother who recently passed away was in Ticino in Bellinzona Tessin—all over Switzerland. And that's part of the hard thing about visiting, is you're going to have to get your agenda right, or you'll piss somebody off.

MS. RIEDEL: Did your father grow up in a certain part of Switzerland, or —

MR. BALLY: Yeah, both my parents are from Zurich. And my father's father, Gustav Bally, was a doctor—a psychiatrist in the Zurich University. And this is, as I understand it, during the time of Jung. He was his contemporary. So it was kind of all that. And his wife, my grandmother, the royalty woman, was a Johanna von Zollikofer, and from—I guess the castle that I was referring to is Altenklingen, which has now been taken over by the government. And they manage and maintain it and you can see it on the Web.

It's really amazing. I show my kids and they get tickled and I tell my son, you know, you really are kind of a prince. So I even grew up with the myth that I was sort of a prince, which is kind of laughable, but it's funny. It's a good imagination, you know. But my mom—and it's funny, because my dad and my mom are kind of contrasting social corners of Zurich.

My mom was from a very poor family—Theo and Anna Egger. And I remember my mom telling a story growing up that they were so poor that the house that they actually owned, which actually doesn't sound very poor—Swiss people don't own houses—they had to live in a tiny part of it because they had to rent out the rest of it to stay alive. Her father left when she was very young—Theo, who, quite frankly, gave me the creeps every time I'd see him. I still have his hat somewhere. So they came from very different social spectrums.

My very privileged father—son of a psychiatrist—his mom was a translator and a linguist, translating ancient Greek, among other languages. And she was—to me, growing up, she was my guardian angel. We had a special something where she'd do anything for me and I loved —

MS. RIEDEL: This was your grandma.

MR. BALLY: Loved my grandma, yeah—Johanna Zollikofer Bally. Anyway, so my dad came to this country—no, in '57 or '58, my dad was 19 [came to USA in 1959-BB]—the same year that I was apprenticed—he apprenticed for Otto Lutz in the Möbelschreinerei Herrliberg Zurich. And the Möbelschreinerei is a furniture manufacturer company.

But he was basically an apprentice cabinetmaker. And when you do a short stint for a year, like I did or like he did, it's called a *schnupperlehr*, which is—a schnüpper is, like—[sniffs]—sniffing, like a sniffing apprenticeship. So you're getting a taste for it before you go in with your full feet.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MR. BALLY: My mom graduated as a fashion designer at the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich, 1960, I guess. She got her diploma. Ironically, my cousin there is now a very beloved teacher who teaches there—Sandro—my favorite cousin—Sandro Bally is a very beloved teacher there.

MS. RIEDEL: At the same school.

MR. BALLY: At the same school. Later, my mom got a diploma at the Modeschule Brünn in Zurich as a dress designer, and she worked for about a year—oh, that's something else.

But anyway, so essentially—and this is what I always wanted to know, and I'm not sure about this, but I'm still wondering—did my father basically knock up my mom and then leave to come study in this country? Because I remember her parents being freaked out that he suddenly left. I know that's true. Because you kind of didn't do that back then—you didn't have a girlfriend and then just leave for another country.

So my father came to study in 1959 at the to Chicago, to study design. And I remember, he was lured—he hated the apprenticeship with the cabinetmaker—I'm sure he learned tons of stuff [Not 'hated'; rather 'he did not fit'-BB]. He came to the IIT to study with Bucky Fuller, who—and his words were, "I was just his art slave." So apparently, he was his art slave for two years. And I wouldn't be surprised if Bucky Fuller—my father is kind of all that—quietly all that. I'm sure that he was very utilized—I mean, he made use of him.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And he was studying industrial design?

MR. BALLY: And he was studying industrial design at the IIT, and later, she [my mom-BB] transferred to the Southern Illinois University in Carbondale in 1960. Now, I'm born in '61, so it's—I don't know; it was kind of close, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, there's a full year going on there—'59 to '61—two full years.

MR. BALLY: You're right. So I guess I was wrong then, probably. But she took—and I think this is so trippy—she took Brent Kington's class and some of my first tools that are up there on that rack came from her class. And I said, "Mom, did you leave because you didn't like Brent Kington? Why did you leave?"

And she wrote, "I liked Brent's classes—just had a little kid at home. No money for babysitting. Could not do it at

home with you running all over the place. I took weaving. Was much easier with an active kid, and got a loom from school so that I could do it at home." So basically, I think—and I know this is true—my mom basically gave up her career to have kids, as so many women did. —

MS. RIEDEL: Who did she study weaving with?

MR. BALLY: I don't know. I don't know. She didn't offer—she's not very good with names. I mean, the only reason I know Brent Kington is because I'm, like, "Mom, do you know who Brent Kington is? I just had a workshop with him and he's just"—you know. So it's just funny how the full circles keep happening. Then after that, they moved to Pittsburgh, just history-wise.

MS. RIEDEL: When you were two, then, or three?

MR. BALLY: I grew up with a Moholy-Nagy, who apparently taught there, too. And I asked my dad, wasn't he one of your teachers? And he said no. Apparently, they got a Moholy-Nagy print or painting as their wedding present, because I still have it hanging in the house. And I remember talking about that with my folks.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness. So your father studied with him? He didn't study with him; he just knew him?

MR. BALLY: No, apparently, he had died by then.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I see, I see.

MR. BALLY: But that's a clarification—he knew him and it was that school, and that's why I had always assumed he had taken classes, but he hadn't.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. BALLY: But anyway, dad was Bucky's—Buckminster Fuller's research assistant, comma, "student slave," he wrote—[they laugh]—1962 to 1963. And in '63, he graduated. In '63 or '64, the whole family moved to Corning. There were three of us, then—just myself—and he took a job as an engineer for Corning Glass—as an engineer—not as a designer. I mean, that's the way—his kind of hybrid is design-engineering, and I think he holds numerous patents there still.

MS. RIEDEL: And where did his engineering background come from—his studies?

MR. BALLY: I honestly don't know. [Laughs.] Probably self-taught, you know. The guy doesn't stop. When there's something that needs to be done, there's no stopping the guy. And he'll become, you know, an authority on it.

MS. RIEDEL: His name is Alexander?

MR. BALLY: Alexander Oscar Bally.

MS. RIEDEL: And what's your mother's name?

MR. BALLY: She is Doris Anna Bally. I think her middle name's Anna. She never really talks about it much, but I think so. My brother was born in Corning, in New York—1964. And then in '68, we moved to Pittsburgh and East Liberty, and my father moved to Pittsburgh specifically to work with Peter Muller-Munk, who was a trained silversmith turned designer, which is really kind of cool. And I know he committed suicide.

My father wrote—he was kind of terse with his answer, because I asked him about that. So I'm not sure why exactly he left, but he wrote that he went to—in '69, he moved to the Westinghouse industrial design department. They started a corporate design center. And right around that time—1970—I started having a metal shop in the basement.

MS. RIEDEL: Nineteen-seventy? You were about nine years old.

MR. BALLY: I had a shop. I remember my dad made it a point: You've got a have a shop if you want to make stuff. And, you know, I was just screwing around with stuff. My father—growing up with my parents was that way. I mean, that's what they valued. They don't value—what did my father say? "Words were designed to confuse ideas." That's what I grew up like.

Even though they sure talked a lot about when I put an object on the dinner table—dinners and meals were our critiques. He would critique whatever it was. That was fine—that's cool. You know: This is right, you could have done that better, did you also realize you could have done this and this and this? And that's what—you know, my father at the dinner table with a piece of paper, you know, when the food was cleared away—we can't draw or read while eating —

But he would always—and this intrigued me—he would always draw upside down so that you could see his drawings. And we're talking perspective drawings—amazing mental skills that I would never imagine, ever, to have—just extraordinary.

He would sit there and say, well, so you need a shop. Okay, let's think about how we're going to arrange it. Well, let's draw—let's go measure the basement and where we're going to do it. So he always involved me in the process, and that's how he taught. I didn't realize I was being taught, but, you know, since a little kid.

MS. RIEDEL: And it was always about objects.

MR. BALLY: Objects.

MS. RIEDEL: Drawing—how did it become metal? Why was it not wood, or —

MR. BALLY: For me, personally?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, was that your choice, or was that something —

MR. BALLY: Oh, um, specifically metal—my father has always had a shop and he's always made stuff. I remember him taking me to Westinghouse to—days when they didn't have a babysitter, my mom basically said if you don't get him out of here, I'm going to go nuts.

And I'd go there and use—I'd get all the plexiglass scraps and I'd grind and I was just a little kid—using a grinding wheel? My father was never—safety was never an issue. And they think Americans are pretty much idiots for the way that they overdo the safety thing, because nobody's learning anything. You know, the way to feel that fire is hot is [to] get burned. That's kind of the Swiss mentality, again.

So why metal? That happened with—I think I was probably about 14, I'm guessing. I wrote it somewhere—14—yes, 1974. How old was I? Thirteen. My mother said, you know, you've got to do something. Get out of the house. Stop making pipe bombs, or whatever I was making. And I was making—I was mixing gunpowder in my bedroom. [Laughs.] And collecting spiders and making model airplanes out of wood and just having fun.

But apparently, I think, I was getting a little bit too into the bomb-ish area—explosives—which, if you think about it, allowing your child to mix gunpowder in your bedroom, in your house, and making pipe bombs and launching them in your side yard—hello! [Laughs.] I think my parents had a wakeup call and they said, "You know what? You have to get out of the house. You have to take a course."

So it was my mom's push that said, I'll find what there is. I was just basically a bored, young kid. Oh, an art class—I don't want to take an art class. We went through the catalogs, like, look, there's dance, there's drama, and metal. Oh, well, I guess that sounds kind of fun. All right. So she signed me up and she got me—the lowest age was 16, or 19 or something like that, and she was able to convince them to take me. I think part of it was that she had an ongoing relationship with the—as a weaver, she showed a lot at the time and had a good relationship with the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, where I first took my class.

And I'll never forget my first day of class. And I told Steve—Steve Korpa was my teacher. The first day of class, he sat us all around the table and he said, now, this is my first demo. And he said, "I'm going to turn you into little magicians." And he is kind of, like, that little magician-y—he kind of buys into that '60s "I will let you be like a little fairy princess of metal," you know. [Laughs.] And he's still like that. I think his website is something like, "under the oak tree live the pixies," something like that. Which is really cool.

Just, at that age, I thought he was—and when he loaded up the saw frame and he sawed a piece of metal, it blew my mind. And I told him that. It feels really good for me to be able to say, look what you've done for me. And I just was—from there on, that was like the one turning moment. And this is way before Switzerland. I realized, oh, my God, I need a saw. Okay, I've got to do this. So I'd go to class —

MS. RIEDEL: What was it? Do you remember specifically?

MR. BALLY: Not a clue in hell. It was just a piece—the fact that you could saw something that I thought was so very permanent—up to this point, I've only bought things, found things, bent things, smacked them with a hammer a couple times. You know, you can cut wood—that's easy—but metal? Whoa! It's god-like, somehow. And it really moved me.

From that point on, I couldn't be stopped. I used to raid all the cutoff shops in Pittsburgh—and Pittsburgh is a really great place to start because it was so not full of itself. And people were very accessible. And I guess I must have had a big mouth—a lot of courage, they tell me. I always thought I was shy. But I'd go into this huge company and say, hey, you know, I want the little piece of brass. And they'd look at me like, what the hell do you want, kid? And, sure, that's like a dollar right there. Take it.

And I'd go home and I'd saw it. And I remember, my first tools were a saw frame and a little hammer. And I had a little BernzOmatic propane torch, and I couldn't stop. I'd go home at night, make stuff. And then I'd bring stuff in to make at the class, and —

MS. RIEDEL: What were you making?

MR. BALLY: I was making a lot of jewelry—a lot of rings. I still have photographs of the very first couple rings, and, man, are they gnarly. But so what? What did I know? I mean, for that time, I'm going to refer back to that at one point. I was 13 and 14. But if you think about it, I hit the ground running. Most people start this in undergrad, going into Metals 1. By the time I was in Metals 1, I had probably done 10 years, you know?

There's no way you can make up for that kind of time, and screwing up, because that's how you learn. So I just started making rings and buying silver. And through that—I used to have a paper route—35 papers, 40 papers, all through Shadyside and my old neighborhood—College Avenue—and I think through my paper route, when I'd go collecting, I'd bump into people and ask them for the money [for the newspaper subscription] and find out what they were doing.

And a couple of these people were metalsmiths, ironically. Not only that, but through my parents' affiliations—my mom's affiliations with the craft world at the time, I bumped into people like Elvira Peake, who still has the Clay Place on Walnut Street, Ronald McNeish, who has The Collection on Walnut Street, who happened to be one of the founders of SNAG.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BALLY: Interesting. And then at—around that time, my family friend, Johanna Dahm, who just recently retired from teaching at Pforzheim, would come stay with us—good friends with my parents. And she'd bring all this wonderful work that she'd be bringing for a show at Joke van Ommen's gallery when that was still around. And I got to play with the stuff—so I got my education of—contacts, too, early on.

Ron McNeish would let me come into his shop and sell me a piece of silver. And then I bumped into Jeff Whisner, who was across from Ron McNeish. He was like the hippie, young, cool guy. And I always liked that about him. I used to have hair down to my ass and wear beads and want to be a hippie sort of guy.

And in 1974, I think it was, I had my first—1974, Jeff Whisner and Jerry Bennett, who I didn't have much to do with after that, but he was one of the first people that sold me silver.

My first craft fair was in 1975. So how old was I, 14? Yes, 14. So this was a year after I started making stuff—talk about balls! I remember making—and I had a little tiny vitrine that I'm sure my parents helped me make. I don't remember, exactly, but I'm sure they did. And I remember it had these little tripods—it was about this big. And I was selling stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: At a little local crafts fair?

MR. BALLY: Yes! And I remember, I made $300, which, if you think about the time and the age that I was, I was, like, whoa, wait a minute! Never mind the paper route; this is good! And I was making belt buckles out of forks—recycled forks. My parents were huge flea market, Salvation Army people. They never believed in buying anything retail.

Our family motto growing up was: use it up, wear it out, make it do, do without. And that was the way we lived, really Germanic—we don't need anything; you must learn to fix things. These Americans, they just buy everything new. They have no understanding for anything. [Laughs.]

And here I was, making stuff out of recycled spoons and this and that. I'm embarrassed to say, cut out quarters and pennies and things and made cufflinks and practiced and made stuff. And wouldn't you know, I'm in front of Jeff Whisner's shop having a little booth and he comes out and says, hey, you're kind of a fun little kid—here, smoke this. [Laughs.] Do you want to come be my apprentice? He was a total stoner.

So I was able to come into his shop. I don't know—it's vague how often. But he was in the neighborhood, probably about 20 blocks away—which, we walked everywhere. I remember him having kind of an open-shop policy. I was welcome anytime. He would let me work on gold and silver. Whenever he made a big sale, he would take me out to dinner with his brother. I mean, he was like one of the family, which is pretty exceptional.

MS. RIEDEL: It's an exceptional childhood.

MR. BALLY: It really is dreamy. Who could have wanted more, you know? Then Johanna Dahm, who would stay with my family, ended up working for Ron McNeish, and I think possibly, she made the introduction to Ron McNeish. And he, surprisingly enough, took me seriously, even as, like, a little runny-nose kid. And he would sell

me silver.

And he put it out that he was interested in seeing my stuff. To this day, I'm still in touch with him. I'm saddened that a founder of SNAG has kind of lost faith in SNAG, because to me, I want to be able to bring him in to give him, kind of, his just desserts. You know, I wish he would feel some pride for what he started.

Anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: Because that community has been extraordinarily important to you—SNAG?

MR. BALLY: Oh, completely. I can't imagine any more influential community than—that's kind of my family. It's always been. And part of growing up with my parents very—it's all about the work. Growing up was very warm and loving—as loving as Swiss could be. [Laughs.] But I never felt unloved.

My brother and I talk about this often—how was it growing up with these, you know, really rigid Swiss people? They were progressive, very young—I think my parents were something like 22, 23, when they had me. And they would let us do anything. They didn't care where we went. So the world was our playground. We'd go out, make pipe bombs, go meet jewelers. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: They were art collectors, too, weren't they?

MR. BALLY: They were. They've always—not the conventional sense, but they go to flea markets and Salvation Armys. They trained me how to find things from the masses, how to be selective. And I have found some amazing treasures, tools, things of value that I can—like a ceramic Teco vase I remember seeing, that, just, the shape of it. Somehow, at a flea market, the shape spoke to me. It was spray-painted gold, but I knew it wasn't a tchotchke, somehow. I knew there was something to it.

And I bought it for $1 and sure enough, I looked it up—I took the paint off and it was this beautiful turquoise green art deco piece. I don't know how old—maybe, at that time, 60, 50 years ago or something old. I ended up selling it for, like, $500. But with that kind of training, I was able to —

MS. RIEDEL: So they taught you to look at form and look at lines.

MR. BALLY: And environment—how to get things cheap. Other families went shopping at Kmart, and I remember, we'd go shopping at the Salvation Army. That's where I got all my clothes. And no wonder I looked like a street waif, which is really shocking that they would even talk to me—these jewelers that I mentioned.

MS. RIEDEL: It was the '60s, though, right? That alternative —

MR. BALLY: Maybe. But as a result of that, my parents have the most amazing furniture collection because Americans have thrown out all these examples of design—are Salvation Armying them. You know, you name any designer, my parents had that furniture—Saarinen—whoops, oh yes, we got that at the flea market. A Breuer chair, I remember. Who's the guy with a—Bertoia. I still have a Bertoia chair my parents got at the Salvation Army. Furniture—because my parents had the eye. They knew what was made well, so that was —

MS. RIEDEL: So you learned that really early.

MR. BALLY: Really early. And I loved it. And you know, I'd walk to school—we walked everywhere—three miles to school—and I'd see things laying on the street, laying here, and I'd pick them up and I'd wonder about them and I'd see if I could work them into something. I was really kind of a—I guess I was a trash-picker.

MS. RIEDEL: Found objects.

MR. BALLY: I guess. And that's also a very Swiss cultural thing—as I said before, to not waste and to make do. And so I grew up realizing—my father had—he designed one of the first assembly robots for American Robot, called—I think it was called Merlin, and he won a big prize for it.

But I remember when he made it, the initial form—a motor would be a corn flakes box, or a hot oatmeal box, and the pedestal would be made out of a lawnmower. I remember toilet paper rolls stuck all over to signify certain elements. So he, spatially, was creating a model out of garbage. And I always laughed that he took this garbage and turned it into this most amazing, award-winning, high-tech robot. So—but that's been kind of instilled in me.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: You played guitar, too, didn't you?

MR. BALLY: I think my parents would beg to differ. [Laughs.] I thought I did. Yes, I took—growing up, I guess in my teen years, one of the things that my parents tried to get me to feed my head with was metals. The other was guitar, and then another was martial arts and karate. And I kind of failed miserably at the two. I still love to play guitar. My son's taking lessons now, and I do all right. I get by. But it's embarrassing to play for other people because it's so bad [laughs]. And the karate—I can walk with my head held high and I'm not afraid of anything, so I never have to prove it. So I guess it worked.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, that's a good balance. You were also back and forth to Europe every summer, right?

MR. BALLY: Not necessarily every summer, but often, often. My grandmother would come from there during the summers and stay with us. I think it was, like, two weeks at a time, maybe more. So she would take us around and spoil us. I don't know if I mentioned, but even to this day my parents only speak Swiss to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. BALLY: Yes. They don't—and I answer back in English because I'm an American now, but —

MS. RIEDEL: Can you still speak?

MR. BALLY: Oh, I speak fluently, yes. But fluent as, probably, now, a 19-year-old. So I've moved up from the six-year-old thing. [Laughs.] So every time I go to Switzerland they still—they understand and I can say anything.

When I was an apprentice, I didn't speak a word of English for a year—which was weird as hell, coming back to this country to go to art school, and saying, [speaks with accent] I really would like to do that, but how do you say—oh, bus. Just forgetting, half of what—and it's always confused me.

MS. RIEDEL: So growing up at home, you only spoke Swiss.

MR. BALLY: I only spoke Swiss to my parents. And I only spoke Swiss to them until I had to go to school, which, I guess, was five or six.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So you really had a completely bicultural experience.

MR. BALLY: Yeah. But my brother, who also understands, word-for-word, fluently—he can't speak it. I think he took German somewhere in there so he can speak a little German, but he's kind of rejected the Swiss-ness. He kind of doesn't like it. And when we have Swiss visitors he kind of doesn't want to have them. We're all going to Switzerland in four weeks, so it's going to be interesting to see how we negotiate that.

MS. RIEDEL: And how many years younger is he than you?

MR. BALLY: Three years younger; he's 1964.

MS. RIEDEL: What's his name?

MR. BALLY: Nicholas, Nicholas David Bally. And he is a grip for the movie industry, and also has a crane company called Cranium. Isn't that cool? He rents cinema cranes and—what are they called—motorized heads for cameras, remote heads, automatic remote heads. So he's —

MS. RIEDEL: Sort of engineering in an industrial sense, to design —

MR. BALLY: A sense, yes. And as a matter of fact, yes, because he also retrofits his own cranes himself, to make them much better than the manufacturer. So, yes, you're right. And I have to say, as a brother, I was terrible to him, because I used to take everything out of his hands very impatiently. So he always thought he couldn't do this and I feel terrible about that. And now that he's on his own, he realizes, wow, I can do anything.

So I try carefully not to be like that with my kids because I see the damage it could do to my brother—trying to take everything away because I can do it better. Here, I'm impatient—which, it's hard to back off like that. But no, he's a great brother. He has two kids around the same ages as my kids.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so were there art classes —

MR. BALLY: So how are we doing so far?

MS. RIEDEL: We're doing great. How are you doing?

MR. BALLY: It's okay? I'm not blabbing too much? [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: You're just [laughs] you're being extraordinarily thorough, which is wonderful.

MR. BALLY: Too much?

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all.

MR. BALLY: Okay. Feel free to, like —

MS. RIEDEL: We'll go over the names later, to get some of the exact spellings. So primarily, when you were working in metals as a young person—say, junior high, high school—was it all jewelry?

MR. BALLY: Yes. And as a matter of fact, that is a very—high school was—I was so excited to get to high school. And we had just moved to a new neighborhood, and I was still commuting to eighth grade into the city of Pittsburgh, which is a half-hour bus ride. I so wanted to go to a public school and I think my hormones were raging. I really, you know, just wanted to be a teenager.

And so I went to ninth grade at Carlynton High School, ninth to twelfth. I graduated early because I ended up hating it. I mean, I loved—I have memories of wonderful teachers. You know, Mr. Jones taught me math and taught me to love math, and Mr. [Pasquale] Camarco [ph] taught me science. I mean, all this amazing stuff. The art teacher, Janice Schwilm, who I did not have as my art teacher—I had the wrestling coach. Does that say anything?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Why?

MR. BALLY: I don't know. They signed me up for—Mr. Morocco, Mr. Morocco was his name—and he'd say, hey, boys, you've got art class. You've got to take art, so here, go do something creative. We know you can be wonderful. Straight A's, there, great. That was my—he didn't know nothing.

There was no—this was a very jock-y school, and I was a loser because I didn't know how to play football. No sports for me. In retrospect, I wish I had found swimming. I would have loved it. I love swimming now; my whole life is swimming. But back then, I was a total hippie, stoner, wanted to take drugs, good-for-nothing, art—pardon me for saying "art fag," because that's what people used to call me—because I would wear proudly the rings that I made. Not cool in the '70s. So I made a couple great friends, but it was kind of tough, anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: So it was math and science that were more interesting to you in high school?

MR. BALLY: Yeah. I loved math and science, and I loved—I had a German teacher, Fraulein Schpitznagel—she was like a safe haven, and she knew I was fluent, but she still taught me a lot of the—Swiss-German is not a written language.

MS. RIEDEL: I didn't realize that.

MR. BALLY: Swiss people cannot, when they go to school, all their lives, they have to go to school and speak another language, called High German, which is the formal Swiss. And then they go home and they speak Swiss. It's not a written language. They write it, but only like they say it. And that's all I'd ever known, so when I got to high school, I was able to learn the formal, more technical writing and how the sentences fit together. So for that, I'm really thankful. And that kind of prepared me for Switzerland a little bit more.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did your apprenticeship come about? You graduated high school.

MR. BALLY: During the last year of high school, I remember—my parents, my father, really took me under their wing—and he had just started Bally Design, I guess, around then. He was very busy, so I think it's —

MS. RIEDEL: This was an industrial design business?

MR. BALLY: He started his own industrial design business after leaving Westinghouse. And I remember him sitting us down at the table and saying, guys, times are going to be rough. I'm going in on my own, and I'm not sure if we're going to have that much—you know, we can't spend crazily. Not that we ever were doing anything like that. But I remember the caution speech: Be frugal, be careful.

Anyway, what were we talking about?

High school—oh, and then in the senior year, he said—I was really interested; I wanted to be a marine biologist because I loved biology; I loved animals. And I loved chemistry, and just—science and math and I just had great teachers. So it was which way do I—I had the moron art teacher—and right around that time I got a scholarship to go to the Bucknell University Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Arts, where I had a wonderful teacher, Nelson Maniscalco. This is in my sophomore year of high school, which I loved. So in the junior year I was

conflicted —

MS. RIEDEL: Hang on, I'm just trying to follow this. You got a scholarship to go to an art school while you were in high school. They were evening classes or weekend classes.

MR. BALLY: Yes, and the way that came about was, my mother—and she was really resentful that my high school cared so little about anybody—and they did, they cared very little. It was a terrible school. I remember my —

MS. RIEDEL: This was at high school in Pittsburgh?

MR. BALLY: This was in high school in Pittsburgh, in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, called Carnegie. It was called Carlynton, Carnegie, Rosslyn Farms and Crafton—Carlynton. I remember my history teacher—this is part of the reason why I can't stand history—is that he was such an imbecile oaf, probably belonged to the Ku Klux Klan.

I remember them showing a film on Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, and he's running the film forwards and backwards, laughing about this guy's head rolling. And he would always reward, like, the cute little sexy girls sitting in front, and I thought—I disengaged. There's no way you can engage in that.

That school was so bad that they didn't even tell us about this one, wonderful gifted program that my mom found out about, for sophomores, who get to taste art school. It's a full scholarship, for a full summer, to go to Bucknell University to study art—to live in a dorm.

MS. RIEDEL: So drawing, painting, 3D design —

MR. BALLY: Drawing, painting, ceramics, history—it's art school. And it was just really amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: Full time?

MR. BALLY: Full time. My mom found it, signed us up, tried to get our school to help us, which they didn't at all. She was outraged. So my mother helped me to apply and I got a scholarship. One of, I think—they probably gave out, maybe, 40 in the state? And they created that class of 1977. You know, Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Arts. And my school could not believe that somebody from their school would even get this. I mean, why would they? Art, ugh. It shows you how much they valued art, to put the wrestling coach in touch with it.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. So between your sophomore and junior year, you went full time during the summer to art school?

MR. BALLY: To an art school, which is—if you think about it, it's pretty cool. I learned about—I remember doing a collaboration where we were broken up into different groups for a painting class. I did an abstract expressionist painting. I remember it was called *Death in a Baby Carriage*. [Laughs.] I really splashed paint all over. Gee, this is fun; I love art. You know?

And another valuable thing was I remember a belt buckle I made with a marriage of metals, and I spent all this time on it. And my teacher, Nelson, said, "Okay, the colors are too vibrant. You finished it too cleanly. What we're going to do is, we're going to bury it in a hole in the back and we're going to pee on it." And I was thinking—oh, God, this guy is really off the deep end. He's teasing me, ha, ha, that's funny. He said, "No, really. That's what will bring out the colors." I was, like, God, this is cool. I love this field, you know? [Laughs.]

I mean, it really was kind of cool that—you know, to see—is "visceral" the right word for it? Like a real earthy response. Pee, urine, blow things up. I think the guy had a motorcycle, so he was really cool.

MS. RIEDEL: *Death in a Baby Carriage*; it all fits together.

MR. BALLY: All that. And right around that time, I remember, I was doing my first couple of craft shows at Shadyside Summer Arts Festival. Lo and behold, three booths down is Tom Mann.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. BALLY: Really. So I've known Tom Mann since I was 14, and he was a hippie guy, smoking doobies in his booth, making penis earrings, surrounded by beautiful women. I was, like, someday I want to be just like him. My parents even bought a piece from—he and his girlfriend were collaborating on those things where he'd make metal and he pressed them into paper. He was just, to me, he was the shit. I just wanted to be like him.

MS. RIEDEL: And was he a little bit older than you then?

MR. BALLY: Yeah, he's 10 years, he's got 10 years on me, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: He's 10 years older, okay.

MR. BALLY: So, I mean, you can imagine: He's well into his momentum.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. BALLY: And he's from Pennsylvania—Stroudsburg, you know. We both spoke Pennsylvania-ese, and for him to even come to the Pittsburgh Arts Festival—I told my wife about that arts festival, and she said, he went to that stupid little art festival? I said no, Lynn, but you don't understand. This was the '70s. They didn't have a whole lot then and this was a very popular event.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. BALLY: People came from far and wide, and eventually I ended up having a bigger booth that my parents helped me build, and taking it more seriously, and learning about business more, and thinking about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, because I've seen photos of you doing a booth —

MR. BALLY: Well, that booth was the next year. I thought, okay, well—I got rained on that one day, so I guess I need a roof. And I think my dad really loved that I could be kind of his project, and he devoted a lot of time to helping me understand how to put things together, plan things. Anyway, again, my dad —

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because you still stuck with jewelry and stuck with metal, even after this summer program of exploring a variety of media and, clearly, getting a little looser in terms of technique, and —

MR. BALLY: So and then my dad, in the junior year of high school, my dad took me around to the different programs. I remember being really afraid, and kind of being unfair to my father—being angry to him, like I don't want to do anything. Leave me alone. I don't want to go to art schools.

So that was one of the things that he took me around to see, and he said, "Well, look, there are two alternatives that we can do. One is, I have a friend who owns an avocado ranch on the West Coast, who was one of my father's partners in his business, Bally Design—Tim Cunningham"—who was also one of the first people to commission me. Later, I made decks—during art school, I'd do construction for him and stuff. He was my dad's partner. One of his buddies from UCLA, where he went, owned an avocado ranch, Dan Drown. I guess he was some kind of swimmer, ironically—an Olympic swimmer or something pretty serious.

So I could go there and learn about marine biology, by learning to dive—because it's close to the water, or something like that. I don't know; I wasn't convinced. [Laughs.] So that was plan A. Plan B was I could ping my relatives in Switzerland and see if there's a jeweler that's looking for an apprentice or something.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you were trying to decide if you wanted to—which route you wanted to follow.

MR. BALLY: Right. And so, thanks to my father's extreme generosity and amazing—we call it vitamin B in Swiss, which is *vitamin beziehig,* which is "vitamin pull." Like, who you know kind of matters. And I'm embarrassed about it, but because my father wrote specifically to my cousin Thommi, his cousin—Thommi Bally, in Basel—whose wife was named, at the time, Moschli [ph]—who now goes by Maria Theresa Gessner-Bally, whose grandfather is on the 50-franc note of Switzerland, is all that, is Argentinean—anyway.

He wrote to his cousin in Basel and said, "My son wants to do something like this. Is there something possible in Basel?" And their family jeweler—in Switzerland everyone has their family jeweler—their family jeweler happened to be looking for somebody. And through the pull of dad's cousin, who was kind of a bigwig in Basel—I think he might have even been on the Grosser Rat, which is like the mayoral council of Basel—an architect—through his pull, he was able to score—well, he was able to make the introduction. Upon which point, I remember having to prepare all my jewelry I had done to that point, learn how to ship it to Switzerland, as a means of introducing myself—to show the guy that I'm taking it pretty seriously.

MS. RIEDEL: This is to Alexander Schaffner.

MR. BALLY: This is Alexander Schaffner, exactly. So I remember putting this really carefully done box together, with the jewelry samples. I had to learn about customs forms, which my father helped me with. I can't imagine how I could have done it myself. And if I think about what I sent him, it's really kind of embarrassing now. But at the time, for the age I was —

MS. RIEDEL: You were 18.

MR. BALLY: I got the job. So the deal was, I get to work with Alexander Schaffner. I graduate early in '79—I think it was January—go to Switzerland for half a year, was the deal.

MS. RIEDEL: This was ’79. You’re a junior or a senior?

MR. BALLY: I was a senior.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. You graduate in December.

MR. BALLY: I was supposed to graduate in June of ’79, but I had graduated probably late ’78, or whatever. But I was on a plane to Switzerland, I think, January or February.

MS. RIEDEL: Of ’79.

MR. BALLY: Yeah. I didn’t want to deal with school anymore and I had all of my credits. They let me go early, and I did it—flying colors, thank goodness. Anyway, so I got the job, and the deal was: My parents had to pay something like $40 a month—some token amount—to allow me to be at Schaffner’s. So it was a course, sort of. I’m not sure why they did that. It might be a cultural thing. I didn’t get it, but that was the deal, and we settled for the arrangement.

And I flew over there, terrified, by myself, the cheapest possible way my parents knew how—which was over Reykjavik, with Iceland Air—to Luxembourg, where I spoke no French, and I remember being terrified in the plane over, trying to learn some French [laughs], which I had taken before. I remembered the French dictionary, and I knew I had to get a train in Luxembourg, find the right train by myself. This is at 19, which is—it was scary to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. BALLY: And then get a train from Luxembourg all the way to Basel. In the course of that train ride, I remember, the heat shut off, the train stopped for something like—it seemed like forever, maybe eight hours. They had gone on a strike. I had no food, hadn’t eaten, come from the States, and I was all alone. And I remember that terrified, horrible feeling. Then finally I ended up in the Basel train station.

I had never met my father’s cousin, ever, because he was not part of the family that we were real friendly with—or just didn’t have much to do with; we weren’t unfriendly—but it wasn’t my father’s immediate family that we’d always go see. So I end up in Basel at something like three o’clock in the morning, four o’clock in the morning. Some ungodly hour, with all my tools, all my luggage—there were no cabs—and I found, on the map of Basel, I found where I had to go and I walked.

MS. RIEDEL: There were no cabs?

MR. BALLY: No. [Laughs.] It was wee early-morning hours. Trains didn’t usually come in. Nobody was expecting the train, I guess. And I didn’t have any money. So I walked to the door and I rang the doorbell. And I remember that terrible scared feeling, you know?

And they were just so wonderful and welcoming. I was trying really hard to practice my *Sie*, my formal—and I kept screwing it up, and I was totally embarrassed—and they fed me, and they fed me, and they put me to bed. And I had my own room.

And they put me up for a year, which is hugely generous. They had four sons who were right around my age, and one of their sons, now, just recently asked if he could, maybe, send one of his kids over. Hey, it’s poetry. That’s the way it should happen.

The deal was with Schaffner, work for a half a year and we have to pay. And after that year was up, he said, “Look, if you want you can stay.” And I said, “I’ll tell you what, I’d love to. But I want that money back. So you have to pay me a *lehrlingslohn*,” which is the apprentice’s salary. So basically, I broke even, which I thought was kind of sly of me.

MS. RIEDEL: And how was the apprenticeship structured? Was it a traditional apprenticeship?

MR. BALLY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. How was it structured?

MR. BALLY: I think a traditional one would require what I did and then additional four years. Wouldn’t you know it, I have had one of the most famous jewelers—definitely in the region—one of the 10 top politically showing less conservative jewelers, which at the time—Switzerland’s so conservative—this guy was making stuff with ebony and ivory and silver and spinning stuff with chalices and really unconservative that way—very religious, lot of liturgical things for the church. But he was one of 10 in the city of Basel proper, that a *verbund*, is like a union.

Then he—I just totally blanked out—went to study with him. Oh, the reason why the way that I did this apprenticeship, why it was different than a normal one is because it lasted such a short amount of time. The reason why it was better, in a way, is because [if] you're drawing it out over four years, they end up not getting a lot of time to do the little samples, on one hand. On the other hand, he was writing a book on the little samples so it was also in his interest to try them out on me and see if I could understand the drawings and see if it worked, kind of the order of how he laid it out.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the book? Or was it —

MR. BALLY: The book was the *Lehrgang—Modell-Lehrgang* [ISBN: 2-88012-019-5-BB] or something like that it's called. It was a book of drawings—an exercise book which became kind of the national norm for apprentices in Switzerland.

MS. RIEDEL: For jewelry-makers, for metalsmiths, for —

MR. BALLY: For jewelry-makers, for jewelry—specifically, goldsmiths. Not stone-setters, not metalsmiths—he did very little smithing. I never learned smithing from him. That's not true—some, in a very teensy scale, when you have to hammer a little wire to a certain shape or something but specifically goldsmithing—fabricating, casting—less casting, more fabricating—stone settings was real big. Just pretty much any fine technical stuff—learning about the tools, tool care, studio upkeep, including cleaning vomit off the windows, which I was [laughs] really particularly grossed out about.

But again, it was really good because it was so intense and he allowed me to intensely work on these things—which was kind of unheard of. This was very special scenario.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were the guinea pig for these exercises that he was —

MR. BALLY: Pretty much.

MS. RIEDEL:—putting together —

MR. BALLY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL:—to see if it would work.

MR. BALLY: Yes to see if—pretty much—any dumb American could do it. [Laughs.] So I think I passed the test. This guy was special in that he—my good luck was that it was Alexander Schaffner. Not from his point of reference—that he was a very open-minded goldsmith artist in his own right but he also was very community-oriented in that he would allow—I remember, in our shop, he let somebody come in from Cambodia, I think it was—a *flüchtling* is "escapee."

He took in and allowed a father and his daughter to come use the shop. Even though they had no kind of Western reference at all, he had the open mind enough to allow them to come and show us things that they did and be in the shop for a couple days here, a couple days there. I'm not sure exactly how long they were there but I remember, strongly remembering that he did something very special by opening his studio to complete strangers and completely different people.

I remember that they were not used to toilets and I remember, even culturally, the shop would be a mess that way. And for him to be able to see beyond that and to help educate them on "this is the way we do it here."

MS. RIEDEL: Were they artists as well?

MR. BALLY: Well, apparently the father was at one point—had worked with his hands as some kind of a smith. He was showing us the way that he would work metal was, he would cut metal with a chisel and so we were—there was some exchange there that was really kind of neat. And he showed everybody back in the shop.

The shop at the time was really, really amazing. Historically built, based on how shops have been for thousands of years. Where you have the business center in the front, a place where customers could walk in—am I doing all right? [Laughs.] Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: We're fine.

MR. BALLY: A place where customers could walk in—then my boss had his little—you need to switch it?

MS. RIEDEL: No, we're totally fine. I just wanted to make sure it was —

MR. BALLY:—a little station where my boss would be able to look through the curtains and see the customers and that was the segue to the shop. It was kind of a long, thin railroad-apartment-type of looking shop with a back courtyard.

So you come through the shop door, ring the little bell, the boss would come out and meet with his clients, and then him and his design desk and his little tiny business desk. And then we'd walk through and some of the storage facilities for precious metals and the big safe and then the backroom shop. Which was unique, because it was a table that he had specially built that was round.

So everybody got to look at each other when we worked—we got a lot of together time. And it was on Andy Caderas, me, Yves Thomann—no, Ralph Düby sat next to me and then Yves Thomann. So there were five seats. I think there was one always empty in case somebody came like the Cambodian people that came.

MS. RIEDEL: So would he sell his own work in the shop in front and also take commissions?

MR. BALLY: Yes. He was very commission-based. Also I learned from him that you have to throw out a wide net. He'd have little, smaller trinket-y sort of things that were beautiful—not trinket-y in a negative sense, but more affordable things. Then he'd have major commissions. I remember a white-gold frog that was, oh God, it was so much money, I couldn't even—it was play money. Huge, enormous white-gold frog—he was really into frogs. When I graduated, I got a little gold frog because I was no longer the tadpole—which totally made my day, it was amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great, yes.

MR. BALLY: But I remember some of the stones that he worked with were so much money that he'd have to bring them to the bank, to the safe. Switzerland is a cash society—no credit card, no nothing—way behind that way or way ahead—all depending on [laughs] where you sit. But I remember one of my tasks for my boss was he'd have me take—whenever he'd get a deposit or a payment for a piece—he'd have me take the cash to the post office, which was kind of like the bank there. Amazing—just the wads of cash.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BALLY: And he would trust me. The whole thing was built on trust. To me it was a special indicator that I was a part of the family and I could never imagine breaking such a trust.

And towards the second part of the stint, he actually entrusted me with a key, which was huge, huge, huge. To this day still, I don't give anybody the key to my own studio till somebody has earned it which—eh, you know, you have to wait till.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, of course. So did you march through a set number of lessons in this year or how exactly did he structure this —

MR. BALLY: The apprenticeship thing?

MS. RIEDEL:—variation on the apprenticeship? Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. BALLY: Oh, and I forgot to mention that one of the other benefits to having him as my boss was that he actually taught courses, jewelry courses, as the local Kunstgewerbeschule, which is where you learn art. So he also had the perspective of being a teacher that way, which is highly unique in that system. There, you're either an artist or a craftsman or a professor.

And he was, in a way, he was kind of neither—and both. He was not a professor, but he was a very respected teacher. And at the same time he had a very respected practice and he had exhibitions every once in awhile. And at same the time, he happened to also be an art historian. He wrote several books on the development of metal through the ages and he would have access to the local Swiss museums where he would be able to go and look at these different things and photograph them.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Was the focus purely Switzerland or was it —

MR. BALLY: No, I think European, European *hölebewohner*, caveman—how did the caveman do it and the development of alloys; he had several books. He's the author of several books. Really kind of a Renaissance guy for a very conservative place. And to this day—actually, I just recently donated to the Museum of Arts and Design—the trigger necklace thing in his memory.

MS. RIEDEL: I just saw that.

MR. BALLY: Yes. And I thought, you know what? This is the least that I can do for what he's given me. Which I

didn't even realize what I was getting at the time —it's funny how that is. I sent him a copy and I really wanted him to see what he'd done, you know? I think he still doesn't totally get it.

MS RIEDEL: Has he ever been over here?

MR. BALLY: I don't think so. I don't think so. He doesn't speak a word of English. He's totally very Swiss and speaks High German, very careful with his words, man of few words. His letters are poetry in that he handwrites with the most beautiful writing you've ever seen but our communication isn't that great in written [form] because he insists in writing High German to me and I don't read High German. However, I was able to decipher the entire letter and get the nuances—surprisingly to me—on the plane to Dallas recently.

I thought, okay, now I've got the time, now I'm [laughs] going to figure this out. Through it, I realized that he thinks it's kind of cute—the things that I do now. I mean it's so off the deep end compared—I mean, he was off the deep end, when you think about it, from what his predecessors were doing. So he thought it was kind of cute that I made him for his eightieth birthday recently, an 80 tray with an 80 on it and he was touched and tickled. I'll bet you it's under some plant somewhere. You know? [Laughs.] I don't know—I think the book is just so out of the deep end—it's about found objects and I don't know if he gets it or not. I guess if I see him when I go to Basel in four weeks—I guess I'll find out.

His daughter is a goldsmith and *she* is off the deep end, if I do say so myself—in a wonderful way. The last time I saw a work of hers it was edible art, edible jewelry made out of carrots carved, put together —

MS. RIEDEL: How cool.

MR. BALLY:—but so interestingly different and—Dad —

MS. RIEDEL: What's her name?

MR. BALLY: Sara. Sara. And he has a son too, who I didn't have a lot to do with. I'm not sure what his name is. I think it could be Matthias. I'm not sure. I didn't have much to do with his family when I was there.

MS. RIEDEL: And when you were there were you pretty much just working the shop and then at home or were you out seeing things as well?

MR. BALLY: I was in the shop full time during the week and at night, pretty much exhausted. Friday night I'd go out and I had a little moped and one of the apprentices and I would go out and kick it. There's no drinking age. So we'd go out and I remember we'd have a lot of wine and beer and whatever and try to pick up girls—which we were completely unsuccessful at [laughs]. In retrospect, I can see why. [Laughs.]

Then on the weekends I would explore Basel. Try to look at the different museums. They had a beautiful fountain there by Jean Tinguely, which was very mind-blowing to me, just amazing, of these—it was a water fountain where all these different animals did different things. He's Swiss, Jean Tinguely, and I guess he's just from around the Basel area and he used to play in water and that's how his playfulness came. He's one of my early heroes because anything goes. Old motors—you know, have fun.

MS. RIEDEL: But he was Swiss and he was able to stretch it that far, he was taking it into the art form into —

MR. BALLY: Actually, I think, a lot of people who are my heroes are Swiss people who have—if you look at the work of Johanna Dahm, it's highly conceptual, cutting-edge, amazing. Her recent work is more about Ashanti and casting a technical thing, but what has brought her there was cutting-edge work that had to do with, you know, the non-existence of form, like *The Emperor Clothes,* I think, her piece is where you look at a red square long enough and then you look at somebody and then you see the green piece of jewelry on their [laughs]—I mean, that's brilliant. That's cool. It's cutting-edge.

And if you look at the work of Otto Künzli, who I had the good chance of meeting in eighty—I think it was '86 at a SNAG conference in Toronto, he's a Swiss that defected and went to Germany, thank God, because you can breathe in Germany. You can do cool, weird stuff there and you're not an outcast, which I'm sure has all changed by now. Anyway, so —

MS. RIEDEL: Did you work on any of your own work in Switzerland that year?

MR. BALLY: I did. And the second half —

MS. RIEDEL: Jewelry?

MR. BALLY:—yeah. The second half of that mini-apprenticeship thing that I did, I was able to get the key, convince my boss not to go home for lunch because that a waste of two hours, and so I had the shop to myself

and I was able to make Christmas presents and presents for people and things like that, and that's what I did. And it was fun, I loved it.

MS. RIEDEL: Putting all those new skills to work.

MR. BALLY: New skills to work. You know, I had my own little bench. It was always my bench. It was really —

MS. RIEDEL: And were you working in silver, gold, exploring materials as well?

MR. BALLY: Mostly silver. Every now and then I'd buy a piece of gold. At the time, I guess it wasn't that expensive if you think about it. But I would use gold as accents to a ring. I remember a lapis ring that I made that was really proud of that's kind of a shroud ring with a touch of gold wire around the top with a piece of a lapis. When I came home to—did I come home? No, my parents, I think, came for Christmas to see how I was doing—I'd give that as a present.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. What was your work like at this time? Was it very minimal?

MR. BALLY: Oh, my work was terrible, terrible. You know what? I have to say I don't think I've ever—until after our school did I make anything worth looking at—honestly. There are some cool experiments, I think. One of my favorite things, now that we're talking, is that belt buckle that I made—one of the first things—where I took forks and intertwined them so it became abstracted. You couldn't tell that they were forks. I thought that was—that could be something I do now and enjoy it.

But most of it was very bite-sized, conservative, really about the stone and about the preciousness, which was actually very good because I rejected all that. When I came here I thought, you know what, it's easy to make seductive metal, seductive jewelry. If you have something as sexy as gold, what's not to love? Literally chew a piece of gum and turn it into gold; I think people have done that, as we know. So I always thought, try to make something sexy that's not gold, that's not precious. I think that's a response to the Swiss gold culture.

I also don't like the thought that gold—this is something we never talked about. You know, where does gold come from? Who suffers for the mining? At what cost are we using these materials? And it just never felt 100 percent right. So I've used silver—and aluminum for that matter, isn't the prettiest thing that—all metal has some kind of history of bad treatment of the land and of people. But I'm hoping that it's a safer bet than gold.

But in art school I was not doing —

MS. RIEDEL: You finished after a year and came back and were involved with Tyler?

MR. BALLY: Yep. Then I came and I went to Tyler. I interviewed at a few places and—if I'm not mistaken—I interviewed [with] Jack Prip here when he was still, I think, the last year he was in his department here at RISD. Then I went to Tyler and who else did I interview? I don't remember. But I got in pretty much everywhere I wanted to.

And I chose Tyler for the stupidest reasons. Stanley Lechtzin, by the way, at the fortieth of SNAGs was the recipient of the honorary award; everything's great between us and I thanked him for being there and they had a wonderful core.

But I will say, I was very unhappy, and part of it was my own stupidity at being seduced by beautiful tools and cleanliness and order—not realizing that that is also an indicator that people don't use these tools a lot. At RISD, I remember it was utter chaos and I was underwhelmed. A lot of the work looked like the work that I had just left behind in Europe, so I wasn't really drawn to it.

And Tyler—I saw Stanley Lechtzin's work—electroforming, never heard of it. God, I'd love to do that. So I was fully expecting, naively enough, that when I got into the art department there, I'd start electroforming. How fun.

Not so—because they don't do that till junior or senior year. When I was a freshman there, I had a wonderful core. It all worked so well in retrospect. I had a wonderful core. As soon as I became a freshman, I asked Stanley if I could have a bench in their metal department, which they were very kind to give me, so I could unload some of my tools. I just never had the time to go there and any time I did, the shop was closed.

And then when I became a sophomore, I said, "Look, I'd like to take an assignment. I'd like to do something that the juniors are doing or something that the sophomores are doing, just something that the metalsmiths are doing." And he said, "Well, you can take, you can make pickle tongs," I remember. And he gave me two pieces of copper. So pickle tongs—I made that, like, 15 years ago. I don't think I'll be doing that.

MS. RIEDEL: So they weren't making any adjustments for the fact that you spent this year in Switzerland?

MR. BALLY: They weren't. And you know what? They didn't have to. It's their show. I'm the guest here. And you know at the time, of course, I was upset about it. When I became a sophomore, I was able to take a couple classes and I definitely credit Daniella Kerner and Vickie Sedman, who were my teachers at the time, for teaching me to raise, which led to—look around you. It's everywhere.

And I took it and ran. And they taught me. I thanked them at the SNAG conference too. I said, "Without what you taught me, I wouldn't be here."

At the same time, I was disappointed that I wasn't getting to be Stanley Lechtzin's student, the great Stanley Lechtzin. I just got the other support staff—which isn't true at all, because they were wonderful. They're amazing artists in their own right.

So when I came toward the end of the sophomore year, I had the great fortune of sitting in on the lecture by Carol Kumata, who blew me out of the water, quite honestly. Just her brilliance and the sculptural identity, metal background—I know she studied with Eleanor Moty, who has since retired. But with her fine metal skills, to take it and go 100 percent sculptural—I really never heard somebody talk about their work, so I felt personally touched.

And I went to Stanley—I requested a meeting—and I said, "I came here from Switzerland, I had all this technical stuff and I really want to do something to push myself. I'm bored in metals. I came here to do metals. I want to be a metalsmith. Can't I take a junior class or something more challenging?"

MS. RIEDEL: So you had to have two years' worth of foundation classes before you could even take a metal class?

MR. BALLY: Right, right. Well, that's not entirely true. The second semester of sophomore year, I'm pretty sure that I was able to take one or two jewelry classes—which were great. [Sarcastically.] And I'd loved that—it was just more of the same. Oh, I get to do stone-settings again? Haven't done that. I didn't just come out of the intensive stuff of that.

So it wasn't that challenging and I requested to please be placed where it's more challenging. I said, "I really want to challenge myself or I'm just going to have to, maybe, look elsewhere." And he said, "Look elsewhere."

MS. RIEDEL: Were you able to show them the work you've done in Switzerland and that —

MR. BALLY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—made no difference. Okay.

MR. BALLY: You know, a man like Stanley Lechtzin's been there, done that, seen it all. The guy's a genius. Who am I? Some little runny-nosed Swiss guy, you know? [Laughs.] I shouldn't get special treatment. And I didn't. And he said, "All right, no, I'm not going to make any special concessions." So at that time, my father was professor at—not professor, was he professor?—no, he didn't make full professor yet—assistant professor at Carnegie Mellon in the design department and I wanted to transfer.

MS. RIEDEL: Because Carol Kumata was teaching there?

MR. BALLY: As Carol Kumata was teaching there, I wanted to be with her. I saw in her a mentor. So I was terrified again. I had just gotten used to Tyler, but going back to Pittsburgh was familiar turf again, so it was kind of a cool—[aside] this is tickling me—a cool place to go back to. And I checked out the department and indeed, I loved it. It had glass and ceramics—and I loved being a part of a university where you could take a Russian history course and I just loved that anything goes.

So I was excited, requested a transfer and, wouldn't you know it, Walter Groer, the head of the art department, a metalsmith, happened to be out on, I guess, sabbatical or something—his replacement gave me every single credit. So I got everything, every single credit, including my [laughs] physical education credits transferred. How lucky is that? Usually, people have to make up for it and then furthermore, because my dad taught there, I got to go to school free. It was a very expensive school. So it was just meant to be.

I found a wonderful apartment with a soccer team who took me in and they were just the nicest people in the whole world. And I felt so at home. I ditched my old girlfriend from Tyler, kind of rudely, meanly, who—anyway, she's now teaching art in—I guess she just moved to Florida—Sarasota, Florida so—it was kind of a new beginning. And the cool thing about the way that I see Carnegie Mellon, not only was it a new beginning with life and relationship and coming back to Pittsburgh in a new—more grown-up now, it was also—I just spaced again —

MS. RIEDEL: We'll just take a —

MR. BALLY:—I was going to make a really important comment. Darn. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Let's take a short break. Maybe it'll come back.

MR. BALLY: [Laughs.] Yes, great.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: So we stopped and you had just started at Carnegie.

MR. BALLY: Yeah, so here I was at Carnegie Mellon in 1982. Everything new beginning, wonderful, peachy, new apartment, great friends; a little bit afraid of a new beginning. And I started in with Carol Kumata, who was really wonderful.

The thing that I liked the most about her, then and still now, was that she not only was an amazing artist in her own right but she knew that I needed to be left alone, which she possibly did just out of convenience for herself [laughs] but I couldn't have—to me, it was like a graduate program in that she let me run with whatever crazy ideas I had.

And she was a very good teacher in that she would give me advice just when I needed it; when I asked for it. And we'd have maybe two or three critique reviews during a semester and I would make this piece or that piece and fulfill the assignments. But largely, I was left on my own devices.

And I had a most amazing studio which I shared with Christopher Shellhammer, who was a guy who was deaf—double hearing aids—which I now have, a hearing aid. But he was just the wildest, rowdiest, funnest guy to share a studio with, and we hit it off beautifully. There were two benches—it was basically an empty room in the basement of Baker Hall at Carnegie Mellon. To get there, you had to go through this darkened hallway where the heating tunnel ran. It was out of another era. It was dark and dismal and wonderful in its kind of gothic darkness, and anything goes-ness. It was dirty; anything you did would be improving the space —

MS. RIEDEL: These were not formal studios; it was just —

MR. BALLY: Well, they were, but they weren't really updated for a long, long time. They were really kind of left to waste. As I remember it, it was really not state-of-the-art anything, yet they had all the equipment that you needed, should you want to make something. Even if it wasn't in the best shape, you could always make it nice.

MS. RIEDEL: All down in this space?

MR. BALLY: All down in this dismal space right next to ceramics, where I also learned to—I took some ceramics classes and I loved, I loved, throwing pots. It was one of my favorite things. So as often as I could, I would go and work till the wee hours of the morning in my studio with Christopher Shellhammer, drink a little bit; I smoked like a horse—I smoked cigarettes.

It was fun just working; making what I wanted in my dreams. I'd come up with these crazy dream contraptions—pieces that would take countless, hundreds of hours. To me, it seemed like a graduate program would be; something where you allow the student to blossom with only minor adjustments and criticism when it's required to keep the person on track, which was what Carol was very good at.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, when you say contraptions, you had stopped making jewelry or you were branching out to make other —

MR. BALLY: Yes, yes, and I made—I remember, I made a happiness machine, which I'll show you later tonight. Everybody says, hey, man, you made a glorified bong! That's wonderful! And it was kind of a hybrid between a microscope and a bong and it had—working with the metaphor of human body, it had two test tubes that filled; inside were balloons that you could blow into and they would fill up.

The cool thing about the studio was that there was a Dumpster right outside the door—and, remember, this is a university—right next to us was the place where they would test stuff on rats. And the computer robotics lab was upstairs.

So all this old technology, they would literally throw in the Dumpster. So once a week, Chris and I would dig through the Dumpster and find switches and contraptions and stuff and cages and stainless steel; just state-of-the-art things. We didn't know what it did but it was, like, I didn't have to go to the scrapyard anymore; it was right there.

So a lot of that stuff worked into these sculptures, like the happiness machine. And I remember making a piece called *Maslow* [referencing Abraham Maslow-BB] which was a puzzle piece. It was seven-foot tall, weighed

probably about 200 pounds, with a battery inside. And it was a complex—it was made out of scrapyard—triangular-shaped, made out of scrapyard copper.

Then the top was a carefully fabricated pyramid. In the very top of it was a glass-blown pyramid. Kathleen Mulcahy was my glass teacher at the time—taught me how to blow glass and that was one of the first things I wanted to do. And that's kind of the cross-fertilization that I hadn't been getting at Tyler so much. So it was kind of a welcoming of different things into the making of a piece, which was new to me and just exciting.

MS. RIEDEL: So was it the transfer to Carnegie Mellon that inspired the transition from purely jewelry-making to these large-scale sculptures?

MR. BALLY: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, because up to this point —

MR. BALLY: Up to this point, I tried to make a piece of sculpture at Tyler and it was about three inches by three inches. And I had a—it looked like something—let me see if I can remember his name—Noguchi—Isamu Noguchi was doing. I was looking at a lot of his stuff at the time—organic and cute, a little melting of Noguchi, like the Dali-esque sort of stuff happening. It was the most boring, dumbest thing I've ever seen, with, of course, the reminder that I'm a jeweler, and a little set ruby in it—ugh. So I gave it up because I realized how futile and silly it was.

But when I came to Carnegie Mellon and saw all this great junk and Carol's green light to experiment, that's when I went nuts and it just—I couldn't stop. I was just working all the time, and I was very proud of the show that resulted. It was kind of my thesis show.

I made the wildest—I had one piece, I remember—in the middle of the gallery was this gigantic phallic shape made out of sheet metal, pop-riveted together, and it played on being shy at openings since I didn't really like art openings [laughs] and I still don't. So it was a thing that you could pull up with a pulley and you could go under and hide. You could lower yourself so you could hide from everybody at the art opening. [Laughs.]

That was kind of the central piece and there were some really technical things that I was really proud of. That show to me was like, okay, I'm going to take this ball and run with it. It was like an affirmation to me.

But also, in the course of going to Carnegie Mellon, I had come from Switzerland so I had this entire European immersion experience, very culturally bound and excited about my re-found Swissness, as it were. So I felt kind of alien to the other students that had—even at Carnegie Mellon, had been together for two years, and I felt very different.

And around that time I met Roy, whose name was Rosemary Gialamas, when I met her. Her nickname's Roy, R-O-Y. Just like myself, she had Greek cultural roots and she spoke Greek and —

MS. RIEDEL: You have Greek cultural roots or she also—?

MR. BALLY: No, she does. No, she, as in my own European roots, she had—Greece is in Europe, isn't it? Euro-Asian—it's kind of pushing the —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, Mediterranean.

MR. BALLY: Right, thank you, Mediterranean. She had Mediterranean roots. I think she was something like third generation, if I'm not mistaken; maybe fourth. But in her family and in the great tradition, you spoke Greek, you went to Greek school. And she had just done a stint in Athens and just come back that prior summer, so I felt this amazing attraction to somebody who, like me, had this other experience that nobody could even imagine. And that's kind of how we bonded.

Just to preface that, my grandmother, who translated ancient Greek, had always really loved Greece. And when I was apprenticing in Switzerland, my grandmother, who loved me and loved Greece and had the money to send me, sent me—said, I would like to give you a vacation. There was a vacation going on in Switzerland—I think it was the summer—and I got to take something like three weeks in Greece and travel around by train all over the Peloponnesus—oops, sorry, that was my drink—all around the Peloponnesus, Athens, Argos, just all over, with a buddy of mine, tenting it, kind of slumming it, and having —

MS. RIEDEL: Many of the islands or pretty much the mainland?

MR. BALLY: Pretty much the mainland. We went to Corfu, which is Kérkyra, which is off from Brindisi [where you get the boat for Greece-BB] the first place you would come to; you can look over at Albania. And we met all the rowdy Australians and Germans and British people. I guess I was just over 19, maybe 20. You can imagine the

fun rowdiness. I remember renting motorcycles. You know, just crazy.

Anyway, I loved Greece. And ever since I was a little kid, who doesn't love the mythology or know the mythology? So here I was in a land that was magical. So I also kind of understood Greece from that. So when I met Roy, we just totally hit it off and we dated and we shared a lot of time in the studio. And then it was—we graduated.

Upon graduation, her parents promptly removed her from the equation. They kind of knew we were dating. They thought it was cute during school—it's cute and everything. [Now] they didn't approve. I was Swiss; I wasn't Greek. So they highly objected.

So what they did is they whisked Roy off to Greece, thinking that that would be an obstacle. [Laughs.] So we made a plan. They pretty much took her out of circulation completely; no communication. But before that moment, we were able to make a plan and we were cryptically able to—I was able to find out when she was in Athens and we were able to make a rendezvous through her good friend, who she had met the prior summer, who was going to connect us in Greece. So pretty much as I remember it, when I arrived in Athens, I remember seeing her, kind of following her and her father, waiting for him to finally leave so I could be with her. Isn't that crazy?

MS. RIEDEL: It's pretty extraordinary.

MR. BALLY: It's pretty extraordinary. And we had the best time in Greece. And her parents thought she was all safe and taken care of. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So they left her there?

MR. BALLY: Oh, they left her there. They basically just wanted her far away from me.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were there.

MR. BALLY: And I was there. So when we returned, we decided—if I'm remembering this correctly, we decided to come clean. We requested a meeting with her parents and we said that we wanted to move in together and start a life together. And I remember that they kept avoiding these—not wanting the meeting, not even have to deal with it.

Finally, we waited together at her home so long, till they finally did have to come home to go to sleep and we pretty much said that we wanted to move in together. They pretty much laughed us out of it and they said, there's no way this is ever going to happen—trust us, you're not Greek; how are you going to earn a living? Our daughter is accustomed to a standard of living which you could never provide. And this is insulting to Roy, who said, "What, you sent me to art school for what, finishing school?"

So pretty much, all sorts of stuff happened that night that was very volatile and very violent to Roy. I left, thinking that this is—how are we going to do this. And I remember getting a call the next day, saying, this is not going to work; we either have to hit the road to make it work or goodbye.

So I loaded up the car, drove by her house, packed her in and off we went to somewhere. And that somewhere happened to be Massachusetts. And we drove through Providence. Ironically, I remember getting really lost in Providence because of [interstates] 195 and 95; ended up in the middle of Massachusetts somewhere up 495 in the middle of nowhere, thinking, what are we doing here? This is so insane.

So pretty much, we eloped. We ended up crashing at a sculptor friend of my father's who went to school with him—Dennis Kowal, who was an amazing designer-turned-sculptor—we ended up crashing with his ex-wife, who was kind enough to put us up for a couple days. After a week, she started getting sick of having us around.

So we found an apartment in Hull, Mass., where we had not a penny; we were pretty broke. But we knew that this is what we wanted. I just wanted to live together but she said, it ain't going to happen. So I said, "All right, let's get married then." So we went to the justice of the peace in Hull, so I always kind of tease and say my first marriage was made "in Hull." [Laughs.] And I remember fishing for dinner; fishing for smelts because we had so much time on our hands.

We were looking for work, and that is actually when I landed my first job as an industrial design model-maker at Design Continuum in Boston. Pretty much they hired me not knowing—I'd never done design, never made models. They handed me a blueprint and said, "Can you make this?" I was all cocky and I said, "Oh, sure, I can do that." And they said, "Great, come in tonight, start on that."

[Gasps.] And I swear, I almost had a heart attack. Because I'd never read a blueprint—like, a real one. I'd been teaching myself how to do them but this was really complex, making a computer console or something out of

foamcore.

So I showed up and I passed the test and I was hired and my commute was about an hour into Boston, either way—sometimes by boat, sometimes by car—from Hull. Anyways, so that was our beginning, which was pretty dramatic.

Meanwhile, when we first got married, nobody knew that we were married. Nobody even knew where we were. We decided to not tell them because they had treated us so badly. My parents knew. My parents were fine with whatever I wanted to do; they didn't really care what I did so much. They were actually pretty supportive, I have to say.

I think, probably about a month or two later, we told the Gialamases that we had gotten married. It was too late. And they, in their effort to cover up the fact that they didn't approve, decided to have a 500-person wedding. I had never been to a wedding in my life before, mind you.

MS. RIEDEL: You had never been to a wedding?

MR. BALLY: I had never been to a wedding. My family was not over here. My parents don't go to those things. They don't—they're not involved socially with anybody, really, so I had never been to a wedding. So my first wedding was my wedding. And I didn't know what to expect. And it was fun and rowdy.

Since I had never been baptized and the Greek priest wouldn't marry us again, to save face, they basically paid him off to sit at our table so it looked to the guests that it looked like he married us [laughs]. We ended up buying off some—I think it was—oh, gosh, I forget what denomination with the blue cross and red is—I don't know—some denomination that didn't care what I was or what she was—Episcopalian.

We invited no one to the church ceremony and nobody cared that I didn't believe in God or was baptized, and, quite frankly, could care less about the whole thing in the first place. I thought it was all—it was a show. We were putting on a show to basically allow her parents to feel comfortable with what we had done. And it was this huge, sumptuous affair. I'm sure they spent thousands and thousands of dollars. And that was that. So it was now okay, suddenly. [Laughs.]

Her brother and sister were just wonderful. Elena Gialamas and James—Jim Gialamas—who, ironically, ended up being a roommate of my brother's right around that time, in New York. After we got married, they met, they hit it off, they were both in New York at the time, they ended up becoming co-owners in a building at a cooperative.

So when Roy and I moved to Boston, we would come down to New York to try to sell our work and we'd stay with Jim and my brother and we would have such a great time. We were in the East Village. I think it was on Sixth Street between something like Avenue A and First [Avenue]. And it was just the place to be in the '80s, and we'd go to all-night raves and party. And Roy and I would try to—usually, we'd go for my openings because my metal work was starting to blossom and people were starting to notice and buy it.

MS. RIEDEL: So you both were working separately.

MR. BALLY: She wasn't working in metal. She was working as a—she was an illustrator and she had received this—she got a commission from—I'm trying to think who it was—was it Nicholas Gage? It was some famous Greek guy who, through the friends of the friends of the friends, ended up hiring her to do the illustrations. It was called *The Endless Voyage*. I remember that.

And she would do—she was heavily into pen-and-ink drawings. She was really good at it. It was not anything I was familiar with. I thought it was kind of cool. She, around that time, was trying to get shows and sell it. And she was not—quite honestly, not meeting a lot of success; getting no more jobs; nobody was showing her. She decided maybe she'd try painting. So she tried to teach herself to paint and, again, limited success at it.

So when I go to my openings at Archetype Gallery, which was my brand-new gallery, which launched my entire career—this tiny little gallery on Ninth Street—kind of parallel to and in competition with Clodagh-Ross-Williams.

And by the way, I found this gallery, Archetype, whose owners, Iris DeMauro and Robert Gaul, had put an ad in the *New York Times*. Somehow I found this little, obscure thing that said seeking crafts artists—artists of all kinds—for representation. You know, this is New York! So I thought, okay, I'll enter. So I sent my slides, and, wouldn't you know, I got into my first show there and they sold so many things that I was able to suddenly—and I'm working as a model-maker still full time. So suddenly —

MS. RIEDEL: Up in Boston?

MR. BALLY: Yes, up in Boston. So now, I'm selling this stuff again.

MS. RIEDEL: And is it jewelry, now? Sculpture?

MR. BALLY: No, no. Now what I was starting to do in Boston—and my first-ever review was by the *Boston Globe*, Christine Temin, from a few pieces that I put in a tabletop show at the Society of Arts and Crafts on Newbury Street. So I was starting to sell things locally there but I was still kind of looking for—slowly—I have to say, very slowly. I couldn't make a living on that.

MS. RIEDEL: Were these objects?

MR. BALLY: These were objects. Napkin rings, candlesticks. I was really interested in things that were functional. To me, it seemed more sincere, for the big reason that I could play with them, I could hold them, people could have relationships with them. And they weren't—somehow it seemed less pretentious to me.

MS. RIEDEL: So these were early flatware designs?

MR. BALLY: Starting to. I was starting to experiment with flatware. My first flatware, I actually made at Carnegie Mellon, which was called *Sliding Perfections*, [laughs] and I called it there because they slid together kind of like a Swiss army knife version. It was a camping set made out of sterling for a sterling silver competition. And I called it *Sliding Perfections* because it had slight imperfections. [Laughs.] So there's always kind of a funny little stupid thing behind some of my things.

But when I think about that, it immediately reminds me of David Tisdale, who is a huge mentor and mentoring figure, who came out of metalsmithing, who did flatware and who at that time in the East Village was the guy to do flatware and I wanted to be him. I'd never met him; I'd never dared. So through kind of seeing what he did and kind of emulating it, I developed eventually my own set of flatware that blossomed.

But ironically, he even designed for Zebco or something like that—designed a set of stainless camping ware. I have a pair and I always tease him that I made the first one out of sterling.

Anyway, so right around that time, I was working as a model-maker, Roy was trying to get shows in New York. And this is one of the things that I really want to credit Roy, learning from Roy, is that she was fearless: reach for the stars; do whatever it takes; don't be afraid of anything. That kind of fearlessness, whether it's warranted or not; the courage to go and get it. And at that point, the only thing I really did was answer a couple of little ads and a want ad. I never really had huge aspirations. I just wanted to make a living from my work—because I loved to work. I just wanted to work.

So I'd go to New York to do these exhibitions where I felt like, wow, I'm getting somewhere. I get to go party, people are actually wanting to meet me, and this is just something. I remember getting written up in a Japanese magazine, *Axis*.

Steven Holt, a huge, huge mentor who was teaching ID—[industrial] design—at Parsons at the time, decided to review my flatware and my bottle stoppers for *Axis*, some Japanese magazine. This was, like—this can't be. Suddenly, *Metropolis* magazine is running ads and doing reviews.

And I thought, whoa, I'm in the right place; I've touched a nerve; I'm bringing together jewelry training, design, and I'm trying to do something that's something different, that has some kind of a concept behind it that could possibly be mistaken for art. Although I don't profess to be an artist; I'm really more of a metalsmith/designer.

MS. RIEDEL: And all this work at the time was a functional focus?

MR. BALLY: Yeah, much of it, although I was still doing—I was making jewelry that was [laughs] highly unfunctional. I made a set of rings that you could practically use as chopsticks because the bar on the top was so long. I just thought it was a visual statement that to me was very powerful. So I was still just playing, wherever it went.

At the time, we had a little apartment in Boston, in the Fenway—right behind Fenway Park. My bedroom, I transferred into a shop, where I would sneak up my torch tanks, and I'd even do fire-gilding with mercury. I didn't tell you about that yet.

When I came back to this country, I had something like 10 times the normal amount of mercury in my body because in Switzerland everybody fire-gilded in the shop, and we ate around it, drank around it, smoked around it; never cleaned out the shop. Danger. I think they've stopped in the meantime.

But anyway, I'd set up the shop and I would try to learn—I knew that multiples was an important way to make a living. So my secret little ambition was to make a living with my jewelry. So I'd make multiples and test them out at a little gallery in Newton called Pacchetto and also at the Society of Arts and Crafts. This is before I'm at the New York place.

So I come down to New York to the Archetype. Since I'd met them, they had started to really count on me as one of their core, maybe a dozen artists that were getting tons of exposure in amazing magazines—*New York Times* reviews. I mean, just amazing stuff was happening. And for me, doors were opening left and right.

And at the same time, it was kind of sad because Roy kept trying to get an opening, get something. And she was trying in all the right places. I remember, she would go to OK Harris Gallery and she got a meeting with Ivan Karp on his advice. And I remember his advice to her was, hey, you've got your priorities all wrong. You have to go party with the right people. That's how you make it.

I remember my stomach turning, thinking that is exactly what I don't want; my work to get somewhere for all the wrong reasons would make me feel terrible. But that's kind of the advice she was getting fed.

Right around the same time, Jean-Michel Basquiat happened to be listed in the phone book—wouldn't you know it! Roy called up his number, said, 'Hey, I'm an artist; I'm going to come see you." And he *agreed*. So she went and asked him for advice. This is before he died, of course. This is maybe '87 or so; maybe '88.

So she was pounding the pavement, meeting with no success. Meanwhile, I was starting to acquire more galleries that were selling my stuff. I was starting to get in more and more shows, more and more publications. The disparity between our careers was starting to grow and the resentment started to grow. And I could feel it and it was very tense.

I remember at one point, I said, "You know, Roy, you have this painting studio and you have your pens and everything, and you have this—my philosophy is that if you're an artist, you should be able to do anything. Maybe metals is the hot thing that people—there aren't a lot of metalsmiths; there are tons of painters. We used to say in art school, chances are, if you throw a stone, you'll hit a painter—and so why don't you learn metals?" And so she said, "Yes, all right, I'll try."

So we sat down, I showed her how to—she had had Metals 1 with Carol Kumata, which she flunked. I still have her piece that she had from that—just to remind myself what the background was.

Anyway, so we gave it a go and she learned to saw pretty well. She came out with a series of animals—dogs and cats and things like that—and very flat. And I thought, that's great. She started selling them and with her chutzpah, she started getting little write-ups in *Boston Magazine* and local stuff like that; she started to sell.

And at one point, I said, "You know, if you'd like, we can do some work together. We can call it a collaboration." Niobium and titanium was really in. And that was really pretty much where we started this notion of collaborating.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, and this was late '80s?

MR. BALLY: This was, yeah, like '88. Something like that. I remember we had a show at a gallery called Sang Mi gallery. And that was our first collaboration show. What we did is a series of brooches where I did the technical surrounds of a brooch—kind of the chassis of a brooch—with the findings—I had learned how to apply these really amazing Swiss tubing clasp findings, which you'd never seen in this country.

So my job was to meticulously make the outer components and then her job was to be the painter on metal. I would texture the metal for her and she would paint on it with different voltages in immersion bath; it was like an anodizing process. And she would come out with some really beautiful colors.

At one point, she experimented by painting—by resisting certain things and creating paintings—miniature paintings—and then I would fit these things into my chassis and then I would rivet them. And that was our first thing.

It was a lot of work for me, and, pardon me for saying so, but I think it was a lot of play for her. And it was actually—in retrospect, it was a dangerous liaison; it was a dangerous direction.

Slowly, she started to learn more and more about metals. Every time I'd do something, I'd bring her over and say, so this is how you solder this hollow stuff, this is how you do this. And one thing led to another and at one point, I guess, kind of like my parents, I was trying to be critical of what we did—not just myself but also her—and I would say, have you ever thought of doing this or that, would you like to try this or that?

At one point, I remember her having this series of little houses. We learned about fabrication through her houses. I thought they were cool. They were maybe two inches tall, fabricated, silver, kind of whimsical, narrative—whatever that means. They weren't designing. Anti-design—which I liked because my work wasn't at all like that.

Then I'd say, wouldn't it be cool if you could join all these buildings and make, like, a skyline because we keep

going to New York every few weeks; I'm sure it would strike a nerve. And sure enough, it did. And I had to teach her how to make hinges and I taught her how to hinge them all together.

I remember one of the photographs for a show at Aaron Faber, we brought to Dean Powell, who I totally dedicate a huge amount of success to, is this photographer who was kind of the guy who knew how to photograph three-dimensional stuff. I remember Roy brought him a bracelet that she hadn't finished yet for the show tomorrow, and he photographed it without the clasp on.

So the next day, we learned how to make a clasp, and she figured it out, and finally had a piece to bring to the show. The photograph had been taken but nobody really realized there was no clasp.

So she started this whole series of skyline bracelets, and I was actually very proud of her. She did a good job. Her technique got better and better, and she started to—anyway, that comes later.

So right around that time, 1989, my father—I had started teaching. I loved to teach; I always wanted to teach. And part of my multi-pronged plan for staying alive, doing what I love, is to always have a foot in teaching. I know that you don't get from point A to B without steps in between.

So thanks to Claire Sanford, who used to teach metals at the Cambridge Center for Adult Ed,probably around '88, she left. But she started the program, is my understanding. And she left it to Mary Hughes, who was a few years older than me. And I had come to town—and I met all these metalsmiths. I don't know how, but we'd meet at openings, and I just loved meeting people who did what I did. We get it.

Mary Hughes decided she wanted to move on, and she asked me if I would take that. And I jumped at the chance. That was my first teaching gig, was at the Cambridge Center for Adult Ed. I would go there and it was all-ages students; young and old; talented and not so talented. But I loved it and I took it very seriously and I'd show up—I forget if it was a weekend or late night—go up to Cambridge, set up shop, and I took it very seriously. And from that point on, I started teaching myself to teach.

I think somehow I must have—I think what happened was Joe Wood, who at the time was kind of my contemporary, only I think far more brilliant than I'll ever be; amazing, amazing talent, Joe Wood. Whose work I was very—obviously, knew about and following. He was teaching at Mass Art at the time, and—I think he brought his classes through my studio in Quincy, where we had bought a house, Roy and I.

And I think he was impressed that I was trying to teach—I don't know what possibly could have impressed him but I think he liked that I was doing something very different than anyone else was doing, in setting up my own shop right out of school, making connections, selling stuff. And I got his interest and he, through Charlie Crowley, who's Claire Sanford's husband, offered me a teaching job at Mass Art. Which was adjunct; just a course here and a course there.

And I loved it. Still to this day, I'm in touch with students from that class. So that was kind of the first tip of the hat.

MS. RIEDEL: And what were you teaching?

MR. BALLY: I was teaching foundation metals, my favorite thing to teach. You teach that right and the rest falls into place. I'm a product of that. So I've always loved—I've always looked for in teaching the "aha" moment, of laying out the tools and not getting into concept, not getting into artspeak; learn how to solder, learn how to fabricate. Then, we can dream.

I've seen it in my students. They really appreciate starting slow. Sometimes, you can be much more creative if you don't throw everything at somebody, if you constrain—very carefully constrain a technique or a process, you can challenge the world with a saw blade. You really can. And so much more creativity blossoms from not being overwhelmed.

So anyway, right around that time, to get back to the original story of Pittsburgh, Roy and I had just bought a house on Billings Street in North Quincy, which we loved. I did a lot of renovation on it, including almost [laughs] collapsing the whole house because I didn't know what I was doing.

I literally took out all the support beams, went to the lumberyard and said, "Hey, so I just raised our ceiling, took out the beams, so I want to get some drywall." And I remember the guy over the counter saying, "Here, see this two-by-four, take it, run home as quickly as you can and retriangulate the roof." [Laughs.] So trial by error, building decks and all sorts of stuff. Anyway, I love to build, so I was always doing renovations.

Right around that time, my father quit Carnegie Mellon. He had just gotten tenure offered to him. They offered him tenure, and he—I remember the conversation with him and he said, "You know, I just got offered this job

tenure, I've been heading the department and quite frankly, I think they're a bunch of buffoons."

I don't know if those were exactly his words, but that's how I remember it. He was just disheartened because all the universities, they were filled with talk. It was no action. My dad's a man of action. You don't talk; you do. And in his university system in Carnegie Mellon, they had committee meetings, they talked about important things, they talked some more about them, made a lot of points, nobody did anything, and it got on his nerves.

And he said, "I don't think I can be in that sort of system. Nothing's going on." And he happened to have had a particularly nasty class that didn't take learning very seriously, and he said, "You know what, I don't need this." He walked away to focus on his career, which was blooming, blossoming, just amazing —

MS. RIEDEL: Through Bally Designs?

MR. BALLY: Bally Design. He was winning awards left and right. Fireman helmet in Museum of Modern Art collection; robot here; he's learning Pro/E before anybody really knew about digital rendering, 3-D design—what is it—CAD—computer-aided designing and model-making. He was getting all that from the university but then using it in the field, and getting tons of work, very busy, very successful. And he walked away.

So he told me, "Hey, guess what, everybody basically moved up a notch in the design department. Why don't you submit your slides? You might get a teaching job." And I said, "You know, Dad, I'm kind of in Boston, we just kind of bought a house and I'm kind of busy teaching. And I love teaching; you're right, I love it, but I don't think I really want to go to Pittsburgh." And he said, "Just send the slides." "Dad, shut up." So I sent the slides and the résumé.

And about half a year later, I hadn't heard from them. I said, "You know, I need slides." So I called the design department and I said, "Look, can I please have my slides back?" And they said, "What are you talking about? You got the job." I said, "What? Excuse me? No interview, no letter, no nothing?" They said, "Oh, no, you got the job; didn't your dad tell you?" I said, "I don't talk to my dad that much. What are you talking about, got the job? What? I don't really want the job, to tell you the truth." And they said, "No, no, we've got the course, you got the job."

So I thought, hmm, here lies an opportunity. This is actually a really good job. It was tenure-track, design department, freshmen and sophomore, teaching the foundations of design.

And I was terrified. I have to say, I was a little less terrified because Joe Ballay, who formerly had taught that course, gave me his entire notes of the entire class. And me being not a designer was terribly insecure and terrified about all the things that I hadn't learned. I mean, I was taking on design students and art students. The art students were fine; I could have a party with them. But the design students—gulp!

So I was trying to read Design 101 books before this. I decided to accept—oh, to back up a little bit—so I thought, do I want this job? This is a great opportunity. I thought, you know what, shoot for the stars. Since I don't want it, I've got nothing to lose.

MS. RIEDEL: Real quickly, why were the design students terrifying as opposed to the art students?

MR. BALLY: Well, because I'd never been one. I don't know what animal that is. [Laughs.] I know metalsmiths in and out; I've been with them all my life. And I knew I could give them a lot. I could give them a whole lot about designing—anything foundation-wise. I had had a really good foundation at Tyler. So I did have a good sense of that. But as far as design—I mean, I saw the way my father had taught design and he, being a wonderful teacher himself, it's big boots to fill. And I knew that one of the rules of teaching is just be sure that you're a chapter ahead of the students. [Laughs.] And I figured, maybe I could wing it. So I was even entertaining it.

So I called them up and I said, "Well, would you pay my moving expenses?" And they said, "Sure." You know, 10,000 bucks—boing. I was, like, "Really? Okay. So what salary are we talking about?" And they lifted some unheard-of number that was way off my Richter scale. And I thought, oh, my God, let me think this one over. Okay, let me get back to you.

So it was a huge nerve-racking moment. Am I going to lose my life that I've created for myself in Boston, away from my parents' strong arm and wanting to take over my life and my career and talk about art all the time, and what am I doing? I had my own thing here. I had my whole studio there.

So in the end, Roy liked the idea of being home closer to her family, and I liked the idea of trying that, too. So we made the move. It was a huge move. I remember, there was tons of stuff. We actually were able to sell our house for pretty much what we bought it for and put into it. And this was right before the bottom dropped out, when we couldn't have even sold it. We were able to sell it pretty quickly. We sold it and we moved back to Pittsburgh.

MS. RIEDEL: Hold that thought.

[END OF DISC 1.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art interviewing Boris Bally at the artist's studio in Providence, Rhode Island, on May 26, 2009. This is disc number two.

And when we stopped, we had just started to talk about the move to Pittsburgh and starting to teach at Carnegie Mellon.

MR. BALLY: Yes, so —

MS. RIEDEL: This was 19 —

MR. BALLY: This is 1989.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BALLY: And so I think I was under contract for a year to teach design.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you pack everything up and leave Boston?

MR. BALLY: Packed everything up and the plan was—my parents were thrilled. This is—all my life, in a weird sort of way, I'm guessing because we don't talk about it much, but I'm guessing that it's a little bit of a disappointment to them that I didn't become a designer. Because my mom still says, you would have made such a good designer.

I hear that in and out. She tells my brother, you would have made such a good director. So, eh, disappointment [laughs] but they were happy because here I went back home. And the plan was to move in—my parents had just bought a dance studio—enormous. It puts this studio to shame. It's something like 25-foot ceilings.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness.

MR. BALLY: I think four stories with a roof garden and the floor—as I remember it—the floor dimensions of their loft were something like 100 by 200 [feet]? Huge. A dance studio where an official, you know, dance school performed. The plan was to move in with them till we found something to buy.

Not a real good thing for a young relationship that is used to surviving on its own without parental input. And I swear to God, I was so miserable and my wife was miserable. It made me more miserable—to be mothered again? Ugh. You know, trying to find my own—and you should do this and you should do this. And, oh, I remember it driving me nuts.

We got to live on their loft floor, enormous as it was, we got to stay in the guest house in the middle of the floor, which happened to be a house in the middle of the loft—a two-story house [laughs] with its own bathroom. But still, no privacy and my parents are—my mom is very, kind of, nebby, wants to know—nosy, wants to know everything. Kind of very involved in us, but they were—they only had our best interest at heart. It's just so hard, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: So it's just a big open space?

MR. BALLY: Big huge open loft. I think for our—for Lynn—when I met Lynn, for our wedding party and when she made the M.D., we had—hundreds of guests had room there. I mean, just unbelievable how big and beautiful. My parents started collecting totem poles because they fit, why not?

There was an exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art that had to do with Greek architecture and, lo and behold, my parents were able to salvage from that exhibition some—I think they were Doric pillars—I think Ionic? I'm not sure which they are, but they're these huge pillars.

So in the middle of their floor, they had five or six Greek pillars and at the top of the guest house had a Greek pediment, literally, with gates from Bali where they had recently traveled. Just collectors of art and lovers of objects and the place was just—movies would come there.

Later, movies would come and want to shoot on films on location in my studio and I would say, "Well, I'm going to do this only to piss you off. I'm going to show you the coolest studio you've ever seen in your life, the coolest loft, but you can't have it." And I would show them and they'd say, "Oh, you're right, it is the coolest thing. We can't have it? Really, we can't? My parents don't care about movies. So, no."

Anyway, it was all that and my father helped us to locate a building, which we then bought for 70,000 bucks on Bigelow Boulevard, which was the Kazajian rug building, which was built as a battery shop. So it wasn't architecturally—it wasn't what this is. It was just built out of—what are those? Cinderblocks.

And it did have a really cute little—as the name implies, it was a rug/carpet business and the front of it had kind of Asian—not Asian—Mediterranean tiles. So it did have some character. My father helped me—I'd never done a renovation of this magnitude. He helped me to file the permits for the building permits, reviewed the drawings with me, and to review the plan for how to renovate it. And this is a busy guy. He took out the time. He also helped me with the demolition.

Meanwhile, Roy was very worried because she really felt that she needed to get to work and make some art.

MS. RIEDEL: And you had no studio space?

MR. BALLY: We had no studio. So I felt very —

MS. RIEDEL: And she had no job.

MR. BALLY: She had no job. She had no studio space.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were teaching.

MR. BALLY: And I was teaching and I was showing—what's that?

MS. RIEDEL: How much were you teaching?

MR. BALLY: I think it was three classes a week I have in my memory.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BALLY: So I had lots of time to do my own stuff and I did have to go to a whole bunch of meetings and stuff like that. But it was adjunct, so—actually, it wasn't adjunct. That one wasn't adjunct, but I did not have to volunteer for committees because I was the newbie.

So I felt kind of obligated to create a space for Roy. I felt very guilty and she had all the power because here I was, I dragged her back to Pittsburgh, kind of—it was kind of unfair because it was all for me, sort of. But in the meantime, she had a family there and they hit it off again after all the rough bumps and everything.

I want to say, one other kind of historic thing that happened with Roy that created a very bad kind of dynamic between us and it's important not only because we have, quote, unquote, collaborated on pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: And collaborated for years.

MR. BALLY: Yes, but I use the word "collaboration" loosely and I will define, but I kept applying and my desire to teach—I kept applying for assistantships. One of those assistantships was for Haystack, where I was awarded an assistantship for Randy Long. On our way up—and Roy wanted to come along for the ride. I think she was going to take a course.

So again, setting it up that I got the award and she was going to follow me up to Haystack. At the time, I had a huge boat of a car—I forget what it was; I forget what automobile it was. I think it was—could it have been a Chrysler Imperial? Some big old American boat.

On our way up, we stopped at a gallery that sold my work, Pacchetto in Newton Centre, because they hadn't paid me and we needed the money so that I could take time to go to Haystack. At the time, our car was overheating. So what happened is, I went to check the radiator of the car and Roy became impatient.

What was I doing? And as I went around to the front of the car, she walked around to the side of the car and the radiator cap blew off, splashed her, threw her against the windows of Pacchetto Gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my gosh.

MR. BALLY: And completely burned her body. I think it was something like 20 percent of her body that basically I inflicted—because I lifted—I had unscrewed the radiator cap and it just—it hurled. It exploded. And without any —

MS. RIEDEL: It was a complete accident, obviously.

MR. BALLY: Oh, totally. Oh, I would never, ever want to hurt—anybody, actually, for that matter. And I was too

unfamiliar with the system. What I wanted to do was add water. I think I might even had a little cup of water on my hand or something [laughs] to add to it because the gauge was way off.

It was a hot summer day. We're on our way to Haystack. Had to cancel the whole thing—I had to drive her—post-haste—she claims I even ran over a dog. Ran her to a burn unit nearby to Wellesley, Newton-Wellesley Hospital or something, immediately changed everything—our dynamic, our lives and her you know, poor her. She suffered, *suffered*.

And she had to go through debriding and literally, that ward mistreated her. And then she ended up in the Mass General Hospital and I got to go home. She had to stay there, pretty much thinking about suicide and being miserable, and I felt so terrible. I would bring her steak dinners and visit her every day and try to make her feel better [laughs] because I was feeling so bad.

And that pretty much—it kind of offset our hierarchy, where I did something to her that set her back and I was the bad guy and that—from then on, that was kind of the setup, which was—there were a couple bad things. And that was one of the bad things. And also, when we moved to Pittsburgh for my work, when I was getting in all the shows—for my work. Everything was about me.

I wasn't trying to push it. I was trying to help her catch up, so to speak. So the only reason why I told you that is it relates to the whole Pittsburgh setup. So here I am trying to make her happy again, trying to set up a studio. I had just burned her, you know.

So, okay. So we got a commission from the Society of Arts and Crafts. This is how the traffic sign thing started. To back up, as a kid, going to scrapyards, my father, in his shop, has always taught me that traffic signs are a great source of flat aluminum material if you want to work through prototypes. It's just that—it's just a material. It's cheap, nobody wants it, and it's a discard. So I've always had signs at home.

So I got a commission from the Society of Arts and Crafts in Boston. Donald Brecker, I think it was, who later opened a gallery, commissioned a fireplace set. This is probably around 1990. So having my raising skill, I raised a base. I planned this really cool—I was going to call it *Fire Play* and it had a two-shelled base that was large.

The idea was to create a rail around which fireplace tools could roll, and shockingly enough, he accepted the proposal and— I mean, it was a lot of money. To get the material to create the base, I grabbed one of the signs that was laying around and I raised it. Roy didn't know how to raise it at the time and I know we needed dimension, so I started—I had the stakes for it.

Daniella Kerner and Vicki Sedman taught me to raise. Started raising it up. And just as I was putting the halves together to cast concrete in them, [laughs] I looked at it, total epiphany, what am I doing? I'm going to hide this? Look at the graphics here. They're still there. And it's a stop sign and it's told me what to do, and, man, did I tell it what to do.

You know, how awesome is that? Something that tells you what to do in life, a sign. Here I am, beating the hell out of it, and, damn you, you're not telling me anything. I'm going to make something out of you. It was really kind of an exciting moment. So we finished the commission and hit—a funny little side story is that Donald Brecker, when he got it—he loved the tools.

Roy actually made one. She made the shovel. She made one of the four tools, part of our collaboration. That's all she had to do with it—which is fine. But he threatened to throw out the base, he hated it so much. And it's really funny because, look, now, historically, it really propelled this whole thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. BALLY: So in the end, I had to remake a base with a kind of a pyramid shape that was stable. He said, "If you don't refund me, I'm going to throw it in the river." I said, "Throw it in the river." [Laughs.] So he probably did. Very base guy. Anyway, so I —

MS. RIEDEL: So that was the first piece you made.

MR. BALLY: That was the first piece. And from there on, I started going to the local scrap yard. Now, we were posed up on the hill in Pittsburgh, just under the Hill District, overlooking the Iron City brewery and Heinz tomato ketchup. The smells that you would get there in the morning was like hops and tomatoes and whatever else.

You could look down to the scrapyards. I literally—I had a telescope where I could look to see [laughs] if they were open—quite literally. They were under the 40th Street bridge, was my favorite scrapyard, one that when I taught, I would take my students through it to get materials for their foundation course.

So I had a good relationship with them, so I started going there and getting signs. At first, we'd trade—I'd buy

them, but I would bring him a case of beer, always kind of lubricating the open channels. So I'd start collecting signs. So I started experimenting.

In the process, I taught Roy how to raise, which I don't think she liked very much, but I know she made one. She made one. She learned it more or less. And we decided that we would have a collaboration show of the pieces that—with the traffic sign that we made together. So we had that show.

I think it was 1991, and what was it called? Gosh, I should remember this. I remember the first piece. It was actually that, which was called *No Yuppies in Neighborhood* because that's what they graffitied on our door when we moved in. They graffitied "no yuppies in the neighborhood." [Laughs.]

We thought that's such an anti-anthropomorphic thing. It's such an anti-person thing that, that really related to that title. And that piece, consequently, has traveled for two years in the continent of Africa to various countries throughout, based on the U.S. Information Agency show that Dorothy Spencer had curated. So that was kind of our big international thing.

And to me, I think it's utterly absurd that—the U.S. Information Agency would pay to have recycled objects sent to Africa, which invented all this stuff in the first place. Anyway, [laughs] whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Where was this exhibition? Do you remember?

MR. BALLY: Yes, the one that Roy and I had was at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts. I'm trying to think who the director was at the time. This crazy Australian guy. Oh gosh, it has been a while, hasn't it? It might come back to me.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll come back to it.

MR. BALLY: So anyway, it was met with rave reviews and we realized we had something. I remember the way that I figured out how to put it on the wall is we had all these pieces for the floor and it just wasn't happening. And I said, "I know, I have a great idea. I'll run"—I think the opening was the next day—"I'll run and get some hangers." So I made some things to hang the platters and that made it—and up they went and that was the beginning of the whole series.

MS. RIEDEL: So the platters came first?

MR. BALLY: The platters came first. And right around that time, Roy was making the skyline bracelet things. And I said, "Instead of just having plain, boring metal, why don't you inlay some of that traffic sign?" So she did, and they were amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet.

MR. BALLY: And I showed her how to tube-set so she could set a diamond in the middle, kind of contrasting the materials, which I always love. But the platters came first. Gail M. Brown, I think, was the first person that ever wrote about these. We entered in the—I think it was the Wood Turning Center's exhibition.

I entered this and also a bottle cork sculpture. And ironically enough, just a couple days ago, I was at the Wood Turning Center, where I curated a show on bottle cork sculptures. Isn't that funny?

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MR. BALLY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Full circle again.

MR. BALLY: Full circle again. So anyway, that took off. At the time—I had started doing craft shows even before I moved to Pittsburgh. We did Springfield—or I did Springfield and now—so we had a vehicle for selling these things, for getting representation, at least, you know, stores and wanna-be galleries types of things.

So when we brought these, they were overwhelmingly successful and started doing well. At the same time, we were starting to enter the series into different exhibitions, the most notable was curated by Robert Schroeder for the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center to open at the SNAG conference.

And the piece that I made for that—and I say "I"—made for that was called*No Two Bowls*—and I'll show you that when we go home. I actually sold them to my parents because I needed money and they bought it. And now they don't know where to put it, so I have it again. [Laughs.] Full circle. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Smart.

MR. BALLY: Anyway, that piece, I remember Robert Schroeder said, “Look, we want to do—we want sketches on the piece.” And at that point, I realized, all the sketches were mine. The work was mine. Actually, Roy kicked me out of my studio because I was too noisy. And that did not ride well with me, that suddenly, I was the person to get kicked out of my very own studio did not ride well.

So I was raising the pieces that I made for that show in the lot next to my studio, outside, on a wooden stump and pretty much realized—I saw the writing on the wall. I was, in her mind, the studio technician, the drawer, the maker, the technical guy, and she was the one to go to the parties and make the connections.

And with that, again, I want to credit that I never had the courage to make these connections. So there is something to that, to having the courage to go out, but I did not want to be something that I had so dearly done all my life—didn’t want to be somebody else’s second fiddle. So suddenly—there always has been an inequality of power. But suddenly, it became very apparent to me it wasn’t going to work.

So when Robert —

MS. RIEDEL: So you had a studio in your new house in Pittsburgh?

MR. BALLY: Yeah, this is in that—the Kazajian rug building. The entire—it was the three-floor building with a roof garden that I made with the deck up there. The ground floor off of Bigelow Boulevard, you could walk into our showroom and then in the back, really kind of ratty, okay studio.

We used to throw parties and have people visit, and it was a really great thing for students to see, even then, in its raw state, it was just fine. Still an extraordinary space. We did a great job renovating. I learned how to build walls. I drywalled the whole thing. A lot of square footage, a lot of work. I built a deck in the back. We had to get a grader to get back, rear access, just unbelievable.

So anyway, when I couldn’t use my studio anymore, I knew there was something really wrong. And at that point, Roy used to go to New York a lot and disappear for a long time on end, occasionally bringing new friends home, whose relationship I did not know. So it started kind of falling apart and I realized that either we’re going to fix it or move on.

So I wanted to fix it. We went through a long volley of—to psychologists who would help us work through our issues with our marriage and try to bring us together. I remember at one point, he put a pebble in the middle of the table and he said, “Look, if any of you wants to make this thing work, push the pebble toward the other person one inch.” And none of us did and that was the end.

We actually, upon that point of realization, a lot of pressure had come off of us and we actually became friends again. I helped her move out. One of the most brutal things for me was, here are the tools that I’d grown up with, collected, honed, fixed, been with personally and mentally all my life. And suddenly, I had to split half of this to the woman that, had I not taught her metalsmithing, would have walked out of there not caring about my tools.

Suddenly, I had to split, basically, *my* tools. So I was sad about that. And planning ahead knowing what—we made a long list. We were very good about splitting them up and parted our ways. And as —

MS. RIEDEL: This was 19—early ’90s?

MR. BALLY: This was ’93, I think it was? Like that. She ended up—I think her parents bought her a house or she moved into—I think she moved into her mom’s studio in Aspinwall. After we had separated who gets what, I started buying new tools because I knew I needed them because I had a lot of work to do.

So I started buying—I thought, this is an opportunity. Whenever life dishes it out, take it as an opportunity. So I thought, I’m going to get better tools. I bought that rolling mill right there, kind of saying, okay, we’ve had this ratty little thing. I’m going to get the king of the king—great rolling mill.

I remember it coming one day and Roy saying, well, actually, I know you wanted that one, but can I have that one instead? [Laughs.] I’m like, no, honey, we decided you were so out of here [laughs]. But still, always wanting more and more and more.

That ended up being the way it went after she moved out. We kind of fought about who should get the building and she felt very entitled to the building even though she practically did nothing on it and it was my parents that really helped. I was so happy when that was over and I wanted nothing to do with relationships or women. I honestly just wanted to work. I just wanted to work.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, how did it affect your work because you’ve been—how much did—then some degree of collaboration, but —

MR. BALLY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Fifty percent of what you were doing or not even?

MR. BALLY: No, no, no. I mean, this is only a small little vein, the traffic sign thing. I was still making jewelry commissions and bottle corks and flatware and selling stuff to galleries all over. This was only a tiny little part of it. It still was exciting to me and I wanted to keep it up.

I knew it was a spark of an idea and I just wanted to go on and on with it. And she knew it was a good idea. So pretty much with a wink, a nod, and handshake, when we split up, the way we said, so what are we going to do about this collaboration thing?

She pretty much said, “Well, I’ll do the jewelry,” because she had no interest in this stuff; she didn’t even know how to do it. And I said, “Okay, you can do the jewelry and I’ll do the big stuff.” In the meantime, I will confess, I’ve reneged because jewelry’s—something different than what she was doing, is kind of a natural to-do with the leftovers. And who knows, we haven’t talked since, so who knows what she thinks, and I honestly don’t care.

So right around that time, this was probably—maybe 10 percent of what I was doing? And the height of it was the very piece that, I think it was Cincinnati SNAG 1993, and I think we had already broken up by then, and our piece that we supposedly made together that she hadn’t touched.

She kicked me out of the studio for, didn’t make the working drawing that was now in the catalogue—, which I asked her to please write something on it, do something to the drawing so it looks you had anything to do with this.

She wrote some kind of artspeak thing like, is art deep or is it sweet? And you can see it. It’s some kind of art thing on it.

It was a blatant reminder, and here it was, at the SNAG conference of our piece and everybody’s walking around saying, these are great, these are wonderful. And it was so over. Even to make matters worse, right after that, Roy and I had offered to teach a course—were offered to teach a course, co-teach a course at Haystack.

So we, in the summer of—I think it was the summer of ’94, maybe, whenever that was, we were supposed to co-teach, we agreed to co-teach the course even though we were apart; which, we agreed we would be professional. We would not be personal. And lucky for me, I did a phone call about a week ahead and said, “Stuart, I want my own bedroom,” or it would have been [laughs] really kind of tough.

So anyway, that was kind of the beginning, the middle, and the end of the Roy thing. And in the meantime, I have to say, she’s probably my most successful student. And that’s kind of the bittersweet of it. And you know, I wish we could talk. On the other hand, I’ll tell you the truth, I don’t really value what she’s made of herself because she’s not into the community and to making it better. And to me, anybody who’s in it for themselves only, really—it’s a one-liner, it doesn’t really do anything for me.

But ironically, this is a segue into meeting Lynn.

So you asked me what I did now that I was alone—is I worked a lot and I also tried to work out my aggression by swimming and working out. So wouldn’t you know it? I met this wonderful, young somebody in the pool swimming laps, which was Lynn. I didn’t even know what she was—a computer programmer or something—not art.

I don’t know, I didn’t really care. I didn’t want anything to do with anybody. We were just friendly. She had been diagnosed with lymphoma cancer and I had just gone through a divorce. Actually, I hadn’t divorced yet. It hadn’t gone through yet.

So we’d been swimming back and forth for—you know, bumping into each other at the pool. What I found out from Lynn is she actually purposefully made those rendezvous happen at the same time [laughs] but we kept bumping into each other at the pool and became friendly. And at one point after I was little bit over the pain of the divorce thing, I thought, you know, I am kind of lonely. It would be fun to do something. Do you want to go out on a date? I’m having a party, my brother’s coming over.

And she said, “No.” So I thought, oh well, I tried. Whatever. Shortly thereafter, I tried—she called me and said, “I would like to see Pittsburgh and you offered to take me around on your motorcycle. Is that still cool?”

And I’d put her out of my mind. I was like, Lynn who? I said “Okay, great.” And that was it. And I was with Lynn ever after that. I took her to my art studio and she, of course, loved it. We were actually on our way to Carol Kumata’s opening.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BALLY: Yeah, we were going to do an art date. She didn't know—she knew a lot about art, but she hadn't been to Pittsburgh. I took her around on my motorcycle and then we were going to end up there. We had dinner at Kiku, Asian restaurant, sushi. We had kaisen nabe soup [seafood hot pot-BB], a big bowl where we stared deeply into each other's eyes [laughs] and we knew we were meant for each other, one of those things.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MR. BALLY: On the way, I was sneaky and I said, "Hey, I have this husky and I have left him alone for a long time. Would you mind—you can stay outside—I don't want to scare you or pressure you, but I'm going to have to check on him real quick." So I pulled my motorcycle up next to my place and Blue the husky came out and looked all beautiful. And she said, "Oh, husky, can I come in and pet him?" And that was the end. And she stayed. We never made it to the opening. [Laughs.]

Then later I found out who she really was. I mean, I had no idea. I wasn't dating her because she was a doctor-to-be, or I didn't—she just was beautiful, young, and kind to me—just kind. I needed kind. Anyway, so it came out that she was studying, med school. She was in her second year and after her fourth year, we threw a "three M" party. It was marriage, M.D., and moving. We decided to make a fresh start in Providence, where we decided we could go to Baltimore; Portland, Oregon; something Pittsburgh-ish where I could set up a shop and still feel a community; or Providence. And she matched here. [Internship/residency at Brown University-BB]

MS. RIEDEL: And what was happening with Carnegie Mellon?

MR. BALLY: Well, in the meantime, right, several years had passed. I had done the tenure track, design thing. And I didn't really want to do it again. So I went adjunct, I think, for one semester. So I had —

MS. RIEDEL: What about it wasn't appealing to you?

MR. BALLY: It was just eating my time from the studio. I wanted to be in the studio and I love—the students love me and I love them and they were just geniuses, wonderful. I'd never met such a—that's one thing I have to say. In a university setting, to meet these brilliant students. Man, they know how to pick them. So many brilliant minds in one place. You just have to wind them up and they go.

That was—it's very different than teaching, adjunct somewhere, night-course students, very different. And I loved that part. It was just so intense and so much work, because for every contact hour I do, I'd do like five at home or six at home and try to get them—be a good teacher.

So I stopped that with the design department, to focus on my work. And then in 1991, Carol Kumata went on sabbatical and she asked me to be her replacement, which I jumped at because metals is my favorite—foundation metals is my favorite and I had, I think it was 60 students that semester.

They cycled, I guess, it was 60 core students who—they broke into three groups of 20 and then they would cycle them through. So I had one group in one semester, I had 20 students, then 20, then 20. And—unbelievable. They all loved it. I loved it and I —

When Carol came back, I said, "Carol, I've got great news for you. I've got about 40 new metal students for you." And she said, "Oh, great." [Laughs.] Because she didn't really want to work that hard, I got the sense. I mean, she's a great teacher and everything, but I think she wasn't into the menial part of showing up at work and doing a lot of work sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've really loved that aspect of it?

MR. BALLY: What? Yes, I loved it. I ignited 40 sparks that I would have loved to have seen to fruition, but —

MS. RIEDEL: And what did you focus on teaching when you were there?

MR. BALLY: I focused on really, really basic things. Basic handwork stuff in some kind of fun—I tried to make fun assignments. Like maybe a self-portrait or, you know, we'd make a spoon. Some people would make roach clips, you know, whatever. It didn't matter, as long as it was good—technically good, and you had some good story to tell with it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So how directly did it relate back to your own apprenticeship?

MR. BALLY: It kind of didn't, because I was much too lenient and too nice, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BALLY: I didn't and I think —

MS. RIEDEL: But it was a technical focus?

MR. BALLY: It was a technical focus. Yeah, and sure, we'd have to—they would almost insist on having critiques to talk about the conceptual part, and that's when I realized, as a part of teaching, how can you talk—don't make the emperor's new clothes by talking about something you haven't even made yet.

People do these wonderful air drawings. Well, what I was going to do was kind of about, like, that big and about that wide, and it was really going to be cool because I was thinking about, like, my early childhood experiences of when I had this accident, you know? Then, I started that and that didn't work, so I thought that it would be much easier to just like, I don't know, make this spoon? [Laughs.] You know?

And it just, it just lost me. So I focused—I wanted the next teaching gigs—I realized I didn't want to get into that stuff, especially early on, and I would not tolerate if somebody would talk a good game. That just didn't work. We're not talksmiths. We're actually people of action. You have to make something and then we can talk about something.

When I taught at Penland, which is one of the best teaching experiences of my entire life, that's what I focused on, the technical rigor and slow—and before we even got into the conceptual stuff so much. You know, just make a basic spoon, make a basic knife, make a—which was even challenging for some people already.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. If you think about a school like Penland or a school like Haystack in comparison with a university art program, is there—do you think there's certain strengths and certain weaknesses to the two? The two different styles of teaching or the students?

MR. BALLY: I think the strength, just to reiterate what I was saying before, the strength of a university program—people seek it out and they recruit and they recruit to get kind of a cohesive flavor of student. And the people from which they can draw—they have such a bigger pool of people—a school like Penland, Arrowmont, Haystack, all of which have wonderful flavors of their own. You know, the one in Pennsylvania is—oh God, it's been a long time.

Oh my God, if they even remember that I forgot—if they hear this. Upper Pennsylvania, it'll come to me. Pretty much anybody who has a sort of an interest and a lot of money to do it, or a scholarship, can get to go, which is wonderful because some people really—I've met some of the most wonderful passions from out all that way—not necessarily talents, but passions.

And we need that, too, and that adds to the field. And it adds to the class. So they're given almost like another chance, even though they don't want to enroll in the whole gobbledygook university thing. It opens different doors for other people.

MS. RIEDEL: So why was that one Penland experience so extraordinary?

MR. BALLY: Well, I'd never been so—I had taught Haystack, which is also wonderful for, I think, it was a three-day—no, it wasn't three-day, it was like a one-week? Maybe a one-week course, fall, concentration or something and I chose to do, like, lobster picks and crackers, technical stuff—so fun. But it wasn't long enough to really get something done—major done.

But at Penland, I think it was three weeks, if I'm not mistaken, and I think you can get something done in three weeks. It was just at the right time in my life and they were so—I had never been treated like royalty before and that was—I was treated like royalty. They gave me pretty much my own house to live in, and I was the young guy.

Even students of mine said, wow, Boris, based on your résumé, I thought you'd be this really old Russian guy, balding [laughs], you know? Just the conversations that you can have that you can't have in the university setting, that you can have over a bottle of wine or two or five. [Laughs.] "I love you, man. I really love you. You're kind of like my brother," you know. [Laughs.] All the way from that to the more sober "What do you think about art?" You know, whatever. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BALLY: Oh, God. Sorry, sorry.

MS. RIEDEL: There's the difference between Penland and the university.

MR. BALLY: Terribly, but all right, let's—is that good for now? We can revisit, [laughs] right?

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: In your own experience, you've apprenticed with a master jeweler in Switzerland. You've been to university, you've been to art school. You've taught at Penland and Haystack. What do you see as the significant difference, if any, between students or artists or designers who learn their—who study their field in a more formal program and others who are more self-taught?

MR. BALLY: Well, I think the ones that are self-taught have the unique ability of teaching—of learning by themselves, rather than to be kind of spoon-fed the information. I think they have a greater appreciation for what they get. That said, I think that the folks that come out of the university program have, I think, a broader kind of contextual sense of history and a knowledge of who—a different knowledge of who's been there in a greater, maybe, context of the—say, an art context as opposed to just a very narrow smithing, in my field, metalsmithing context.

So I think people that come out of the university program can have, maybe, more of an imagination of what they could do, perhaps not a focus of technical knowledge. At the same time, the wonderful thing is in a lot of these departments when I was going to school, you could find glassblowing, ceramics, painting, take a course in design, model-making or something, which I didn't. But you could do anything.

Study this, study that, and so you get a taste of life more fully. That's why I think it's really important, that's something that, in Switzerland, the apprentices have a very kind of one-dimensional life. They graduate from their apprenticeship program—it's not academic in any sense of the word, even though I think they do try to give you some metal history and perhaps some art history.

But it's really more the history of the master before you and what they've taught and been handed you, but without real—in my experience—without any real kind of seeking or knowledge or desire to be something more than just another goldsmith. And, of course, there are—Beat Lehmann, who was goldsmith who also worked for Alexander Schaffner at the time, went on to be a really out-of-the-box-thinking Swiss jeweler whose work I was able to see when I was in Switzerland and really, was definitely one-of-a-kind.

But he came out of that system and decided to make it, somehow—I don't know what his history is, but somehow, he was able to make it more into art, in my perspective. I think somebody like Tom Mann has a similar upbringing to me, in that I think he kind of learned by doing. However, I'm pretty sure he graduated as a theater set designer. So he did have some sense of something greater than just the jewelry field, which is why he's Tom Mann.

I mean, why he has tried different things and he's tried, from sculpture to this techno-romantic production thing to one-of-a-kind thing. I think he and I are very parallel in realizing that we better get out there and get it. And also coming from the university system, to some extent, knowing what we could do, more than metals—I mean, in addition to metals.

MS. RIEDEL: And what you've said so far, it seems as if, from your perspective—neither is complete in and of itself, apprenticeship lacks certain things and the university education lacks, perhaps, the technique. So —

MR. BALLY: If I could build a program, I'd say—and actually, my father, at one point, I'm pretty sure he tried to do this with the design department at Carnegie Mellon—say, you know what? We're going to do something where we're going to teach you the technical stuff for the first two years, three years, and then you're going to start learning how to design all the different segments of design product and corporate and whatever else, interior.

I think that was pretty well-received, but that would be my perfect thing, is teach the ground rules—don't even talk to me about art. Then go take a year of art history and fill your head with why you're doing what you're doing, what's possible and what people have done. And then start making your art. I guess it's almost like undergrad and grad.

It's sort of like that. The problem with that system as I see it, is that a lot of—when I was at Tyler, a few of the grad students had not even had undergrad in metals. Now, how are they possibly going to be metals artists when they don't have a clue how to solder something together? Tyler's a bad example because I'm sure eventually, they'd learn. They're pretty rigorous with that.

But seeing the people that come out of the art programs—my big beef with it is that many of them aren't that good at metalsmithing, technically. And they don't realize it. So I think they have the perception that they're special and have so much to say and meanwhile—is that my tenant going down?

And meanwhile, they're flipping burgers, which seems wrong to me. Keith [Lewis] and I were talking about that. We actually had an argument at the SNAG conference. Somebody came over and said, "Keith, you know what?

You should teach business classes in your program." And he said, 'You know what, honey? No, I don't want to."

And I was shocked to find myself actually agreeing with Keith that it's not his responsibility. A professor in an art school, as Keith pointed out, and I agree, is trained to teach art. To talk about art, to teach art, to teach technical —I think. But how can you expect them to teach you about the business of art when that's not their business?

They've probably never learned it. They don't have to. It's not their business. To me, the academic area in this country is like a pyramid scheme, where the G.I. Bill helped fund the top of—and then it made space for all these wonderful teachers who are our predecessors, who started SNAG—who really did a wonderful job. So wonderful, in fact, that they've made—they gave birth to the next layer and so on and so forth.

And when I was going to school, what I hoped to graduate to—potentially—any master's candidate out there—master's recipient looking for a teaching job was kind of plumb out of luck because they ran out of spots.

So to me, it was the smartest pyramid scheme ever. [Laughs.] And I saw that. I'm not buying into that. I think I saved a lot of money on it—but I met a lot of graduate students that have excelled and that have taken it on—what it comes down to is personal responsibility.

MS. RIEDEL: And so many artists, it seems, do teach as a way to—well, for many, multiple reasons, one of which is to supplement their income. And it does seem, though, increasingly, that there are also artists, again, doing that through studio work and through multiples and through —

MR. BALLY: Right. It's creeping in again.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly, and through interfacing with industry.

MR. BALLY: Right, right. Well, I think it's been dormant for a while. And now, industry, I think—part of it is that industry realizes the resource that artists and designers have that will add an advantage to whatever it is they're doing because these people are thinking out of the box. I can't think of a more exciting time to be in this world.

I feel so boring compared to so many people out there that are surfing, you know, Phil Carrizzi, who invited me to do a solo show at the Kendall School of Art. I was totally—when I met him, I was awestruck at what a—kind of renaissance—this is a young guy. He's doing computer stuff. He's doing hand stuff, talking to industry, designing for industry, able and showing this to his students. What a great role model. It's an exciting time, that way. And people are willing to open their doors.

MS. RIEDEL: Stop there for today.

MR. BALLY: Sounds good.

[END DISC 2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. I'm with the artist Boris Bally in his home in Barrington, Rhode Island, on May 27, 2009. This is disc number three. Good morning, it's great to be here—a whole different arrangement from yesterday, from the studio to the house.

MR. BALLY: Properly caffeinated.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, exactly, properly caffeinated. Let's just describe, briefly, your home, because it's pretty extraordinary. It's an old barn? Is that correct?

MR. BALLY: It is—yes, 1890 or something like that, barn for stallions. The Vogel family had renovated it, I guess, in the '70s, or so. We ended up buying it, I guess last March was the closing. We bought it for our children. It's just so one-of-a-kind, beautiful, spacious, and a perfect place to hang lots of art.

MS. RIEDEL: And swings.

MR. BALLY: And swings, and swings.

MS. RIEDEL: And totem poles made by—carved by your mother, or —

MR. BALLY: No, no, these aren't—my mother's totem poles are in the back yard. And she started collecting totem poles, maybe, probably nine years ago, now, or so. But I think these are from Papua New Guinea, which had been a source of big attention to her. And I think she's always dreamt of going there. They've gone as far as Bali in Indonesia. But I don't think they went to Papua. But I know that a piece of her heart is there, always.

MS. RIEDEL: And the ceiling supports—how high are the ceilings?

MR. BALLY: I honestly don't know. Maybe 20 feet—something like that? It's pretty up there.

MS. RIEDEL: It's just an amazing space. And all the skylights—it's really—it's so bright. So we were going to start off today with Humanufactured and how that came about, when that came about.

MR. BALLY: Okay. Yes. I was thinking about that, actually, swimming laps this morning, and I was thinking, how *did* that come about? I believe that it was—you know when you're supposed to fill out—when you make a piece, you fill out the descriptions of what—how big it is, how heavy it is, the title, and they come to this interesting line called "technique." And a lot of times, I wrote "hand-fabricated, hand-riveted, hand-this, hand-that," and I thought it was very important to mention that it was hand, the hand being a very apparent, important part of it.

The kind of irony of it is that we—all of us makers tend to use machines, as well as the hand. So it's almost like every handmade—quote, unquote, handmade object still is mechanically assisted to some degree, and so manufactured, to some degree. So I toyed with that for probably a decade, just for a long time, and it just didn't feel right. And then at one point, I thought wait a minute, I'm a human. This is manmade. The people in my shop are sometimes helping me make certain parts of it.

Some of the things are jobbed out to different subcontractors—I get my platters spun in Pittsburgh—and they're still spun by a hand-spinner. So it fully encompassed everything I was doing. And I thought, you know, "humanufactured"—that kind of sums it up.

And it began with the chairs. Because they really were humanufactured. When I realized—I actually tried to get them CNC-manufactured, out of house, by a third party completely, to see if I could go that way. They could not do it.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. What was the problem?

MR. BALLY: The problem was that the signs aren't meant to bend—they keep snapping—and they really do need a person's knowledge, experience of the quality of the signs, and which signs tend to bend and which not; and the experience and eye of a metalsmith, who can see the direction of the different grains of the metal—how it's rolled—and be attentive to that.

So when I reclaimed the chairs back in my studio, I said, "You know what, darn it, they're humanufactured now." And rather than to give up after they kept breaking at the manufacturer, I redesigned the chair, I took it on as a challenge. That's when the champagne corks came in as the feet. And so finally, I figured out a way in order to redesign how certain components were put together to reduce snapping and to reduce the chances of something going wrong. I actually was really proud that I—rather than to reject it, I reclaimed it.

And that was reclaimed under the term "humanufactured," which, I tried it on for size. And I got an e-mail from a guy named Chris Lefteri in England. He was working on a book. I didn't know who he was; I didn't have a clue. And I just tend to be very generous, as far as letting people have photographs and access to promotional stuff because I know, inevitably, it's good for my business.

I sent him photos of my chair, and in the description, I tried it out for size—the word "humanufactured." Wouldn't you know, about a year later, when the book was published for RotoVision, it was under the heading "Metals"—"Metals" was the title, "Metals." But Chris Lefteri—he gave me a full-page spread as an alternative-material use, a novel approach to using metal, and under the heading "Humanufactured." And that's the first time it officially was in print.

And I thought, whoa! This is—wow! I've always wanted to create a buzzword, or something. I mean, every artist has—Andy Warhol has pop and Marcel Duchamp has Dada. So maybe this is my thing. So I was very proud of that. And in the meantime, I have been able to protect that as a registered trademark, specifically with the chairs. I still stamp, now—anywhere my stamp will fit, I still stamp "Humanufactured," because it really does sum up poetically the hybridization of art, craft, and design, all kind of boiling down to the technique.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yesterday, we skipped ahead over a lot of your work that happened, I think, in the '80s and early '90s to discuss the sign work and the chairs. But I want to go back and look at some of the work in the late '80s, which really seemed to emphasize objects. And some were functional, certainly—the candleholders, the corks, the tripod vessels—some were purely sculptural. What was the inspiration for a lot of that early work?

MR. BALLY: Well, I think that was when I was coming out of making things bite-sized and wearable. It was kind of my opening my eyes to sculptural—the vessel form idea. And my parents took my family to Haiti to Port-au-

Prince, where we—and this is 1984, when Baby Doc was in power. It was a pretty—a strange time to go—a big military presence, I remember.

And my family rented a car and drove all the way to Cap-Haïtien, through the countryside, where I had never seen anything like that. It was really—it was this parallel universe I never knew about. I'm thankful, again, to my parents for always introducing these wacky, crazy things by taking us traveling. But in Haiti, I saw very striking images of these houses on stilts—kind of like Baba Yaga huts, which I had never seen. And they were magical—somehow carried more meaning than what was evident. So I took that image home with me, and at the same time with —

MS. RIEDEL: Was it the materials or the forms, or —

MR. BALLY: Well, it was both. It was the crudeness of the materials to make these huts—essentially, I guess, mud huts made out of twigs and sticks, but made really beautifully, carefully. It was just using what you had around you to make these amazing structures that were somehow powerful because they were painted white.

In this lush, tropical-ish, hilly countryside, I remember the striking image of some kind of—maybe a voodoo ritual or something—seeing, way up on the hill—all these figures—dark-skinned figures—who were all wearing white making a circle. It was this really striking image. And the huts filtered in the same way—that they were very bright white and neutral in their coloring in this really lush countryside. And that I took with me.

And at the same time, another travel was when I went to Greece during my apprenticeship. I took lots of photos. I used to be an avid, kind of a photo nut. So I always took photos of possible inspiration for here or there. I'd filter through them when I got home. And in Greece, they had these amazing water towers.

I think if it was a water tower in this country, I wouldn't have, probably, through twice about it—but it was the patina, specifically, in Greece—the patina and the age and the coloring and these mysterious, beautiful characters that make up their alphabet, which, later, I learned what the letter said and it wasn't that exciting [laughs]. But just, the water towers were very striking visuals. And between the Haitian huts and the Greek water towers was this notion of an object floating, hovering on legs, that somehow, it created its own pedestal.

Same thing with the bottle corks that I was using in Switzerland—this idea of an art piece on a pedestal, but the pedestal becoming part of it. So I remember in Quincy, maybe 1987 or 8, as I always had done, I'd gone to scrapyards, and at this one scrapyard, after a scrapyard run, I came with some particularly thin aluminum material and a couple rods, and I started making a vessel form. I don't know why or what—I just started playing. And I poured some concrete into it and started shaping it. It was probably about nine inches tall.

It was the first Trirod vessel and it was ugly! But I loved that it was the spark of the next—the whole generation of vessel forms. And I didn't mind that it was ugly. It was really—it helped my attention, because through the concrete, I was able to give it some importance. I think weight is almost equal to importance. An object has to have some value—some weight value, as it were. But through that vessel and negotiating it in my studio, I realized that I could take this idea and just continue it.

So in the next one—*the* Trirod vessel—I actually taught myself to fabricate and to smith certain components. I had not really ever silversmithed or metalsmithed. I didn't learn that in Switzerland. But I was eager to learn it. Right around that time, Perreault—what is his name?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, John Perreault.

MR. BALLY: John Perreault, who was a curator at the Craft Museum at the time, decided that he would put on a show called *Studio Production More Than One* [*More than One: Contemporary Studio Production*], and I had just, through this exploration with the Trirod vessel, decided I would try to make something out of silver. So I had made a silver saltshaker. And the reason that came about is because I had made a serving spoon and I taught myself how to make a die [set] to create—I was working on flatware at the time—so I made a die to create the serving spoon dish, which I had laying around—that little part laying around the studio.

And a lot of the ways I design is I play. So I started playing with it, with a cylinder—oh, look, this could be a saltshaker. So I made a saltshaker and John Perreault decided to invite me into the show, where I had candlesticks and a salt and peppershaker. Now, the irony of the whole thing is that, that saltshaker was definitely not one-of-a-kind—well, not a production piece—it *was* one-of-a-kind. I had only made one. And I, in turn, made a peppershaker to complement it.

And I always thought it was funny that I could play a little, sneaky trick on the curator. I mean, I wanted to be in the show really badly [laughs]. And I thought, if he can't tell what's more than one, what does it really matter? So the whole Trirod vessel thing not only was an offshoot into something that didn't necessarily have to function—flirting with the idea of being just being an important sculptural object—but it also led to another path, which

definitely was a useful and more functional approach, like the salt and pepper shakers or the serving spoons.

MS. RIEDEL: And you'll often start your series with, I would imagine, prototypes to see if they're suited to—or do you? Do you start with the idea that it's definitely going to be a one-of-a-kind piece, or it's a prototype for multiples, or does it go back and forth?

MR. BALLY: It definitely goes back and forth. I think that, my approach to working in the studio is, it has to—to hold my attention, it has to be playful, fun, accessible, mildly useful, or at least become a performance in the attempt to use it [laughs], and it's got to feel right.

So a lot of times, I'll take as an inspiration a challenge, a competition, or somebody will have a show or I'll have a show, and I'll say okay, I'm going to do something special for the show. How is it going to fit either the topic, the venue, the challenge that's risen? And I'll start with an idea—on a piece of paper, I'll write down maybe 100 words. It's a chair show, so we'll write down 100 ways that a chair could seat you, 100 different directions I could take with it, 100 different materials or connections, or something—kind of a brainstorming.

Then I'll take the words and I'll start, usually, sketching. And I'll come out with some rough sketches of what this thing might look like, and then immediately embark into a paper model. And I'd like to credit Jack Prip [John Axel Prip, nicknamed 'John Prip', 'Jack Prip'-BB] for a mind-blowing show that he has had at the American Craft Museum when I was a kid. My parents brought me his catalog and the thing that struck me—this was the first time I'd ever seen a metalsmith showing his prototypes.

And to me, that was just—it was humanity, approachability. It showed vulnerability. It showed not this prima donna artist who—of course, Jack Prip was doing amazing stuff—but it showed, it shared his thought process. So based on that, I kind of absorbed that kind of method of working. And so I've always loved making paper models. I remember growing up with my parents, that was the way—we always drew and made paper models of things, so that came very naturally.

And to me, even to this date, it's almost like having children, you know. You have a child and you have their photographs around. Eventually, if you're a good parent, they'll go off to school or go away somewhere and you still have this little baby pictures to remember what it was like. And to me, the real essence of a design or a piece of artwork is actually the prototype, or the drawing. To me, that's the spark. It's like the photos of your wedding or something, that the passion is still—the power is still in that. Meanwhile, the piece has gone off to some important or not important place—a scrapyard.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you keep your prototypes?

MR. BALLY: Oh yes, I do. I mean, I do. Every now and then, somebody will want it for a collection. I think the only prototypes I've ever—I know Museum of Arts and Design has a whole bunch of drawings that led up to the pieces they have in their collection, of the jewelry. And the Brooklyn Museum has a whole bunch of actual metal prototypes that I made for the flatware.

To go back to the topic of the prototypes and how I work: So I'll make a paper model. It can be crude and rude, but at least give me a spark of something to start launching into the material. And a lot of times, the material will speak to me and show me what it can and can't do. Or once I'm in the material, it's evident what I can add to something or subtract, and that's when things start happening.

And I always work in a series, knowing that once I make one of something—like, say, let's pretend I'm working on a set of flatware. I'll make a drawing, make some paper mock-ups, and then launch into the first series of metal, not worrying about that it's finished or done well, but just working out some bugs. And then will come one generation of—for instance, the flatware will be finished and I'll do my best to make something presentable. I'll put it out in the wild, to the show, and I'll try to reassess it, maybe a year later and see what I could do differently the next time around.

That's actually a good point to make, is that I try to work in kind of a spiral, where I give myself—I'm the center of—in my studio—I'm not the center of anything—but in the studio, I'm the center and where the ideas come. But one shoot will be jewelry—like, say, wedding rings—conservative jewelry—really wearable, functional jewelry. One will be art jewelry—something that has more of a challenge, something sculptural happening with it.

Another thing will now be vessels; another thing will be flatware; another thing will be bottle corks; and another thing will be art. So what I tried to do, when time permits, is I try to revisit, every year, that spiral. And what I found myself doing in the '80s was finding a theme—some element of the environment—architectonic element or some memory of a travel or some theme that would strike me and would be able to hold its way through all these different, radiating ideas.

So, for instance, it was maybe 1991 or 2 when I was feeling very uninspired, waiting for my torch tanks to get filled—you know, picking my nose, looking up at the rafters. And the guy was taking forever, and I was impatient. And I was, like, harrumph, I want my acetylene tanks. I look up at the ceiling, and there is this beautiful truss shape in this ratty old acetylene-filling place. And it was just like, boing, there's my idea.

So that became the year of the truss. It worked its way into the flatware. I started building it as a mechanical element in flatware, started perforating the things that I was raising with the triangular perforations, just as kind of a decorative element. I started making jewelry, like the Axion earrings, with the little truss things. I'm just trying to incorporate it into everything, because it really held my interest.

And then the next year was the year of the perforation, which became—the next inspiration for my flatware was, again, here I was having my little low moment, wondering where the hell I was going to get inspired. And I quite literally was drawing on a piece of paper—I'm bored, what am I going to come up with? And that table was made out of a glass top supported by an anti-burglary window protection that I had dragged with me from Pittsburgh. So here I am in Providence, sketching, wondering what the hell I was going to do.

And I looked under the table, through the table, and there's this beautiful, expanded metal. And I thought, boing, there's the next idea—expanded metal. I've got a hydraulic press; everybody presses with them; maybe I can somehow magically make it pull with that same force. So that entire year, the flatware became stretched. I'm very proud of that tactile texture, and I put gold plating in it so it would illuminate—highlight the different depths of it.

And then, at the same time, you asked me about *Vessel with a Silver Heart*. That was right around the time when I was going through my divorce, and I decided to start experimenting with raising, which is a great thing to work out rage, let me tell you [laughs], banging metal all day long, quite literally. So I started to drill into these blank—large, blank circles, and I started to see what they would do as you raise.

So as I raised, I was noticing these beautiful spiral forms happening. And I loved that it made the material fragile enough to start tearing—almost pulling it to the brink of not being able to hold together, which I thought was kind of beautiful in an ugly, genuine sort of way. And so that piece, *Vessel with a Silver Heart*—the idea behind that was that I would reverse the sign so that it would be hidden, kind of like, we all form a hard shell around us. And the idea was that if you had the time to look deeply into it, you would realize that there's a highly polished, well-raised—I really did a good job raising it, as well as I possibly could—shiny silver surface that you could look through.

And only [in] the reflection of the inside of the sign could you discover that it was really a traffic sign. From the outside—I was feeling very sad—feeling like I was a good person but I had broken up the marriage, was a bad thing. I felt really low, and I thought, but I'm still a good person, so there's still a good heart inside me. So that piece was, I guess, what do you call it, autobiographical.

MS. RIEDEL: I didn't realize because I had only seen photos of that—you have to actually look through the holes in order to see there's traffic signs inside?

MR. BALLY: Exactly. And so at first look, you see something that might be mildly interesting, just because it's got a beautiful patina. As I remember, you can even see where the pole was attached to the sign. And the intriguing part is the holes. But it's something that you can quickly walk by—I don't think it's that special—on the first glance. And then if you do inspect it and you look through the holes, you can actually see the yellow from the MPH signs through it. Then it's almost like a little surprise that you've earned.

And right around that time, my grandmother, who I loved very dearly, died. I guess this was probably—she died in '89, I think it was. And so it took me a few years and some knowledge—I had to learn how to smith. I created a piece that, actually, I don't think I showed anybody, which was based on her favorite plant, which was a poppy, and the bud of a poppy. I kind of made it as an homage to my grandma, who passed away. That was, I think, the one that I did, maybe, right after the *Vessel with a Silver Heart*.

So it was a time of reflection and taking a break to figure out what I was about.

MS. RIEDEL: You, also, right around this time were working on those very large arm forms, right—Constrictor and —one had preceded that, I think.

MR. BALLY: That's a really great—right before all this, after the trip to Haiti—I'm trying to think—I think the very first one was called *Tri-rubinium [ph] Tip*, which was a bracelet with three kinds of—weenie shapes on it; three cylindrical, elongated, curved pieces with 18-karat gold springs on it and tube-set with three rubies. The reason why I liked it was, right around that time, I was starting to look at these vessel form inspirations I was telling you about, and I started making—and I was making mostly jewelry at that time, so I thought I've got to break out of this jewelry thing.

And what was I looking at? I was looking at a lot of the European jewelry, and I loved the excitement and the freshness. It was almost like when punk hit the scene. It was, like, this total wakeup call of, whoa, there's so much yet to do, and so visceral and raw. And I thought, I want to try to be like that. So it was my experiment into bringing jewelry into kind of the vessel-ish sort of thing. So I made that.

Then I made another piece with Delrin rods that I got from a scrapyard somewhere—some cutoff room—and I really liked that because it brought another material into it that wasn't orthodox. I think I still have these. Anyway, then —

MS. RIEDEL: Do you look specifically to do that, whenever you have the opportunity to bring in unexpected materials? Because that's something that runs throughout your work.

MR. BALLY: Yeah. Well, you know, I'm not—after having done that rigorous training, I love the idea that we can, ourselves, become kind of alchemists of garbage. We can take—the most important work, to me, is done by artists who can take something perfectly common and make people really, really desire it, not just to invest themselves into finding out about it, but possibly buy it.

But to me, the real skill in making something is to be able to transform the very kind of common materials from our environment—scrapyard, mud, money—whatever is right at our fingertips—and then abstract it so much or just barely, so that there's some sort of familiarity so that the viewer or the wearer or the purchaser senses something familiar, something oddly available about the piece and then only on further inspection—that's what I call the "aha moment"—all of a sudden, they go, oh my God, wait a minute! That's a traffic sign? Or, wait, the feet are champagne corks? Oh my God, that's so good!

And it's funny because it's right there under their nose the whole time. So I do try to bring in that element. More now—it took a while to learn how to do that. A lot of times, it will be brought on by somebody who gives me something and says, oh, hey, you like materials; this is what I have.

A lot of times, it will be from going to a scrapyard or cleaning up the garbage in my side yard and finding some old—one of my inspirations was the cap of a fence—a Cyclone fence—had fallen off and I picked it up to put it on and was, like, wow. Oh, wouldn't that work well as a foot for a table? And that's—you know, our dining room table now has these holding lacrosse balls as the feet.

But to get back to the arm form thing, the next version of the arm form was when I started the vessels. And I thought, what if I made kind of a *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, transformational piece where I could take the arm form and turn it into kind of a sculptural form off the wearer, so it changes. There's that aha moment. [Laughs.] So I came up with *Arachnid Armform*, which is now in Museum of Arts and Design.

And I created this little robotic thing—now, remember, this is the time when robots weren't really—this is, maybe, '86 or something like that, maybe '87, when that wasn't anything people thought about. And I just totally got a kick out of something that you could unfold, put on your arm, fold back, and then it would stand on its own on a pedestal to enjoy. And it's almost—it is its own pedestal.

So that piece was very pivotal. And then I thought—and right around that time, I met kind of mentor and colleague Joe Wood, who, he and Dan Jocz were curating a show called *Jewelries*, *Epiphanies*, which opened—oh, gosh, where the heck did that open? I think it was opened in Boston, and they took it upon themselves to invite me—which is a huge—to me, it was one of the more significant turning points, realizing that some people take me seriously—somebody like Joe Wood. I mean, pretty amazing pat on the back.

And he said, "You know, Boris, I want you to make a piece specially for this show." And I said, "You've got it, baby." And so I came up with *Constrictor*, which was the first kind of moving form that played off of that *Arachnid Armform* thing of movement.

I will back up to tell you the wrist kind of holds a very special place for me. Some of my very first cuffs that I made at the Shadyside Summer Arts Festival in '74 were these big cuffs. They were like Superman cuffs. They make you—the wrists are very important places, because they're a place where—people that want to slit their wrists do so—I mean, that's their location of choice. And at the same time, to me, it was a place that signified strength, because my hands were so important to me and it was right there. It's also something that's very vulnerable and exposed. And to me, it seemed like a very—kind of a good site to focus on making jewelry. It didn't have as many constraints as a ring. More wrists are similar in size.

Anyways, so I made the *Constrictor*, which was, for me, a chance to try to impress Joe Wood [laughs] which is important to me, I think; and to impress myself, to see how far I'd come with the skills that I'd learned in Switzerland and really apply them to—I made a piston form, tube-set rubies, started playing with titanium. I think that might have even been right around the time when Roy was playing with titanium. So I had some titanium wire laying around. So it's all joined by that, to add a little spark of color.

And wouldn't you know it, that show ended up in Czechoslovakia and getting tons of attention. I think it kind of made a place for me in the world of art jewelry, which I had quite—I had no place in before. For good reason—that wasn't my focal thing, or anything. But with Joe Wood's entry into that, I thought, whoa, this is cool. I can do this. And right—I think right around that time, Susan Grant Lewin wrote the art jewelry book [*One of a Kind: American Art Jewelry Today*] and interviewed me at the Paramount Hotel. And that was, again, an affirmation of that direction. So it led to me to continue that vein of work and to continue exploring with the wearable, kind of sculptural jewelry stuff.

And shortly thereafter, I think my next piece—oh, my next piece was an invitation, by Susan Grant Lewin, I believe, to enter Schmuckszehne, which was 1993—Schmuckszehne, which was in Munich. And that—any chance for me to show in Europe, I would grab, I would relish. Because to me, it seemed so, kind of, small-minded to be only exhibiting in this country. And I desperately, I think for obvious reasons, I wanted cultural connection to—and maybe even affirmation from—Germans and the Swiss and the Europeans. Because it's easy enough to impress an American, but try to impress a German.

I remember I sent a piece to—I sent a teapot to the Goldschmiedehaus [Hanau, Germany] for the Silber-Triennale, which was 1991, and they sent a damage report back—an object report back when they received my teapot. And they said, it has minor blemishes and it has not been finished very well. And I was, like, oh, shit. [Laughs.] I can't believe this. [Laughs.] But that's their rule and I wanted to be challenged by that.

MS. RIEDEL: Now also, just real quickly, *Constrictor* is almost like a medical piece, like a brace of sorts. I know you've gotten inspiration from that in the past; did this precede that source of inspiration or were you thinking about that when you —

MR. BALLY: It did. I was vaguely thinking about it for no real—it was right around the time when I had gone to the hospital for my dual stapedectomy, so who knows. Maybe I'd seen a lot of those things. A lot of my tools came from dentists who—I remember, growing up in Rosslyn Farms, a dentist died up the block and I got all his tools for 10 bucks, or something—just the most amazing syringes and scary-looking things.

And it reminded—and I liked that kind of darkness that comes—the kind of ambiguity that comes from medical instruments—things that heal, but could go the other way pretty fast. And it reminds of the Jeremy Irons—brrr—creepy movie. But it had nothing to do with looking through medical anything—not yet. Lynn came a little bit later. But the next one—the one I made for Germany—*Caress*—I thought, you know, all of this jewelry is too clean, too slick. And this is a piece I'm going to make for Germany.

This is Germany. "This is Germany, where we wear very heavy things and torturous, dangerous—and we like dangerous." So I made *Caress*, which was anything but caress. It looked more like a medieval torture device. I wanted to see if I could push the boundary a little bit and really go off the deep end, so it was, like, leather-clad and brass with no precious materials, or very few of them, and it was kind of clunky.

And one of the funniest stories was, apparently, they give—somebody's name—some big prize, they give, at that show, to a piece of jewelry [Herbert-Hofmann-Preis-BB]. And when the show closed and we got our catalogs back—I was very proud to be in the show—but I got a letter—and I assumed everybody in the show got a letter—that said something like, the such-and-such prize was not awarded this year because the piece that would have won it was a questionable piece of jewelry. And I always hoped to think that it was my questionable piece of jewelry.

And I'll tell you, the reason why I even have the ego to think that is because they took the photo of my piece, and pretty much every single press release had my piece in it, which led me to believe that they were probably oversaturated with that thing anyway. But I loved the fact that I didn't—or I loved the idea that I can actually have the ego to think that the prize could have been mine, which is kind of vain. And on the other hand, I'm really glad that, if it was, that I didn't get it. Because that makes such a better statement, and a great story.

And then after that, shortly after that, I met Lynn while I was making the *Fixator*, which was the last in that series. And I was able to pore through—in the making of that, I was able to pore through her medical books and really see what a fixator—a head-fixating device—looks like. So that's my favorite piece, and that was kind of my little entrance into meeting my wife, Lynn.

MS. RIEDEL: How did the *Dig Wear* and *Eat Wear* bracelets come about? Is that a fusion of the flatware with the jewelry? They're really interesting.

MR. BALLY: Right around the time where I was making the flatware—I always thought it would be really boring to just go—these lines that radiate from the center that I was talking about—they really are—they're not lines; they're blurry. And like I said, I like to play to come up with ideas. If I'm working on a set of flatware on the one hand and then an arm form on the other, it's kind of not a far stretch to see what they might look like together. I forget what *Eat Wear* was for.

MS. RIEDEL: That actually is interesting, too, because it makes me think of the early, sort of, Swiss Army knife you did, remember, with flatware? There was something about carrying it with you —

MR. BALLY: Kind of, but it also touches on the love for martial arts. I used to make martial arts weapons, and in high school, I was forbidden—our local policeman forbid me to make them. But I was making throwing stars. I had a good business making nunchucks. And I had made brass knuckles, and I collected knives. I was really into —I don't know what I was into, but I think it might have been, just kind of the macho, want-to-be-cool-with-the-guys thing.

And at the same time, it was metal, a lot of times, and nunchucks are really involved. But I know that carried on into the flatware that you could wear like that. And I always thought it was really kind of cool that you could have this wearable set of flatware. I love to eat; there it is. It's cool; it's dangerous; don't come too close! [Laughs.]

Then the *Dig Wear* actually came from, I think it was, Society of Arts and Crafts, again, possibly—some show that had a garden theme. At first, I thought, oh, stupid, I'm not making a damn garden—and then I thought, wait, this is an opportunity. How cool would that be? Wearable garden tools! And I like them because they're so not about wearability [laughs].

I think they should make a movie—like a Freddy Krueger movie out of it somehow, you know, *Nightmare on Elm Street*. It's dangerous. I think danger has a good place for jewelry. And somehow, if it's not heavy or it's not a little ugly or a little dangerous—danger will hold somebody's attention more, or at least get somebody's attention.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's shift gears completely and talk about the Kalimba vessel that won the Fortunoff prize, because the antithesis of danger, but —

MR. BALLY: Well, the good story in that is that—I think we talked about it before—that rejection—if you're not getting rejected, you're actually not learning something. And I figure I can always enter things. That's a way to learn new—open new doors and to try new things and have new opportunities.

MS. RIEDEL: And you do that routinely as a way of challenging yourself or stretching —

MR. BALLY: Yeah, I try to, I try to. And I think every artist should. I teach my students that, you know what, you're my class, go enter this, enter that, enter this. You have nothing to lose except a rejection, which, quite honestly—you know, my son was late for the thirty-fifth time this year in his school and he said, "Dad, I'm really worried, I've been late for the thirty-fifth time."

I said, "Look, you should be very proud. How would you like to be mediocre? How would you like to be on time? You know what, you've got a story to tell, honey. Did you miss anything? Do I care? Are you getting spanked by me? No. You're not mediocre. You're failing gloriously! Make your mark. Be late again. And by the way, we're late again." [Laughs.]

Sorry. [Laughs.] But the Fortunoff thing is a really good story and I'm actually very proud of being persistent.

When I did the salt and pepper shaker for Perreault for the *Studio Production More Than One*, I thought, wow, I like this. I'm making candlesticks, which the Archetype [gallery] in the East Village was selling. I was making a lot of money—couldn't make them fast enough. I had the salt and pepper shaker show and the studio production [show]. I was starting to work on the Trirod series. And right around that time, I ended up making a series of three vessels—one, actually, is in the St. Vincent's Hospital room somewhere for people with AIDS.

But I thought, okay, now I've made single vessel forms like that; now I'm going to try and make three that are different in scale and I'm going to learn about scale. And right around that time, I taught myself to draft and was flirting with the idea of getting some of this produced. I mean, what if these could be prototypes and eventually be produced, as a making-money scheme?

MS. RIEDEL: Sure, and what about that?

MR. BALLY: Well, it didn't go anywhere. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: But is that something you would entertain as a thought later?

MR. BALLY: I would. You know, the thought of licensing something, if it's done well with the right people and the right circulation—if I could be David Tisdale for a year, I'd be a real happy guy. All this—even the interview and all this attention and stuff—to me, it's like building your brand so that it's positioning you to eventually, possibly —I mean, my whole life, this is my investment. And at some point, I'd be more than happy to hand off the series. And in a way, it would be a way to fund the next series.

So to me, making art for art's sake is masturbation. I think that it's really important—commerce, to me, is a part of continuance. It's a part of sustenance—providing for the next generation for your materials. I think it's a really important part of being part of the world—you know, not like my mom, who never wants to sell anything. I think there are some valuable connections that are made from people who actually want to own your work.

But back to the vessel form things. So I had made the salt and pepper shaker and I was developing slides. Early on, I recognized that it's very important that—in our culture, that we need to have good—incredibly exceptional slides of things. So I found Dean Powell, because he was shooting up in the Northeast. And, lo and behold, he was fantastic. I started getting grant money, winning fellowships, and getting into competitions. So it was an obvious—obviously the right decision to delegate something I wasn't that good at.

Through that, Fortunoff came out with this competition. It was to be a series of three, and it was for young people like myself, who were seeking an opportunity to create in silver. I had never imagined—I never knew how to silversmith, so I never imagined working, on a large scale, with silver ever. And I thought, wow, wouldn't it be cool? This would be the perfect vehicle to fund such a venture. So I entered the first year, and I entered with those three vessel forms I talked about and the salt and pepper shaker and, maybe, a Trirod vessel. And I got rejected.

Oh, and I had to come up with a design for the competition that, should I win the ability to get the silver, I could make that piece. So I designed *Incubus*, which was a vessel form maybe 15, 16 inches in diameter, maybe 18 inches tall with turned ebony, was the idea. I submitted a sketch. Right around that time, I had taken a rendering course—adjunct—what do you call that—after-hours—like a crash course at Carnegie Mellon University from Joseph Ungar, who was a guy who literally wrote the book on rendering for industrial design. So I have to tell you, that was a darn good rendering. And it was done in a design-y way—not what you learn in jewelry school, but as a product design thing.

Anyway, I got rejected. And at first, I was a little sad. And then I thought, you know what? The hell with them. I don't need silver to make this. Up yours; I'm going to make it out of brass. So I bought a bigger piece of brass and I remember smithing it, learning about seaming it, turning the ebony—I had a little lathe in my shop. And it was really exciting. I remember specifically wondering how the hell I'm going to finish this 15-inch cone to get it to my standards. And I remember looking at my band saw, thinking, what is that top wheel—oh, it's about 15 inches.

So I hot-metal-glued the shell onto my belt-sander wheel, which—not belt-sander, my band saw wheel—which is actually quite a dangerous thing, because the saw blade's still in there turning it. So I just had to avoid that. But I hot-melted the shell on there and finished it. And I always loved that I kind of changed the tool from the purpose that it was supposed to be.

Anyway, the next year, I thought, you know what, I'll enter again. Why not? Nothing to lose. Wouldn't you know it, I got in. And I came in with the *Kalimba* vessel, which was based on the design of an African thumb piano, which I had grown up playing because my parents had those kind of wacky things in the house. And I had made a bottle cork sculpture, which I just thought was beautiful, visually, with the different size keys. On the *Kalimba*, they'd be keys, but what I ended up doing was making rods that almost ended up looking like an organ in a church somehow—visually lyrical.

So I took that and changed the scale to make it a larger piece because now I was working in big silver. Wouldn't you know it, Torsten Bröhan, who was then, I guess, the head of the Silber-Gestaltung [Hanau, Germany-BB], or something like that, in Hanau, Germany, had come to the show and he bought it. And not only that, but I got a second-place award. So it was, like, whoa! Oh my goodness! And then, right at that time, I ended up on the cover of *Matter*—the piece ended up on the cover of *Matter*.

It was Arango—Jorge Arango—who liked it, put it on the cover. To me, that was the first cover ever. And if this wasn't the big, huge, green light to go ahead. So here I was, right around that time, getting green lights from everywhere, like, whoa, there's a future in this! This is something else! And I'm able to teach at the time. And I've got my studio doing almost everything that I want. It was a very exciting time.

MS. RIEDEL: And where were you teaching at this point?

MR. BALLY: I was teaching—that was probably '91, so I was teaching in Carnegie Mellon. Or right after Carnegie Mellon, I taught a course for Christina DePaul at Akron University. I used to commute two hours each way on my motorcycle—Ninja. That's why I bought my Ninja, or so I told myself.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] In '95, you made another switch—I'm thinking about the Tread Wear brooches. These seem completely different than anything you'd done before—very textural and in gold.

MR. BALLY: Right, well, that was—when was that?

MS. RIEDEL: Ninety-five, I thought.

MR. BALLY: Ninety-five? Was it that late? I guess it was. Right around that time, I had just met Lynn. I was really into my work. I think I stopped teaching, to focus on what I was doing. I had been in Pittsburgh long enough to have friends that knew I was around. And my friends weren't all necessarily, kind of the working type. They just wanted to party and I did not want to party. So I became pretty reclusive and just focused on my work.

I remember up on Bigelow Boulevard, I had the Kazajian rug building, my studio, and the doorbell would ring, and I would ignore it. I should have unplugged the darn thing. But being curious, I'd wait a certain amount of time, and then I'd go out to see who it was. And I could tell by the tire tracks in the mud outside who it was. Is this Tim Hegedorn, my party buddy? Oh, gosh, I'd love to go out and party with him. He's so fun. But I'm so glad I missed him.

And I could tell by the tire tracks whether it was FedEx or UPS or Tim Hegedorn or motorcycle friends of mine. And at one point I had the "aha" moment—oh my God, I'm like an urban pathfinder. This is cool. And look at these patterns—these serpentine, lush, rich things that are marked almost like a hydraulic press would mark metal.

So I had this idea that I would go around on my bicycle, with my camera, and photograph all the tire-track textures I possibly could. So I went around Pittsburgh, which is a great place to—down in the Strip district—just pull up to any old construction vehicle, huge tires—photograph, photograph. My goal was to make 100 photographs, then create 100 dies, and then create 100 pieces. And the pieces could go home with people, and then show the idea, the photo, the inspiration, the dies—which ended up taking an enormous amount of time to get right—and then the final piece.

But the idea—that's one aspect of the idea, the urban pathfinder. The other thing that really appealed to me was that kind of like the alchemists of the medieval area—their big goal was to take common materials and turn them to gold, that was their obsession. And I thought, well, I think my new obsession is turning gold and precious materials and mocking them. Because it's not all about that; it's more about what you do with them.

And so I became, kind of, the reverse alchemist. First, I made a few silver prototypes, which ended up becoming the first series of square brooches that ended up going to a show called *Crosscurrents*, which went over to England. Well received, it was a catalog. I was very proud. So I made the next generation, which were easier to make, which are round. And again, the dies would take me four days to make, to perfect—and then I make one impression, wow, and get $300 for a piece. It just ended up being torture.

And I thought, I'm going to go out in flying colors. I'm going to spring for a piece of gold to really do it the way it's supposed to. That's the whole idea. So I made these three-inch-large gold pieces, which were the epitome, to me, of turning it into mud—squishing it to make it mud-like. And right around that time, I was making New Year's cards. So the dies from those ended up becoming the dies to make the New Year's cards that I sent to all my friends and associates.

MS. RIEDEL: And was that the first time you worked with gold in that way?

MR. BALLY: In such a naughty way?

MS. RIEDEL: I imagine you worked with gold way back, when —

MR. BALLY: Yes, it was. It absolutely was. I'd never even really thought about it, but it was—I remember working with, specifically, the gold blank to make that pressure thing. I remember sprinkling all sorts of gold dust on it, and a couple iron filings, and really just not being so uptight about the gold—knowing that it was going to be squished and unrecognizable, sort of—and going with the naughtiness of it. Not to say that the back isn't meticulous and polished. [Laughs.] That's in there for the record.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: So shortly after this, you really started to focus on the signs. And were the chairs—the chairs weren't the first. You started with the platters.

MR. BALLY: We started with the platters. And right around that time, when I was making the truss ware and I started getting ripped off with that —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes—have we talked about that on tape? I don't think we —

MR. BALLY: I don't know. We can. But right after, in the year 1993, I believe it was, I had multiple knockoffs happening. I had a platter that I had put into an auction, donated into an auction and Rob Brandegee and Ava [DeMarco]—I don't know what her last name is—of Little Earth Productions, who made license-plate things,

bought the piece—and they were younger than me, young, fun-seeming people.

Rob Brandegee's father was a, I guess, a community designer—pretty well-placed, I guess, in the community. So I invited them over. I met them, invited them over to my studio to come hang out and have a few beers and talk. And they asked a lot of questions, looked around, liked what I did, and wouldn't you know it, about two months later [laughs] they came out with a traffic sign line. So right around that time, I walked into that store on Walnut Street, the kitchen store and saw my flatware, you know, made by Alberto Tiramani for Michael Lloyd and just about fainted with that.

And there was one other one. It was probably not as striking because I can't remember it. But it was a multiple—like, whoa, hello, wake-up moment. So right around that time I was invited to submit a design for the chair show. But just to back up half a bit—so I realized that I better start designing—I better start knocking myself off because someone else is going to knock it off.

So that's when I started going from the hand-raised pieces to something less pretentious and more accessible to the general public. Which, to me, is almost the definition of what design and product design means, which I really like about it. And that's why I don't have a problem with the word, being a designer, because it's really for the masses.

And that's why the platters became spun; they started being spun. And that's a whole other story but one of the funny stories that came from it was right around that time, Bernard Uy and James Nesbitt of Wall-to-Wall Studios in the Strip District, who I'd worked with or sold stuff to—somehow we knew each other and they were the cutting-edge graphic designer people doing amazing, cutting-edge work. And they decided to have a gallery. And to kick off their gallery in their new location, they decided to have a show called *Stool Samples*.

Wouldn't you know it, right around that time my wife in medical school was giving a lecture on real stool samples and we thought this is such a funny parallel, you know? [Laughs.] As I told you before that one of my goals—instead of having a graduate degree—is to do things that are required of people that do the program. So, I guess, gleaning more from a design graduate program where they're required to make some sort of furniture design, I thought, this is the perfect time to make a chair. I haven't made a chair.

Here I've got these materials, I'm recently divorced, I met Lynn, and life is good. Let me try something new, it's going to—so I made in probably no more than two days, I whipped out a chair. I had some fun, I knew the material already pretty well and I happened to have a bending brake in my studio—lucky for me—and with a little bit of experimentation came out with the first chair, which is one of the ones that was hanging in my studio that I still have. And I riveted it together and I —

MS. RIEDEL: Fairly similar to what we're looking at now. Fairly similar to what —

MR. BALLY: Fairly. Technically, a lot has changed. But that one was riveted together. It was all handmade. It was all—I hadn't changed the bending brake to address issues of tearing and the radius, to perfect the radius. So much exploration has gone into perfecting. And I'd almost say that the chairs I'm making now are—there's no better way to make them. I've kind of perfected every element of it and learned from each mistake—each series gets better and better, which is also a life goal, to always make something better. There's no point in making it worse.

So I made the first chair and James Thurman was my assistant at the time, he had been my student. I have a great photograph of him sitting there and I photographed it out in the dirty lot next door where the tire tracks were from the tread wears, where there was a billboard where all this stuff they scrape off the billboards just laying all over, littering—it's almost like the phoenix from the ashes. Here you see—I'm seeing the skyline of Pittsburgh up on this hill with the trash here and there's this gleaming object, and I knew in my heart that this was—I had a winner.

It was fun. It was *comfortable*. I made all the right—I guess 30 years of making stuff, it came into play. I made all the right bends in all the right places. It was comfortable. It was iconic. I knew that no matter how brilliant of an architect you are, you're reduced to the fact that you've created an iconic chair. Which is kind of sad in a way, but it's a great advantage for me—because I'm not a great architect. [Laughs.] So I have it easy—so my goal was—and that I knew that I had kind of an iconic chair—and at that time recycling wasn't that big yet in this country.

In Switzerland, they've been doing it for decades but here they finally—people woke up. So in a weird sort of way, I was at the cutting edge at the time of this whole recycling thing, in the right place at the right time. So I thought, I've been ripped off now three times and it's happening again and again. I have to do something.

So I hired a intellectual property, IP lawyer, Adam [Pollack]—something—anyway—and he advised me on how to proceed to protect my designs and I hired a person to make exactly the correct kind of sketch to get a U.S.

design patent. I hired the guy—I think it cost me 2,000 bucks to get a patent—and I decided not to be stupid and put my chair in the show.

I thought, you know what, do I really need this little local bang from—get an 'atta boy from my friends just because I came up with a cool chair, only to have Little Earth go and knock it off shortly thereafter? I thought, that's not fair, that's just not fair. I put too much into this, you know? All my life and two days, to make a chair. So I hid that and I made a decoy—my first ever decoy chair —

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BALLY:—which was made—at the time I had these golf clubs and I was experimenting with crushed cans, and so I made probably the ugliest piece of artwork I've ever made in my entire life, made out of upside-down golf clubs which kind of radiated out of this crushed-can stool with a hand-hammered top—ugh—and I sent that to the opening. And I went to the opening and my friends literally said, you know, dude, you're slipping. That's really, kind of, eh.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BALLY: I said, "Well, I had kind of a hard year and it's been an off year and knowing"—I felt like the cat that ate the canary—I knew I had a, ooh, secret weapon at home. Oh, just you wait. And I have to say it was a really smart thing that I protected it. In fairly recent history, somebody completely knocked me off and it served me well that I had a patent. I was able to disband him, so it was not a dumb move. I also learned that you have to choose where you're going to launch something very carefully.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So where did you launch the chair? When did you launch it?

MR. BALLY: Where did I launch the chair? Oh my God, where did I launch the chair? I think I launched it—I must have gotten the patent in, maybe, '94? So '95 would have been the big launch—where did I launch it? I think I was doing the New York gift show [New York International Gift Fair] at the time—either that or Baltimore. And I'm pretty sure it was one of those and I just got tons of orders. And I also—I changed it so that it could come apart so that you could—KD construction so you could ship it cheaply and it was all the right elements. It was recycled; it was what I thought was affordable. I thought $1,000 for a chair is what—for a special chair, people are willing to pay that. My father thought it was the craziest idea.

And here's a great story. My critical father, when I showed him the chair that I first made, I said, "Dad, is there anything that you would change? I value your opinion, obviously, you're a great designer." And he looked it up and down and he couldn't think of a damn thing. And I was, like, whoa, *that's* a compliment. And my dad got really excited that I was doing something kind of closer to his world, chair design. So I always have a special place for that in my heart.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. And they're interesting, too, because not only did they hit on the recycling theme and the recycled materials but in terms of the history of metalsmithing and jewelry, they are some sort of enamel on aluminum, is that correct?

MR. BALLY: Oh, yeah. Well, at first I didn't even realize that. And as I was starting to work with traffic signs, you know, I'd walk into my studio with the light on behind me before I turn on the light switch and it would just—, whoo, it would light up. You know, at first it's, kind of, subtle, and you ignore it, and then after a while it's, kind of, hard to ignore it. Wow, why do I love coming to my studio again? Oh, because they smile at me.

Then as you start sifting through the different signs, you get to see some are painted, some are reflective, some are even more reflective. So after a while I started realizing—I think I looked it up on the Web or actually I spoke to sign manufacturers because I had to get material safety data sheets in case there was any lead content for some of the potentially useful vessel forms. And in that process, it unveiled to me that these things actually contain glass particles.

And I guess 3M has some kind of a trademark or patent on the process. But to me, it intrigued me that what I was creating was kind of an urban enamel. That it was an enamel that was all around us, kind of stripping enamel of its kind of pretentious place in society—the goldsmiths, specifically, the enamelists who spend tedious hours making little precious baubles for wealthy people. Here I was grabbing it off the damn traffic signs and changing the context. And it still retained a lot of mystery because of the luster and the depth and the reflectivity.

And recently, in the very recent history, I've started to flirt with—I noticed at the scrapyard when I went to get the signs, that they were cutting them with a blowtorch. I noticed just where they had started cutting them that it was starting to amalgamate and create kind of a vitrification or a melting of the glass with the plastic. So that's launched this whole—and actually, that's in the show *GlassWear* that Ursula Ilse-Neuman is curating and is

actually about to open in New York in, I think, July maybe?

And so again—oh, and this is a funny story—Ursula, who I have to say is my new best friend. I mean, this woman comes from the jewelry tradition, so I—to be honest, I didn't even know who she was. I met her at SNAG once—Oh, hi, nice to meet you. She said, "Well, I am curating a show that has to do with glass, do you do anything with glass?" I said, "As a matter of fact, yes, my traffic signs." She said, "Ah, ha, I never thought of that before. That's very interesting. Are you making any wearables?"

I was like, uh—uh-huh. [Laughs.] Sure, I can do that. I have been doing that. So I said, "Let me see what I can come up with." So we kept in contact and I showed her, based on that cutting idea, I started experimenting and I knew that I had to market this in a way that didn't sound as crude as it was. So the next time that we talked, I showed her what I was doing. And she said, "Ah, this is in the show, this looks really wonderful. There's glass-containing, there's glass in it, it's kind of cutting edge, it's something I've not seen before."

And I have to tell you, I personally responded to the natural way—the signs became less pop-y, less one-liner, less graphic, they became more organic and more almost animal-skin-like in the melting process. So it totally changed or pulled away from the obviousness of the signs, which held my attention for awhile.

So I showed her this and she said, "So tell me, what is the process?" I had my answer ready. Now I want to see if I get this right. I called it something like torch—no—it was thermodynamic vitrification.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BALLY: She said, "Wow—tell me, what is this process? I've never heard of that." I said, "That's because I made it up." And she said, "Well, tell me about it." And I said, "No, first tell me am I in the show or not?" And she said, "Oh, of course you're in the show, this is wonderful." I said, "Good—in writing. Okay, now, I'll tell you."

Basically, I light up the torch and I burn the shit out of the signs [laughs] and see what happens. And then I cut out the best part. She's, like, "That's it?" I said, "That's it [laughs]." Because I was afraid that she'd think it was so stupid and base but she was—I respected that it didn't change her opinion of the piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I would think not.

MR. BALLY: I thought that was pretty cool.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Thermodynamic vitrification [laughs]—it was a pretty apt description.

MR. BALLY: Well, and the funny thing that I've learned is that people pay attention to how you label things. It's all part of the marketing package—how you photograph, how you name it, how you present the thing, where you present the things. So that's always—and again, Phil Renato-slash-Carrizzi, or formerly Carrizzi, has picked up the ball with that because whenever he makes a piece, he creates a catalog, he has a prototype, he has a finished piece, he writes a poem for it, he has all the promotional stuff. And it's already blurring design and craft and it's, whew, that guy is going to hit the ground running, you know. He has to come up with a product but —

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Right about the same time that you were doing this, you started off on a completely different trajectory, which was the *Pistol Chalice*. And that was the first piece that involved —

MR. BALLY: Guns, weapons.

MS. RIEDEL:—weapons, yes? Yes.

MR. BALLY: We'll touch on that in a sec but I also, at this moment, I really need to, kind of, tip my hat to a guy named Bob Ebendorf, who I couldn't even be doing what I'm doing today without having—J. Robert Bruya was one of my friends in the area who was doing stuff with bones. As a little kid, I'd seen shows of his torque neck pieces with bones and feathers and so that paved the way to what I'm doing. Bob Ebendorf has paved the way into recycled materials being even thought about.

So when I met Bob, I have to say, we totally hit it off and he knew that I got that he had led us this way. Just like Kiff Slemmons had. You know, she's in that group. And so when I met Bob—and that brings us back to the Victoria and Albert—he's the one that arranged for—he was the liaison to the Victoria and Albert for me, as also with the Brooklyn Museum—I think that was him—and the Museum of Arts and Design. Once he realized that I was a guy worth investing in, he was very generous, took my work and saw that it was placed in a way that would benefit me. Which—try to find somebody to do that for you. That's amazing. And it's also a responsibility because now I want to try to do that [for someone-BB].

But to back up to your question of the guns. I'm in my studio and I get a call from Derwin Rushing, a local attorney, I think he is, who said that they were doing some work with guns, with the Pittsburgh gun [buy]-back,

Goods for Guns Anti-Violence Coalition. Had I heard of it? No, I hadn't. Could he bring his group by to see our studio? He heard that I was, like, the metalsmith of Pittsburgh that might be interested in doing something. And I thought, sure, studio tour, no problem.

So he brought by Phil Dacey, who was at the time, I think, the SWAT commander for the city of Pittsburgh, Lt. Phil Dacey, Matthew Masiello, who was a pediatrician from a hospital on the North Side—I forget—it's been so many years I forget which exactly, specifically, hospital, and Derwin Rushing came to me holding an article from the *New York Times*, two young artists in Louisiana had done an exhibition with guns. And they wanted to do something like that. They had done the Pittsburgh buyback program for, I think, two years prior and had had great results buying back these weapons for gift certificates, annually around Christmas time at various locations throughout Pittsburgh.

But it was a one-liner and they wanted to do more to educate. I let them know that the proper way to do this—and I liked the idea, I thought it was a great idea—up to that point, I hadn't really done anything overtly political, more subversive, trying to be, wanting to have a good cause and do good but not really having, being affiliated with any movement or anything. So I said, "Guys, you've got to call"—I forget the two peoples' names who had the show, [Jonathan Ferrara, has a gallery in NOLA; Brian Borello-BB] Jonathan something—"let me talk to them to see if they're interested in bringing that show up here, what their intentions are, if they welcome continuation of their seed—this is their idea."

So I talked to them down in New Orleans and said, "Look, these guys are approaching me, I'd like to do something, specifically, to metalsmiths, for the reason that guns are made out of metal and it's metalsmiths, more or less, that made the guns." To me it was poetic that the metalsmiths could then take that and undo them—the swords to plowshares biblical notion. And the New Orleans guys were really, really cool about it. I said, "I know—I'm going to mention that you were the spark."

Whatever it is we do, I'm very aware and thankful for your bringing this spark. I will footnote you. I will give you credit. I welcome you to participate and anyone you think should participate. But what we're going to do is we're going to have an exhibition. We're not sure yet what. And they gave me their blessing. And I thought, you know, I've been down this road before. I have actually never, I never curated an exhibition so that was, again, something that I wanted to do, to learn. My little master's idea wanna-be thing.

So I thought, all right, what does it take to curate a show? I thought, I'm a busy guy—teaching, showing—I want to set up a committee to help me and I've never really worked on a committee. So I wrote down the names just so I don't get them wrong—it was Lucy Stewart, a local metalsmith, Elisabeth Agro, who was—I think it was also Rachel Layton.

MS. RIEDEL: Was Sarah Nichols part of this too?

MR. BALLY: Yes. I will get to that. Anyway, I'm pretty sure that it was Elisabeth Agro, who also helped me start PMS—Pittsburgh Metals Society. As soon as I moved to Pittsburgh, I decided that I would start a metals group. So I got together a couple people and we had meetings all the time, brethren of sorts. Knowing that, I got together a committee to help share the workload and we decided that we would do this hook, line, and sinker.

We would invite anybody who wanted to come. They had to call themselves a metalsmith, whatever that meant, to make the point. They had to submit a drawing. They had to submit something like $20 or $30 to show that they're serious, and then we would send them a weapon—disabled weapon—which I had to disable with a welder with the lieutenant watching. I mean, that's a whole other story, wonderful story. So we got something like, not sure exactly the quantity, but something like 85 entrants from around the world, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you advertise it?

MR. BALLY: Through—the Internet wasn't big then, so it was through mailings. I had a database. I was really, really good at organizing stuff like that and I sent it all over, put a bulletin in *Metalsmith* and really word-of-mouthed it. Anyone welcome and what we will do, to get, to entice people, we will get prizes and we will get a distinguished jury, which was Donald Stuart from Canada—Barrie, Ontario—Gail Brown, who was an independent curator from Philly, and Sarah Nichols, who was at the time chief curator of decorative arts at the Carnegie Museum, who agreed, graciously, to accept our minor honorarium, which I think they even, might have donated back, to come and jury the show.

The reason why I set that up is I didn't want to be put in the position, being the bad guy if I cut something. I was too insecure with my own place in the field at that time. So it wasn't a bad idea. Then the other prong of this was we had to do some fundraising because we wanted a catalog. I knew at that time that a catalog was a really important thing to have. So I went around and I fundraised and I think we pulled together $6,000, $8,000—which is not bad for a little guy.

So we were able to have a catalogue, able to award prizes—Lucy Stewart, I believe, wrote the statement for the catalog, the name of the wonderful designer [Stan Mamula designed catalog-BB] who did the catalog will come to me, hopefully—anyway, we printed out X amount of catalog. Everybody in the show got a catalog. The way the selection process worked was we—out of 85 or 90 entries—we picked 50 for the first show, which opened at the Hewlett Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University—beautiful show, wonderful opening, well-attended, well-reviewed. And then first—I think it was the first 50, no, first 50 or 60 were in the show—50, I believe, made it to the catalog. And then we decided that since it was so successful and eye-opening and political, we would allow it to travel.

So we selected, I think, 20 or 30 works that could travel and I ended up putting together and marketing, finding the different venues—I think it was five or six venues, I know Torpedo Factory was one, which is a great place to have it. There was something down in, oh gosh, I can't even remember it. The Philadelphia Clay Studio was one—numerous. And I ended up being kind of OCD about being organized about details. I'd learned how to do the paperwork and fill it out, make sure there was the right binders to go with the show, write publicity —

MS. RIEDEL: That's an enormous amount of work.

MR. BALLY: It was an enormous amount of work. And I have to say, Lucy Stewart handled the brunt of it.

MS. RIEDEL: And did the different venues pay for it to come and travel there?

MR. BALLY: No, no, they didn't have to pay.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you fund that?

MR. BALLY: We—what?

MS. RIEDEL: How did you fund it travel?

MR. BALLY: I think we just kind of sucked it up or—I don't remember—possibly they paid for the shipping—which, real honestly, it wasn't a lot of money. It was all kind of bite-sized work. And I think they specifically chose the pieces that could travel, that's why we culled it down to that. The end result was that a few of the pieces sold to the Smithsonian, which two—I think, two of the pieces, including my ex-wife's, are in the Smithsonian. And then Mickey—Florida jeweler guy, who had a wonderful charm bracelet with different components from the gun set in gold with diamonds was the other one. Mickey Johnston, Mickey Johnston—who is now a tattoo artist, imagine that. So he owes me a tattoo now. [Laughs.]

And I have to tell you that the favorite thing about working with found objects—weapons, traffic signs—is that I get to work with people. It's all about relationships. I get to work with scrap dealers. I get to work with lieutenants of the SWAT commander force, you know, whatever. I get to work with politicians. I get to work with a huge cross section people that are basically all really wonderful people and very accessible. And I love—I think that's almost—an artist's role is not to be alienated from the public but rather infiltrate and be a part of society. I've always loved where this work has eventually steered me, and this is a really great example of it.

After this gun show traveled and it came down, I was relieved—a lot of work [was] over. All the pieces went back to their homes. Everybody's really pleased. I did a follow-up e-mail with all the press. I felt really like I learned a lesson in what curators go through, too. How much work it is—how could you know if you never did it? So it gave me new appreciation.

But it also connected me to the city of Pittsburgh's buyback program. So after the show was done, they kept disabling—they kept collecting weapons. At one point I thought, whoa, I've got this great opportunity here, I've got all these weapons. And I never saw myself as a sculptor—I've made a couple smaller sculptural pieces but nothing worth writing home about and so I entered a competition here in Providence called Convergence which was, I think, the year 2000.

And I entered the competition and got in. It was a name who escapes me—I had so much—he started the entire Convergence thing [Bob Rizzo-BB]. He used to work for the parks and recreation department here. And he accepted my proposal for the *Gun Totem*. This thing was 12-foot tall and weighed 10,000 pounds or something. I'd never worked larger than breadbox size. I want to get his name because it is really important. I just haven't been in touch with him for [laughs] nine years so—*Gun Totem*—I'm writing a note here.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was really the first large-scale public installation?

MR. BALLY: Yes. So it was the kind of thing where they said, "Hey, congratulations, you were able to go in here. Basically, we're going to fund your piece. And we're going to give you—so let's do it." And I was, like, oh my God, yay, yikes! I'm terrified. I've never made anything that big. But at the same time, what a challenge.

Peter Nassoit was my assistant at the time and helped me with the entire project. Dan Niebels was my assistant—no—I was his mentor from the Met School [the Metropolitan Regional career and Technical Center]. He was sort of my apprentice from the Met School, which is a regional high school, kind of vo-tech around here—alternative high school.

So I had these wonderful resources of wonderful people, minds to help me. And I went to Pittsburgh—Dan Niebels came with me—and I disabled 3,000 weapons, or some exorbitant amount. I don't know what the exact amount was, but we really set up a very meticulous way of disarming these weapons. The SWAT commanders of the city watched and explained how to disable each weapon so it couldn't be operable again. It was kind of interesting—a whole different world I'd never entered.

So we were able to disable these, throw them in the van, bring them to Providence. It was quite a heavy load. I kept worrying—I had to get a letter from the city of Pittsburgh to make sure that if I got stopped by a trooper, he wouldn't think I was starting a militia somewhere. And I kind of promised with a handshake, a wink, and a nod that I would use this for good—only, specifically, for promoting nonviolence and the buyback program. And that if any major releases went out that were, maybe, not exactly what they wanted, that I would check with them first, or—any project, keep them in the loop.

So we brought these guns, made a wonderful mold for the *Gun Totem* to be, checked out a site which happened—I was very pleased—right across from Superior Court here in Providence, which—I couldn't think of a better place for it. Ironically, it stands—it's kind of the little penis next to the immense, World War II, manly, erect monument to World War II veterans. And mine's like the little guy between Superior Court. It's okay—size isn't everything. But to me, it was big. [Laughs.]

I created a mold in the studio, way overbuilt it, had kind of a brainstorm of how to do it with insulation form, and then pour the concrete in. We wired guns to the exterior of the inside mold so that some guns would be appearing on the outside, too—so they wouldn't all sink to the bottom. We got a concrete truck to come and pour the mold, and then we chipped away at it. Jeff Johnson, who was my tenant at the time, who also helped me renovate my building, who is now my webmaster, and also my photographer, is a master welder. And he welded the gigantic footplate to the reinforcement rod that goes on the inside, with the crane hook at the top. So it was really a collaborative effort.

And when the concrete cured, we pulled away the mold, cut the wires, and chipped away at it, and got a crane—Bob Rizzo is the name that I—and I owe everything to him, because he saw in it the vision to do this—from a jeweler. I mean, that's a leap of faith, I'd say. Anyway, so he allowed for a crane to come and erect it so that we could chip away more and get it ready to finish, to bring on site. We went to the site, mounted the mounting holes, got a crane, with much to-do brought the crane to erect this monument.

And I remember feeling, like, oh my God, I can't believe a jeweler that made things like this 20 years before is making a 12-foot-tall sculpture. I attended a lecture by Albert Paley at SNAG, and I have to tell you, what I do is so small in comparison. He showed some 80-foot-tall steel structure. Somehow size, I guess, does matter, when you're talking metals. It involves weight and work and planning, and a knowledge and understanding of materials that you wouldn't otherwise have to worry about. Because you're not going to get killed by a piece of jewelry—well, depending on whose jewelry.

MS. RIEDEL: Danger.

MR. BALLY: Right. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: But you've always identified yourself, too, more as a metalsmith than as a jeweler. So in some ways it makes sense.

MR. BALLY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did the transition to the *Brave* necklace come, with the triggers?

MR. BALLY: Well, knowing that a lot of these guns were going to be not seen in this sculpture—and I think there are 2,000 guns in that gun sculpture, the *Gun Totem*—I decided to, for SNAG, I was invited to make a piece for—it was at the San Francisco SNAG conference—a piece for the runway. They selected, I guess, a dozen jewelers or so to have a piece worn by models, for this one kind of—exhibition of motion, I think it was the first year they did that.

And I thought, hey, that's kind of cool. That's an opportunity to make something that has to be blatant, stand out, be powerful, doesn't necessarily have to be that wearable—but make a statement. So I remember, I think it was four days before SNAG, working all day, all night. Did I have kids then? I think we had just had Etai, my son, at the time. It was probably around 2002. Yes, I guess he was probably about two.

So being a fresh daddy, and knowing that I had SNAG coming up [inaudible] and things, San Francisco. And having a wife—I think she was a resident at the time, or a fellow, or something. Some major—her business was just insane. I remember being so worn-out, and I have this terrible picture of me wearing the final thing, like the night before flying to SNAG. And I have these black eye-rings. I look like hell. I look like death.

But having the insight to know that some of these guns weren't going to be seen, I thought, you know, this is material. You've got to use all the material. Use it up, wear it out, right? So I clipped out some of the triggers, and I clipped out 100 of the ones that you wouldn't see. Ironically, what I thought was gigantic now led to a piece of jewelry that's more intimate, and somehow connected, which now belongs to the Bowling Green University collection. And that was *Brave 1*.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a beautiful, strong piece.

MR. BALLY: It's okay. I don't think it's beautiful. I disagree. It was a phase-one piece. It was a, you know what, I've got three days—let's make a really cool piece—sort of thing. I remember wearing it, myself, to opening circulation night at SNAG. And it got a lot of attention. People would come over and touch it, and I always was struck by how, almost immediately, people respond to weapons. It's kind of an immediate conversation and a connection. A lot of people have told me a lot of private, scary stories to do with weapons, in the course of dealing with them. It's a loaded topic.

MS. RIEDEL: But it's interesting because there's all sorts of interesting metaphorical references, I think, to Native American jewelry, and —

MR. BALLY: Oh, absolutely. And also inspired by Kiff Slemmons, who made the breastplate made with pencils. I mean, what is more iconic than that groundbreaking piece that paved the way to opening my eyes that something like this could be done? Of course. My first jewelry was actually Native American jewelry. A guy named Hunt—I think it was Ben Hunt—wrote a book on Native American silversmithing.

So in between courses I would go through that, and learn about how to make your own punches, and how to work silver—and a lot of my first rings were Native American. I used to make headdresses, bows, weapons. I used to be into that Native American culture. I had a beading loom. My first jewelry was actually beaded on a beading loom. I used to make chokers and wear them, with long hair, and everybody said to my parents, you have such a nice daughter. [Laughs.]

So it's not a short stretch that I would be interested in that. And the thing that always inspired me was kind of the talismanic nature of a lot of the indigenous cultures. They would take something from the ground, carry it, and it would power them against whatever it was that they needed power against.

The Native American fetishes, they have little stone—I remember a trip with my parents to the Southwest, and we would go to Indian trading posts. They would have these fetishes, and I would collect them—carved-bone whales—I still have them somewhere in a shoe box to give my kids. That stuff somehow connected me. And I love the—specifically, in our Native American culture—the bear-claw necklace struck me as this—it made people look fierce, frightening, powerful. And it was pretty much the claws of a bear ripped out, that they probably killed. So of course it's going to make you feel powerful against something that you took the life of, or took a part of.

So for me, it was an easy shoo-in to the disarmament of a weapon and plucking, ripping this kind of Jabberwocky monster, this unknown, dangerous weapon thing that takes people's lives—ripping out the trigger and embellishing one's neck with it seemed like a natural thing. And I don't think it's anywhere near as striking as Kiff Slemmons's breastplate, which, I think, is in the Museum of Natural History, or—some Smithsonian, maybe the Renwick. I think she might have made that when I was a teenager. Maybe?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I think she made a couple of those. I can't remember the titles of them right now, but they are really powerful pieces.

MR. BALLY: And again, I have to say thanks to my parents, who always were interested in art. My mother got *American Craft* magazine, and she would say: Oh, look, here is a jeweler—Rebecca Scherr, Mary Ann Scherr? You don't know her? Mary Ann, maybe. The Scherr woman, who, I think, taught at the University of Akron, who hybridized industrial-design safety monitors into wearable jewelry. And my parents would constantly be shoving this stuff under my nose as a kid.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BALLY: Yeah, so I mean, I was very fortunate as an artist to have hit the ground running—not so much studying it as much as just kind of absorbing it. It was a pretty fortunate thing.

MS. RIEDEL: So what are you working on now?

MR. BALLY: Well, I am pleased, very pleased, to tell you that I am excited with—this year is the year of starting a new direction, of starting to make new stuff. The past 10 years has been young children, autopilot, manage my business, buy a house, stay alive. And also, through having children, learn how to delegate certain things I didn't need to make and how to organize much better how I work.

And now, living away from my studio, I've had to even organize that—hyper-organize it—so that every little moment is a productive moment. But this year is the year of eye-opening. I've started by making—I've never made an armchair. I've always been a little afraid, because making just a regular chair is kind of a no-brainer—or not as much of a challenge as an armchair. An armchair has a lot of different angles, and a lot of different human factors, elements to consider. So I designed the *BroadWay* armchair. I'm really pleased with it.

Now the next direction is going to be my dream tool—which I had access to, to make the large municipal garbage cans through the steelyard—sadly, they had an accident with it. And now they're no longer allowing, I think, me, specifically, to use it. And I've kind of backed off of my collaboration with the steelyard. But that's my dream tool that they have, that nobody's really using—that I would like to create a series of furnishings, furniture that has to do more with curvilinear, softer forms like this.

You know, have a small slip roll—I need an industrial-strength slip roll that won't break every time I shove a huge piece through it. And I want to create, like Frank Gehry—you know, Bilbao to that sort of flavor. But on a more personal, kind of usable level. Not to say that he's not personal or usable. He's a genius. In my next life, I would like to come back as Frank Gehry.

MS. RIEDEL: As Frank Gehry? Okay, duly noted.

MR. BALLY: Hey, do you mind if I take a quick break?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, let's take a break.

MR. BALLY: Thanks.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: So before we move onto discussing exhibitions over time, let's talk briefly about the Subway chair, which is the newest of the chairs started, you said, in 2007, yes?

MR. BALLY: 2000—yes, something like that. [Side conversation.]

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because you've had to work with the MTA in order to be able to use this material, correct?

MR. BALLY: Yes. And what happened with this entire offshoot of the traffic sign series happened kind of more subversively, maybe in around 2001 or so, when I went to—what I used to do frequently is to get scrap traffic signs from wherever I could. And one of the places that I'd figure I'd try was I'd call different sign manufacturers and see if they had any discards.

And in the course of that exploration, I found a really nice guy named Tom Coyne, who was the CEO, or the head, of a large design company who actually gave me the time of day, invited me into his place of business to go through the scrap and buy it from him.

And he and I have developed a relationship over maybe a decade even, where he's a patron and he also is just kind of tickled with what I do. But at the time when I first met him, he said, oh, you're the other traffic-sign guy. I was like, what, hello? What? So tell me who else is doing this kind of work?

And he said, "Well, there's a woman, Mary Carothers, who comes in here, and she's at RISD and she is making a series of signs that we're developing especially for her with imagery—like the one that you're sitting on right now—with deer horns, and she's taking specific icons such as Kentucky Fried Chicken, you know, Colonel Sanders logo and adding the Harley biker dude. She has, like, a mudflap biker chick one and she has an alien—a blue alien, which is just amazing imagery. And what she's doing is somehow doing some kind of installation with it, taking a photo and that becomes a piece of artwork."

So I thought, wow, wouldn't it be cool if I could use her—do a collaboration where I use her imagery and I'll bend it up into my chairs and creating kind of a new dimension to this, which, again, is not recycled. So he put me in touch with her and we worked on a collaborative series of chairs which we actually brought to SOFA Chicago and

debuted there with the Thomas Mann Gallery I/O.

I don't think we sold any. And I'll tell you the truth, I don't think they were that successful because again, they were new signs. I think the icons were just so strange that they weren't that recognizable. But what that did is it kind of opened my eyes to the making of signs. I didn't realize so much how they were made and it opened it as a possibility.

Now, shortly thereafter, I'd been doing the New York gift show booth, taking wholesale orders, opening doors, trying to sell my work. One of the fellow participants, Lynne Lambert, who runs the—I think her company's called something like New York City Subway Line. She is a licensee of the City of New York's MTA and creates T-shirts and wearable purses and stuff like that to do with the New York City graphics.

So pretty much, once you're a licensee, the deal is you can use anything that you want to do with the subway and you have to pay them a royalty. But she came to my booth and said, "You know, you should do this." And I said, "Oh yes, that's great, thanks, have a nice day." She's very wonderful but at the time, I wasn't open to the idea.

Shortly thereafter, another friend of mine, a fellow exhibitor, Ward Wallau of Tokens & Coins, who uses the subway tokens in his jewelry, came over to me and said, "You know, Boris, you really should think about becoming a licensee. This is really something that might open a new direction for you." So again, I ignored it.

And then in the third year that I did the New York gift fair, both of them came to me and I thought, you know, okay, great idea. I think I'm going to run with it. So they—actually, with their guidance—set me up with Moxie, who is the person who takes care of—two people who take care of the licensing arrangements with the City of New York—with the MTA, who I think is part of the City of New York.

MS. RIEDEL: Is Moxie the name of the person or —

MR. BALLY: Moxie is the name of the company. [Laughs.] Yes, Arlene Scanlan is the woman that runs that. So she set it up with me to meet with Mark Heavey, who heads the licensing program at the MTA. And they invited me to come give a presentation for—I think it was 50 licensees that they now have.

And I had to give a presentation at the MTA on—what is that? Lexington or some major, big-deal place in New York, in the MTA building. It was really apparent that I was very different; that I kind of had—they were looking to me to fill a niche that they had never considered, which is the art niche. They saw me as, like, a crazy artist. I'm not making widgets; I'm not really making products. I could and where could it go? They had nothing to lose.

They agreed to allow me into the program and I had to sign a contract—like, a two-inch contract that really terrified me. And again, kind of flirting with corporate America, which is kind of cool in a way to have some little artist guy being able to do that.

So based on that, Mark Heavey from the MTA sent me some of the graphics that I requested, specifically the Times Square station. I wanted graphics that were recognizable, punchy. Their graphics are beautiful, anyway.

Then the map, which particularly struck me—this is something iconic, that everybody—even people that aren't from New York—can see the visual beauty of it, the colorfulness and the recognition of the map; and especially the New Yorkers who just love and cherish New York and what it stands for. It's such an amazing place. Me, personally, for all the time I've spent going to the East Village to visit, you know, James Gialamas and Nico, my brother Nico, and hang out there. So to me, it spoke trips on the subway.

So I thought, all right, I'm going to take this imagery and go to Tom Coyne at NES Signs [ph] and see if he can make signs for me. I took these huge—I think they were PPS files or something like that—some program; I didn't even know. So big. I got them on a CD from MTA, gave them to Tom, and he created for me large-scale signs—big enough that I could glean the components to make the chairs. And the idea was to first start with the chairs and see where I could go.

When I signed on with the MTA, I actually got a really wonderful tour uptown of where they store the subway trains and the different materials that they hold. The initial idea was that I could use the recycled New York signs. So they showed me all the ones that they've kept in the oil room, in the darkest dungeon of the MTA servicing area. And they're beautiful.

But a big problem was that the older signs that were so wonderful were actually enamel on steel. So I couldn't bend them, I couldn't manipulate them. I would try happily; the problem was, they had value to them; they would sell them to me for $200 a piece at least. So basically, the material that I'd get free recycled just didn't make sense. So I thought, I'm going to make these signs, which is what led me to the sign guy.

I backed up a little—I'm sorry, but [laughs]—try to clarify.

So anyway, so I got a couple of these signs. They were very, very expensive to make but the $300 apiece that I spent on the signs were at least $300 that I spent for signs that I could bend, unlike the ones that I would have spent at the MTA.

So I made the chairs, and, wouldn't you know it, some New York magazine—it made it to the editor's page and people started liking them, buying them. They had to go for a lot more money because they weren't recycled anymore. But to me, it opened my eyes that you can actually make signs. It doesn't have to always be about recycling.

The problem that I had with the New York series—so far, the problem that I am having, and I'm trying to come to terms with—is that the signs are new and I really don't feel comfortable with that. It's almost like a backstep. To me, it should be about recycling, and we are in kind of a green era, and it's irresponsible.

So what I'm trying to do is to get just the films—the superficial films—made and apply them onto the recycled furniture or furnishings, whatever. So it still retains—it's still 99.9 percent by weight recycled signs, just with some exciting imagery on it. So I'm not sure exactly how that's feeling or fitting, but right now, I'm selling—I have a commission right now for a large, six-seater table made from exactly that technique—taking pre-bent panels of traffic signs and then laying the film over it carefully so it looks like it was always meant to be.

MS. RIEDEL: And the pre-bent signs that you're using, they don't have any imagery on them now?

MR. BALLY: Well, I specifically use the most boring ones, knowing that they're going to be covered. And sometimes what I'll do is I'll flip them over so actually the back of the sign can have some color for once because now I've got that ability to choose where I want.

Another interesting thing that I found from seeing signs from the City of Providence's scrapyard, Bernard Lebby, who has allowed me to buy the signs from the City of Providence, with the mayor's blessing, I might add—or, especially with the mayor's blessing. [Mayor] David Cicilline had to make a few calls. The department of cultural affairs made a few calls and so now I have carte blanche buying the city's scrap.

But in the most recent haul—in a few of the most recent hauls, I was able to notice that the city, in order to save money, will recycle their own signs by layering, layer upon layer, until it's not viable anymore—layering the signs with the new films.

And what that creates is a really neat—I'm not sure what the technique's called but there's this technique where you can take crayons, colorful layers upon layers, and then dig through and get the colors from underneath a normally boring surface.

So that's starting to happen. You're starting to get a topographic variety of texture and thickness and color coming forward through the worn-out top layer, which is maybe the next direction of exploration.

So now I'm actually making a few platters where I'm experimenting with layering layers on top of other layers and seeing what happens. The MTA thing is still somewhere I'd like to experiment more with.

MS. RIEDEL: The graphics are so well-suited to the forms.

MR. BALLY: Yes, and part of that is because of the scale of the graphics, the recognizable thing. But the other part is also choosing where to cut. By using the templates, where exactly that I want to cut it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. You wanted to talk briefly about the connection between Andy Warhol and the scrapyard in Pittsburgh.

MR. BALLY: I have to say that I have always respected Andy Warhol, even as a kid, obviously, because it's iconography that he's throwing back at us that's from our environment. And I have always loved his appreciation for and embellishment of the things that are all around us. So on that level.

And on the second level, he's from an immigrant family, my hometown of Pittsburgh, he went to Carnegie Mellon University; he's a Pittsburgh boy who made it big in New York. To me, as kind of a role model, kind of an inspirational figure, I kind of chuckled with the imagery that he's—with his obvious vanity portraits, he's taken the people that are the most vain and most into themselves and created a commissions structure—for survival.

And it's brilliant. I've always respected that this is an artist who understands that—you know, when you have a factory and a studio, you bring people through it. You show them. It's part of your responsibility, and you better have something that they can buy when they're coming through there, because you've got to stay alive, and to take the time to do it. And to also bring other people in as assistants—his whole business structure, I think, was

brilliant.

Not only that; that's one level. The other level is that the pop iconography, of course—and wouldn't you know it, one of my first scrapyards was Paul Warhola's scrapyard, who is Andy's brother, who happens to have a scrapyard on the north side of Pittsburgh, not far from where they housed the guns for my gun sculpture. So while I'm going to Carnegie Mellon, knowing, learning from my family that scrapyards are basically a shopping mall for artists, I went to Andy's brother's scrapyard, not knowing—it was just Paul Warhola Scrap.

I went in there, looking. Hey, do you guys have any signs? And I think at the time I was making a sculpture out of recycled copper plumbing for my BFA thesis. And he said, "Oh, you're an artist from Carnegie Mellon." Yes, my brother went to Carnegie Mellon. I said, "Yes, yes, so do you have any signs?" You know, trying to be all business. And he said, "No, you probably know my brother. He's the most famous artist in the whole world." And I was, like, "Yes, yes, that's really nice. Could I please now have some signs?" No, seriously. I was like, yes, right. I believe you—not.

And he went to great lengths to prove to me that, indeed, it was his brother that was Andy Warhol. He had to go into his office and drag a portrait of those two together. And I was, like, oh my God. You really are! I had this shocking moment, and wouldn't you know it, I actually had the wherewithal to have my camera with me. And I took a photo of him in front of the scrapyard. Paul Warhola—and in my photo, I cut off the A, so it says Paul Warhol, to make it easier for those of us who don't know.

And wouldn't you know it, Paul Warhol, when Andy died, decided that it's easy being an artist. I don't want to be a scrap dealer. And he had his world premiere opening on Walnut Street, the street where I had first sold my stuff—at the corner of Aiken and Walnut in some hoity-toity gallery. When was that? Maybe 1991? Maybe 12 years after I had graduated.

I went to the opening, and I pushed through the masses, and I found him and I showed him the photo. And I said, "Do you remember this, Paul? Do you remember this? Congratulations." And he said, "Get that out of my face. I want nothing to do with that. I am an artist now." And I thought, oh, you so don't get it. You don't get what this is about. There's no depth in you.

He didn't realize just how brilliant his brother was, and it was sad to me. I think his world premiere canvases were that he let chickens run across canvases—you know, step into paint and run across canvases. Poor guy missed the boat big time.

He also missed the coolest part of him, which was actually being a scrap dealer. You know? To me, the poetry of me taking this very pop, iconic signal, sign, bold-color thing, and—in a very natural way—being from Andy's hometown, and being able to bring this back into the public eye, knowing full well it came from Andy—spark. Coming from his brother's scrapyard—it's just poetry, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. Full circle.

MR. BALLY: Full circle.

MS. RIEDEL: A couple times.

MR. BALLY: And Andy did not graduate from Carnegie Mellon. He left—and I loved him for it. And wouldn't you know it, when he finally died they awarded him with a degree, which he would not even want. He doesn't need it. Jerks.

So now, every time I get the alumnus newsletter, he's always the first one on there, so they can brag about all the wonderful things that their non-graduate did.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about commissions. And you've done multiple commissions over the years. Which do you think of as among the most important or the most significant?

MR. BALLY: Well, I think the most important were the ones really early on—that were the associates of my parents, who had come in and out of the house to see what I did, thought it was cute, and would commission me. Larry Mayo, my parents' contractor at the time—I think he built a greenhouse for my parents, or something, fixed the foundation—bought a piece of mine. Bill Lieberman, who was our insurance guy, bought something for his wife. Neighbors up the street—I think the Salvatos.

Actually, Phil Salvato, who was a painter, who painted a lot of the portraits around here of my mom and my father—his wife needed a piece of jewelry, so he commissioned me. And early on I learned that commerce is a big part of support. I think I touched on that before.

But to me it was also—if somebody's willing to buy something, they're invested in you; and somehow they're not just all about talk. It's also about support and action. Now I see it as these people who have bought my work are shareholders of my company, and it is my responsibility to keep them happy, to make them—they're part of my extended family, because this is my work. So it is my responsibility to make them feel like they have something of value. Which is part of the whole promotional thing—to keep them feeling very comfortable that they bought an early Boris Bally, no matter how insignificant it might have been. You know?

That carried through to getting through art school. In the summers, I learned to build decks. So decks were my business for a while. I built fences and decks, and did construction, learned how to hire a team of other summer workers, learned how to do drawings to present the—pitch the idea to customers, and customer relations. And all this kind of worked into that same thought of, why are commissions important to me?

Also, some of the commissions—I wanted to mention Richard Tait of Cranium [board game company]. It was one of the funnest commissions because of where it was going to be placed. To me, I always think about, where's this going to go? Who am I dealing with? And this is a guy who invented games. He's a playful guy. He wants a playful piece of furniture, and I enjoyed the dialogue.

And this is with all the commissions. I enjoy the dialog that comes from somebody who wants something of yours, but they want you to make it special for their situation or their environment. I feel like that's even a more special thing somehow. They don't want just something that you've made. They want to push you somehow, in a direction. So it's like a conversation, and they're taking something to the next level.

One of the most exciting commissions that I got was through Linda Sinkler of Comedy Central, who came through my New York gift show booth probably around 2004. I didn't really talk to her much, [she] took my material. I didn't know who she was. I tend to—I try to be nice to everyone. I'm sure I was okay. I probably poked a little fun, or made a little joke, or whatever. Anyway, she called me up probably in July—maybe later—of 2005. They were looking for someone to make the holiday gifts for Comedy Central.

So I was very interested, and so, what are we talking about? Oh, we're talking about a thousand. A thousand—a thousand's a good number. And then I go hang up the phone, put the phone aside, and [gasps] hold my breath. Oh my goodness! Oh, a thousand, yes, no problem. I've done a thousand before. (I've never done a thousand of anything before.) A thousand, yes, I can do that. Okay.

So what are we talking about? Well, we need some samples, so I was trying to pitch the trays. She was interested in the coasters, and I thought: You know, this is a cool opportunity to work with Comedy Central. What a great place. And Comedy Central, at the time, had been bought by MTV and Viacom—they were all kind of one conglomerate, so that's who the things would go to. And I made some samples.

I think they sent up stencils for me to start seeing how their logo would fit on my stuff. And the reason why—at first, the thought of a logo turned my stomach. But then I looked at their logo and I thought: Buildings, that's cool. Comedy Central's cool. It's all cool. I'm cool with it. And then for me to spray paint on, almost like graffiti—which is very much a good match for the signs. I thought, this is a good fit. I like it. And she thought so, obviously, too.

So I had to talk to their art director, who—it was very interesting—he had to let it be known that this was his show. So I had to suck it up and listen very closely to his little nitpicking crap about this detail and that detail, and this color and that color. That's the thing about commissions: You have to learn to work well with people. So I sucked it up, and we finally came onto something we were all happy with, and we started making them.

And I think was it was—they were to be delivered no later than, I think, December tenth, or something like that. And I think I found out, probably, around October twenty-fifth that it was a go. We were ready to rock. This was going to be—and right around that time, they also said that they actually increased the number from 1,000 to 1,400. And we're talking 1,400 times four coasters; it was sets of four. So I think, through my cockiness and my bravery and my excitement for something new, I kind of forgot to think about what it really meant—these numbers. [Laughs.]

I remember the realization moment of cutting for four solid days, cutting coasters of scrap, realizing just the monumental task ahead of me. And Curtis Aric, who I talked [about] before, was my assistant at the time. He's basically a Providence-based guy who knew every local hoodlum, friend, dealer, ex-dealer, whatever—I don't mean art dealer. Anybody who needs a job. And I said, "Curtis, you're an amicable guy. Do you know anybody who needs work?" And so he pulled in friends left and right from the shadows who basically saved me.

I had to quickly think of a business model, how I was going to handle this. So I thought, all right, we're going to pay per piece. This is how we're going to do it. You guys are not contractors for me; you don't work for me. You're independent contractors. You can use your own tools; you can take the stuff home. They just need to be done. So I need these coasters. I was the person who sawed them; they were the ones who filed them. And they

pretty much camped out in the studio, night and day, until the job was done.

And it came really close to not getting done—which, of course, I never let on with any communication with Linda Sinkler. Oh, we're on top of it; no problem. Hang up; oh my God! [Laughs.] What am I going to do? What have I got myself into? And somehow, to me, it was exciting because I had never dealt with the quantity, the corporate quantities that that demanded me to—and I remember Linda, when we were talking about this, she said, "Can you do fulfillment, too?" I didn't even know what that meant. But it was, basically: You've got to pack and ship and keep track of it and put it in the boxes. So I just said "Yes. Oh, sure, fulfillment—yes, I'll fulfill the order." Doesn't that mean finish it?

So completely naively—which, I think, is a lot of the ways that I approach things is—if I knew too much, I probably wouldn't do it, so I don't mind being cocky and naïve and kind of dumbly courageous. That gets me in all sort of great trouble. Anyway, so I learned how to keep track of inventory, where the slowest spots were, how to become more efficient. I actually put Crystal P. Meyers in charge of fulfillment. She was the box person who had to put on the decals, put in—quality control—put in the coasters, and then put them in the larger boxes.

And then I had to find out where what needed to go, which hub of distribution they needed to go—from California to San Francisco to—I don't know, San Antonio. Whatever. All of the far reaches of the country. Keep track of that shipment, make sure that it was on time, make sure that it had arrived, how many were in each thing. I have never seen so many boxes in my life. That entire front showroom was filled with boxes. You could almost not walk. Literally, every day I'd have trucks coming and bringing boxes.

I never knew what a thousand looked like. You know, the word doesn't sound anything like the volume of something that you do a thousand times. It was exciting.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have to design the boxes as well? It wasn't just the coasters, it was the entire presentation?

MR. BALLY: Yeah, it was the entire presentation. And I thought, this is Comedy Central, so let's do something funny. That's what I liked about having them as a client—they wanted funny, because after all, they're Comedy Central. So I thought, what funner thing to get around Christmas time or the holidays than a pizza box? So I designed a pizza box with four cuts, one for each coaster. So it was almost like—and here's your pizza.

And they had a place to put the stickers—they did the stickers, the art department under the famous art directors. I have to say, they used the sign idea in the graphics, and I thought it was really—I was very flattered and it made me feel very important. They actually put my name on it, which is really nice. Good PR to interesting, weird places that my work had never gone before.

I have to tell you, a funny story is—I do a super-Google alert on my name to see where it comes up. Wouldn't you know, on eBay, one of those coaster sets made it to eBay, I think—for five dollars or something, it went. And I thought, you know, this is kind of cool. It goes full circle? Not everybody wanted those, but apparently they were overwhelmingly appreciated. At one point, I almost got the job to redo their lobby in New York, the Comedy Central lobby. Right now, they commissioned me to do several pieces for all their executive offices, so they have a lot of my work around the office—which is just great.

MS. RIEDEL: Permanent installations?

MR. BALLY: Yeah, the platters. [D.P.W. Platters-BB] And they also had me do a whole bunch of key chains that went out. I think they were trying to sell them. But it's just kind of cool because I never, ever would have thought of me making corporate widgets. And yet, it's kind of cool because it's a whole kind of unexplored area.

You know, that's where the money is, and that's where the work is, and who knows: If you can bend it to fit something you're comfortable with, it could be kind of neat. Mary Ann Scherr is actually not that different, if you think about it. She's making medical monitors—all right, it's different. It's more important. But, you know, it had to start with some spark.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think that's interesting in that it leads into the question of how the market for craft has changed over the past 20 or 30 years, the 25 years that you've been working. Because you have shown in an extraordinary range of venues and internationally—not at all straightforward gallery exhibitions for the range —

MR. BALLY: Yes. I think that the way that I find galleries—there are a couple ways. A few are shoot for the stars. Blindly send out slide packages of places you'd love to be, often ending up with nothing—sometimes, occasionally, piquing the interest of, you know, the director whose mission might turn in your direction.

I have to say, Patina Gallery in [Santa Fe,] New Mexico—Ivan and Ali, Ivan Barnett and Alison Buchsbaum, when they formed their new gallery, they embraced my work, and became a very wonderful springboard of the upper line of things that I wanted to do—the more art stuff that I was doing. That was their play. That was their thing. And that was good, but at the same time, you see the spectrum of how I sell my work.

At the same time, I realized that you might not necessarily sell that much of that, and I still had to worry about staying alive and paying mortgages and stuff like that. So I thought—I kept doing the Baltimore craft show, which led to the New York gift show. I knew that I had to create some things that were more affordable, and could move easily. So a lot of the way I designed work was that some of the more important, special signs or materials would go to these more special places, like Patina, like Velvet da Vinci, like the Works Gallery, which now is, I guess, the Snyderman-Works—which I don't deal with any more.

But Nancy Sachs Gallery, which was very pivotal for kicking off this traffic-sign line in St. Louis, and a lot of the nonprofits where I'd show a spectrum of the work. But some of the places were just little old ratty gift shops. Pardon me for saying ratty, but some of them did turn out to be quite ratty. Some of them that would come to the gift show were actually restaurants that would use my work for props. Some of them were movie prop houses that would come and buy my props. So I wasn't really—I wasn't picky about—I let the people choose what they responded to.

And I have a funny story about the prop house one. Wouldn't you know, on *Days of Our Lives* they created, in their soap opera, a character who had a gallery of recycled furniture. And he was this young artist who made work out of recycled furniture—mine—and it was this gorgeous, sexy soap-opera guy. I have a tape of it. [Laughs.] I have a spot of the videotape. They recreated my life on a videotape of *Days of Our Lives*. It's hilarious.

I don't know how I found out about it. I think a friend of mine who watches, sadly enough, these stupid things, told me: Boris, you won't believe it. He just taped this and sent it to me, and I somehow got it together, figuring out where that came from, and it was from this movie prop house—which, apparently, they loan props to different movies.

In the *Sex and the City* movie, where—I forget her name, the main player—little Annie, whatever [Sarah Jessica Parker-BB]—where she's having—no, the slutty one [Kim Cattral-BB] is having sex with her dream surfer guy. Right above where they're having sex is a piece of mine. So it's so funny, because you never know how these people pick the stuff. You just have to get it out there in the right—and not be picky, and let it find its mate, I guess.

So how's the market changed? I would say that the '80s was a great, lucky, fortunate time for me to try to make a living because everybody had money. Crafts was cutting edge. Crafts was coming into its own. Metal, specifically, was starting to be collectible. Specifically, functional metal—Al Paley was just starting to be a household name, and was the sexy metal god guy, who made metal sexy, who brought it to the forefront.

Jonathan Bonner, who is just an incredibly brilliant man, who was, maybe—I think he's probably about eight years older than me—who was starting to show in the East Village. It was the time of renaissance, where you could make a candlestick that was art. And it was incredibly rich because people were starting to collect it. I remember, when I launched my bottle-cork sculpture series, based on the Swiss cultural heritage of having —

[Telephone rings.]

[Audio Break.]

MR. BALLY: So we were talking about the bottle corks and talking about the '80s. My bottle corks were based on the Swiss cultural kind of collectible item, where the Swiss would have a bottle cork in the middle of the table and it would be handed down through generations, have your coat of arms and —

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. BALLY: Yes. And knowing that and taking that back to this country —

MS. RIEDEL: I had no idea.

MR. BALLY: Oh, yes.

[Side conversation.]

MS. RIEDEL: We'll pause a minute.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BALLY: So, anyways, so the bottle-cork thing specifically came from the Swiss tradition of having—believe it or not, we're a bunch of alcoholics—having wine for lunch, which is probably why they need that two-hour lunch break, to take a nap.

But I always thought it was really cool that here's this position in the middle of the table, in a place of prominence, over the one time you actually get to relax, be with people you like, and here is this really special object placed above everything else with this importance of the family heirloom—of the heraldry on it, the coat of arms.

So I took that back and, for me, I reopened that as a possibility for sculpture. At the time I had just bought a new little lathe and I was starting to sell stuff in New York to Archetype and so I thought, I'm going to make a series of bottle corks and work through learning—perfecting tube-setting, dealing with things that would later transform into the vessel series.

But having the scale be so small, it's quick to work through ideas because it's not that big. And, quite frankly, I love to drink—I'm embarrassed to say—and there is an added edge that when I go to Baltimore to the trade shows I can buy a great bottle of wine, have it on display and then write it off as the display and then drink it later [laughs], which I found out was a nice little—the IRS doesn't get the —

MS. RIEDEL: No, of course not.

MR. BALLY:—a great little loophole. But anyways, so you asked me how the sales were going. So in the '80s, say '86, I think, was about when I found Archetype—or '87—I would make bottle corks for them. They were the first people to launch these. And wouldn't you know it, they found one specific collector whose name was never made public to me because I think the gallery was trying to protect their clients—she had a vineyard, was a vintner in California; had a wine cellar; had a tasting room apparently in the wine cellar with this huge long table and had all my—she would fly in from San Francisco to go to the opening to buy my corks the day before the opening. So I never met her. All of my corks would have red dots on them. It was amazing!

Vogue magazine actually did a thing on my corks—and still to this day some people say to me—and it's really funny—they say, you know, someday you're going to be in *Vogue*. [Laughs.] And I always laugh, like, oh, that was the '80s, that was —

So it was a great time to launch stuff. People had money; they were free with it; and I needed that to carry on—also to know that I had the security now. I'll tell you, times are very different now, as you know. However, business has exponentially grown. And part of it, I think, is because I got more cunning about how to market my work.

I'm sad to say that a great percentage of people that buy art are basically pretty stupid about it. And my angle, kind of knowing this, people like what other people have or what they read about. So I knew that if I kept myself out of the equation and let the work be in the limelight and be in really great places, good museum shows, that people would not feel so nervous about parting with their money to buy my stuff—because I was going places—and never let on how young I really was by not saying my age, doing everything professionally through writing.

So luckily, with this new kind of green awareness wave, it has worked in my favor and people are scrambling to be green. I have to also say that I didn't do all of this work just to be trendy or green or suddenly be aware. But it has unfolded over 35 years.

So even though I'm aware that this is a trend, I hope—I don't want my work to be trendy. So I'm not satisfied with resting here. It's always going to—and then hopefully people will still buy it. But as far as the market, the question specifically about the market, I continue to know that I have to market myself and that I have to try to pay the bills. It shouldn't always be the first and foremost thing.

I'm nervous that suddenly it will dry up. I think that fear and nervosity keeps me always kind of working at marketing. And, like I said before, I'm not picky about who sells it except that I—my more special pieces, I want the work treated with respect. I don't like to get work back that is damaged.

I think a lot of that has to do with some of the newer venues. It's the artist's responsibility to educate the people that are handling the work. I just sent—I sent a flatware—a serving set to the Nasher Sculpture Center. Their

kind of focal center point is di Suvero sculptures, which is, as you know, all I-beams and wonderful and huge. The Nashers [Raymond and Patsy Nasher], who are just this amazing supportive family—supportive of the arts—created the sculpture center based around the need for getting sculpture, preserving and learning about sculpture, and access to the public.

I'm trying to think of the guy with that pounding hammer; Seattle Museum of Art has him [Jonathan Borofsky-BB].

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. I can't think of his name now, either.

MR. BALLY: Borofsky, Jonathan Borofsky, who happens to also be a Carnegie Mellon University graduate. I proudly wear now a shirt from the Nasher with Jonathan Borofsky on the front. They were talking about maybe collaborating somehow to make some wearable something that has to do with his work, which I think would be kind of fun.

MS. RIEDEL: Collaboration makes sense.

MR. BALLY: It could be. But part of the education thing with that specific venue, it's a good example of what's been happening. Ward Waleau [ph], who does the New York gift show—I don't do it anymore—he needed props for his booth. He asked me for props. I gave him chairs. He was kind enough to make the connection with the Nasher center to the buyer. He didn't take a commission; he was generous. And he knows that I'm going to promote him now in turn. It's a community. And we can go into the community thing later.

But these folks at the Nasher, who have multiple locations, realize that this stuff sells. We tried it very carefully and at one point we had a conversation about me coming there and them making a focus in the display. They flew me in and I embraced the opportunity. And they're just wonderful, which, in turn, made for more sales.

Then I thought, hey, this is the perfect place to launch a brand-new chair. So I sent them my brand-new chair. And they actually were the impetus for the brand-new chair, the BroadWay chair, because they said, 'Have you made anything new lately?" And I thought, you know, you're right; I haven't. I will make you something new, I promise you.

So a week before it was due at the Nasher center, I'm really glad I took the challenge and they're the ones that launched it. All of this is going somewhere—oh, so anyways, now we've gone to the next level of a relationship; it's a relationship. They are part of my inner family and I see that they're good people. They're trying to make a buck but they're also trying to be really good and have a relationship.

So I said, "You know, you have the di Suvero pieces. I don't know if you're aware of this line of my work, but I make flatware that is very I-beam-esque." I mean, it is Nasher, so Nasher. And nobody really has seen it. I haven't really gotten it out there. It's maybe four years old or so. The serving pieces are maybe a year old. I made them for a show at the Society of Arts and Crafts.

But I'm reluctant to send it to you because the flatware takes me probably a week to make a set and the serving pieces probably took maybe 120 hours. And I'm not convinced yet that I'm sure to part with it. I want to have a conversation about how you're going to treat these things and what you're going to do with them.

So I talked to the store manager—not the store buyer, but the one responsible and the one under—the ones under him who will be handling it and I said, "Look, I want you to wear gloves; this is sterling. You have to know that you can't bang them together. I want you to appreciate how long they've taken. They're not kind of the quickie-sell things. They are the kind of reach-for-the-sky. Somebody who buys a di Suvero needs to have the serving set when they're serving for the opening of their brand-new mansion, that's the set for them. That's why you will want this—and that's why you'll sell it, too."

And at the same time I gave him flatware and stuff that went with it, so they can have a more contextual display. And they were really wanting to understand. They had never dealt with fine silver before. I know that the prior buyer had worked for Neiman Marcus and had worked with gold and silver, but not hollowware, which has to be treated with respect. I also didn't want to get my flatware back all dinged and banged, which I have seen way too many times.

So, anyways, that was my little lecture on getting to become—to trusting people to try something different and being a part of the education process with that.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there specific galleries that you've shown with over a decade or two?

MR. BALLY: Oh, yes. One of the longest ones who I have a great relationship with is the Society of Arts and

Crafts. And Beth, who runs it, is just warm, and I think she sees in me accessibility and an understanding of what they're after. Beth Gerstein, and George Summers, [Jr.] who runs the shop, it's actually a great example of a nonprofit that has the heart and soul of craft in its mandate and realizes that they need to sell things; bring the public into that and then have an expansion of the public's context and understanding by having an exhibition space, which [is] carefully curated and are wonderfully fresh every time.

They're pretty much the ones that I've dealt with the longest, since 1986—the longest.

MS. RIEDEL: Over 20 years.

MR. BALLY: They are the longest. And then I'd say the next one is another nonprofit, the Society for Contemporary Craft in Pittsburgh on Smallman Street, the street where aluminum was first put into production—ironically, another connection, you know, Alcoa.

And then I'd say probably the kind of most pivotal gallery that I've ever worked with was the Nancy Sachs Gallery, which is no longer in existence, in St. Louis. She helped propel this whole traffic-sign line.

Then the ones that I think are kind of the wave of the future that I deal with on a limited basis—a show here, a show there, never a solo—is Velvet da Vinci. Elizabeth Shypertt and Mike Holmes, I think, are just a beautiful collaboration of finding and exploring and discovering what craft is becoming. And that's refreshing.

So I'm happy to be affiliated with them. And if they said, "You know, Boris, we want to have a solo show, I'd jump at that." Patina Gallery I've probably dealt with as a real craft-oriented gallery I've dealt with—in this line of work, I've dealt with probably the longest. And that's been—go ahead.

[END DISC 3.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art with Boris Bally at his home in Barrington, Rhode Island, on March 27, 2009. Disc number four.

You were talking about how your work was so well-received in the '80s and there was a lot of enthusiasm for its style and its concept, and craft in general. But then you mentioned how your work is—the business is growing exponentially and how there has been an increasing interest in this hybrid of design and art and craft. Do you think that is having an effect on the perception of your work?

MR. BALLY: Absolutely. And I have to thank the designers, the product designers for—who tend to work more with the greater public and products that are manufacturable for that. And I'd say in that late '80s, there was this desire—it was my understanding that there was this desire for the public to kind of push the boundaries of design. They didn't even know what product design was until, I'd say, probably the '80s. And suddenly design was a household word. Everything had to be designed—oh, is it designed? Suddenly, the public wanted a piece of design.

So I think that that was starting to build up, and I see it through my conversations with my father and his associates and his friends that would visit, and the conversations around the dinner table and how suddenly it's an exciting time for design. I think that the same thing happened with metalsmithing in particular, because suddenly metalsmithing, which kind of came from a more traditional standpoint, I'd say, in the '70s, where a spoon was a spoon. It had to be a spoon. Suddenly—and jewelry had to be jewelry—suddenly, you could start making more design-y objects like a candlestick that didn't necessarily have to be so functional. And you can also—you could also start flirting with making multiples.

So suddenly you were blurring the boundary between the two. I think that the designers kind of made the introduction and the jewelers might have had a little fun, nice, easy tag-along time with that, where they were able to piggyback on that kind of momentum. At the same time, my own designs didn't seem so outrageous because I could play with that pretty easily and suddenly it wasn't such a bad idea that I could make concrete-handle flatware. It was kind of a cool—yes, bring the street to the tabletop.

So I'm sure that you're right, that it has helped to sound my work or to make it open to a larger audience. And I think my own understanding of making production and delegating things out to create more volume and to also bring the price of my things down to make it more accessible to pretty much anybody. I think that's part of why the business is better, too.

And at the same time, this kind of influx of wanting to be the green trend, combined with a hybrid of craft and design, I think, has totally helped me out. And who knows where it'll go.

I wonder—I think art—has art also embraced design and craft? I kind of think so.

MS. RIEDEL: It was like that. The spectrum is spreading and the borders are blurring.

MR. BALLY: Right. And that's an exciting time for that. If you think about it, pretty much anybody and anything can do anything. Frank Gehry with his chairs and his making museums and competitions are addressing these and welcoming people from different perspectives to come and apply. I'm going to try to apply for another chair competition coming up. I don't know what I'll do, but I want to try to do something totally off the wall. But I know that it will be something that will be looked at.

I think that metals departments don't feel so tentative about allowing—as a matter of fact, I'd say they feel very supportive about allowing students to address multiples mechanical processes, production processes. And the computer has been huge in that. Now students, I think a lot of the students, for better or worse, are exploring with CAD/CAM and stereolithography and making mock-ups of something that is pretty much fertile for production, kind of easy to hand off the production.

My only fear is that throughout this excitement with the new technology, the old technology might get lost. I'm not sure if I have mentioned that before, but I hope—I think the way it's going to happen—my guess, if I could venture a guess—is that everybody's going to be so excited about computers and so excited about machines that make your work and production that soon they won't know how to make anything anymore and they'll lose the tactile sense of materials and the knowledge or the building blocks—simple building blocks of technical skill and drawing and making models.

I think that folks that have learned in their core [courses] or somewhere, will actually have an advantage, because at some point that will be deemed much more—I'm guessing—much more precious because it is handmade still and does have some kind of tactile—and people, I think, will respond to all this. Everything being information age, computer, I'm guessing that, still, much more value will be placed on things that are actually made by hand.

MS. RIEDEL: You've seen that already a little bit, don't you think, through the whole DIY movement?

MR. BALLY: I think—right, right, absolutely. The people are going off on the left there with that. Now, if those guys actually learned how to make stuff, it would be dangerous. [Laughs.]

I'm not a huge fan—I like what it stands for. It is like the punk—I heard a lecture by Andrew Wagner and I thought that was really good. And he likened this DIY movement to punk, to this insurgence, this great, vibrant new thing—throw out the old. In with the new.

The thing that frightens me about that is that it actually is throwing out the old. I think that when you come up with something new, you do have to still remember where it came from. And I think that it's dangerous to give such attention to something so shallow, at the moment. Even punk had—its roots were very clear and there was technique in punk music. Believe it or not. Everybody will know, the Sex Pistols—they were musicians, too, not just heroin addicts, but [laughs] but they actually had a basis for all this and discarded it.

But I think you can't discard something until you've learned something. You can't discard something you haven't had. That's kind of my issue with DIY. And I hope that that is understood by Andrew Wagner and —

MS. RIEDEL:—kind of the same as the swing back and forth, between technique and idea and —

MR. BALLY:—right, but you can't be Voulkos without having some knowledge of clay. I'm sorry. You just can't be —well, Albert Paley is a terrible example. You can't—you just can't be a punk without having—that's what I believe. And I think it's pretty sound reasoning.

MS. RIEDEL: It's really interesting to see what happens, what may come from those different perspectives.

MR. BALLY: I don't know who it was, but I saw this striking image—I forget where it was, but it was an image of one of these—a young graduate from some program—for his thesis, he took his bench, put it in a Brooklyn mall somewhere, and made jewelry. And I thought, this is brilliant. This is allowing people to see what it takes to make this stuff, anyone. I thought that's cool. That's DIY. That's bringing the public in, in a very novel approach, educating them, and getting them exposure in a really cool way. I forget where that was.

MS. RIEDEL: Writers—has anyone been particularly significant to you?

MR. BALLY: Well, I'll be very honest. I don't do a whole lot of reading. So to appreciate writers, you really should be kind of a reader type. I tend to read visual imagery more than anything else. But that said, the writers that have impacted me or influenced me most are people like Rosanne Raab, who has written on the field of silversmithing specifically.

I'll tell you, the people that have written about my work—I'm always curious to see what they say about it, what

is their take [laughs]. I guess that's kind of an egotistical way of approaching it. So of course every show that I'm with—I'm curious to see what they say about it. So that's kind of an honest way to tell you what I don't read.

But when I was on the board of SNAG and was in the editorial advisory committee, I thought, oh, boy, I better know what the heck I'm here with. And I, with great pleasure, realized that I'm not as maybe dumb as I think I am. And I read. And I shared with the [*Metalsmith*] editor, Frank Lewis at the time, my ideas and my suggestions and my hopes for new writers and my thoughts about the writers.

And he said, "You know, you got it. You're right now. You understand. You know why somebody might be a good writer and somebody's not." I would say somebody I'd love to continue reading is Marjorie Simon. She's also a maker, and I love her knowledge and her perspective.

And I love the context that she is a maker, though I don't think that's important at all to me. I know you had asked that question at some point. To me, it's part of the thing, my philosophy, let the people do best what they do best. Like I have a photographer. I have a webmaster. Let the spinner who does the spinning for a livelihood to spin my platters. Let the critics be critics. Let the historians be historians.

And when I get the chance to read, I love to read. I've just read Steven [Skov Holt] and Mara Holt [Skov]'s *Manufractured* catalog. And that's art. I think in our time, I think they're one of the most influential curators. Just with the spirit of adventure, with the knowledge of a really good foundation and base, with open eyes, and when they write, it's poetry. And it's sex to read their writing. I'm just like, ooh, I can't believe I'm allowed to read this, and just turn the pages.

And then I have to say Bruce Metcalf, to me, is very pivotal as a writer. I think that he is—there's nobody that's kind of taken the ball and run with this—our movement, our metal, our material, and put it in such a knowledgeable light, yet so delicately written. Sometimes not so delicately, but astute yet humor-full.

I think one thing I really liked about Bruce is he doesn't take anything for granted. He'll take a term that somebody uses loosely—"avant-garde," and he'll—now, wait a minute? Why do we use this and what does it mean? And he will do the historic research to bring to his writing. I always find it refreshing that somebody doesn't take something for granted. So he's kind of bringing history forward instead of relying on just word-of-mouth colloquialism, things that just come out.

Then I made a little list here; I'd say Toni Greenbaum, of course, Matthew Kangas on the West Coast there. And then Gail Brown, who kind of surfs between the ceramic world and the jewelry world. I always find it refreshing—more as, I guess, a curator than a writer.

Other than that, once my kids are a little older and I can dive into more reading, which I'm excited to do. Maybe when I retire, I'll read.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't see —

MR. BALLY: It was always bad manners to read at the dinner table. And I swear to God, that's only time I can ever have a moment. Lynn does that all the time; I just can't bring myself to get over the rudeness of reading, I'm sorry, at the dinner table —

MS. RIEDEL: We've talked, I think repeatedly throughout the conversation, about community and that's come out in all sorts of different ways. It seems that SNAG has been an especially important community. Have you been involved with any other particular national craft organizations? Are there any groups—I'm thinking of SOFA perhaps or other gallery people that have been significant?

MR. BALLY: I am embarrassed, sort of embarrassed, to tell you that I don't get out much. And I don't really mind that much. Right now, I'm just relishing my kids. So I don't get out much. But as far as organizations, I think there couldn't be anything more important than being a part of something. You can't possibly be everything you can be in an echo chamber. We're part of society. If you have nothing to add, that's kind of a shame. That's wasted space. And I've always been sad that my mom, who used to be very active in the weaving community—she formed—I think it was called Fiber Ten—they realized there is a strength in numbers and there's a way to kind of nurture each other.

So especially in the underling field of crafts, when you are part of an organization—SNAG pretty much is kind of the beginning and the end for me. I was in SNAG even while I was still in college. And Carol Kumata didn't take me to New York, but she met me in New York and introduced me to a few people that I'd read about in books and I couldn't believe they were real people. Shocking, these icons, oh my God—a real person sits here. Pavel Opocensky—wait, you freakin' are Pavel Opocensky and you're wearing that necklace and you're talking to me and you're asking me if I want a beer? What the? Unbelievable.

And to me, that's really, really kind of sobering, welcoming, and necessary. And to bump into—[inaudible]—in Toronto. For that, SNAG has done really, really well. Everybody, for the greater part is incredibly accessible, incredibly generous. They realize—and I think it's part of being like an underling field, especially metal, we've all kind of selected it and don't mind that it's underling. A few of us—I know Don Friedlich gave a lecture where he likened us to—one of the Swiss just won the gold [medal] in—the thing on the ice?—curling. [Laughs.] He said, "If we were in the Olympics, we'd be curling." And I always thought that that was a great quote.

We're not on the map and I guess part of that is frustrating, but part of it is refreshing in a way. We don't need to be full of ourselves and in the limelight. We've got each other. What else do we need? We're all making a living, most of us. So, yes, SNAG has been totally influential and important. And I hope someday again I can be on the board again or do something to help.

But also in my work, I'm creating a network. And, for instance, a good example is the chairs that I make. At one point, I ran out of champagne corks. And I thought, oh, my God, what am I going to do? I hate champagne. And I've collected, like, four or five and now I don't have any more. What am I going to do? Lo and behold, I thought; I had a little scheme. I'll send out an all-points bulletin over the Internet and I'll think this out. How am I going to couch this to get corks from people, make them feel comfortable giving me their corks, maybe get something in return?

So I put this out there like a seed and I sent it to maybe 100 friends of mine, who promptly sent me so many thousand corks, I can't even begin to tell you. My idea was I will refund your shipping or you can charge it to my shipper number. And no matter how many you send, I will send you something of equal or greater value. And every time I get low on corks, I'll send something out like this out again. I have gotten corks from Australia, from Seattle, from Canada, from everywhere, Switzerland. I have even gotten corks with a little stamp on them with a mailing address label with my address on it, which still freaks me out because I don't have a clue who it's from.

At one point, I actually—being Swiss and being meticulous, I have—kept track of every person, every cork they've sent, how many, and what I did to respond. And now I just can't keep up. So I'm having a hard time, but who knows where that will go? But that whole idea of community—I love that I'm taking the community's discards to make these chairs, specifically the chairs. The community has helped to make the cork. There are people behind every object. To me, there can't be anything more kind of real, somehow community-oriented.

I have never—growing up, I was never part of—hated the Boys Scouts, wasn't part of a community, didn't really see the need to have any close friends. I was very much a loner. Now I realize how empowering it is to have community. And political; I see it with—Lynn and I—I think a lot of this is learned from Lynn, just through watching how she carries herself, how she creates the communities and the collaborations that she does that are very genuine and realizing that everything is political, including in the case of Lynn—AIDS research is very political.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't think we've said that she's a doctor.

MR. BALLY: No, Lynn is an AIDS physician, who I met [when she was] in medical school and her specialty is AIDS and hepatitis co-infection, and treatment and prevention thereof. So that's her kind of cutting-edge research. Now that people can live with HIV, can lead fairly healthy lives if they take their meds, unfortunately many of the patients have hepatitis for one reason or another, and that's what's killing them, is the liver issues.

So she realized this early on in the game and also realized through trial and error that the treatment for people with both and the medicines required and their interactions create all sorts of terrible effects, including suicide. So she's realized that she needs to build a community to treat the patient—the social workers and the placement. You can't just treat the disease. You have to treat the situation.

Some of these people are homeless, and so you have to find out where they can live before they can't even think about not taking drugs, and set them up with work and set them up to deal with their psych issue, before they can even hope to get better and deal with the things that are killing them.

So anyway, through her, I realized that participating in the community—it's ironic because a lot of our paths are parallel, where the politicians, for instance, that come to these events that support her work—and specifically [Providence] Mayor Cicilline, who is gay, is an activist, is Italian and Jewish.

It's funny how many communities intersect with my wife. And at the same time, this is the city of the arts and he is a huge advocate for the arts, as was Buddy Cianci, who cut the ribbon for my building. So these politicians are realizing that art, and somehow art and medicine again, are traveling parallel. So we'll have this gigantic AIDS auction to try to raise money and I'll give something for the auction. A lot of Lynn's patients and collaborators and other docs and politicians and other artists are all at this event. And here we are, knowing two sides of the same event. This happens all the time. It's really kind of neat to see it.

That’s what I really love about Lynn, not only is she a great partner, but also a great kind of mentor in that she’s a role model and—starting to choke up—just so sincere, so sincere. And that’s what I was missing before I met Lynn, is honesty and sincerity. We all screw up, but that’s—to be Lynn, pretty good work.

MS. RIEDEL: I think we’ve done, really, a very thorough job. If you think of anything you’d like to add. You want a minute?

MR. BALLY: My Lynn. [Laughs.] No, you’ve heard it all. If there’s anything you think I should talk about. I have to say, all this art stuff and craft and design and art and—it is so put in perspective for me when I have made little versions, little collaborative projects with Lynn, when my kids Etai and Aila—it’s just so fun to be able to have a chance to sculpt their being. And it puts such a perspective on the stuff that I used to think was so very important—my work, which if you think about it is really kind of not that—it’s not going to change the world. I’m a little cog in a huge thing. But the promise of having those two little kids out there and the curiosity to see what they do with that is very cool.

MS. RIEDEL: But it’s interesting because one of the first things you’ve done for them—they’re seven and nine—or six and eight, right?

MR. BALLY: Six and nine, and going to be seven and nine.

MS. RIEDEL: You have benches for them both. Each of them —

MR. BALLY: They each have their own bench and they were really excited about it. I bought myself my first [authentic-BB] jewelry bench after all these years and we have the space for it. And I thought, you know what? They love to make stuff. Both kids love to make stuff with their hands, with their minds. And I’ve never seen them so happy. They were overjoyed. They can’t wait to go back there. In a way, it’s actually positioned well in the house because it’s kind of tucked away and out of the way. And, like, they’re so busy, I don’t want them to feel like they have to add yet one more thing.

What they are, the lurking beasts, they’re the lurking beasts of the potential direction. It doesn’t mean that I want to make them be little metalsmiths and Lynn doesn’t want them to be little doctors. They have to find their own road. But it’s one possibility that might end up one way or another. I’m excited to—we had a little sawing lesson, and I think Aila broke a whole bunch of saw plates, but she’s intrigued, and you know what? There’s a spark there. So to me, that’s very exciting that it could potentially carry on.

I know that Jack Prip leaves behind a son and a daughter who are both just amazing metalsmiths in their own right. I don’t know if I’d even like that, to tell you the truth. It’s kind of scary, but I do like the possibility and also sort of the accessibility to Dad because they’re going to understand Dad a little more because they each have a jewelry bench. But yes, that’s pretty cool.

MS. RIEDEL: Great, thank you very much.

MR. BALLY: That’s a wrap. That’s me, yes. Wow. I wish I had something deep and astute to tell my children so when I’m dead they can listen to this say, oh, Dad said that? [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: You got that covered.

MR. BALLY: You think so?

[END OF INTERVIEW.]