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Oral history interview with Gary L. Noffke,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Gary L. Noffke on December 4 and 5, 2010. The interview took place in Farmington, Georgia, and was conducted by Mary Douglas 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.

Gary L. Noffke 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

MARY DOUGLAS: This is Mary Douglas, and I'm interviewing Gary Noffke at the artist's home and studio in Farmington, Georgia, and today is December the fourth, 2010. I'm interviewing for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number 1.

So, Gary, I think we could begin at the beginning and ask you to talk a little bit about where you were born and when.

GARY L. NOFFKE: Sullivan, Illinois, which is pretty much the center of the state, small town of a little over 3,000 people, pretty much exclusively a farming community. I think there was 90-some kids in my kindergarten class and 90-some kids in my senior class when I graduated from high school. And there's probably still 90-some kids in the senior class there. [They laugh.]

MS. DOUGLAS: What year was this?

MR. NOFFKE: That — I graduated there in [1961]. So I was born in 1943.

MS. DOUGLAS: And what did your parents do for a living?

MR. NOFFKE: My father was — worked in a shoe factory most of the time that I remember. I think early on, in the war, he was some kind of guard at an — a Caterpillar plant in Decatur, Illinois, which was, you know, like a large city, almost 100,000 people, and for somebody from Sullivan, that was big.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: My mother was more or less a housewife, homemaker, and she worked later on when I'd graduated from high school.

MS. DOUGLAS: Siblings?

MR. NOFFKE: One brother, three years older, named Robert. Now lives in Forest City, North Carolina.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, not too far —

MR. NOFFKE: Not too far from you.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what was your grammar school experience like?

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, I don't know. I actually always disliked school immensely. I just did not like school. I didn't like sitting in — sitting at a desk for hours. I was happy, happy when school was out all the time — all the time. I was glad it was over.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's interesting.

MR. NOFFKE: And I never liked school even when I was in college for the most part. I did — I did like being in the studio classes. But if it was a lecture class, I disliked it. It was like sitting in church.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, so —

MR. NOFFKE: And so I had a lot of that too when I was going to school. My parents were very religious, and so

Sunday — Sundays were wasted days. You couldn't even — you couldn't even enjoy yourself in the afternoon because it was the Lord's day; Sunday night, back to church; Wednesday nights to church.

And if there was a revival within 50 miles, we went to that too, and that was every night- for the duration of whatever that was. So couple that with school and somebody that didn't like to sit in a chair — [laughs] — that's pretty much my background.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, did you take any art classes in high school?

MR. NOFFKE: We didn't have art classes in school it — at that point; I don't know that they do now for that matter. They probably do, but certainly not then, and none of the teachers had any background in art either. There was — no appreciation.

My fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Booker, was an amateur photographer and she was at — lived down the street from my family, maybe two or three blocks. And I would go down there frequently, and she let me work in her darkroom. I think I have photographs here that she took of me in the fourth grade that I hand-colored.

MS. DOUGLAS: What was her — how did you get interested in that — in the photography?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, it was just — I don't know. I don't know. It was just something — it was something else, you know. It was — it — you know, even though at that point, photography wasn't considered to be art in any way, shape or form, you know. It was something that interested me, and the process interested me, and seeing her develop film and make prints and so on — I mean, it's sort of — that's fascinating after being in school all day.

MS. DOUGLAS: What about — did you draw when you were a kid?

MR. NOFFKE: I did — I did a lot. I did a lot of drawing; particularly, I remember the fifth and sixth grade, and I don't recall early on if I — if I did much in the way of drawing, you know, in the lower grades. But I know the sixth grade I remember, I was pretty — I was really bored that year, and I did a lot of drawings of these futuristic cars. I remember doing that, and I don't know where they ever got to; probably got trashed —

MS. DOUGLAS: Your drawings?

MR. NOFFKE: — but I — I'd love to see those things now [Laughs], you know, the whole Buck Rogers-type things.

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay.

MR. NOFFKE: And I learned to write backwards. That — those were the two things I did in the sixth grade.

MS. DOUGLAS: And what was that about — writing backwards?

MR. NOFFKE: Just to pass the time. But I'm — I — I'm still pretty good at it. I mean, I can write backwards almost as fast as I can write forwards in longhand.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's interesting.

MR. NOFFKE: Every once in a while, I'll get things mixed around. B's and D's are a problem.

MS. DOUGLAS: So the fact that you didn't much care for the scholarly activities in school, did you take shop class in high school, that kind of thing?

MR. NOFFKE: No, no, I was in — I was in the other — the other curriculum for sort of college prep, you know, with the math, chemistry, physics and those things.

MS. DOUGLAS: Did your parents expect you to go to college?

MR. NOFFKE: I'd — I think my mother wanted me to go to college. I don't think my father cared. In fact, he probably — he probably didn't like the idea, thinking back, you know. But my mother supported it, and without her, without that support, I wouldn't have been able to do it, I don't think.

MS. DOUGLAS: What about your brother? Was he expected — [inaudible]?

MR. NOFFKE: He didn't — he didn't go to college. He went to work in the factory my father worked in when he graduated from high school, then left a year later and moved to Chicago in some management job, and sort of all around after that.

MS. DOUGLAS: So did you have any other influences in your childhood that would steer you toward a career in art?

MR. NOFFKE: Yes. I had a neighbor that I think probably when I was in sixth or seventh grade that — he was a painter. He was an amateur landscape painter, but he was pretty good, you know. He could paint an autumn scene right nicely. [They laugh.] And I was impressed with that. And more so, I was impressed with just the paint and canvas, the media.

MS. DOUGLAS: The materials.

MR. NOFFKE: The materials seemed to me to be worth something. They had value to them, not money necessarily, but just something worth doing that — so I mean, I was — I was — I was impressed with those paintings, just for the beauty of the material, and also impressed a bit with his ability to paint autumn leaves and things like that — [Laughs] autumn scenes and deer, you know, walking in a forest, those kinds of things, waterfalls — all of the — all of the stuff that you see in cheap art galleries.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were — the town you grew up in, was it rural around the town or —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, very much so. I mean, there were — there were — the towns of size in that area were Mattoon, which was east of Sullivan; that was 20 miles. That was a town of maybe 40,000 people — 30,000, 40,000 people. Decatur, at that point, was maybe 70,000; it was 25 miles a little bit northwest of Sullivan. Champaign-Urbana was northeast, 50 miles, and we were 200 miles, basically, from Chicago and 170 miles from St. Louis. We were midway between St. Louis and Chicago, pretty much.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it was pretty flat there.

MR. NOFFKE: It's very flat, yeah —

MS. DOUGLAS: Fields.

MR. NOFFKE: — that area and lots of corn fields. I mean, it was like corn, soybeans, wheat — those were the things, you know, if — miles and miles of it.

MS. DOUGLAS: I was wondering if you did much hunting, that kind of thing?

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, God, a lot of hunting.

MS. DOUGLAS: When you were a kid.

MR. NOFFKE: That was the only thing that saved me. My grandfather had a farm, and I really grew up on that farm as much as I did, you know, in the town of Sullivan. My father would always go out on the weekends and help him with things, and it was a small farm, you know, not a wealthy farm. He had cows, pigs and chickens, and he grew 20 acres of this, you know, 20 acres of that, you know. He had hardwoods and, you know, we were mushroom hunting when I could walk — that kind of thing.

MS. DOUGLAS: Really?

MR. NOFFKE: We were looking for morels. We'd go out; my dad loved to get — loved the woods. He liked to hunt when he was younger. So I had a rifle when I was seven years old, you know, and go out and — I mean, I was killing rabbits when I was seven, and that's — a lot of what we had for food was game and fish in the summer, you know, and game in the winter, more so than, you know, meat from a supermarket, grocery stores. I mean, we didn't have supermarkets then really, but sort of —

MS. DOUGLAS: So your —

MR. NOFFKE: — that the business of being in the — in the country and hunting was big to me then and always has been. It always has been.

MS. DOUGLAS: You know what — that's why I asked because I know that you're — that you like to hunt and go look for mushrooms now, and always — and have for a long time. So I just wondered if it was something you did then.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, the better part of my childhood. That was — that would have been — that would have been out in the woods with my father and brother, and hunting and fishing and, you know, doing those things.

And we used to help with the farm work too. You know, I remember riding — this is funny, feels so funny when you — I remember riding on a wagon behind [two horses], shucking corn, picking corn and shucking it by hand, throwing it in the wagon. And that was when I was seven or eight years old, we did that. And my grandfather — I don't think had a tractor until 1955 or so.

MS. DOUGLAS: No combine?

MR. NOFFKE: No, he wouldn't let a corn-picker in his — in his cornfield. He wouldn't — they — he'd see one on the ground, and that would be it. You know, it'd be all over. No, get it out of here. [Laughs.] So he picked it all by hand.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow.

MR. NOFFKE: And loaded it and unloaded it by hand too. Loaded it — put it in his corn [crib]— and most of the corn he grew was for feed for his cows, and he had — he had milk cows. So, you know, he was milking cows twice a day and had the pickup out; you know, the truck would come by and pick it up twice or three times a week. I'm not sure how often it was, but —

MS. DOUGLAS: What about your mother's family? Were they in the area?

MR. NOFFKE: They were — they were in the area too. Actually she grew up in a farm that was only like three or four miles away from where my — from where my father grew up. So that was how they sort of got together. But — she had five brothers, and I think her — they left the farm. I think her father and mother split up when she was quite young or he was — he was — he — my grandfather on my mother's side was a bit of a problem [they laugh.] with the family.

MS. DOUGLAS: The black sheep, you mean? —

MR. NOFFKE: He's sort of like me. He was the black sheep, yeah. He caused everybody a lot of grief.

MS. DOUGLAS: — Oh, no.

MR. NOFFKE: So.

MS. DOUGLAS: So when you were in high school then, you were taking college prep courses or preparing for that track. When did you start thinking about what college to go to or what to do when you got there?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, that was — that was pretty much a no-brainer because it was — it was — it was hard enough to come up with what little tuition was required at the state universities in those days, and so the closest college where I could commute was the — really the only option, and that was Eastern Illinois [University, Charleston, Illinois]. And then when I went over there and saw the school, I loved it.

You know, it was a small school, maybe 4,000 students when I started there, 5[000] on the outside, I would think. And the arts school was — the building was fairly new and the faculty that was there — there's eight or ten faculty members; the people in the drawing and painting department were really — were really quite good, you know.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you started out in the art department?

MR. NOFFKE: I started out in the art department and started out with a major in painting.

MS. DOUGLAS: And how did — how did that come about? That you knew you were going to do that?

MR. NOFFKE: I didn't know. That's just what I did when I got there. I mean, that was what I had most experience in was drawing, and I did do — I did do a good bit of painting on my own in high school.

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay.

MR. NOFFKE: You know, just — I started out probably in the seventh grade with paint-by-numbers stuff because that's all — that was the only access I had — those kinds of materials. And then I would — I'd get off the lines and forget that — skip the numbers after a point. [They laugh.]

And then I found the art supply store, you know, in Decatur, and I started buying tubes of colors and white and, you know, painting mostly on Masonite. And I didn't do a lot of painting, but I did — I did some, you know.

MS. DOUGLAS: Did you take any art lessons then?

MR. NOFFKE: No, Uh-uh — [Negative].

MS. DOUGLAS: There's —

MR. NOFFKE: There was no place — no place to take things. So it was mostly a matter of copying things — *Reader's Digest* covers, and things like that—

MS. DOUGLAS: Experimenting.

MR. NOFFKE: —Yeah, yeah, just to get the skills to be able to transfer something from here to there, you know, an idea and, you know, dealing with the scale of it and so on.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what did your parents think about you majoring in art?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, my dad didn't object, and my mother supported it, so that wasn't — I don't think that was the issue. I think the fact that I was in college pleased my mother, and I think she would have been pleased no matter what I majored in. And my father was just staying out of it because he didn't want the friction, I think. And he maybe — he maybe was more supportive than I give him credit for being too; I don't know, I don't know. All I knew he was interested in for sure was God.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.] So at the Eastern Illinois — is that in Evanston?

MR. NOFFKE: That's Charleston.

MS. DOUGLAS: Charleston, okay. And you said they had a relatively new art department there?

MR. NOFFKE: A new building.

MS. DOUGLAS: A new building—

MR. NOFFKE: I'm not really sure what the history of the art department was. The building they had there — it's funny how you talk about departments in schools as being the building — [laughs] —

MS. DOUGLAS: True.

MR. NOFFKE: — rather than the school.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that's true.

MR. NOFFKE: But it must have been — it must have been some history of the school. You know, it must have been there for a number of years. I think Shull was the main painting professor there — had been there for 10 or 15 years before I got there because he was — he was in his 50s, I believe, when I was there — '40s anyway, late '40s. Well, he was in — he was a veteran of WWII, so that'd give you a clue on his age, so.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what year was this when you started college?

MR. NOFFKE: 1961. And graduated from there in '65, and then stayed there a year in the master's program. And both my degrees were Bachelor of Science, Master of Science in education, even though my major was painting. Doesn't make a lot of sense; I could have gotten BAs and MAs and the only difference in those programs would have been taking foreign language instead of education courses. And at that point in time, I thought I might end up teaching the — in a high school or public school somewhere. So the education degrees made more sense than just a liberal arts degree.

But as far as the curriculum in the art program, it was exactly the same; the only difference was what your — what you took in addition to that for — to — for degree requirements. So. Now I wish I'd done the Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts [laughs] because I never — I never did the — I never did appreciate the art-ed attitudes and the way that they still operate — never, never. I think —

MS. DOUGLAS: Even though you have had a career of teaching, so that — you mean — you would have hoped —

MR. NOFFKE: Right. That's — that gives me — that gives me privilege to say that I think it's a bunch of bunk —

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: — that should be taken out because what happens I think is in those art-ed programs is that, for the most part — not — you can't generalize everything — but I think for the most part the weaker students — this is in Georgia, this — I'm not talking about Eastern because I went through it. It wasn't any different whether you were a BA- or a BS degree person. You had the same teachers and the same curriculum.

But at [the University of] Georgia [Athens, GA], where I taught for 30 years, there were certainly different students going through the art-ed program than there were through the — through the BFA programs. And the weaker students were in the art-ed program as far as — as far as having any ability, interest in art. They were — and that's a very general statement because there were a lot of good students in the art-ed program too. But generally they were weaker, and those were the people who ended up going to the public schools and teaching,

and a lot of the BA people that I had go through my program ended up going into real estate or something else afterwards to make a living or waiting tables. You know, they didn't go and — and I think — I think the people in public school teaching should come out of — should have a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and do their education degrees and that work in grad school.

MS. DOUGLAS: Mm-hmm — [Affirmative] — yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: Get the artists first and then send them to — then send them to that other whatever it is that they require for certification, or just eliminate certification would be an improvement.

MS. DOUGLAS: I see what you're saying — is though there's the separate tracks for professional artists and— grammar, high school teachers in terms of their study of art — they're tracked separately, whereas you were saying your undergrad experience wasn't like that.

MR. NOFFKE: It wasn't, but that was because — that was because I went to a small state school that specialized — almost like a normal college that was a teacher's college. But the people in the art department there were serious.

We had — there was one man there in art education, even though 95 percent of the students that went through there got degrees in art education. But they only had one man in art education that taught the art education courses in that school. Then there were general education courses that we took as well — philosophy of education.

And probably the most valuable education course I ever took was in media. We learned how to run tape recorders and slide projectors and film projectors. We had four major pieces of equipment, those three plus an overhead projector. And when you mastered those you got through the class. Okay? [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: That was — that was one course I took in education.

MS. DOUGLAS: So your teachers there in undergrad — you obviously had a painting teacher. What were the other studios that you worked in there?

MR. NOFFKE: There were a good number of drawing classes, some of them life drawing, some figure drawing. The other painting teacher there was Lynn Trank who was — both of these guys had Ph.D.s in art from Ohio State — in studio. They weren't — you know, they weren't MFA people. They actually went to one of the few degree programs where they gave Ph.D.s in studio art.

And they were — they were both — Trank was — Trank, to me, he was — he was boring compared to Shull. Shull was a wild man. That's one of his paintings on the wall right there — the devils — the — no, down here, the tall red and black one. And he was a big influence of my — in my early painting. And also in continuing in art, he was — he was very encouraging.

So there's drawing, painting; they had printmaking. There was a separate faculty member there that taught printmaking. And I was — I loved the intaglio process, although I hated — you know, I liked working on plates, but I hated doing the printing part of it. I didn't like that because it was just too tedious and, you know, repetitious.

Doing an edition of 40 prints that all had to be the same? I mean, I wouldn't mind doing 40 prints off of one plate but I'd — I wouldn't have any interest at all in making them all the same. You know, there's lots of different ways to put ink on a plate and wipe it and do things with it — you know, just lot of different ways. [Laughs.] And to do 40 of them the same didn't make any sense to me — or 50, whatever, or 200.

They had a fairly good crafts area there. Mostly — they didn't have fibers and wood and glass and things like that, but they had jewelry and metalwork and ceramics, which I took — I took two or three classes in each of those areas.

MS. DOUGLAS: Who were the teachers there?

MR. NOFFKE: There was a lady named June Krutza — is that right? Krutza. I'm sorry. That's a long time ago. She basically — her main interest was ceramics, but she also taught jewelry courses there. And then I think my senior year Garret DeRuiter came in, who was a graduate of Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. So that was my initial exposure to the — to Carbondale, was just knowing where he had been to school and the difference in the way he worked and what — and what Krutza had done before he got there.

MS. DOUGLAS: He must have been pretty young at that time.

MR. NOFFKE: He was — he was pretty young, yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: Just out of grad —

MR. NOFFKE: Just probably 25, 26, something like that.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah, that's interesting. His daughter was a student of mine when I taught at University of North Texas. So —

MR. NOFFKE: That is interesting.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: And I knew — I knew she was an art student.

MS. DOUGLAS: Metal student.

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

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, so the intaglio reference is interesting because that's of course cutting into a metal plate.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right.

MS. DOUGLAS: Or etching it — whichever. So were you encouraged by any one of your teachers to go on and pursue art in a master program at that point?

MR. NOFFKE: Shull was very supportive. He told — he told me that, I think, when I was a senior that I was the best student that he'd ever had. Which, I mean, that's pretty encouraging for a little kid from a hick town to hear something like that. And like eight or ten years later I was talking to some of my classmates from Eastern and he'd told them the same thing. [They laugh.] That's how good he was. That's how good the guy was. [Laughs.]

But by then, you know, it didn't matter. You know, I saw the humor in it because I'd been teaching for a few years. And also he was — he was being — he was supporting people as best as he could. And he wouldn't have done that had he not believed that it was worth doing. Because, I mean, he wasn't a liar. He was just smart.

MS. DOUGLAS: He was motivating you—

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, he had our best interests in mind, you know. And I mean it was very motivational, very encouraging.

MS. DOUGLAS: So when you decided to stay there and do a master's, how did that come about?

MR. NOFFKE: Part of this goes back to the Vietnam War. If you think about that — about the dates, '65, '66, '67, '68, '69, those were — those were heavy years in the draft. And I happened to graduate — get my undergraduate degree and immediately was called for the draft thing. So I applied to graduate school, because I didn't want to go there. I mean, I didn't believe in it, I didn't understand it, and I didn't want to go.

So I stayed at Eastern Illinois in the master's program. And I got a graduate deferment that year; because I applied to graduate school in 1966 I got a graduate deferment that I kept for four more years after that. And part of that was help from University of Iowa where I went to work on an MFA in painting after the master's from Eastern Illinois. I was there for a year and a summer.

MS. DOUGLAS: So how — the master's at Eastern Illinois was a one- or two-year program?

MR. NOFFKE: It was a one-year program.

MS. DOUGLAS: And that was an MS in —

MR. NOFFKE: Education.

MS. DOUGLAS: Education.

MR. NOFFKE: Master of Science in education degree with a major in art.

MS. DOUGLAS: And then from there you went to Ohio —

MR. NOFFKE: I went to University of Iowa —

MS. DOUGLAS: Iowa.

MR. NOFFKE: In Iowa City. And the head of the school there — Frank Seiberling, of Seiberling Tires and Company — he was helpful because when the draft was after me when I went there, you know, well, here it's another master's degree, you know. But he wrote a letter saying that the Master of Fine Arts was equivalent to the Ph.D. degree in college teaching, period. And the draft board bought it. So then I was there. I was actually working on an MA degree, which was a prerequisite to an MFA. And I think I was just three hours short or so of having an MA in painting from the University of Iowa.

And then I lost — I took a metals — couple of metals classes there from Raoul Delmar who was not a good teacher — he was an old man and not interested in it. But I decided, you know, they had the studio and, you know, I had access to things. And I just decided to transfer to Southern Illinois back, you know, into metals, and somehow managed to keep that deferment for three more years after my MS.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, talk a little more about that transition from painting to metal and how you were aware of SIU [Southern Illinois University] at that point.

MR. NOFFKE: Well, I remembered SIU because of — because of DeRuijter from Eastern. And even though Southern Illinois didn't have — didn't have near the reputation as the University of Iowa did, I knew they had a better metals program. And the reason — I think the biggest reason I decided to change from painting to metals was that there were something like 500 graduate painting students at the University of Iowa in 1967.

Professors — you met — you met an under — you met in classrooms with freshmen, sophomore — or not freshmen but probably sophomores, juniors and seniors in drawing classes and painting classes. And you worked mostly from models. And you had faculty that were teaching these large classes with graduate assistants. And they didn't know who anyone was. They didn't know me from — somebody from Texas that was in their second year of undergraduate school.

But they had their, you know, you were — like I said, you know, you were drawing or painting a figure in a class. And they would come around and critique it. And, you know, they had no idea what I had done before I got there, what I was interested in doing. And that wasn't — they didn't care — not only no idea, no interest in knowing. You were just there taking a class from them. And —

MS. DOUGLAS: So this —

MR. NOFFKE: And that didn't seem — you know, and, I mean, I knew how big the United States was and how many art schools there were; I had a good idea. And here you have maybe a hundred MFAs coming out of one program every year? And I really, at that point, wanted to teach, you know, art at a university. That was sort of my goal. You know, being an artist was my goal too, but as far as a career, you know, I would much have, you know, much rather have done it the way that I did it than going out and dealing with galleries and that scene, which I still don't do for the most part.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what did you know about SIU at that point in time?

MR. NOFFKE: Not very much. I'm not even sure if I visited the school before I applied there. I might have, I just — I don't remember. I just recall that I decided to change and I made the application and [L. Brent] Kington accepted me and I went there. And, I mean, I knew something about the school. And I think, you know, immediately, you know, like the first day I was there he went and got me an assistantship. I mean that was — that was the kind of environment or atmosphere that I started in.

And that just doesn't happen these days. You don't apply to some school at the last minute and get in, and then they walk up and pat you on the back and say, you just got an assistantship, you know? [Laughs.] It was a lot easier in those days than it is now for the students, that's for sure. And there was — there were jobs in metal. That was when metal was growing.

MS. DOUGLAS: What year was this, when you started at SIU?

MR. NOFFKE: '67. So that was probably the biggest reason. And I had — I would say my interest was equal in both those areas. I could just as easily have stayed in painting, but I saw more possibilities for academic positions in metal than I saw in painting. And I didn't like the environment in Iowa that I was in. I didn't like being in a school where people didn't know what I was interested in or care because of the numbers.

MS. DOUGLAS: okay. So who was at SIU when you started then?

MR. NOFFKE: I think there were four other graduate students. There was — Mary Lee Hu was there, Elliot Pujol was there. Elliot, I think, was in his last year. His undergraduate degree had been in theater. And so he started

out as sort of like — making up some undergraduate courses. His first year, really, in the metal studio was doing that. And that was the first year of my graduate work there.

And I guess I'd had enough jewelry classes, metals classes at Eastern Illinois and then at Iowa that Kington just sort of blew — let me slide — also enough background in art that I didn't have to do that even though I might have made some of my people coming in that had the same background I had — [laughs] — you know, go back and take another three courses — senior-level metals courses before I'd accept them as a full-time graduate student.

But — so Elliot was there, Mary Lee was there — Mary Lee was in her second year when I got there my first year — she was a year ahead of me; a girl named Dickie Nettles was there who later married Tom Ladousa, so her name was Ladousa and she taught metals at — in Louisiana — what is it — Lafayette — the school right in the middle of the Cajun country. She was there. And let's see who — oh, Marci Zelmanoff was there, who was a wild person. She was really nuts.

And then there were a couple of people — a husband-wife, the Walkers, that already had their degrees but they were just sort of interested — they were around but they didn't take courses. They weren't in a degree program; they were just there. They'd take classes every once in a while. And then an old lady, an English professor, Muriel West, was in the studio a lot. And she was interested in metals, but as a hobby. But she was in the classes with us, so —

MS. DOUGLAS: The graduate classes?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah. Yeah. Or working in the studio — she was a fixture in the studio. So really there were three other graduate students there in degree programs when I started — a lot different than 500.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what about the other faculty? Was it just Brent teaching?

MR. NOFFKE: He was the only one there then. And the second — the second year — when I was leaving there, he got a second position. And they were interviewing people coming in, and I remember them interviewing — Albert Paley was there. And that was funny because I was applying for the same jobs Paley was applying for, except not at Carbondale. But Kington would have hired me at Carbondale before he would have hired Paley, I think. [Laughs.] It was funny.

Paley was interested in the blacksmithing at that point. But basically he was a — he was a very slick guy from Philadelphia. And he had a nice portfolio. I mean, he came in with this big thing, you know. It was like, "Jesus, is that what I'm supposed to have, Brent?" [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: So —

MR. NOFFKE: And he had been — he had been working on his portfolio his whole — his whole last year of graduate school, you know. So [Richard] Mawdsley ended up getting that job. But I think that job was the only one in the country that Paley applied for that he didn't get because all the jobs that I applied for, you know, well, Paley was their first choice and I had to wait to see what Al was going to do. So the job I took at DeLand, Florida, with Stetson University was the only job, I think, that I applied for that he hadn't applied for because he wouldn't have gone there to a department of two. [Laughs.]

But me, I was more interested in living where I wanted to live than in teaching in a large university or school. I didn't care about that. I mean, I loved DeLand. I wish I could have stayed there, really. But it was not a — it was not a position — you know, they rotated people out every two or three years, period, and that was it. [Robert] Ebendorf started teaching in DeLand at Stetson University. Did you know that?

MS. DOUGLAS: Before or after you?

MR. NOFFKE: Before me. He was there two years, I think, in the — let's see. I was there in '69; he was there in mid-60s, and then had his Fulbright or something — he went to Norway, was it — Norway, I think, for a year or so to work there. And then came back and got the job at Georgia. He'd only been at Georgia for maybe two years or so before I went to Stetson.

And that's where I got to know him was, you know, back and forth through Kington. Kington had slides of Ebendorf's work that we looked at when we were in graduate school. And I liked his work. I liked the work he was doing better than a lot of the later stuff that he did. I mean, it was — I mean, I related to it more. I can't say it was, you know, anything other than that without offending Bob. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well that's a segue, maybe, into your work, if you would like to talk a little bit about the kind of work you were making in graduate school.

MR. NOFFKE: I was — I was doing a lot of different things. I had — I had an interest in rings early on from Eastern Illinois. And a good friend of mine, Gary Erbe [ph] and I, were doing casting there and somebody had done a demo there — because they hadn't done any casting at Eastern Illinois; they didn't know how to cast there. That lady June Krutza, she didn't know how to cast. Erbe and I figured out the steam casting business. So we steam cast a lot of jewelry — silver and gold as well.

I worked a lot with gold in undergraduate school — melted down my high school class ring in my first class, I think — really. [They laugh.] And so we had these investments, you know, that we did. And you do them pretty much the same way for centrifugal casting, and then you have a — and you melt your metal right in the button of the flask. And we had a system where we'd clamp that thing down because when you apply the pressure with the steam casting thing you really got to press hard to get a cast, and you got to be fast. Slap that thing on there and press it and be done with it.

But we had the old — and I don't know where we — nobody did a demo there; I don't know where we got this information. But you'd have a wooden handle with a can lid with layers of asbestos in it that you would soak, and you'd slap that down on that thing with the molten metal and press like heck. And the steam would force — would force the metal down in the mold. We had good luck. Other students tried it; they couldn't get it done.

Now, maybe somebody did a workshop there — I don't remember. But I know Erbe [ph] and I were the first ones that did any serious casting with — and had any luck with that. And we worked as a team, which made it possible, you know — kids trying to cast by themselves — and so we did castings for other students too, and we helped them do that.

So I had an interest in casting, and then they had the centrifuge at Carbondale, at Southern Illinois. And we had one at Iowa, too, but it was a — it was a horizontal, and it threw metal everywhere.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: I didn't do much casting there, you know? It was like — [laughs] — you wanted to throw metal all over the ceiling, you know? Just go ahead and try that thing. But there was — you know, those things were designed for casting platinum.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, I didn't know that.

MR. NOFFKE: And —

MS. DOUGLAS: It must melt faster.

MR. NOFFKE: — which is denser — no, it doesn't melt faster; it's like 3,500 degrees to melt platinum. And I mean, how can you — you can't do that with a Prestolite torch anyway — [laughs] — you'd need — [inaudible]. And — but they had one there, government surplus, I'm sure.

So I did — I did a lot of casting. That was one of Kington's main projects for the — for the undergraduate students. And I learned — I learned how to forge there because I hadn't done any forging before other than hammering on wire, which I don't consider to be forging.

MS. DOUGLAS: You were casting ingots and forging from ingots?

MR. NOFFKE: No, mostly there were — I was forging from copper rod. And I had — I had some sterling rod; I did a few forgings in sterling that — and most of the forging I did, though, at Carbondale was steel — you know, old files and things like that.

I got into making knives. Kington had made a knife that he made as a gift for the head of the art school, and — Herb Fink, who was a printmaker. So I mean, the head of the art school there was an artist, for one thing. So Kington had a better rapport with him. And Kington, I think, was — you know, just, like, moved into that position after Fink [ph] left. But they were good friends. And it was very beneficial. I mean, that's where Brent got those graduate assistantships and built his program, from being a good — a good person in dealing with the politics in a small school, which he couldn't have done had it been an art historian or an art educator running that place. I mean, you could just kiss it goodbye.

I know him well enough, and I know those kinds of programs well enough. Some people, you can't deal with, but having an artist actually run an art school is quite beneficial.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: And I don't know where people come off with the idea, oh, an artist can't handle a budget and that kind of thing; we need to get a professional businessperson in here.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, really —

MS. DOUGLAS: Well —

MR. NOFFKE: Really — the budgets — the budgets now, as you know, for running an art school aren't a whole lot more than people's personal budgets at home. But you got one more zero, and that's it — difference.

MS. DOUGLAS: SIU's a — was a big school, though, at that point in time.

MR. NOFFKE: It was — there was maybe a faculty of 25 or 30 there. It was much bigger than Eastern Illinois, not nearly as big as Iowa. Iowa had probably 40 painters on the faculty.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I guess I was talking about the whole school, not just the art school.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's a fairly big university at that time? —

MR. NOFFKE: It was about 20,000 when I was there, the total student enrollment.

MS. DOUGLAS: And when you were in grad school there, had Brent started his foray into blacksmithing?

MR. NOFFKE: He had. He had a Johnson forge, two-burner Johnson forge in the — in the studio. He hadn't — I think he'd maybe had a coal forge at home, but he hadn't — he was still working out of that gas forge. This was early on — '67. He hadn't really gotten fully cranked into that; he was still doing some silver work and — but I think he was making the move. I think he was making the plan to do that then. But he made that knife for Fink, so — and I mean, I looked at that, but Kington was interested in other things. He wasn't interested in knives.

But knives interested me, partly from my hunting, fishing background, and also just because I grew up in the country, and those tools and things like that — I mean, that meant something to me. That was, like, all right — [laughs] — this is something of interest here.

So I made — I made probably five or six, seven knives when I was there in graduate school, and doing the casting. And I did a lot of — a lot of two-dimensional work there with copper, brass bronze, collage-work kind of things on plywood — some big things.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, I've never seen any of that.

MR. NOFFKE: You haven't?

MS. DOUGLAS: No.

MR. NOFFKE: There's one right outside the door —

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, I hadn't —

MR. NOFFKE: — that I did when I was at Stetson, I think, or right after that — you'll have to look at it after a while. But it was one of the later ones; the first ones were — I mean, I've worked on these things with crayon and — I mean, just, tacks all over the place, all kinds of — tacks were decorative too.

But I started out, some of my three or four pieces there that were — you know, some of them large, like three-by-five feet. And I just had a lot of copper shim and brass shim, bronze, and I would — and I — you could draw it and put it on felt and draw on it, you know, emboss it, do these things, and then fold the edges over and tack them down and just build these things up, overlap them and — you know, I had quite a bit of fun with those. And they were — they were — they were interesting pieces. I still — I still like that, like the idea of those things.

And the one out here was the last one I did, right on the wall — next to the door —

MS. DOUGLAS: On the side of your house.

MR. NOFFKE: Right. And it got into more decorative things; I used Plexiglas on it. But I had cast over elements and old parts of iron — you know, steel cans and things — so, like, just a mix of metals and tacks and color. This one even has some canvas in it, you know, and a bunch of seeds tacked to it — [laughs] — a row of seeds, just like the seed-bead things. Just — leather, you know, just all kinds of materials stuck together.

So I did those. I'm trying to think — I think most of the — most of the work I did, this later work in graduate

school there, was combinations of casting, forged knives, some other forged elements. And I was starting to forge gold, then, too — not stock, but sheet. I was working with different ideas of forging two pieces and soldering them together in a ring, sort of forming them, you know, from flat instead of beating a piece around a mandrill.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, your work in context — is of the period where people are starting to do more experimental work and get away from traditional hollowware and goldsmithing or silversmithing —

MR. NOFFKE: Yes, yes.

MS. DOUGLAS: But the blacksmithing angle at SIU was very different, wasn't it, from other metal programs around the country?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, there was no blacksmithing anywhere then.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right, so —

MR. NOFFKE: Absolutely zero. So that was — that was a big — that was a big — a big thing. And I did a lot of blacksmithing, you know, well into the '70s. I mean, I was — I did as much blacksmithing as I did, you know, hollowware and silver.

And also — I forgot, I did do a good bit of hollowware at Carbondale, too — almost all copper then. I don't recall any silver sheet that I raised from there. But I did that when I got to Stetson; I started raising silver there.

But I did a good number of copper pieces at Carbondale.

MS. DOUGLAS: What were they like?

MR. NOFFKE: Mostly very organic things where you — where you would raise the piece, and then collapse it. Kington was doing those shrink — remember — that tube things, the candlesticks and so on, out of, like, copper tubing? He would hammer them in. And Pujol's work was that sort of corrugated, folded stuff. I did some of those, only what I did was a little, you know, not as much of a system as those guys had with their things. I just beat the heck out of it. And —

MS. DOUGLAS: Well —

MR. NOFFKE: I didn't do a lot of it, but I did some. I've got a couple of pieces downstairs I can show you, of the old pieces I did in graduate school.

MS. DOUGLAS: So was it raised in a conventional sense, or was it [inaudible] —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, some of them — some of them were, and then they were beat up after that. There was one piece — Phil Fike did a workshop there when I was in graduate school, and he had this eutectic welding outfit there that would — you know, this oxy acetylene thing with canisters that screwed on that sucked this metal — different metal alloys through the torch tip, and sprayed it on the — you'd hit the — hit a lever on it like a cutting torch, and it would spray this metal powder on copper or silver or steel when it was red-hot. You could spray it with nickel; you could spray it with bronze; you could spray it with this, and he had all this stuff there.

So he said — he gave me the assignment of raising — I had to raise a piece for him to use as a test. And it was real weird, you know, because he — they were doing the crimp raise thing, so I think I had, like, a big — a big sheet of maybe, like, a 16-inch disc of copper or something — 24-gauge, 26-gauge. I don't remember what it was. We have to look at it downstairs.

But he started laughing at me so hard; it was the funniest damn thing because I took it. I cut — I cut that disc out and I folded it all up into a smaller disc, like into an eight-inch disc, and then I raised it in the traditional way — [They laugh] — like over a stake — [They laugh].

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, god. [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: And he was, like, going, "Jesus Christ — [emphasis added]." [They laugh.] You know? This guy's —

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: [Laughs.] This guy's dense, you know, didn't get the idea of gathering it, tucking it in, you know, where you tuck your raise space. And I folded it all up flat and raised it like it was a solid sheet, which probably none of them could even have done.

MS. DOUGLAS: That' so you, Gary.

MR. NOFFKE: [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: That is so you; that is just your —

MR. NOFFKE: It was fun; and I remember Fike just busting a gut over that one. But this is downstairs, and he sprayed it with all that stuff. I don't know how many metals that's got on it — metal oxides, that's got on it. And that — what that does, that locks up that stuff. It makes it a rigid piece. And then you have all these different-colored metals. You know, it takes patinas, you know, to sort of go all over the place. They don't know what to do; they don't know which color to go.

A time they start turning green, they run into something else that changed [laughs].

MS. DOUGLAS: So it sounds like you were very experimental with all these different traditional techniques, like raising and forging —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, I didn't —

MS. DOUGLAS: — you weren't just moving the metal every which way.

MR. NOFFKE: Right. And Kington was very encouraging with that because he disliked Scandinavian stuff — you know, that slick —

MS. DOUGLAS: Perfectionist material.

MR. NOFFKE: — stuff as much — and you know what I figured out, Mary, is that I think it's through the years, is just — is just — and maybe this shouldn't be recorded on here, but I'm going to do it anyway because I don't care —

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: For the most part, the metals were — [inaudible] — the biggest bunch of tight-ass people I've ever seen. You know, they're so impressed with technique. I mean, that really, I think for the most part, a lot — it's just — it's just exactly what I would never want to get involved with, to be that tight, execute it to death — everything they do. You know, it's like, if it's not perfect, it's not right.

And you know, by whose standard of perfect are they — are they talking to begin with? But it's like, I never was — I never was interested in doing those kinds of things that impressed the people that were sort of like — considered to be the avant-garde that they had — Kington supported that.

And just like Kington and Shull both, both those guys were really important to me.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, to contextualize it for an audience, a non-metals audience, your generation would have been reacting to, like you said, the Scandinavian modern —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: — model or paradigm of silversmithing, which was —

MR. NOFFKE: It was —

MS. DOUGLAS: — flawless.

MR. NOFFKE: I was — my work was probably more reactionary.

MS. DOUGLAS: Totally flawless metalwork.

MR. NOFFKE: You know, you look at — you look at the other schools of the time, there was Alma Eikerman at Indiana, and Stanley Letchzin at Philadelphia —

MS. DOUGLAS: Goldsmith.

MR. NOFFKE: — and their work was opposed to the Scandinavian thing, too. Everybody was experimenting, maybe less with Eikerman's program — her work was pretty locked into that.

MS. DOUGLAS: Different forms, but the same —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: — kind of flawless execution.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, yeah, right.

MS. DOUGLAS: Hollowware — silver hollowware.

MR. NOFFKE: But I was — I was — you know, and it wasn't a matter of reacting necessarily to that; it was just, I was taking advantage of the freedom I had in getting away from it. I was — I don't think I was reacting that much to Scandinavian work at that point, you know? I just had more support to not think like that.

MS. DOUGLAS: But at the same time, were you responsible to learning the basic techniques upholding that kind of a traditional thing, of a solder seam, or a —

MR. NOFFKE: Absolutely, yeah. I learned how —

MS. DOUGLAS: That kind of thing.

MR. NOFFKE: I learned how to — I learned how to planish. I've done some — I've done some really tight planishing. You know, I've done — I've done those things. I've paid my dues with that, and I think that's important that you — that you can do that, that you can make a piece as clean as Jack Prip's work at that — in the '50s. I think that's important.

And I like those guys' work. You know, I — there was nothing about that work that I didn't like, it's just I — it wasn't my personality to do that. And you know, saying that the metals people are a bunch of — biggest bunch — the tightest bunch of people there — you know, well, metal attracts those types —

MS. DOUGLAS: Yes. [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: — because, I mean, it requires a lot of discipline and a lot of — a lot of tight technique.

MS. DOUGLAS: Detail.

MR. NOFFKE: And I'm not saying at all that a lot of metals people aren't super-creative, because they are. I'm just saying that it attracts some of the tightest minds on the face of the Earth, you know — just get into metal. And some of them are boring dullards, too, you know. A good number of them are, that they rely on that technique so much. And that's what's — always been fun for me, is to — [laughs] — is to be a counterpart of that end of it.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that's — that points to the way metal is taught. And you know, you look at a job application to teach metals, and there'll be a list as long as your arm of techniques you're responsible to know —

MR. NOFFKE: Not anymore.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it used to be.

MR. NOFFKE: [Laughs] — used to be.

MS. DOUGLAS: It used to be, right. When I was applying for jobs, so —

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right, right, right. Absolutely.

MS. DOUGLAS: — you would — your own work may only involve a few, but yet to teach it —

MR. NOFFKE: Right. But you're supposed to be competent.

MS. DOUGLAS: — you would have to know —

MR. NOFFKE: And — absolutely, absolutely.

MS. DOUGLAS: — just tremendous amount of information. And that's —

MR. NOFFKE: If you're a one-person metal department somewhere — of course, now, we don't have one-person metal departments; we have one-person jewelry departments.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right. But even in jewelry, you'd have to teach a lot of techniques.

MR. NOFFKE: Not necessarily; not anymore.

MS. DOUGLAS: But —

MR. NOFFKE: You haven't been around that many of the art programs —

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: — have you, Mary? [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I'm dating myself, aren't I?

MR. NOFFKE: A lot of those — no, no, no. No, it's not that, it's just, things have changed a lot in the last 10 years.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah. But to go back, then, to your graduate work, were you — were you influenced by your fellow graduate students then with the kind of work they were making, and bouncing off each other — that kind of thing?

MR. NOFFKE: I think so. I think we were all pretty much doing different things. I think Kington was real good about having students work in their own interest, developing their own sort of personal approach, and the body of work to get out of school.

So we weren't — we weren't really doing the same things at all, but we were aware of what each other was doing, and I think pretty much supportive of what everyone was doing there.

I don't remember what Dickie Nettles was doing. I do — I do remember Marci Zelmanoff's work, and Mary's work, and Elliot's work. You know, I do remember that. And they were all different.

Marci worked with wire, too. She got into the thing with Mary Hu, and there was a bit of — a little bit of friction between those two because they — well, they had radically different approaches, which was good, but it was — so there was a little competition between those two, I think, in the class. And I don't even know whatever happened to Marci. But she was — she was pretty talented.

MS. DOUGLAS: Brent probably had you all entering competitions, or no?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, we were doing that. I did that at Eastern, too. That was something Shull encouraged. I was in, like, four or five exhibitions, professional exhibitions, before I got out of undergraduate school. Somewhere — I think there was a couple in Evansville — and exhibiting paintings.

I'm not exactly sure what all was there — you know, what the shows were when we were at Carbondale. I'd have to find one of my old resumes. And those things got trashed by the University of Georgia, like, after I had been here eight years. They took — one of the secretaries took everything off my resume up to, like, the time I got to Georgia. And I think I may have some old copies somewhere, but I don't know where they are.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, what was the feeling like —

MR. NOFFKE: I had 30 shows or something before I got to Georgia. I don't know what they were. I couldn't remember all of them; I remember some of them. But all the painting and drawing shows that I was in earlier were thrown out.

MS. DOUGLAS: Did you feel encouraged by doing these shows, that it — that you could have a career doing this?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, the shows were just an important part of academia, basically. And — well, it's also — it was important, you know — [sounds of objects falling] — acorns. It's been raining.

It was just — it was — it was just important in a — on a lot of different levels. You know, if you got in, you know, you felt good, and if you didn't get in, well, you know, you'd try again. I never — I never was too upset by being rejected from shows because I had — you know, there were a lot of competitive shows back in — back in the '60s and '70s. Not too many juried shows; there were a few juried shows, but there were competitive shows all over the country that you could send work to. And you'd either get in or not, and it was like — well, if you had applied to three, you may get in two or maybe one — or none.

But if you didn't apply, you didn't get in any, so it was — it was part of what we were — what we wanted to do, and what we — what we were expected to do at the same time, I think.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were aware of who your peers were then, across the country?

MR. NOFFKE: To a certain extent, although a lot of those shows, they didn't produce catalogues, you know — or what would be a catalogue would be like a three-page brochure with just no images at all, just a printed-out list of names and titles and whatever — media.

And I think the catalogues started picking up a bit in the — in the '70s. And you know, they've started almost approaching professional publications, but — and I've got lots of those things around. I've got lots of those old catalogues that are, like, just, you know — they're pretty much jokes. But at the same time, if they are — they are documentation of those exhibitions. And that's something that I still have that, you know, should go to some collection someplace, somewhere, you know. Because I don't know how many people kept those things.

[END TRACK 1]

MR. NOFFKE: — they really weren't worth keeping. I'm sure there are some in existence, but I kept them all. So —

MS. DOUGLAS: Let's take a break here for a sec.

MR. NOFFKE: Is it off?

[Audio break.]

MS. DOUGLAS: So we were talking about your graduate work at SIU. And what point did you start thinking about your next move?

MR. NOFFKE: It was — it was late. You know, it was just probably a few months before graduation. And I mean, I knew I needed to — I needed to get slides, you know, portfolio together for job applications and so on. And I was — and I was doing that. I was working on it, you know. But I was more — I was much more concerned about my last three or four months in the studio, what I got done, than getting a job at that point. So I wasn't — I wasn't that much into — you know, that concerned about teaching positions and so on. I mean, I was doing it, but it was a minor concern.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, you had a thesis show to produce, or no?

MR. NOFFKE: Yes, yes. And I don't know exactly how many pieces I had in that, 35 or 40 maybe. One was a chess set that I'd cast there that was like — that was a lot of work. That chess set was a lot of work because it was like, what's that, 30 — 32 pieces to cast? And they were fairly large. The king was like five-and-a-half inches tall, and they were all done on this open wax wire work, sort of — it was one of the few systems I think I ever developed in making anything, that I just got into this particular way of making a framework and then joining wax wires across it. And some of them were rolled out where they were round and flat. Some of them were soft wax so that when you'd press them together, they'd squish out, and they were very organic. It — they were very organic pieces.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were they cast in silver?

MR. NOFFKE: Silver and bronze, one side silver. The king and queen were so big I had to do multiple castings in each mold — couldn't — we didn't have crucibles big enough to cast them. So they, you know, ended up — the castings were probably six or seven ounces, but the capacity at that point was like five ounces in those crucibles. And I think that might've been — I maybe started drilling them out, but even the drilled-out crucibles — I'd drill some out later where you could cast 10 ounces, which would've been adequate to cast those. But we didn't have any that big at Carbondale at that point.

So I'd cast, you know, like, a full crucible and then throw another three or four ounces in and cast on top of that. And then you'd take them out. When you're cleaning them up, you have to pickle them. You don't cut the sprues off. You pickle them with the sprues and the buttons on and then solder everything back together where they — where they — where the two castings met because they didn't fuse. It was just metal packed in there, and then you had to oxidize — oxidation in between them, so you'd have to boil them in the acid.

MS. DOUGLAS: To get — to clean them up?

MR. NOFFKE: Clean them up and then solder them before you cut the screws off. Otherwise they'd fall apart once you cut the screws off because we had risers coming — right, just like the way — the whole setup for it, like one casting held the other one in place. So —

MS. DOUGLAS: What about the board?

MR. NOFFKE: The board was one of those copper assemblage pieces. It was all made out of — it was a plywood box about two-foot square and, you know, yea high with a little foot on it, and then I just covered the whole thing

with copper, brass and bronze and tacks and stuff. It was not as developed quite as much as the two-dimensional pieces. It was more of a — but it was just the — you know, the board for the — for the chess set.

And you know what, I used to play chess a lot. And after I cast that chess set, I never played again. I never completed a game after that.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: And I don't know if it's because I didn't want to lose with my own set or what. I think that might have been part of it. [They laugh.] But I like the game a lot, and I just never played after that, except I played chess some with my daughter when she was young. You know, I taught her how to play, and we would play — you know, it was just like — I didn't have to think too hard, you know, when you're playing chess with a seven- or eight-year-old. But —

MS. DOUGLAS: So what else did you produce for that thesis show?

MR. NOFFKE: I had probably a lot of cast jewelry in it, mostly rings — a few pieces of hollowware, those wall pieces and maybe the — more forged knives probably than anything. I think I probably did, you know, a dozen or so pieces in steel.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were —

MR. NOFFKE: And I don't know that I had anything other than the knives that were forged steel. I did this one large alligator gig when I — when — after I got the job in Stetson, which was before I left Carbondale. I was still working on the show. That piece was probably in it. And I don't know where that thing went, but it was a huge damn forged steel gig, you know, like a frog gig, only this was like a big thing for alligators. And I was serious about it. I was going to use the thing too. [Laughs.]

But it was more of a joke than it was anything [Laughs] — you know, it was just like a new object to make, and I liked that. I always liked — I think I'd like — I liked the simple common objects more than the — more than the sort of pristine — you know, teapots. I wasn't really interested in making a teapot or a — you know, a crucifix or, you know, something — the serious metal things that people made that you see in museums and so on. It was like — goblets I could see, you know. I could see a purpose there. But as far as — I always liked hardware-store things.

MS. DOUGLAS: Tools.

MR. NOFFKE: I mean, I wish I had made more screwdrivers. [Laughs.] When I was back — when I was first forging, I wish the first thing I had made should have been a screwdriver, something that you could buy for a dollar anyplace. [They laugh.] And I'm still thinking that I need — that I need to go back to that, you know, that I need to — that I need to — that I need to go to more simple objects and treat them with the respect that they deserve because they're — to me, they're more — a screwdriver is as important as a crucifix.

MS. DOUGLAS: You said earlier that you made a forged knife out of an old file?

MR. NOFFKE: That was — all of the early knives were pretty much made out of files. That was just the stock we had that we used. I mean, I didn't know what O1, O2 and all those other fancy steels were. I didn't know, you know, what oil-hardened steel was. You didn't buy that stuff when you had the old files all over the place that would work. But I learned years later, after making, you know, 20 or 30 of those knives out of files, that —

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I remember that piece you — at the — in the Penland book [*The Penland School of Crafts Book of Jewelry Making*, 1975]— I'm sorry, I'm jumping around, but the Penland book — you're showing how to make a knife out of a file.

MR. NOFFKE: You're right — out of — a pocketknife out of an old file.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right, right.

MR. NOFFKE: I think that was — that was — and that was — that was — that was an interesting — that was an interesting project, too. I think — I think that was maybe the second pocketknife I had made, and I'd — and I figured out a few things about the spring and placing the rivet and so on because the first one I made was — the blade was just a little loose. It would never quite snap up. So I learned from that one that you had to offset the hole when you had that spring. You'd mount — you'd do the frame of the knife and mount the back — the back of the spring first, and then the blade when you put it into the frame; you had to — you had to put tension on the spring so that the thing would snap open and snap shut. And there was — there was that little cam on the back side of the blade, the little curve part that moves the spring up, and then when it gets over that cam, it snaps it into place. That's the nonlocking type of — type of pocketknife.

MS. DOUGLAS: And it was — if I recall, it was very embellished. The surface was embellished?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, very much on that one. And actually, the handle and the frame were the — were one piece on that because I — you know, it didn't have — it didn't have inserts in it or other materials in it. So that was, I think, gold. I'd have to — I'd have to look at it now to remember exactly how the piece was fabricated, but I think those were fairly thick sheets of silver with some gold appliqué. And I think I had gold bolsters on the front of it, 14-karat likely because even then I knew that 14-karat was tough, tough stuff. And —

MS. DAVIS: So that — since I brought it up, that book, the Penland School book of jewelry making that you were featured in — that book came out in 1975. So when did you get involved with that project, that book project, I guess?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, that project was done in '74, and I remember talking to, oh, probably, Bill Brown and Evon Streetman — both. Evon — they had just done the ceramics book, a book of different potters around Penland. And then they decide to do the — to do the book — the jewelry book. This is interesting, too, because I suppose that knife could be classified as jewelry. But there was more metalsmithing in that book than there was in the last Penland book that they did, which was on metalsmithing — it was all jewelers — [laughs] — which is funny.

But they weren't — they weren't exactly sure — they had — they had, like, a group of people they decided to use that had been teaching there. And at — and at that point, 1974, I had taught there, like, three or four summers — I think started it in '71. But it was — it was my second home then. I mean, I was there — I had — I was there a lot in those years.

And I remember talking to Bill and Evon, and both at one — or both of them about that book. But that — the idea to do the almost *Popular Mechanics* step-by-step thing was my idea for that book. And I was quite pleased when they did that, when they did it that way, rather than just having a portfolio of work in it, and — which I think if you'd look — I think if you look at the ceramics book, which I don't know that I've ever really even looked at the whole thing or not; I remember seeing it back then, but I don't have one — but it was a different format than that.

And I don't know what the last book was; I haven't seen that, either — only people that are in it, and noting the name of the book and what — and then what was in it about the [inaudible].

MS. DAVIS: That format was very helpful to me as a student. That's what stood out to me about that book, was that it showed how you made the piece, and —

MR. NOFFKE: It just made sense to me, if you're going to do a book about — and you're going to have these people here, and you're going to photograph, interview them and do this, that we make a piece and you document step by step. And they bought it, so — but it was — it was — it was — [laughs] — funny because it really was a *Popular Mechanics* approach making something.

And somewhere not long ago, I ran across this set of slides that Lane Coulter sent me after he saw that book. And it was — he reversed the process; it was like, "How to make a" — no, "How to make an old file out of a knife."

MS. DAVIS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: So he starts — he starts out with, like, a — with, like, a typical hunting knife, you know, with the black handles and those plastic rings — things in them. And he anneals that, and he saws the — you know, saws the blade off of it, and then he lays out a file shape on there. And he — and he saws that shape out, and then he — and then he etches the teeth in it. But he just totally reversed the whole goddamn process so that you ended up with a — with a file out of an old knife.

MS. DAVIS: Yeah, that's —

MR. NOFFKE: And I think it was a set of — a set of 10 slides that he did. Lane was interesting with stuff like that; he was really very bright.

MS. DAVIS: More conceptual puns —

MR. NOFFKE: [Laughs] — well, no, there was — there was a lot of conceptual stuff going on then. That's like — I'm surprised that it's — that now it's — all of a sudden, it's hot.

MS. DAVIS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: Because — [laughs] — they just thought we were weird then. You know? Basically, you know, I considered a lot of the avant-garde stuff that you see in the museums and galleries now as, like, that's 40 damn

years old, you know? We did that — we did that in the '70s, and moved on. And —

MS. DAVIS: Well, talk a — talk a little bit more about that: What are some of the specific incidences you're thinking of — conceptual pieces like that about making, really, about process?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, I don't know specifically, but you have — and maybe there's not so much of it going on in the craft areas. Although there is the sense — well, like the — like the biennial at the — at the — at the Renwick [Gallery, Washington, DC] last year — you know, that was four peoples' exhibitions, nothing in there functional. It was all according to, you know, this guy O'Sullivan who writes for *The Washington Post*, all about narrative — functionality is dead, so to speak. And I jumped all over that because it irritated me.

You know, this conceptual stuff, and, oh, what's the other — the other thing — presentation — what — installation — I don't — I don't see a lot of — a lot of deep thought in that. To me, it's like it's old hat at this point. But all of a sudden, it's hot, you know? It's like, what's important; you know, it's what galleries want to show, it's what museums want. You know, they want these walls built out of weird materials and things, and it's like, whatever — you know, it's like, what about the conceptual people that were working in the '70s that they got no respect, no recognition, and then all of a sudden, you know, they're considered old fuds because they've actually maybe decided to make something that was functional — [with emphasis] — and functional work can't be conceptual. That's absurd. [Laughs] Nor can it be art, you know, by current definition.

You know, to me, it's very bothersome.

MS. DAVIS: Well, when you brought up the piece by Lane Coulter where he reversed, you know, the pun of how to make a knife out of an old file when he reversed that, that made me think of Elliot Pujol doing a — forming with dynamite —

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right.

MS. DAVIS: — metalforming with dynamite. And then your work, your cappuccino makers or your steam pieces, you used to blow those up as well. So I was wondering about that body of work, or those ideas where you're putting a little contemporary twist on some traditional things there —

MR. NOFFKE: Right. Those were —

MS. DAVIS: — at the time.

MR. NOFFKE: Those pieces were — you know, they — when they were finished — the steamers that I blew up, you know, that was — that just was part of the final forming on it, but that was some kind of a — oh, I don't know what the word is —

MS. DAVIS: Well, it was a, kind of —

MR. NOFFKE: A happening sort of thing.

MS. DAVIS: — theater, yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, really, a bit of —

MS. DAVIS: Performance.

MR. NOFFKE: A bit of theater involved in the process of the piece that also, you know, affected the piece itself. And like you say, but Pujol, he did the dynamite stuff. Did he do that when he was in graduate school? Was that part of his graduate thesis, I think, maybe? I mean, that was way back then. That was like '70 or '71 when he was doing that, I think.

MS. DAVIS: I heard about it, you know, at Summervail—

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah.

MS. DAVIS: — because some of Elliott's students were working at Summervail, and they would talk about Elliot taking a sheet of metal and weighting it down, and putting dynamite underneath it and blowing it up.

MR. NOFFKE: Right. He'd put all kinds of stuff in there, you know, like huge gears and things like that that'd blow the metal into the — for texture, you know, for forming the piece.

MS. DAVIS: Right, as opposed — [laughs] —

MR. NOFFKE: Or a rock.

MS. DAVIS: He'd talk about hydraulic forming and dye forming, and it was a —

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right. He just — you know, dynamite — of course, you can't do that now.

MS. DAVIS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: Not after 9/11, you can't do that kind of thing. Probably couldn't have done it 20 years ago, either. But it — you know, 30 years ago, you could go — you could go — anyone could go out and buy a — buy a — [Laughs] — case of dynamite, and some caps and fuse — [They laugh] — you know, you could.

We had — we were talking about doing that at Penland years ago, and then we didn't do it. But there were some — I think — some glassblowers there that liked the idea. They went down to the mining supply place and bought a case of dynamite, got the caps and fuse, and went out starting throwing sticks of dynamite off bridges, you know?

MS. DAVIS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: Into the rivers, and so on.

MS. DAVIS: That's a little different. [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, well, I mean, it created a — it created a problem for Bill Brown at the school.

MS. DAVIS: [Laughs.] Yeah, that's a little different.

MR. NOFFKE: You know, people didn't — people didn't necessarily like having strangers come into the neighborhood and start throwing sticks of dynamite out along the road [Laughs].

MS. DAVIS: Yeah, that went beyond the idea of making art.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, it did. Right, right. It just came into pure vandalism.

MS. DAVIS: Yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: [Laughs] — or a nuisance.

MS. DAVIS: Yeah, there's a fine line between art and vandalism, isn't there?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah.

MS. DAVIS: Also, backing up just a little bit, to go back to a chronology, how did the job at Stetson come about?

MR. NOFFKE: It was just one of maybe six or eight jobs that were opening up that, you know, that I was qualified for that were in metals. And this one required teaching everything else under the sun, too, which made me a very likely candidate because I had — I think I taught everything in the curriculum that they had in the art department at that art school at Stetson.

I taught printmaking; I even taught a course, an independent course, in macramé. [They laugh.] I taught ceramics, metal, jewelry and sculpture all at the same time in one room. And I had — and that worked great; that worked great.

I had — I had two ladies there, Sue Wilde, who later came up to Georgia and got her MFA in ceramics here — but she had her bachelor's degree in ceramics. Then another lady, Lydia Norell — whose daughter came up — was one of my students here, but she was a potter from Ormond Beach. And she had a good bit of experience; she knew glazes and fire — how to fire the kilns that were there. And she could throw well, and I didn't like to throw, I did — so I did hand-built pieces there, and so the —

The ceramic students worked with Sue and Lydia in the studio, and I — and I worked with them somewhat. But they — I worked with people that were handbuilding clay pieces, the students in that class. The metal students were doing mostly casting, and then the students that signed up for sculpture could either — could either work in ceramics or metal or both.

So we — [laughs] — and I've worked — I've worked in the studio with the students teaching three different — actually, three different separate classes at the same time, and I got a lot of work done during those classes. I worked in the studio all the time with the students.

MS. DAVIS: You were the only faculty then — the only art faculty?

MR. NOFFKE: There was one — no, there was another guy, Fred Messersmith, who was — who taught painting and art education. And I taught some art education courses one time when he was out of town because he was — he had a program in Florence that he went to. And every year, he said, "well, next year, Gary, you can go." [Laughs.] I was only there two years.

MS. DAVIS: So how did — you said earlier that you liked DeLand, Florida. And what was it like then?

MR. NOFFKE: In the late '60s, just absolutely beautiful. It wasn't — you know, it was before Disney World. And that's only about 60 miles north of Orlando, 70, maybe, on the outside — 20 miles from Daytona Beach, 20 miles from New Smyrna Beach right at the edge of the Ocala National Forest, right on the St. Johns River, a mile to the St. Johns River; fishing all over the place there. Good — lots of stuff to do.

And it was such a — such a nice thing to get out of the Midwest. Down there in the winter, you know, I'd never spent any time in the winter in Florida. I knew it was supposed to be warm there, but you know, if you hadn't been there in January, you didn't know. I mean, it would freeze there in the winter, but most of the time in the day it'd be 60 degrees, you know? You'd need a jacket. And I loved that, and I loved — I loved the — I love Florida a lot. I like being close to the beach. I just really liked the Florida environment; I liked the climate; I liked the — I liked all the plants that grew there, the — it was tropical, basically, or — you know, sub-tropical.

I mean, just the variety of plants and things that grew there were just amazing. And if I had been 20 or 30 miles further south, you never probably ever would have seen a freeze at all. I was sort of on the edge of it.

MS. DAVIS: What was the school like at that time? How big was it?

MR. NOFFKE: I think there was two-and-a-half thousand students in DeLand, 2,000, two-and-a-half thousand. Called a university, they had a law school in St. Petersburg, I think, or Tampa — one of them; not sure where it is — St. Petersburg, I believe.

And they had a business school, a music school there in DeLand. But it was a small — a small liberal arts school. And I liked it. I liked it. I think it was — I think it was adequate. I had some good students there when I was there. They were as good a students as I had anywhere. And you know, they worked with two faculty members. The really good ones, I said, "you need to go to, you know, Florida State or the University of Florida. You know, if you're serious, you know, you can't — you're not going to get that much from here."

But I had some — I had one student there, Tom Gingras, who I still communicate with. I mean, I hadn't — I hadn't talked to him in over 30 years, and I started getting this communications from him last year. He was — he's been teaching at a junior college in Austin, and I guess he got out of Stetson and ended up getting his MFA from University of Tennessee or some school north of here — I think it was University of Tennessee, but I'm not sure — and then just taught in a junior college out there for 30 years. But he was, you know, one of my first students at Stetson.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were doing your work in the classroom with the students.

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

MS. DOUGLAS: What was that like? Was that energizing, or distracting, or —

MR. NOFFKE: No, it was just — it was just the way that we worked, and it was the way that Kington worked. Kington worked in the studio with the students. I mean, he had — we had a room that he and Elliot and — Mary Lee Hu and I had benches in. And we all worked down the main shop, and then we would do our finished work up in — in that office, studio thing. And it was — it wasn't as big as this kitchen; there was four of us in there.

Shull used to paint; he'd have his — he'd have — he had a bigger office and studio in his — you know, at Eastern Illinois. But he would come out; he'd sometimes — he'd be out there in the morning, you know — just, like, we'd go into class maybe at 8:00; he'd be — already be in there painting.

So I liked that environment, and I — and I did it as long as I could. I did it at Georgia as long as I could. And then, probably, the mid-80s, it just got to be where there was just too much hand-holding. The students just — I mean, there was a new generation of people, and they wanted constant reassurance, constant stupid questions —

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: They didn't want to watch you work. They didn't want to watch you work; they wanted you to help them get their job done so they could get out faster. That was the thing, and it was a total change in attitude.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.] How insulting.

MR. NOFFKE: It was — well, it was one of the reasons — it was one of the reasons why, after 30 years, I'd had it —

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: — because I — you know, the only work I'd get done in my studio became demonstrations, you know? And I only get to do two or three of those in a class. That wasn't good enough; that wasn't good enough for spending 12, 14 weeks in this stinking place.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what about — at DeLand, what kind of work were you making, then?

MR. NOFFKE: I was doing a lot of — a lot of knives; I was still forging — we had some kind of grant there, and I had, like, \$6,000 to buy equipment with. And one of the things I bought was a Johnson forge — I want twice as big as Brent had. [They laugh.] I had a four-burner forge —

MS. DOUGLAS. [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: —And I remember — I remember one time, one time there, I went out — and we used — we used to have a lot of fun in that place. It was — it wasn't party central, but we had fun. I went — I went out; I found this place out in the St. Johns River; it was Crows Bluff Marina, I think. And they had — they had — they sold crabs there. It was a lot of — you know, St. Johns, I mean, they'd catch these huge crabs; these things were, like, eight inches across — just the shell. And their claw span would be, like, 28, 30 inches sometimes.

I mean, I've — and I had — I had — I went and bought a dozen of those things, and I had this big enamel pot that I swung that lid off that Johnson forge, and they had that pot on there with a dozen of these huge crabs in there. Their claws were hanging out, flopping around. And somewhere, I still got a slide of that. Did I — I don't know where it is, but I ran across it fairly recently.

MS. DOUGLAS: So combining sort of —

MR. NOFFKE: But we'd — I mean, I'd do —

MS. DOUGLAS: — cooking in the studio —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, right. Just anything like that.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: It was, like, sort of fair game. But I was doing a good bit of hollowware there, too. I was doing some large silver — large silver pieces. I made the big swine horn there; I don't know if you ever saw that piece.

MS. DOUGLAS: Describe that.

MR. NOFFKE: The piece the Mint [Museum of Art, Charlotte NC] has in their collection I made at Stetson.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, the —

MR. NOFFKE: The gold goblet with the chasing, I did that at — most of that at Stetson.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, really?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: The infamous goblet that was on the cover of *Metalsmith*? —

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right. That's where — that's where I got into that chasing, was at Stetson.

MS. DOUGLAS: You started that at Stetson?

MR. NOFFKE: Absolutely. I did most of that work at Stetson.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, wow.

MR. NOFFKE: I think maybe all of it might have been done when I was at Stetson.

MS. DOUGLAS: And what got you into doing that embellishing technique?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, that particular one was — I don't know what got me into it, I just was experimenting with those tools. And maybe it went back to pointillism.

MS. DOUGLAS: Ah!

MR. NOFFKE: You know, where everything is a dot.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yes.

MR. NOFFKE: And part of it too was sort of, like, it was — it did have a lot to do with the amount of time and work that went into it because it was an incredible amount of work that went into that. That's a lot of marks on that piece of metal.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right, the entire surface —

MR. NOFFKE: You think about how many times you can do this in the course of eight months or — no, actually, I chased on that piece for about a year and a quarter — probably 14 months I spent chasing that piece, the surface.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it was raised first —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, that was a week or two of raising.

MS. DOUGLAS: And then you planished the surface?

MR. NOFFKE: Then it was planished —

MS. DOUGLAS: And then you started chasing?

MR. NOFFKE: And then I started out with round chasing tools, maybe an eighth of an inch in diameter. And then those were — there's some sort of heavy work in that. And I ran into slides not too long ago, too, that showed a good photograph of that thing in the early processes, a pretty good detail photograph before I'd done — before I'd done the second or third course even. I think it was the first or second course that I — that that thing was taken.

MS. DOUGLAS: What —

MR. NOFFKE: Because I kept going over the whole piece with progressively smaller tools, down to a near needle point — a really sharp point.

MS. DOUGLAS: These were all chasing tools that you used on it?

MR. NOFFKE: Right. Everything was a dot.

MS. DOUGLAS: And what prompted you to make this piece out of gold? Up until that point you'd been doing silver hollowware.

MR. NOFFKE: Sliver — you can't drink beer out of silver. It just doesn't taste right.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: It does — it's metallic.

MS. DOUGLAS: But that was quite a bit of gold though, Gary.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, it was.

MS. DOUGLAS: I mean, how —

MR. NOFFKE: My mother bought that for me. But you know how much that gold cost when that was bought? \$597.

MS. DOUGLAS: Which was a lot of money then.

MR. NOFFKE: Well, it was but I mean not really for — not really. I mean, I was poor. [They laugh.] I always have been. I mean, the people, you know, I see these goddamn — these, excuse me — these people, you know, that just — you know, they make — they make more money in six months than I make in four years, and they wouldn't even think about investing anything in gold to make to use for themselves or to put in a show or

something. I don't understand that.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah, that's a good point.

MR. NOFFKE: I don't understand that. What do they spend their money on? You know, go to Las Vegas every year and blow a wad?

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that's a good point —

MR. NOFFKE: I never did that.

MS. DOUGLAS: — about what gold means to people, or doesn't mean.

MR. NOFFKE: I've spent most of the gold I've worked with, and I bought over 100 ounces of gold through the years — Maybe 150, I don't know. I don't even — I don't count it, don't keep track of it. I got grants to buy some of it, but most of it I bought with my teaching salary.

MS. DOUGLAS: That piece — that cup — or do you call it a chalice? Would you describe it as a cup?

MR. NOFFKE: I think a gold cup or a beaker. It's more of a beaker.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's cylindrical and then it flares out at the top.

MR. NOFFKE: Right. That's a pre-Columbian form. That's — I saw some of those, I think, in graduate school at the St. Louis Art Museum.

MS. DOUGLAS: Made out of gold?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah. They're Peruvian beakers — called beakers. And I just thought it was an elegant form, and so when I — and I had that form in mind. I don't think I worked with that form in the graduate school at all, but when I was at Stetson I thought, well, when I got that gold I thought, well, that's a nice — that's a nice form, you know? It's a functional form, it's elegant — that I'll just make one of those forms.

And I wasn't looking at a photograph of one of those beakers when I made that. And I did the silver one first, like that, that I gave Ebendorf years later that he just recently donated to the Racine Art Museum. And it's on loan to the Mint for that show.

MS. DOUGLAS: Your retrospective show.

MR. NOFFKE: Right. So I had that — I had bought that — it was an eight-inch disk of 18-karat — 18-gauge gold sheet, and then raised that form. The interesting thing about that form is that anyone would arrive at it if they were trying to raise a cylinder. You know, if they were trying to raise a cylinder you would end up with that form.

MS. DOUGLAS: Because you would naturally flare it out?

MR. NOFFKE: No, it's just the edge comes in slower than the rest of it.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, I see.

MR. NOFFKE: So in order to catch up — in order to get that flare out to straighten it up into a cylinder you have to go up and raise in extra courses on the top because the bottom has less resistance to it when it comes in.

MS. DOUGLAS: I see.

MR. NOFFKE: So it's a natural form to raise. And it's probably a form that's been made in most every culture anywhere that ever did any hollowware because there has to be enough people out there that have enough sense to know when to stop on something. You know, and why raise a cylinder anyway? You can cut a piece of tubing off and solder a flat sheet on the bottom.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right, a pipe.

MR. NOFFKE: Right. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: So how tall was that piece — or is —

MR. NOFFKE: I think it's about six-and-a-half inches — somewhere in that neighborhood. It's like — you know.

MS. DOUGLAS: So was that — had you been doing that intense chasing work on other pieces prior to that one?

MR. NOFFKE: That silver piece. That — the first one that was a similar form to that, although it — the bottom on it curved in a tad, whereas the bottom of the gold one is wider at the bottom and then comes in and then goes out—

MS. DOUGLAS: Flares a little bit.

MR. NOFFKE: —Which is more stable. The silver one had a little bit smaller foot, wasn't quite as stable. So I wanted — you know, I certainly wanted the piece to be functional. I was starting — in those days I was doing an awful lot of work on surfaces alone without a whole lot of thought and function of pieces. And it was in the early '70s that I caught myself making things that could have been more functional, tapers and blades and things that, you know, you couldn't cut much with it — you know, you couldn't slice a carrot with some of those knives because they were wedges. You know, you'd send it across the room.

And I became more concerned about function in the '70s, although I did make a few things in the early '70s that were quite functional. I get — I did get — and probably it might have been just from sheer quantity of work I did. That every once in while you get — you know, you get lucky.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, so in other words, if you're going to make a knife, you want to make a knife that cuts really well.

MR. NOFFKE: Absolutely. You know, why make —

MS. DOUGLAS: You don't want to just make a knife —

MR. NOFFKE: I don't make a knife-looking thing.

MS. DOUGLAS: — to look like a knife.

MR. NOFFKE: And I don't want to make an art-looking thing. You know? I have problems with both of those things. It looks like it'll work, but it won't.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.] Right.

MR. NOFFKE: It looks like art, but it's not. [They laugh.]

MS. DOUGLAS: But like you said, when you first started making knives maybe you had to get little better at it to make sure it actually worked really well.

MR. NOFFKE: Right so — yeah. Well, I figured that, you know, I've made some that did work really well, and then some that — some that didn't. And I — you know, and I used the piece. I use all the pieces. So I knew which ones worked and which ones didn't. And I started figuring out, you know, well, there's no point in making it if it's not going to work right.

And so that was the difference between the silver — the silver tumbler or cup and the gold one, is the gold one was more stable. And it was probably more elegant too. So it doesn't — you don't have to make compromises, I don't think, with aesthetics when you're working with functional things. In fact, I think I'm pretty much into the form-follows-function theory.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, so when you made that gold cup, was anybody else doing gold hollowware? Was that a —

MR. NOFFKE: Now, I don't know anyone that — well, Pat Flynn has done a few smaller pieces. Other than him, I know no one that's done any serious gold work in this country or anywhere ever.

MS. DOUGLAS: As opposed — other than jewelry?

MR. NOFFKE: Other than, you know, back in —

MS. DOUGLAS: Jewelry.

MR. NOFFKE: No, I'm talking about hollowware.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MR. NOFFKE: I'm not talking about jewelry. I mean, that's — you can buy that at Sears & Roebuck.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, what I mean is the goldsmiths' — focus on jewelry; they don't do objects.

MR. NOFFKE: Right. Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you really didn't have a model when you decided to —

MR. NOFFKE: I had seen some historical pieces in gold — the pre-Columbian or Peruvian pieces and then some Egyptian gold cups, which were — and I would imagine the pre-Columbian stuff too as electrum. And those pieces actually might have been done hot because it's possible to do those hot. And those people weren't stupid, you know. They were actually 2,000 years ahead of our technology in a lot of ways.

MS. DOUGLAS: When you say "hot," they forged — you mean they forged —

MR. NOFFKE: I think they — I think they did a lot of their early work — I think that metal was hot when those people were early — were working early on. Just my thought, you know: If they could work it hot, why wouldn't they? You know, they had tongs and you know, because they melted metal in clay pots and —

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it would be easier to work hot, wouldn't it?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, it's four or five times as fast. And even though you're working with material that's worth that much, you know, the time element isn't that critical but still it's something. You know, if you can do it fast, if you understand how to do it, you know, you're not making any sacrifices in finishing the piece or in the quality of it. You just get there faster. So you can do more. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Would you — were you still making rings when you were at Stetson?

MR. NOFFKE: A lot of rings. I did a lot that were — that were similar to, like, the chess set that, like I said, that was sort of one of the few systems I developed of making things. And I actually even did — it was the only time that I can recall that I actually did a group of pieces to sell to galleries. And I was selling those stinking sterling silver rings for \$20 in a couple of — in a gallery down in Winter Park, Florida. And I didn't do many of them; I maybe only did a dozen or so.

And then I had — then I had some guy — the guy that taught at Stetson before me, started knocking those off and selling them for \$15. [They laugh.] And I just said, "Okay, you can have it, Charles. You take that as far as you can." And that was about the end — that was about the end of it. And I never really — it was the only time that I ever got irritated by somebody copying me, because they were underselling me in the same place I was selling a few pieces. [They laugh.] And underselling me by \$5 — stealing my process, stealing my tricks, and underselling me by \$5.

MS. DOUGLAS: No shame. [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: Oh man. So yeah, I did a good number of rings at Stetson. I've always made a lot of rings. I've made hundreds of rings.

MS. DOUGLAS: What about that —

MR. NOFFKE: I just gave most of them away rather than putting them in shows. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: What about that form? Is it because it's so personal that —

MR. NOFFKE: There's just always been something about a nice ring that — it just seems like a natural piece of jewelry. You know, other jewelry forms to me aren't as natural as rings. They're not as simple and they're not — they're not seen as much, they're not noticed as much. You know, somebody talking, you know — you see a ring, you know?

It's like — and rings always were — to me, that was sort of like a status symbol. If somebody had a nice big flashy gold ring with a big stone, you know, it was like — you know, we were poor when I grew up. [Laughs.] And stuff like that, you know, was — you know, had — made an impression on me. So I always liked — I always liked the ring as a form in itself. And I still do. I think they're very personal pieces of jewelry — personal statements. I don't wear any, anymore.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what — the rings that you were making then, were they cast, fabricated?

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, all. I did some cast, some fabricated. That was one thing — fabrication was something I learned probably down — starting at Stetson I started — because I think I did those silver coins and beads then. But I learned — I learned more about fabrication at Penland from Ebendorf, and being around him, seeing how he went about making tubular — cylindrical beads, those kinds of things; how he would take a cylinder and flatten the bottom and then solder a flat sheet on it, and then saw the edge off.

Oh, I mean, that was like all I needed to know — that was all needed to learn about fabrication. I knew how to solder, I just didn't — I just didn't know what intelligent, simple ways of putting forms together. You know, I

would have tried to cut a disc out and fit it exactly inside the bottom, you know; that would have been — which makes it really almost impossible to solder, you know, because you can't get both pieces equally hot and apply the solder. You know, it's like — but, you know, just sitting it on a flat brick — a flat bottom tube on a flat piece of metal, any shape that it is, but big enough so you can heat it equally to the cylinder, put your pallions inside and outside, wherever you want them, and then solder it.

But I learned — I learned just that and a few little tricks from Ebendorf. And then — and then I thought fabrication was important and I'd been shorted on fabrication, and my — you know, Kington didn't do it; he didn't like to solder. And they did some minor fabrication at Eastern Illinois. I mean, I knew how to — I knew basically how to do it. But I had forgotten, you know, even how I did some of my fabrication there because I — I learned how to solder at Eastern.

MS. DOUGLAS: So out of necessity of teaching it, you had to learn how to do it again?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah. I thought it was important and that was — that was, like, one of — that was, like, what I added to Kington's curriculum that he had at SIU, his basic metals classes there. And he had — they had art education students there too. You know, it was casting, forging and raising. You forge a spoon, raise a little hemispherical bowl — like that, like the wooden bowl there, only, you know, usually out of a six-inch sheet, so it's smaller than that. That would be an eight- or a nine-inch sheet to get a bowl that scale — eight-inch, probably.

But basically I thought — I thought the four important forming processes were casting, fabrication, forging and raising for metals — that that was the basics, you know. There's other related things, you know; die forming. But that's — you know, that's not nearly as important to know as how to raise something — the raising process from a flat sheet of metal, and not as important to know as forging, not as important as fabrication. That's just something that you add to your repertoire at some point or other. Not something — electro-forming, you know, that's forming outright. But that's — you know, so is throwing wax on ice. [They laugh.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, you know, there's a lot of techniques that when I was a student that were out there that, like, photo etching or —

MR. NOFFKE: That was what now?

MS. DOUGLAS: Photo etching was a —

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, right, right, right. Oh, those — yeah, those are surface — right.

MS. DOUGLAS: It was popular when I was a student — surface techniques.

MR. NOFFKE: I mean, that's — those were surface things. Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: A lot of — a lot of specialized techniques — married metals — the inlay, that kind of —

MR. NOFFKE: Right. And see married metals, that was one I did — that was our main fabrication project in all of my beginning classes at Georgia.

MS. DOUGLAS: Really?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah. And what I would have — and I had a crackerjack project for them. I mean, it was all laid out. They didn't — all they had to do was to — and this, I think, was an important class. I think it'd be a great class for any — for any liberal arts school anywhere, even if they didn't have an art school, because it's a process where you have steps one through 30. You skip step 23 and you're screwed. [They laugh.] You know what I mean? It's like — it's like — it's a matter of — it's a matter of starting with an idea and learning how to go from one step to the other, like building a house. You don't start with the roof and then build something under it. You know —

MS. DOUGLAS: That's what metals is all about. [They laugh.]

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah. So it was — it was — I think it was a very good problem-solving, you know, course in logic, really, as to how to — how to identify what it is you're doing and then start and do things in sequence and get done with it. And I learned a lot in that project too, because every once in a while a student would skip a step and get away with it. And I figured out — and I paid attention. You know, I wasn't — I wasn't, like, going to slap them down because they didn't do it the way that I told them to do it. If they found a better, faster way they got an A.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right. [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: And I learned something myself. I learned more from my students, probably, than I did in college.

And I also learned more building this house than I learned in college. [They laugh.] That was a — that was a good one. That was a real humbling experience.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah, that's —

MR. NOFFKE: Building this house. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Building this house —

MR. NOFFKE: Thinking, you know — anyone — you know, you see these local builders around here, you know, they can do it. Well, hell, I didn't know — I didn't know to use a string, you know, to snap a straight line between two points. [Laughs.] I was a college professor; I didn't have to know stuff like that. [They laugh.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, we're approaching the end of this tape, so we'll cut it off at this point and continue on tape two.

[END TRACK 2.]

MS. DOUGLAS: This is Mary Douglas, and I'm recording an interview with Gary Noffke at his house in Farmington, Georgia, for the Archives of American Art. Today is December the fifth and this is tape two of our conversation.

Gary, so yesterday, we were talking about your time at Stetson University, and you had described the school and your teaching there and you were talking about the gold cup you made there. And I guess to pick up where we left off, were there any other, you think, seminal works you made while you were at Stetson?

MR. NOFFKE: I did two or three knives there that I think were among the best of that series of pieces, and also probably close to the last of that series. I made knives into the '80s, but for the most part, after, you know, the early '70s, I was pretty much through with it and sort of concentrating more on vessels, I think, and hollow-ware than the knife-making.

Those knives, I think — the two — one of them, Richard Wattenmaker has. Is that right? Is that name right?

MS. DOUGLAS: We'll have to check —

MR. NOFFKE: And then Evon Streetman has another one. They were both chopping knives with highly decorated, carved surfaces and etched inlays and so on in them. I'm trying to think of other things I might have done there. I really spent the bulk of the time when I was at Stetson working on that gold goblet. The silver one was sort of a task before that with that chasing technique that I was using. And that took a lot of time, some casting. But that's — I was only there two years and probably at least half that time was spent on that one gold piece.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, you were there two years. Was it a two-year contract?

MR. NOFFKE : Well, it was really a year-to-year contact and after the second year, you know, I was looking for a job and they were — you know, that was sort of an understood thing not really — it wasn't in a contract. It was, rather — you know, it's just the way some schools operate. They lead you to believe that you might be able to stay there if you're real good and everything, if they like you, if you fit in.

MS. DOUGLAS: But there was no commitment on their part —

MR. NOFFKE: No, no, it was a non-tenure-track one-year appointment for, you know, two separate years.

MS. DOUGLAS: So where did you go after you left Stetson?

MR. NOFFKE: I had met Bill Brown up at St. Augustine at an art festival, along with Ebendorf. They were the jurors at, you know, this outside art festival they used to have. They probably still have them. But in those days, those were fairly important art shows — at least, in Florida they were.

So I actually planned, after Stetson, to move to Penland and be a resident there and run the metals thing, teach the metals concentration. They were just getting started with the concentration in the winter and — or spring and fall. And I was going to do that. And then when I was there that first session in the summer, I moved all my things from Florida up there, planning to come back — I had a summer teaching thing after Penland at Los Angeles College — Los Angeles State College, right in the center of LA.

So I think it was basically a teacher's college but they had a metals program and they needed a summer — just a summer instructor there. So it was when I was in LA, that I got the job in Georgia and then had to call Bill Brown and tell him that I couldn't do the Penland thing, give him a little bit of time to find someone else. So that was that sequence.

Then I was at Penland for the first session teaching with Ebendorf, and that's when I met Fritz. And we'd decided to drive to California together after that session. He had a job in San Francisco — or California Arts and Crafts in Oakland. And then I went from there down — got a ride down to LA.

MS. DOUGLAS: And how long were you —

MR. NOFFKE: For the summer.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were you at — oh, just for the summer.

MR. NOFFKE: Just for the summer, right.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I know you've had a long friendship with Fritz Dreisbach, so you've also done work together, haven't you?

MR. NOFFKE: Right. I spent a lot of time at Penland from, I think, you know, probably the early '70s — '71, '72. He was really pretty much a resident there and ran that glass program from '71 or '72 up until Bill Brown left that school, and that would have been the early '80s, I think — '84, somewhere around there, '83 or '84. I'm not sure about those dates.

But there was probably the last four or five years that he was there, I went up there, often every weekend — you know, 30 trips a year for a few days, at least — and we worked in the glass studio together. He let me be the designer and then I would do these layouts. We were putting lots of — the threaded glass, the Venetian — what's it called? Latticino, and wrapped with gold. We put a lot of fine gold and gold leaf, and we experimented with a lot of stuff.

Like, mica works very well in glass. It's not — it's compatible. It doesn't expand or contract, you know, to any extent that would cause cracking and looks like silver. We tried silver, and silver vaporizes inside the — or fine silver — not fine silver, sterling melts too low and it also oxidizes in the glass. And I think fine silver was enough lower than fine gold that it vaporized, sort of like beaded up. It was strange — strange the way that it reacted.

So I worked with him a lot in the late '70s and maybe early '80s. I don't recall the exact dates. I'd have to do a little check-up on that. But we've been friends, you know, since we first met at Penland in '71. And he would come here frequently and we'd make things, work on things in my studio, too — same kind of thing, only backwards.

MS. DOUGLAS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] What was the atmosphere like at Penland in those days?

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, it was great. It was great. You know, it was before the time when there was a whole lot of compliance with state and federal regulations, you know, with just all kinds of things. You know — all of that business changed the nature of the school, and I think probably, it was because of, you know, grants they applied for that were either state or federal grants tied somehow with that. And if it was totally a private school, you can — had a lot more freedom with certain rules and regulations.

MS. DOUGLAS: In terms of studio —

MR. NOFFKE: And policies, you know — everything. Yeah. I mean, now when you go to Penland, it's still a very good school, I think, a neat place to go, and creative. But you have staff meetings, you know, for two hours that give you all the dos and don'ts — what you can do and what you can't do, you know. And it's just like almost the school making everybody sign a disclaimer or something, or them getting a disclaimer. And that nature has changed.

And now it's — now the school — now, here's an interesting thing that happened with Penland. Bill Brown, when he was there, he worked for the faculty. And if a student came in and complained to him, he'd throw them out of school. Now, if the faculty screwed up and he knew about it, they were gone, too. But no student came in and went over their teacher and complained about conditions in class or being ignored or being embarrassed or some such thing like that.

That was not — we worked for \$30 a week there and Bill thought we deserved a little respect. [Laughs.] —

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MR. NOFFKE: —And to me, that was a lot better deal than what came later, when students would go behind your back and complain about this or that, whether it was based on anything or not, you know, it was like — it was great to have that kind of support. And we were there to help the students. You know, we weren't there to cause them trouble.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you would have been working with Fritz, then, when he was just starting the glass studio? The glass studio was new, wasn't it?

MR. NOFFKE: I'm trying to think. They had rebuilt — when I first went there, it was a very small studio and then they expanded. I think in the early '70s, they built a new studio there, and then blacksmithing moved into part of the old space. I'm not exactly sure how that went. I mean, my memory isn't that good about the sequence of studio development there but glass and blacksmithing went through a lot of transitions. Now they have two separate buildings, you know, away from that. That building is something else now. I'm not even sure what it's used for — maybe resident studios, or not resident studios but — the technicians or whatever they have there, whatever that position is — coordinators. The coordinators, I think, maybe have studios there.

MS. DOUGLAS: But it was experimental in nature at this point — the glassblowing.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, glass actually had started there, I think, with Mark Peiser a few years before that, but they really didn't have ongoing — I think Mark was more of a resident. They hadn't really brought in too many people and started classes.

I think Fritz was sort of the beginning of that glass during every session there and glass as a separate craft area, you know, as opposed to ceramics and metals and fibers, which had always been — was ongoing, at that time. Glass was added. Wood, I think, started maybe before glass or at the same time. I'm not sure. It was back in those days, anyway. Somebody else can give better information on the history of Penland. I'm not that familiar with all of it.

MS. DOUGLAS: What other — were there other artists up there that you — influenced you or inspired you to make work, collaborations?

MR. NOFFKE: Early on, the first session I taught there was with Ebendorf. And we worked together pretty well. We had, I think, a good — you know, both of us had different approaches to our work and it was a high-energy place. I learned a lot from Ebendorf. So I don't know that he was that much of an influence in my work, nor I in his, but we learned from each other.

And the environment is just — when you have two people that are working, there's more energy in the space. And that was always exceptionally good at Penland, was that there was a lot of energy in that school. And I got a lot of work done there, teaching or not teaching, either way. It was always a very productive environment for me.

I think the next time I taught there — or recently after that, I taught with Barry Merrit at a joint session there, and that was also a good one. Barry was a real creative person. I think he was quite important in the movement at that time. He was doing some large-body jewelry, you know. That sounds sort of like, well, I've heard of that before but he was among the first.

You know, I think he did commissions for Madonna and people like that, you know. And I don't know exactly what the history is on that or when that was, but I remember — maybe it was some other person like Madonna [Laughs] but it was in the early '70s he was making these great, big things out of fiberglass and leather and all kinds of stuff. Pretty wild.

MS. DOUGLAS: So while you were going up to Penland, you had started working at the University of Georgia?

MR. NOFFKE: Right. I started here in the fall of '71. So —

MS. DOUGLAS: And what was it like when you started there? What was the program like?

MR. NOFFKE: It was rather strange. We had a studio that was not very large in the visual arts building, which was relatively new then. That building was only like eight years old or so when I went there — maybe 10, I don't know. And then there was a separate studio for graduate — for majors and graduate students at Griggs Hall, which was across campus in an old dormitory.

And there, we just had a series of dormitory rooms with doorways knocked out in between them, you know, on both sides of the bottom floor. And — a couple of walls were removed in the metalsmithing and jewelry studios later, when we moved the whole program there. And that was interesting because there was extra space in the visual arts building that I was trying to get to expand the space, and as soon as I made the move to get it, well, then that space was identified as available for studio.

So some of the tenured faculty members, that had a little bit more pull than me, got that space for something else. You know, I don't know what it was turned into. But in the end, I just finally just moved to have both the graduate and undergraduate classes all in one space, rather than driving back and forth. And so the studio was

always problematic at Georgia for me.

They never, ever had a really well-designed studio in the art building, and still don't even after a mega-million-dollar addition to the — you know, a new building on campus, one of the biggest state projects that has happened in the last 20 years. And they still only have about two-thirds of the art department in — or art school in that building, with satellites spread and a brand-new, multi-mega-million-dollar building.

MS. DOUGLAS: So were you the only metals faculty when you started there?

MR. NOFFKE: I was, yes. Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: And you were in the school of art, which was —

MR. NOFFKE: At that point, it was the department of art, and then ten years later, or so, they became a school — or we became a school —

MS. DOUGLAS: Because they're pretty well-known for their painting department.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, when I first went there, Lamar Dodd was the head of the department, and he was a painter and it was sort of for his own legacy or something, you know, that he built the painting department. It was like there were 12 or 13 people in drawing or painting when I first came here, and there are at least that many now, if not more. But the department has grown and, you know, they added 20, probably, faculty positions since 1971. I really don't know the size of the school now but there was around 60 when I retired in 2001.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it was a big change from Stetson then — the size of the school and —

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, definitely, definitely. We had, you know — there were as many people in — you know, there were three people in ceramics when I first came here, and that was larger than the whole art department at Stetson.

MS. DOUGLAS: Three faculty.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, which was a faculty of two — me and Fred Messersmith. [They laugh.]

MS. DOUGLAS: So when you started at Georgia, were you planning on staying there? Did you feel like that was a good move for you to stay there?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, I had moved around a good bit during my graduate degrees here and there, and so I moved from Eastern Illinois to the University of Iowa, and then back to Southern Illinois, and then to Florida, and then up to North Carolina, to California and back to Georgia. And I was looking for a place to land.

And it maybe was a mistake to have built this house when I did because it locked me into that place and people knew it, you know. Lots of politics in universities and academia, and when you make a commitment to a place, you know, they've sort of got you and they knew it. So I lost a lot of leveraging by having built this house here because people knew that I wasn't going to just quit and leave.

MS. DOUGLAS: So talk about the house. When did you build it?

MR. NOFFKE: In 1973, I think, was when I bought this property and started building the house. It took about a year to get it finished — get the house and studio finished.

MS. DOUGLAS: And could you describe how you came across the property and what your ideas were for it?

MR. NOFFKE: I was just looking for property and when I found, you know, I had looked at two or three other places and somebody told me that this property was for sale. And I checked it out and, I mean, once you take a walk down through the woods here and see the creek, you know — and that was an old mill site so it was just a real nice piece of property with the shoals there, and I bought it the same day that I looked at it.

MS. DOUGLAS: How many acres is it?

MR. NOFFKE: It was seven-and-a-half then, and I bought one more acre, years later. I wish I could have bought more. I should have insisted on more from my neighbors up the road because they ended up all going to, you know, a developer, more or less, that cut all the trees down, paid for the property and then tore up this, dug a lake and blocked one of my springs, that kind of thing.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, just sitting here, looking at the property, it looks like it goes on for miles in woods. You can't see anything with the woods —

MR. NOFFKE: There are a lot of woods around here. And this property is long and thin. It goes about a half mile up the creek because it was basically part — this side of the creek — there was property on the other side, too, that was affected by the mill pond and the mill operation, and that went — I think the mill was built — that dam and mill probably were built before the Civil War by a number of years, and then it operated into the early 1940s.

Actually, from what I read about the mill site was that they let the place go, that the pond had silted up and they knocked — tore the dam out in 1943, which was when the mill closed. And that was the year I was born. So, all the trees back in the bottom in the old mill pond, now, are the same age as I am. [They laugh.] You go back there and you know how old you are when you see those trees. [They laugh.]

MS. DOUGLAS: So this house — what was your ideas, when you saw the property, for building a house?

MR. NOFFKE: I had known this architect, Jim Mitchell, when I was down at Stetson. He was a local architect and he designed a lot of houses for the faculty there. And I saw them and I had been to his house a few times, which he designed and built. And I just liked his style. You know, there weren't very many architects around that were doing residential homes, you know. That just didn't happen. And I don't know why, but that was sort of his specialty.

And he moved out of that later — you know, had a bigger firm and started doing bank buildings and hospitals and things like that to make more money. And then, you know, that got complicated. And at any rate, I had Jim come up and look at the property and he designed this house. I made just a few changes in it but basically it was, you know, very few, very few — just, like, adding stained-glass windows on the end. Those windows weren't designed in the house.

MS. DOUGLAS: Would you describe the house — the style of it?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, it's a modified A-frame. It's split-level, so it's broken — I don't know how you would say it. You basically have to look at it to see, you know [laughs.] It's hard to describe.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, the floor plan follows the slope of the grade —

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right, it does that, yes.

MS. DOUGLAS: Steps down with the grade toward the creek.

MR. NOFFKE: Right. And then you don't see very many houses that are designed in this manner. Like, A-frames are really boring forms to deal with but I think his breaking it the way that he did, it's a simple structure that works well on the site. And opening the side of it, which is generally the roof, is a variation on the way A-frames are designed, generally.

MS. DOUGLAS: And yesterday, you mentioned building the house. Could you talk about that?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah. It was — I actually started out with a contractor that put the lower deck — the under — did the footings, which he screwed up badly, which is a lot of — a big problem now. And then the main structures and — and he had a transit here that he had, had for like three weeks. He didn't know how to use it. You know, this guy was incapable. I won't mention his name but I'd like to see him again sometime and thank him for all the fine work he did here. So I started out with the deck down, which was problematic to begin with.

The upper deck ended up being four inches too short because he had — although he had done the elevations of every post in the whole underground, which is like — there's 60 of them down there, eight-by-eight cedar posts, he cut them all the same length for each row. So then, well, the elevation was different in each spot. So after he trimmed them off so they were level to put the beams in, well, we were four inches short — [laughs.] — on the top end, which meant that it was also closer to the ground than it should have been.

And you know, this whole house should have been built up a foot higher than it was. So I fired him at that point and just decided to do it myself. And he didn't know what he was doing. I could see problems then and I didn't know anything about construction. I could see problems that I didn't need. So I got rid of him and then thought I'd just do it myself, which I did. And I had, you know, a couple of friends that helped.

One guy, Chuck Dorr [ph], did — he and I really pretty much built — we drove 90 percent of the nails in the house, put it that way, and drilled the holes and bolts. We dug the septic line all by hand with a pick and shovel. And there was part of Stone Mountain in that hole that, that septic tank went in. I mean, we busted it up with a pick and then we broke that rock up later in the line and instead of using gravel, we made gravel. It was fun back in those days. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, the peak of this house is pretty big. I can't imagine how you did this without a crane or —

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, we did have — we had a crane parked right where we're sitting on the deck itself that lifted these beams, the big ones. And at one point, he had one of them swinging around and he got a hold of it too low — and those things weight two tons each.

MS. DOUGLAS: What are they, pine?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, they're laminated pine. And I think they're six-by-eighteen-inch beams, 32 feet long.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you know, to take this on yourself without having construction experience, that's pretty amazing, really.

MR. NOFFKE: Well, I knew how to drive a nail and — [laughs] — and I remember seeing the kind of people that build houses. You know, it doesn't look like they were the sharpest tacks in the business [Laughs.]. But there's something — you know, I learned how valuable experience was, building this house. And I also learned that you start — there's different steps in anything and you don't skip them, you know? You do your footings — you do them right, you know. That was the first problem with this house, was somebody skipped right on the footings. They built them and they looked like footings, but they weren't.

They were down — you know, all the eight-by-eights are sitting right on ground level so they get — stuff washes down under the house and then that needs to be cleaned off every six months or so. Otherwise your beams rot, you know, and that's only one hundred thousand dollars to replace those — not a big job. [Laughs.] But , you know, just not having the footings right, and that went — there were further complications later.

I said I didn't know what a string was used for. You know, because I knew the beams were set, you know, using a transit, I assumed they were in a straight line. But I didn't have the good sense to check those damn beams. I marked the centers on top of the beams where these big beams — where the beams sat, actually — the foot of the beams. And I set them all exactly right on a point. Well, the two beams in the center are four inches off line [Laughs], which means that — and then when those things were anchored down, there was no changing anything.

So the roof has got a four-inch bow in the front of it, which means the gutters don't work right. So then you have problems with the gutters. And you know, that could have been saved just by the use of a string because it didn't matter if the beams sat directly on — the big beams sat directly on top of the underneath supports. Four inches wouldn't have been a problem because there's plenty of stability there.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, what I see when I look at the house is just a very personal environment — you know, not considering just the furnishings, but looking at the house itself and the way it's built — it's very personal. It's like a work of art, itself. And I find that interesting that you built the house yourself because then you were able to make a lot of decisions right then and there.

MR. NOFFKE: Right. And this house wasn't like most houses that are — oh, what do they call it? Anyway, regular-frame houses where you have a structure and then you put a shell on both sides of it. This house, when it was built, that was it. There's no hollow walls in it. It's solid walls. And those — the decking that was put on the ends of the house on the roof, you know, was the inside and the outside, both. Of course, there's metal over the top, you know, but —

MS. DOUGLAS: And your studio — was it designed as part of the house at that point?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, and then I did modify that because I dropped the back of it off vertically, rather than being a total A-frame. And it was — I did that to make it larger than was possible because it's a fairly small studio. So that, I did modify. And the studio, pretty much, was built out of scrap left over from the house.

MS. DOUGLAS: But it's built on the main deck of the house.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, it's built on the same structure as the lower deck.

MS. DOUGLAS: And it looks like a —

MR. NOFFKE: And that was built when the house was built.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it was part of the architect's design?

MR. NOFFKE: Right, with that modification in the back to enlarge it just a little bit. That gave me, you know, three more feet depth and the working space.

MS. DOUGLAS: Which, we should note, is — the deck is overhanging or over the gorge that the creek is in so you hear the creek water constantly.

MR. NOFFKE: Right. And right in front of the house is — that nice walkway along there was actually — the ditch that used to have a wooden trough in it, back when the mill was operating. The gate was right down to the left in front of the house at the top of the shoals. And that ditch was all hand-dug, done, you know, with mules and, you know, you can imagine what kind of labor we had in Georgia before the Civil War. And it still looks like it was hand-built. You know, it's got a little erosion in it but not much.

MS. DOUGLAS: I remember in Julie Hall's book, *Tradition and Change*, your house is featured in part of that book.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, I think that was during the construction, too. If I remember right, there's a photograph of Nick Dean in that, standing here in the doorway next to that window.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah, the stained glass —

MR. NOFFKE: And I don't think the door was up then.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah, there was an image of a man standing in front of that stained glass.

MR. NOFFKE: That was Nick Dean, who was the photographer, but he wasn't the one that took that shot. I don't know — maybe I took that shot. I bet I did.

MS. DOUGLAS: So where did this stained glass come from that's in there?

MR. NOFFKE: That came from St. Augustine. I bought that when I was down in Florida. It was in an antique shop and I think it had come out of a public building of some sort there that had been torn down. Whether it was a library or government building, I don't know. I don't recall. But it's just a strange thing because it was kind of — the guy that sold it to me called it "the Indian" but it's obviously like a Roman figure there. I never could figure out, you know, what it was really supposed to be. What would you guess that —

[END TRACK 3.]

MS. DOUGLAS: This is Mary Douglas interviewing Gary Noffke at his house in Farmington, Georgia. It's December fifth. This is tape three. And we were just discussing the house that you built and how it was — has a very personal nature to it. I notice all the metalwork in the house — kitchen implements, containers, et cetera. You've obviously filled your house with items you've made yourself.

MR. NOFFKE: Yes, even during the construction, like the kitchen counters were built. It had a different surface originally. They were tongue and groove and stained mahogany and varnished. And they just — that didn't hold up. But you can even notice that I made the drawers that fit in there.

They're just boxes that slide on wood — not very efficient, but you know, that was — that was just part of doing it. You know, I need a drawer and make a drawer and then the drawer pulls as well. One of them is just a hole, so that was easy. [They laugh.]

But I had — I had fun with the details, you know. It was like everything was pretty much hand-done. And doors, I built some of the doors. And at any rate, all of it together, none of it was really treated in the same manner, you know, because I like — I like a lot of variety in things.

Walls, you can see the valances I made for the lights — now need to be replaced. But I don't even use those lights anymore which is why they're like that, why that they haven't been replaced.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were you doing the studio work simultaneously, or you weren't able to when your house wasn't there?

MR. NOFFKE: I didn't get a whole lot of studio work done that year I was working on the house. But I did some. You know, I always worked at the university when I was there, in those years, you know, definitely. I mean, when I was in a two-hour class, I worked probably on my own things for an hour-and-a-half out of that two hours.

And none of the students were lacking in instructions. It was just a different — a different period when they paid attention to what I was doing. They weren't copying me but they could learn by watching instead of asking questions and having their hand held.

So it was a good environment because they wanted it. They enjoyed that working environment, me working with them. And they had enough instruction. They could figure it out themselves.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, you were working with undergrads, or did you have a grad program?

MR. NOFFKE: Both. Yes, there were graduates. I inherited a couple of Ebendorf's graduate students when I first

came here. I think, yeah, two of them, and then I had — I had my own graduates come in the year after that, the next year. I'm trying to think who were among the earliest graduate students. I think Richard Pfeiffer was one of them.

Barbara Mann, another early graduate student, I think she — she started her graduate program the second year I was here or possibly — no, it would have been the third year. But generally I had two or three graduate students through most of the years I was at Georgia; I think up to four possibly once. But that was large enough with the undergraduate program.

MS. DOUGLAS: And so how did your work develop in those years after you did your gold cup and you were still doing hollowware. And how did it change when you came to Georgia?

MR. NOFFKE: I think it was probably in the mid-70s I decided I was going to concentrate a little bit more on function, and I think I was starting to — starting to get a little bit bored with all of the surface work at the same time. I mean, I wasn't really — it wasn't really developing anymore.

So I was doing pretty much the same thing on new work that I did two or three years before. And I went through a period where I just decided to just sort of skip that for a while, just left it and spent more time thinking about the forms and function of the pieces I was working on. So that was sort of a major shift.

And then after four or five years of that, I went — I went back and started doing variations on some of the old things that I did and — sort of got both those ideas together. I think the function — the function became more important, and it was — which denied some of the surface work that I had done. And probably into the late '70s, early '80s I was starting to get those things back together with some newer work, where I liked the forms better and the surface was — I was doing variations on some of the things I'd done.

So I don't know that it evolved. It changed and came back, sort of went around the circle and back, and I've done that through the years at least once, maybe twice with pieces. I mean, I'm sort of back now where that last big gold bowl was similar in many ways to the early gold goblet that was chased so much, only this one was — the work was done on the inside of it, which was hard to control.

And that suited me fine because it was more — I couldn't see what I was doing when I was working on that gold bowl. It was all done just by feel because I couldn't see what the tool was doing when I was working.

MS. DOUGLAS: You were chasing the inside of the bowl?

MR. NOFFKE: The inside of it, and it had — it had multiple courses, too, and then also treated a good bit with burnishing. I did a lot of burnishing with some agate burnishers on it, which you could actually draw on the gold with the burnisher, you know, just make — just press hard and draw. And that also burnished — I had two or three different burnishers down there that I used a lot.

You could work some of the chasing into the surface more. You know, it's like building more layers. That piece has more layers. It's harder to read, harder to see than the gold goblet by a long ways.

MS. DOUGLAS: And for clarification, the gold bowl you're referring to was — when was that made?

MR. NOFFKE: I'm trying to think exactly when I started that thing. I worked on it for probably three or four years total. I did the beginning of it for the video that Chanse Simpson did, the *Soul's Journey* video [*Soul's Journey: Inside the Creative Process*, 2012], which is still not out, not finished yet.

And then the part that he got on there mostly was forming the bowl, and very early on with some of the chasing, I think I even used one of those — I had a reciprocating attachment for my flexible shaft that I made a silver bit for that was filed down, polished, and I could run that thing like a jackhammer inside that bowl. My god, it was noisy.

And I did — I did several courses of that, and I think that part may be in the video. But that must have been 2003 or 2004 when I started that bowl. I don't really remember. And then I worked on it, you know, for the next two or three, maybe even four years off and on, just kept working on the surface.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, this gold bowl, it was forged out of a billet?

MR. NOFFKE: Right. I did the early part of that hot-forging out to pancake it; you know, probably went — that billet was, I think, about 2.5 (two-and-a half) inches in diameter and about — maybe three-quarters of an inch thick. It was 36 ounces of 18-karat.

And I would guess I did eight or 10 courses hot with a sledgehammer on my anvil and then another eight or 10 courses hot with a cross-peen forging hammer to stretch it out further. And then it was formed pretty much in

the traditional way — cold, you know, raising over a T stake.

MS. DOUGLAS: But this style of making allows the bowl to be thicker and thinner.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it's weighted at the bottom.

MR. NOFFKE: That bowl — that bowl was probably an eighth of an inch thick in the bottom and 20-gauge on the edge, which was about as thick as a penny.

MS. DOUGLAS: Which —

MR. NOFFKE: Or a dime, say.

MS. DOUGLAS: The gold cup that you made early on was raised in a traditional way out of sheet stock —

MR. NOFFKE: That was raised out of sheet and that was a difference. That was — I guess, you know, you asked me a question about evolution of my work at Georgia. And I left out a big part.

And that was — that was developing alloys and hot-forging. So I began with — you know, it was — it was the idea of being able to hot-forge silver, which people had always said you couldn't do, and I knew — I knew you should be able to do it.

It was just hot-forging sterling was — which I do a lot of hot-forging sterling. It's just much more difficult to read the temperature, and the forging range is much less than it is for the higher-silver alloys that I made later.

And I was trying to get this figured out for my students. You know, this wasn't just for my work. I mean, I was — I was — we had always done a lot of hot-forging with copper rod, and that's simple. You know, you can see the color for one thing.

Silver, you can't see it. So that presents problems in a studio because you have 15 people working in a room. You can't turn the lights off every 30 seconds for somebody to heat their silver so they can hot-forge it, and then — and so you had to learn to read those temperatures in the light that was available that we were working in.

And so figuring out that the alloys, you know, cutting half the copper, more or less, out of — out of a sterling alloy, which, you know, gives you 96.3 or something. And I ended up going to 96.9 but half and half, I did some 950, 950 parts silver and 50 parts copper. That would be 950. Sterling is 925. So basically I just cut half the copper out of what you would normally alloy with sterling.

MS. DOUGLAS: And how did that work?

MR. NOFFKE: It works great. It's cleaner metal. It's a bit softer than sterling but it's also a bit harder than fine silver. So it was a compromise to be able to hot-forge this metal, and it changed the forging range — the hot-forging range from — say, for sterling is about 950 to about 1,200 degrees. And when you're working with a small piece of stock, that happens in about four seconds.

MS. DOUGLAS: It gets cold quick.

MR. NOFFKE: So cold very quick, especially when you put it on an anvil at room temperature.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MR. NOFFKE: It's a big heat sink. But the other — the newer alloys with more silver content, the 969, the forging range for it is down probably to 800 degrees, and you can forge up as high probably as 14 [hundred], 1,450. I never knew exactly what temperature I was at, but I would guess I was around 1,450 with that alloy when I started.

And I learned that the first tap, you go lightly because if it's too hot, that's when it'll crack. The second, you tap it once when it's red-hot. If it doesn't crack, then you go for it. Then you can hit it as hard as you want because it's already lost 50 degrees temperature by the time you take your second swing at it.

But the bigger the piece, the longer it maintains that heat, which this allows — this allowed me to go way up in scale with my work, with the spoons. I had ingots made that weighed 10 ounces, 12 ounces for forging ladles and so on.

They were stepped ingots, where the bottom part for the bowl was, say, three-quarters of an inch diameter and

then the handle part was half-inch and just common drills in that stock.

I didn't make these. I had these made because I'm not a machinist. And they were quite expensive to make. I think — I think they were about — I think I had three molds made that cost, like, \$750.

MS. DOUGLAS: Ingot molds?

MR. NOFFKE: Ingot molds for the larger ingots.

MS. DOUGLAS: And the traditional or conventional way of forging silver is cold?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, that was what we were taught. But I think — I think — back in ancient times, I think they forged it hot. You know, even though the technology was more primitive and they didn't really know what their alloys were, you know, electrum was just whatever ore they mined at that particular point in time and place.

And they learned that some places, you know, there was higher gold content and less silver, and probably some places there was maybe copper content. I don't know. And they learned that didn't work so well. I don't know. But a lot of the old Egyptian pieces were — as well as Etruscan work was definitely electrum. It was just ore that was mined, and they melted it.

Some of it was 16-karat, some of it was 18, some 20 maybe, some higher. And that stuff is very forgeable hot, and I would imagine that a lot of those pieces from looking at them, the softness and the way they look, they look like they were possibly forged hot. Whether they were or not I don't think even matters. I did talk to Jack Prip once.

That was when we had the show at Georgia, and I did have a conversation with him and I told him that I was hot-forging silver; you know, that I had upped the alloy, and he said that when he worked in the industry that they — that they hot-forged 800 silver, which is 80 percent silver and 20 percent copper; that they would — that they would heat it up in a — in a pan of charcoal and pull it out.

You know, the charcoal was glowing. They kept it glowing. They'd pull out a piece and forge a course and put it back in the charcoal and get another one and hot-forge it, so —

MS. DOUGLAS: And why were they using the lower grade of silver for that?

MR. NOFFKE: That was just what they did. So I never really experimented with under sterling, and I don't know what the forging range would be. But alloys are incredibly complicated to work with, and I just happened to hit something that worked and I — and I stopped there —

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MR. NOFFKE: — you know, because I had improved what I considered the working properties of sterling silver. And sterling had been the industrial standard for — you know, for 200 years or so.

MS. DOUGLAS: And you didn't want to forge fine silver because —?

MR. NOFFKE: Because it's too soft. And also that was like, oh, that's — you know, nobody does that. And the reason nobody did it was because they couldn't read the temperature or they just didn't try it.

Fine silver hot-forges nicely. It's just — and I don't know what the forging range would be. It'd probably be wider than what it is for the alloy I'm making. But it might be — yeah, it'd be a little bit whiter not having any copper in it.

It'd be just like hot-forging copper. The difference is that — is that you have to know the temperature that you're working at. If you get it three degrees too hot and hit it too hard it's going to crumble like glass, almost like — you know, I did a few — I did some pieces for Chanse when he was doing that video.

I was working on two or three other things and explaining the hot-forging process and explaining the part about if you work it too hot. And I've really never cracked silver by working it too hot when I was making something.

And I had to break two ingots for him because he didn't get the first one on the tape. [Laughs.] I had to get another one out and heat it up to red heat and smash it again. [They laugh.]

I think I've still got those broken ingots out there — rods that I was forging just to show what happened if it was — if it was too hot. And I've had students that were trained to hot-forge, and of course they bust it.

But it's not that — it doesn't take all that long to learn to read the temperature of — you know, if you're using

the same equipment all the time, same torch, same pumice pan, same firebrick furnace, whatever. You know, you can — you get a lot from experience with that.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you mentioned that hot-forging allowed you to get larger with your work.

MR. NOFFKE: Larger and faster, both, which was good for me, plus most of — most of my students were female and not strong enough to forge stuff cold efficiently. You know, if you work lightly on a piece of rod stock, you're moving the surface much faster than the interior, and that causes all kinds of problems, multiple problems, folds mostly.

MS. DOUGLAS: Cracks.

MR. NOFFKE: Cracks — folds and cracks, so that was — part of the idea, too, was to get this thing down where it would make it — where it would make it easier for them to forge anything and also up their scale. I had one student, Alice Currelly [ph], there that — and this was after we learned — how to make the billets was you don't pour them.

You just let them — you just turn the furnace off and dump them out after the metal cools down [laughs]. And then if you want a bigger billet, you buy a bigger furnace with a bigger crucible, which I did [laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: So the billet was just the contents of the crucible.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, and I try — I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to make some ingot or billet molds. You know, I was going to get some big blocks of graphite and have them machined out and then one day I was pouring ingots and I had about six or seven ounces of silver left in the — in the furnace and I was — I was ready to leave.

I was late getting somewhere and I thought, "Oh hell, if it just — if it cracks a crucible, if I have to shut it off with it in there, then I've got plenty more," because I always stocked up on things like that [Laughs.] I didn't want to be out of business because I only had one crucible.

So I came in the next day and dumped that thing out. You know, I had to cool it off, and this thing falls out in the sink, and I looked at it and I thought, "Oh Christ, there it is." It was a perfect melt, perfect billet. And so then I was into hot-forging the vessels.

MS. DOUGLAS: And the billet, for people that don't know, looks like a hockey puck basically.

MR. NOFFKE: Well, it depends. Like, some of the — some of the billets I did looked — were hockey-puck shapes. Some of them were thicker than a hockey puck, and then in the smaller furnace that melts, those billets are probably only an inch-and-a-half in diameter. And I think that's a 30-ounce capacity for fine gold in that smaller Kerr furnace.

And you can melt those to where they're twice as high as they are wide, almost — well, maybe, say, two-and-a-half inches high by an inch-and-a-half wide, whatever the width is of those. I'm just guessing. But you can stand those things up red-hot on an anvil and smack it really good with a sledgehammer.

You can take them down without getting any folds in them. You work on one side only, on the top side only and just bust it with a sledgehammer. I hit it — I hit it almost as hard as I can. I get five or six shots in as hard as I can hit them. We can go down and tape what it sounds like. We should put that on the tape —

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: — you know, because you wouldn't need to see it. Once you hear that bang, you know — you know that this is not —

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it is — it is a visual experience.

MR. NOFFKE: — this is not tippy-tapping.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's not — it's not a —

MR. NOFFKE: It's not filigree work. We're not making filigree here today.

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay, the alloys you were just talking about were sterling alloys. You've done gold alloys too, right? Experimented with gold alloys?

MR. NOFFKE: Right. Well, they weren't sterling alloys. They were variations. They were, you know, definitely

moving away from —

MS. DOUGLAS: Silver alloys.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, silver alloys. And then I'm trying to think about the time, somewhere in the — which was — the first gold piece I hot-forged was I alloyed with the same amount of copper that the 969 had. And I got the bowl out. I got it finished but I learned that when you have the three — the three metals together, it's a whole new ballgame in alloying.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, three being?

MR. NOFFKE: Just gold, silver and copper, which is — basically what's used in commercial gold alloys are those — those three metals. And I don't know the exact proportions of your 18-karat commercial gold, but it's probably more hot-forgeable than what I had. I don't know if it has more or less copper and I don't pay attention to those things that much.

So I had a lot of cracking with that. I did hot-forge it and I did get the piece out, finished and then a year or two later I decided I wanted to stretch the bottom of that bowl out because it was small and heavy for being a pound of 18-karat gold. I didn't — I didn't really feel I'd gotten what I should have out of it.

So I stretched — I stretched it out and I ended up cracking the edge, which I knew was going to happen because you can't make a — you can't forge a sheet out like that and get the edge, say, out to 20-gauge and then stretch that edge out two inches in diameter without thinning it radically. And I didn't want to get it too thin where it wouldn't be functional. So I just let it rip open and then patched it up with other alloys, gold alloys.

MS. DOUGLAS: And how are you — how are you stretching it? On a T stake?

MR. NOFFKE: I was stretching it on a mushroom stake for the most part.

MS. DOUGLAS: But just conventional cold methods —?

MR. NOFFKE: Just, heavy, heavy, heavy hammering with the flat end of the hammer, and I have photographs of that bowl when it was split and then later finished. But I had lots of surface cracks in that — in that alloy, and I just kept working.

I actually was fusing the surface back together every time I annealed the piece, once I was out to cold working on it. So, I decided after that just to skip the copper and go straight to gold and silver. And I've worked with 16-karat, 18-karat, 20-karat as well as the 24 —

MS. DOUGLAS: Did that make it more malleable leaving the copper out?

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, much, much, much more so. And what I found also was that it didn't matter how much silver or how much gold you had mixed together. Any combination of silver and gold has almost identical properties to silver or gold, which are very similar. Fine silver, fine gold are very soft metals.

And so — and I learned that back in the mid-'70s working with Helwig up at Penland because I made some — I made some copper-free alloys for enameling then and, you know, just melted little bits of fine gold and fine silver together in a charcoal block and then, you know, just made little wads and then hammered them out on the anvil.

And I knew from that how soft it was — how soft that metal was. So those alloys — and I talked to Jamie Bennett a bit about that. You know, for enameling, you know, copper's a problem. That's why people don't enamel sterling, because —

MS. DOUGLAS: Because of the —

MR. NOFFKE: Because of the copper oxides —

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah, the oxides.

MR. NOFFKE: — oxidizes under the glass and turns black. So that was why fine silver was used, and you know, it's like — but people enamel on pure copper. It could be also something to do with the compatibility of the enamels with the alloy because the alloys are going to move differently, shrink or expand with heat different than the fine metals or pure metals.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what were your thoughts about the direction your work was going to take with this hot-forging and using gold, for example? Is it something you had thought about before doing gold hollowware?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah. It was — I think probably what kept me from doing more gold hollowware than I did was just simply the expense of the gold because when you get up — get up in several-ounce pieces, I mean, it's like — even back when it was like — the first gold cup, that gold cost \$33 an ounce, something like that. It was 18-karat. Maybe it was \$31, but based on \$35 an ounce, it was three-quarters of that plus whatever the refinery charge for their fees, which was minimal.

Now that gold is \$1,400 an ounce, the refineries add that percentage of their take on top of that. So you're no longer paying them \$8 to refine an ounce of gold. You're paying them \$600 or \$400 [They laugh], you know, just so if you buy one ounce, you may pay — you may pay \$200 two-hundred dollars over the market price of gold. And it may not be that much. I'm not sure. I haven't bought any gold since I retired.

But back in the late '90s, it was, like, \$200 to \$300 an ounce, and there I bought a lot. And I'm glad I did because — and that's what, you know — that one bowl was 29 ounces of fine gold in that and nine ounces of silver. No, wait a second. I'm getting that — something's wrong with my math there. Twenty-seven ounces of fine gold and nine ounces of fine silver is what it was. That's 18-karat green gold.

MS. DOUGLAS: Let me back up a minute. I think I'm backing up. When you were teaching at University of Georgia, I know they had a program in Italy, a summer program.

MR. NOFFKE: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: In Cortona?

MR. NOFFKE: In Cortona.

MS. DOUGLAS: And you participated in that, did you not?

MR. NOFFKE: I did. It was — it was on — it had started like a year or two before I got to Georgia, and the director was a sculptor, Jack Kehoe. And at that — early on when I was here, I knew the program was going on and, you know, because it was — it was quite popular with our students, and then a lot of students from other schools all across the country went.

It was probably the best, most developed studio program in Europe at the time. Any, any university I don't think had a program quite like Cortona. And I started working on Kehoe to add a metals, you know, course to the summer program. And I think it was 1981 was the first year that I got to go over there, and he arranged that we work in the studio or in a school in Arezzo that was the — it was sort of a vo-tech school.

It was a school — a post-secondary school or — for jewelry making and architecture, you know, because of the very large gold industry in Arezzo. It's the largest in the world in that one town. And so they had — they had facilities there.

And my students would get on a bus in Cortona every day and take a bus to Arezzo. We'd get up at 6:00 in the morning and bus over there. Eight o'clock, we worked; we worked till, like, 12:30. And then a bus came and picked us up and took us to a trattoria for lunch. And then we had, like, 30, 45 minutes there and then after that we took a bus back to Cortona.

So we got back to Cortona in mid-afternoon. And that was every day all summer. And then the weekends we took field trips. But the school over there was quite nice. We worked with a guy named Carlos Botti, I think it was, who was a goldsmith instructor at the school. And I worked with the students.

I did the same projects the students did, which was interesting because we worked with an Italian doing basic courses that they did and, you know, part of it was pitch preparation for repoussé and chasing techniques. We didn't really finish any repousséd pieces. We did exercises, which bored me to death. But we did them, and — that was that was — you know, we were there to do it their way that time.

And then I think it was — '86 was the next time that I — that I got to go back on the Cortona program, and we — and Kehoe agreed that we would get — we would do our facilities in Cortona with the program because that traveling every day was — got to be real problematic. I mean, it wasn't bad, you know, once.

But I wouldn't — I didn't want to do it again because it was every day all summer on a bus, and you had to be up before 7 on that bus, five days to Arezzo and then weekends god knows where you went because they — then the field trips were every day on the weekends. And you weren't — it wasn't an option for faculty. We were required to go.

MS. DOUGLAS: And where were you going? To see art?

MR. NOFFKE: We were — we went to different cities around — you know, in the vicinity mostly. We went to

Sienna and Florence and we — well, Florence sometimes was part of — you would spend — no, I think that was always a field trip, Florence from Cortona.

Rome, we would spend sometimes up to nearly a week in Rome before we went to Cortona, and that was due to schedules with their buildings that the program used before they bought their permanent space there.

But '86, I went back, and then that was the beginning. We had metals there every summer after that, still do. And then before I retired, they had the program expand into spring and fall semester too. And that was — I jumped on that one. And that was, like, you know, we had — we had options.

I mean, I could have gone a good bit more than I did. But it was also an opportunity to bring other people in and let them do it. And it helped the guy, you know, that ended up getting my replacement, you know, bolster his salary a little bit more into a regular faculty position.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were hiring contract faculty, metal faculty to go teach in Corona during the school year?

MR. NOFFKE: Right, we had — during the summers. I think Kington went. Kington went one summer. Richard Mawdsley went a summer. Pujol went a summer. I'm trying to think who else — who else I had go over there. But it was an opportunity where — and the program didn't pay much to outside faculty.

It paid actually less than it did to — junior faculty that were from Georgia ended making more. But people would do it because it was just such a nice place to spend the summer and you know, less expensive than traveling on your own through Europe for three months [Laughs].

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, did — how did that influence your studio work, those Italian field trips and teaching experiences? Or did it?

MR. NOFFKE: I don't know - I don't know that it did that much. I'm certain that there were things — things I saw that maybe changed my attitudes about some things or changed my approach a bit. But I don't think my work changed much from that experience. The main thing was when I was — when I was there, you know, it was a very productive place to be.

I'd sometimes get as much work done there in the summer, in the later years, you know, in the '90s — like I said, you know, I couldn't work in my studio anymore. I had to hand-hold, you know, the students. I mean, they were too demanding.

They couldn't handle — they couldn't — they couldn't just watch me work and learn anything because they didn't have the — they didn't have the mental capacity for that. Their brain had been programmed some of the direction. They had to be shown and told exactly what to do every step of the way. They couldn't retain information from a basic demo and then — and then follow through and get a little bit of help.

You know, if they were having problems, you know, that was what I was there for. But that wasn't it. It was like a demo for the next step. Even after they saw the whole process every day — "well, what do I do next?" you know.

And that changed my attitude about teaching and also had a great effect on the amount of work that I could get done in the process of teaching. And the quality of the students' work went down as well.

So one of the reasons why 30 years was enough for me was partly due to that, partly due to the change in the student attitude and also partly due to just being tired of bureaucracy and two hours a day dealing with some of the situations in the art school.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, 30 years —

MR. NOFFKE: It was more than I could bear, and my teaching schedule was down to — I think I had — I taught Tuesdays and Thursdays for five hours, 8:00 in the morning until 1:00. So I had three-day or five-day — was it five — four-day weekends. I had Friday, Saturday, Sunday, you know, away from the university, and I taught Tuesdays and Thursdays and had Wednesdays off and only mornings then basically.

And that was too much. I couldn't stand the time that I had to be in there. [Laughs.] It was too much. But I mean, there was a lot of other responsibilities. I mean, you know —

MS. DOUGLAS: But you got a lot of work done in Italy is what you're saying.

MR. NOFFKE: Yes, during those years I would get more done in Italy in the summer than I'd get done in the whole year at the University of Georgia. Of course, I was working — I was working at home when I came home.

MS. DOUGLAS: Sure.

MR. NOFFKE: I had my studio here. But the most productive time was — it was among the most productive times, the Cortona studio as well as Penland.

MS. DOUGLAS: Because —

MR. NOFFKE: I was always able to do work there and I don't know why. I don't know why.

MS. DOUGLAS: Energy.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, energy was there.

MS. DOUGLAS: You're talking about the collaborative energy of all the people that were there at Penland.

MR. NOFFKE: Well, to be honest, too, in Cortona part of that — part of that — the benefit of being there was I didn't have this house to take care of —

MS. DOUGLAS: Yes.

MR. NOFFKE: — you know, which, you know, can be, you know — it's a bit demanding. There's a lot of maintenance, a lot of things that need to be done around a house.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yes. [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: You know — you know what that's like.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yes, home owning is —

MR. NOFFKE: Taking care of a house, a big house by yourself is not an easy chore.

MS. DOUGLAS: Home-owning is an occupation unto itself. Well, I wanted to segue maybe into a couple of things. One is your work has been described as having a sense of humor to it in some cases, maybe early on.

I know I can recall a couple of things I've heard that you would misdate your work on purpose. You would put a date on a piece when you finished it that was incorrect. And then the other thing was your Vatican donation because —

MR. NOFFKE: [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: — you know, you're known as a — somewhat of a prankster or trickster in the — in the field. So maybe you'd like to comment on that.

MR. NOFFKE: Well, the dates — the dates thing, that was — I'm not exactly sure what the reason for it. But part of it was my contempt for the art historians having no interest at all in developing a crafts history program. And it was like they acted like they were the — you know, for some reason they were the experts.

And what — most of them had never even — had never even done a paint-by-number thing when they were a kid. That's how much experience they had in the studio. I mean, as far as I was concerned, they knew nothing, only what they had read, and they did no original research on anything and they basically didn't understand the subject that they were historians of.

And to me, that was contemptible. And so those dates, that was for that. And that came from a comment, I think, that Fritz made when I did it the first time. He says, "All they really have is the dates, and you're taking that away from them." [They laugh.]

So that was — that was the business.

But I did not misdate everything because if you're consistent in doing things like that, then they figure it out. So some things are dated correctly and some aren't, and I did that purposefully to confuse them further because it's up to them to figure out which ones are and which ones aren't. So they have to think.

So I just found a spoon up here yesterday that I was looking for because I wasn't sure where I put it. And it's one I did in Italy. It was one of the first ones. It's dated on my birthday in 1943. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: And you know, so that's a giveaway.

MS. DOUGLAS: Not necessarily. [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: You know, people can figure that one out. But I had some of them that were dated B.C., you know, which is just dumb because nothing was ever dated B.C. [They laugh.] Let's see now, yes, I'm a hundred years before Christ.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.] You make my job harder. What about the Vatican donation? Talk to me about that.

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, that was some of the stuff that Fritz and I did. We made all of these little Christian shot glasses. And they started off being very satirical. You know, so — but they ended up being quite, quite beautiful reverent pieces. I mean, I couldn't — it was strange. It was strange how that series evolved from something that we were poking fun at into something that was actually serious and elegant.

So we were — we were doing these Christian shot glasses, and then Fritz knew that I was going to Europe. And I think that was — I guess that was '81. That was the first year. So we did these things before '81 because we made — we made some cups for the pope. And there was an English professor on that trip that was — that was a good friend of a cardinal that was the pope's press secretary.

And I tried to get John to approve of, to actually give this piece — have it presented to the pope personally. And he wouldn't do it. He thought there was something unscrupulous about that. And I mean, I didn't — I mean, I took my work seriously, and Fritz was among the best. So I mean, I didn't see any reason why that should be a problem, you know: Give a nice piece to the pope. And, yeah, he wouldn't do it.

So I ended up just taking in the Vatican. There's two different sections of the Vatican. There's — the contemporary collection is in one area, and then this was in the historical collection. I don't know. These were Roman pieces, you know, busts of emperors and things in this one room.

And I just put this cup up behind one of the busts of one of the emperors on a shelf, you know, like way up. I have a long reach. But that was — part of the joke too is that nobody will be able — the Italians are so — too short to reach that one. They can't — nobody's going to find it for years. [Laughs.]

So I just stuck that piece up there, and it was — and that room was rather dark. You could barely see it. I don't know how — it was probably months before anyone found that piece. I don't know.

But it wasn't there the next time I went back and checked it in '86. It was gone. Somewhere I have a photograph on that shelf, not a very good photograph. As I said, there wasn't very much light in there, and I didn't have a flash on my camera then.

MS. DOUGLAS: So the Christian —

MR. NOFFKE: But that got me in trouble with the university because —

MS. DOUGLAS: How?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, they didn't have a sense of humor.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, how did they know about it?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, I put it on my résumé.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh. [They laugh.]

MR. NOFFKE: And then some of them heard the story, and they didn't think it was funny at all. They thought it was not professional.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: It was like they were only jealous because they weren't smart enough to do it themselves in my opinion, or you know what I mean. They're just like — I mean, to me it was a joke. It was funny.

And the piece, I swear the piece is still in the Vatican. It's probably put back somewhere unknown, you know. But it was — it had a lot of gold in it. So they're not going to throw it away.

And it was a big — it was a big thick crystal piece that had a crystal cross stuck on the side for a handle, rather thick. It had a lot of gold leaf and gold — we put the Calvary on there, you know, a little hill with the three crosses [Laughs].

And there were things like that. And I think in the bottom of that there was a big sheet of gold in the foot of that

cup that said, "24 K," you know, which is an American standard mark. So they would have known that it came from the United States because that would have been 999 had it been made in Italy.

MS. DOUGLAS: So where are the rest of these cups?

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, they're right up here. [Inaudible.] This was — these were the Christian — the Christian shot glasses. There's actually gold in the red in that glass. This piece is more reminiscent of the one that was left for the pope, although there was no latticino in it.

But it was a heavy piece of crystal like this, and there was a cross like this stuck on the side of it, like stuck from here on the side. And it was taller and thinner than that, but it was sort of like this.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, I see. It's got the cross and the circle in gold on the bottom.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, see, there's the cross, yeah. Yeah, very primitive. But anyway, those were — those were part of — those were done at the same time the other piece was done.

MS. DOUGLAS: I imagine —

MR. NOFFKE: And I don't know what we did — what Fritz was thinking on that one. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I imagine the Italians would think this was an American product considering their technical expertise with glassblowing.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right. Actually the piece was scaled between this and this that went to the pope's. It was a little bit bigger than this, maybe a little bit thicker than this. But you know, and it was crystal. It had — it didn't have any color in it.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what are some of the other projects you've worked on that you consider satirical or humorous overtly?

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, I don't — I don't know offhand if I could come up with something that was deliberately — well, I mean, it's been an element in a lot of work that I've done. I found an old belt buckle downstairs not long ago that I probably did in the — well, I did — it was a bicentennial piece. It was done in 1976.

MS. DOUGLAS: '76.

MR. NOFFKE: And it has 19 — or, let's — no, 1776 to 1778, two years of progress. [They laugh.] And well, anyway, I like that belt buckle. I think that states pretty much, you know, what I intended for it. You know, after 1778, then — [laughs] —

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, your — a lot of your work has sort of a whimsical quality to it, the earlier work with the hieroglyphic-like markings on it —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: — like the little pocket knife you made at Penland.

MR. NOFFKE: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: It says, "Made in — made at Penland, North Carolina."

MR. NOFFKE: "Made in North Carolina," yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: And I used to put "Made in Georgia" on a lot of things and also "Made in Italy" when I was in — I think I had one flask that I made, one whiskey flask, that had on the bottom. I started that piece in Detroit at Cranbrook, and it has on the bottom "Made in Detroit and Italy" because I did half — I did half the work at Cranbrook and half — and finished it in Italy.

MS. DOUGLAS: What were you doing at Cranbrook?

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, just a — well, I think you were there that time.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, you were doing an artist residence?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, it was one of those visiting-artist things, and I was working in the studio. But I started that

silver flask there and just didn't finish it, didn't have time. We did a cappuccino steamer there and a few other things. I forget a lot. But that was fun.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right, that's when I was a student there.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right.

MS. DOUGLAS: You brought up the cappuccino steamers. When did you start making those?

MR. NOFFKE: I'm trying to think. It must have — must have been in mid-to-late 70s was the first one I think. And that was — that was also working with Fritz. He was — he just was interested. He wanted a cappuccino steamer of some sort and he found this kit that was in a — like a *Popular Science* thing. It was a rubber stopper and a piece of bent copper tubing that went in one of those old Revere pots with the popup lid on it with the round spout.

So you could turn one of those things into a cappuccino steamer. And he said, "Can you figure this out? Can we make one of these?"

And I thought, "Well" — I mean, looking at it, you quickly understand the principle. All you're doing is boiling water in a container and then necking it down into a jet.

And so we did the first one in copper that I think I — that I think he still has. It's called *Old Number One*, and we just made it out of stuff in the studio and, you know, whatever copper was around, some plumbing pipe and then silver — a little silver tip on it. It might even have been a copper tip. You know the Spiculum thing, those tapered tubes that Seppa did?

That was always connecting, and I went with a cone because that was a natural shape to get — to jet the steam — to get it moving in the right direction rather than having a big ball form. You didn't need it. The steam is generated by the surface inch of the surface water, so — and I liked that cone shape. You know, it was a unique shape to begin with. It wasn't like anything that you'd ever seen done in hollowware before other than maybe the Tin Man in the *Wizard of Oz's* hat or something

MS. DOUGLAS: A funnel. It's a funnel basically.

MR. NOFFKE: It's a funnel, sort of reminiscent of an oil can more than — more than some elegant thing.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right, right, like a utilitarian piece.

MR. NOFFKE: And so — but I guess that — you could call that whimsical or something. It was also an appreciation for common hardware store items. I don't know if we talked much about that but I like — there's some things about the simplicity of things you could just buy in a hardware store in the '50s and '60s that you don't see anymore.

You want an oil can now, you know, it's probably going to be half plastic or something — or all plastic. I don't know. But they don't make them like they used to, and so a lot of my work probably deals with that aesthetic.

A little bit like Lisa Norton's things with the — you know, how to make — how to make a watering can. We were sort of working at the same thing from different directions. And that's probably part of the period.

But I have — I see just as much aesthetics in making a bucket form as I do making a goblet form. To me there's honesty and integrity in that, and it can be just as beautiful. So, I mean, I've made a bucket or two [laughs] so —

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I remember when you were teaching a class at Summervail workshop in Colorado, and I was out there as a student/staff person. I remember you teaching keyed seams —

MR. NOFFKE: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: — as a fabrication technique, and that was certainly not considered part of, you know, raising hollowware. But it was very interesting. How did that come about?

MR. NOFFKE: I did a lot of those. I was fascinated with keyed seams. And it was a — it came from looking at a lot of antique pieces when I was — which was sort of — my first exposure to crafts was I had — an uncle I had was an antique dealer and he had a lot of high-dollar stuff, a major collection of art glass and, you know, Tiffany lamps.

He was — he had probably the world's largest collection of custard glass, which had uranium in it, I believe. It'd show up really strange in black light. That was one way that he'd test to see if it was genuine custard glass was

to put a black light on it.

And going back through all those — you know, all the time I spent going through antique shops and junk places and so on when I was in college, early on in college and even in high school, I was looking at some of those things. You know, the big iron kettle — or copper kettles and things were all keyed together.

And I didn't know how that was done. I didn't know it was a lap seam. I thought it looked like everything had been cut out. So it butted up together because it's just sort of a mysterious process. It was a very simple and very primitive process. And it allows for making a lot of — it's a much stronger seam than a butt seam for one thing.

And I had a lot of fine silver that I'd done a few large pieces with and I had a lot of scrap left over with. So what I was doing with that, the early mint julep cups, was a matter of hammering that stuff out to a fairly thin gauge and then keying it together into a disc form and then raising it traditionally.

So a lot of the earlier pieces I did were sort of like that piece that we were talking about with Fike, you know, doing all that crimp stuff and then raising it like a — like a sheet like you'd raise a regular sheet into a vessel. But I did that with the keyed seams, too, and —

MS. DOUGLAS: So you made a sheet — a flat sheet out of keyed seams and then raised it?

MR. NOFFKE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It was all made out of scrap.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah, oh okay.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: You're making a sheet, like you were — you were quilting.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, I made the sheet, whereas I could have — I could have just fabricated it into the piece itself.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right. Oh, that's neat.

MR. NOFFKE: But it's different this way because the seams distort. They stretch different directions sometimes.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, the solder is going to move differently than the metal too, won't it?

MR. NOFFKE: It does somewhat. It's possible to crack it. That's what — you know, why it requires a lot of reheats. And most of the time I was working on those things, forging those seams out, which are a lap seam at double thickness, I would remelt the solder each time and then you take it so far.

And if you don't — if you don't go overboard with it, you know, the seams hold together. You know, a little bit too much hammering without remelting the — the seams or at least annealing. But I would remelt the solder because you'd be folding those edges over. So if you didn't remelt the solder, you had parts of that seam that weren't really soldered.

MS. DOUGLAS: What grade of solder were you using to do that with?

MR. NOFFKE: I think I did most everything with medium solder on those things, which I've heard is the most malleable of the three grades. But I don't know. I don't know for sure.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that's an interesting aesthetic, then, to be raising a silver cup with a keyed seam in it. It gives it this — it's like a —

MR. NOFFKE: Right, and some of them I did with gold solder so they would show up. Because a silver seam on a silver piece, you know, is not very obvious. If you finish the seam off properly, you really don't even see it. You almost have to — you need a micro — you know, you need to look at it under power sometimes to find the seam.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's like you were saying you were creating a blend of low and high references there, like the utilitarian references to common metal objects with keyed seams.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, but those forms that I was making with the keyed seams — and I did that a lot too with the containers. I fabricated a lot of containers and those sort of came from teaching — adding fabrication to the — to the curriculum in the metals program because I thought it was important — an important process. So I would use the keyed seams in those little containers, too.

And a lot of times the pieces were about keyed seams and varieties. I did varieties of keyed seams where the

keyed seams themselves had keys in them, you know, where you'd double-key. [They laugh.] So I mean, they'd be soldered out all over the place, and then sometimes, you know, have funny patterns in it. And so to me that was a fun thing were you could do variations on that simple tab where you just cut into one line and make them all uniform, which was sort of the standard.

MS. DOUGLAS: I notice you have a tray on your coffee table that has an assortment of containers on them that you made.

MR. NOFFKE: That's just where they ended up. [Laughs] It sort of reminds me of Singapore.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh.

MR. NOFFKE: And I think maybe I got those things out. There was this possible job in Singapore. It was, like, for a big new high-rise apartment building, and this sort of came from one of my students that was there. And it looked like it might be a possibility to make a few hundred thousand dollars doing these great big urns kinds of forms that went into this building.

They had a certain amount of budget. I don't know what they ended up doing. The thing fell through. But I made a proposal, you know, did some drawings and sent over. And I had that figured out where we were going to do these, like, two-foot high vessels out of copper keyed together and then expanded with — steam or, as the case was, compressed air at red heat that Elizabeth Brim, you know, sort of developed at Penland. And at any rate, that's where all those containers — why they're out there in a thing like that. To me it sort of looks like a cityscape.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah, they're very — they look like — some of them are flasks, I believe.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, it's just where that group of pieces — there's probably a few — there's a lot more. I made a lot more of those, but they're scattered about. I've given them to people. But that's, I think, what I have left, and there's a couple that are in the — up at the Mint now that'll be in that show. I think there's two of those pieces, right.

MS. DOUGLAS: The retrospective show that the Mint's doing of your work? — Okay, so we were talking about the containers, and I noticed all the spoons that you have here in the house. Want to talk about that?

MR. NOFFKE: Right. There were certain objects — and these possibly came somewhat from the demos I did at school because I do a demo of spoon forging every term for sometimes two classes, either the — you know, both — the beginning class every term and most often the advanced classes as well. So those projects were raising a bowl form, fabricating a container, doing the married metal thing, which got to be, you know, a crack project.

It was really spelled out from one through 25 or whatever it was, hot-forging a spoon, which wasn't necessarily an assignment. A lot of the students did their work cold. You have 15 students. They can't all be hot-forging in a room at the same time. But they'd get to experiment a bit with it, and I'd work with the ones that were interested in it. And then the other project was casting.

So I would do those demos in those things. And those — not because that was the basics — I did a lot more work with forging spoons, and the keyed-seam things were — that was — I used that in the containers sometimes, sometimes not. But the keyed seams became important in the — in the hollowware, the tumblers, working with the thin metal because generally my work had always been relatively on the heavy scale.

You know, the earlier pieces I made were heavier metal and I like that weight, that feel. But then later I went — I moved to all — a total different extreme in making the metal as thin as I could make it just to see. It's like pushing it one way and then the other way to find the right combination of gauge, scale so that it's functional, feels good, works, you know, with a minimum of work and also a minimum of material.

Sometimes that's not a concern, but sometimes it was. But there were those objects I always returned to. The spoons I probably made more of than anything. And it's a challenge. A spoon is a simple object, but it's rather — it's much more complicated forging than it appears to be, and —

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it's extremes.

MR. NOFFKE: — so that's always — it's always — it's always been trying to find — trying to make that one best one because a lot of them are good. Some of them are — some of them maybe aren't good. Most of them are good, and some of them are really good.

And that's the point, is to find — was to find that scale in there for — that's really right for the material that you're working with, for the gauge, the weight of the material you're working with.

You can make a spoon that's the right scale for one thing, but it's maybe too thin. So you missed it on that boat. And so that's always been — a challenge for me is to find that scale that I think is — and you never make one that's the best that's ever been made because there's always one that can be a little bit better scale than any of them.

I've gotten real close on some of them and I'm really happy with that. I don't consider any of them to be the definitive on scale. But I do know there's a — you know, just a half-inch length on a spoon sometimes will make or break it. You went too far. You didn't go far enough, blew it one way or another.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it's like each spoon you make is different.

MR. NOFFKE: It's a challenge, yeah. Each spoon is a new challenge, to make one better than I've ever made. That's the challenge, getting closer to that scale. And it'd be awful to finally get it. [They laugh.] Jesus.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, then you'd have to quit?

MR. NOFFKE: Absolutely. There'd be no point in it [Laughs] because you wouldn't be able to do it again likely, for one thing. So you'd be digressing. So if you ever got one that was perfect, you'd have to quit because you wouldn't want to go back and realize that you weren't as good as you thought you were [laughs] — have to start all over again.

MS. DOUGLAS: It is a forging challenge because you've got such extremes in the spoon. You've got the thin bowl and the —

MR. NOFFKE: Right. Most of them —

MS. DOUGLAS: — narrow stalk.

MR. NOFFKE: You start out with a given ingot and you have an idea. You're making a teaspoon or an ice teaspoon or a soup spoon, whatever. You have a pretty good idea as to where that thing is going to go. And generally the rule is to get the maximum width out of the bowl — to get the biggest spoon possible out of that ingot.

Although sometimes that doesn't apply if you're going for a long-handle spoon and you draw the whole thing out slightly before you start spreading the bowl. It just depends on the stock you have and the idea that you're starting with.

And these things often just evolve as you're working on them, at least for me they do. I don't really try to make anything to exact replica of an idea. I just don't do that. I have a general idea, and then I let the material sort of go where it wants to go.

MS. DOUGLAS: The process —

MR. NOFFKE: The process, yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: — informs everything.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, I mean there are natural things that happen when you're hammering on metal that you can't plan or totally control. And if you don't take advantage of those, you're just, in my mind, screwing up. You're not doing the best you can.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that's the beauty of the material, isn't it?

MR. NOFFKE: — Yeah. It was part of the thing when I learned — and I'd forged some of those spoons. I'd go down one side of the — one side of the handle with a cross-peen on an angle, sort of like a leaf pattern of sorts. And that stretches that edge more than the other edge so the thing will curve.

You'll get a radical curve in the piece that's really quite beautiful. And then you go hammer on the other side, and it'll straighten the piece out because then you're stretched both sides evenly, even though one side's hard and one side's annealed. It's a little bit different.

But you just make those adjustments. I don't think about things that deep or you're in trouble if you have too much control. And I've actually tried to lose control over some things. I don't want total control over it. I don't want it to be that good. I don't want it to look like it was made by a machine because that's — to me then you're defeating the purpose of making something by hand if it's too good.

That idea sort of came from talking to Harvey Littleton once because I was looking at some of his polished glass.

And I saw these scratches and stuff in it, you know, because I'd get up close. I was looking at it. I was being very picky about it because I know how to polish and I know what a perfect surface is and I know what a hacked surface is and I know what in-between is that will pass.

And that's what he had. He had what was in-between good and bad on the surface of those big polished glass things, those loop things that he was making. I thought — you know, I just sort of shook my head. I was kind of disappointed in Harvey [Laughs]. I think I probably said something like that.

I said, "There's a lot of scratches and marks in this glass that's not polished out too well."

And he said, "Gary," he says, "I'm not after perfection, just the illusion of perfection." [Laughs.]

And I thought a lot about that. You know, and it's like — that sort of stuck with me because I think he was on to something that was really pretty damned important. And I don't particularly care for Harvey's glass. I never did.

But you know, I admire what he did. You know, he did a lot. And you know, that's just a matter of taste, too, and something that a lot of people, I think — you know, I have a lot of respect for a lot of different people, people's work. And I think that's a healthy thing.

We did that hollowware show at Georgia, and I had people here whose work I didn't like, but I invited them because I thought they were important people and they did the best of what they were doing. And hell, I know for sure they don't like my work, you know, because they never invited me to their invitational shows. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: When was this hollowware show you're talking about?

MR. NOFFKE: Oh, I don't — I don't remember exactly when that was. It was, like, two or three years before I retired, I think.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it was organized —

MR. NOFFKE: It was done by — it was done at the Georgia Museum [of Art, Athens, GA]. And there was another lady that Bill Eiland had — that was co-curator. And I don't even remember her name. But she was like an intern there from some graduate program, I think. And it was her first show, so he was giving her an opportunity to work with really curating a show. That was probably part of the point of that show.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it was contemporary work?

MR. NOFFKE: It was — what was the title of that? It was American — or masters of American hollowware in the late 20th century ["American Masters of Hollowware in the Late 20th Century"], and I had Kurt Matzdorf in it. Lisa Norton was in it, Helen Shirk. Chunghi Choo was in it. And — let's see, Seppa was in it. Phil Fike was in it. Curtis LaFollette, Elliott Pujol, let's see, David — what was his name — from Arizona?

MS. DOUGLAS: Pimentel.

MR. NOFFKE: Pimentel, yeah. Pimentel, Fred Fenster — Jack Prip, did I mention him? There might have been a couple other people in it. Oh, Marvin Jensen was in it.

MS. DOUGLAS: Marvin, Mm-hmm [Affirmative] —.

MR. NOFFKE: Marvin had a mokume — a big mokume bowl in it, maybe two or three of them. I don't remember exactly what the checklist was.

MS. DOUGLAS: It must have been exciting to have all that hollowware.

MR. NOFFKE: It was — it was — it was a good group. It was a — it was a good group of people, I mean, as far as I was concerned. Oh, Marilyn da Silva was also in it. I probably left somebody out.

MS. DOUGLAS: Going back to your talking about the forms you make over the years, you mentioned the tumblers. Now, are those different from the mint julep cups?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, most of those are mint julep cups, a lot of them.

MS. DOUGLAS: Tell me how that idea came about, making mint julep cups.

MR. NOFFKE: I'm not — I'm not exactly sure. I know there was — one thing that sort of intrigued me about the mint julep cups was that the best ones were traditionally made out of silver. It's like silver's — silver works quite well with some things to drink and not well with others. Like, beer is awful in silver. But mint juleps, that was the

traditional thing. So it could be just the difference in the taste and the reaction with the metal because things do react with silver. People drink wine out of silver and it doesn't — you don't notice it. I've had wine out of silver, and I don't notice any particular funny thing.

But beer out of silver just isn't right. It's aesthetically wrong and also it does not taste right. And maybe it's just because of the way it looks. It's just not right. But you know, I don't understand exactly what that is because I doubt there's much of a chemical reaction. But it could be that there is.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, the silver with the mint julep cup is more — is ceremonial.

MR. NOFFKE: Well, it's traditional too. It's, like, that's traditionally been the best. The best mint julep cups are silver. And so I wanted — you know, I wanted — I got interested in that set, and it just seemed like a natural object to make because the tumblers, too — you don't make them large. You're not making a 12-ounce glass or vessel. You're making a — more like a 6- to 8-ounce vessel.

So it's smaller, and that scale is attractive to me. Scale, I think, through the years, particularly with the spoons, I went so large with them that I found you lose the intimacy of the object at a point, and it doesn't matter how nice the form is. If it's too big, it's not right.

And so I've started — but you had — I had to go to that extreme to find, to learn, to know that too big is not — you know, bigger doesn't make it better. In fact, it doesn't even — it makes it — many things. It's distracting and not only bad visually but it's just damned evil. It's just wrong —

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: -- just not right. So the vessels, they were — a lot of them were mint juleps. Most of the silver ones were made for mint juleps. The gold ones — gold ones you can drink anything in. And I like those. I mean, if that's — if right now if I had another half dozen major pieces to do, I'd like to have a couple hundred ounces of fine gold. That's what I would work with if I had it. But I don't have — what, a couple hundred ounces, that's only — do the math.

MS. DOUGLAS: [They laugh] Now's not a good time to buy.

MR. NOFFKE: Now's not a good time to buy. Now would be a good time to sell one of those big gold pieces, and I could do it. So that's what I'm — that's what I'm waiting for: Somebody to buy one of those so I can keep on working in gold.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it sounds like in your work it's the search for the perfect scale and —

MR. NOFFKE: I need to make more of those gold vessels basically is what I need to do. That's what I need to make more of. The last one got real close. The last one was a beautiful scale. But the bottom was a bit thin on it, which is okay. You know, that just happened. That happened from working in broken stages, waiting for the damn light to change so I could photograph that stage for this educational thing I did for the museum.

MS. DOUGLAS: I see, you were —

MR. NOFFKE: It broke my routine. It broke my rhythm [Laughs].

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were documenting the making of this piece?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, I was photographing every step, and I started out shooting it in the back bathroom on white Formica, you know, just — and I was using two different cameras because I knew that, you know, I didn't want to screw up because you can't go back and unraise something because you got a bad photograph.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MR. NOFFKE: So I was shooting like eight or 10 shots with two different cameras every time I'd go back there and shoot. Sometimes I'd wait till the light changed. Sometimes I'd change the light by turning on lights inside the bathroom. But over the course of time and doing these photographs, I'd work on it one day, and it'd be too damn dark.

It'd be overcast. I couldn't — I couldn't photograph it. I had to quit on that piece. I had to wait until the sun — the damn sun came out, and it was 1:30 in the afternoon, you know, which was when the light was right. I had to shoot at 1:30 in the afternoon. So over the course of two or three months I was working on this piece, well, the trees leafed out.

So that changed it — [laughs] — and just a multitude of problems with photographing that. I'll show you those

photographs I did because it is a neat set. And I'm glad I did it.

MS. DOUGLAS: And just for the record —

MR. NOFFKE: I was accommodating the educational department at the Mint Museum at my own expense. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: So for the record we're talking about the retrospective exhibition that's being produced as we speak for your —

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right.

MS. DOUGLAS: — at the Mint Museum of Art.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, which is, you know, a big show and a great opportunity. It's actually what I've worked for. We haven't talked much about what I — you know, exhibitions and things like that.

But that was always my focus when I was — when I was teaching and still is for the most part. I don't make things to sell. I don't deal with galleries. I just never have. I can't deal with galleries the way that they operate now —

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were producing work for exhibit?

MR. NOFFKE: — financially, or in any other fashion, either, although, you know, and I know a couple of people that own galleries. Cotter is one of my best friends and as is Sandy Simon, both galleries. And I make things and put in those galleries occasionally, more when they're doing a special show of some sort or other.

But they both have a good bit of my work, you know, some given to them, some they've bought, you know, among my few patrons. But basically I make things — I make things to exhibit. I make things for museums, hoping that someday they'll be in those collections.

MS. DOUGLAS: So what —

MR. NOFFKE: And because also I had the luxury of teaching, of that financial support, I didn't need to sell things to any — I mean, if I'd been greedier or smarter, I probably would have sold more. I'd have been able to make more. But that wasn't the point. I never liked selling things. I still don't so —

MS. DOUGLAS: What are some of the shows that you recall that have been important?

MR. NOFFKE: I don't — offhand, I think the last big one was the *Art of Gold* show. Then there was another one. I mean, there were a lot of invitationals through the — through the '70s and '90s. I don't even have any idea how many exhibitions I've been in. I mean, to sit down now and recite the most important ones out of those, there's probably a hundred important ones.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, you were talking just now about your motivation for the work and for producing some of it, talking about museum-quality work.

MR. NOFFKE: That was — that was the idea. I mean, I make stuff that I like. I make stuff that I want to use myself and I use it to test it, to make sure that it's right. I mean, I think that's important.

You make something that you don't use and you send it off and sell it, you know, you don't really know whether it's a good piece or not. But I think using your own work, testing it, you know, helps maybe improve it a bit if you make a series of pieces, which I have done.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, other motivations for the work — some of it you mentioned yesterday was personal, making pieces for friends or family.

MR. NOFFKE: Right, right.

MS. DOUGLAS: You've made quite a bit of work over the years for your daughter, Sydney.

MR. NOFFKE: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: How's that — how's that changed the way the work looks?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, she was — well, she has given me a lot of motivation to make — to make things and to make more things and to make better things. You know, it's like I said, I never sold work. I didn't really need it. Even though I could use it, I don't — I don't basically need it.

But for her, you know, then I have a reason to make more things, you know, just added security down the road, a little bit more of an estate to leave her at some point. So that's — that became important. I mean, and motivation is a good thing to have and —

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, do you feel —

MR. NOFFKE: But part of it, too — I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you, but just one thing I wanted to say before I forgot was the business with the large-scale gold was partly just because nobody was doing it, and I thought it should be done. And it's like — so what we've sort of had in the last 30 or 40 years is the demise of metalsmithing. Who was it? I think it was Nancy Worden that said, "The demise of metalsmithing is synonymous with the advance of lapidary." [They laugh.]

And I mean, if you think about, it's true. You know, the more — the more machined things that you have, the less — the less handmade things. It's easier for a machine to grind something out of a block than it is for a metalsmith to make something out of a wad [laughs] or a sheet, so to speak.

I mean, making a sheet out of a billet is a major job in itself. So, you know, I sort of went backwards with it, even beyond where — but I would assume, you know, that early American silversmiths also forged their own billets out and you know, that they — that they did a lot of that stuff hot. You know, I don't know. I wish I knew more about that, but somewhere along the line that was lost. It was considered to be senseless. But there's a big difference in the aesthetic of hollowware made out of a billet than there is made out of sheet metal that you buy, a big difference.

You can totally control the gauge, thick to thin, either from the center or to the edge or the edge to the center, either way. You can have a thin center and a thick edge or thick — whatever, reverse it.

MS. DOUGLAS: There's more life to it in a way.

MR. NOFFKE: Well, it has — it has more qualities, feel of being actually made by a person rather than by a machine because a machine can't do that. And I see no reason to make something that looks like it might have been made by machine.

That's probably part of that I got from Kington in graduate school, and part of the reason for the surface is that it's like a bit more comfortable driving my old truck around that's got a few dings in it than a new Mercedes that you've got to be careful where you park it at the grocery store because you don't want that first ding in it — the same thing with a big shiny, Swedish teapot, you know. One ding or scratch, and it's, like — that's just not right. But after 50 years of use, it's got several of them and almost gets life back again. It starts having character.

And so I just decided to skip that 50 years and put that into the process of making a piece. So that's — part of the reason for the textures and the surface attitude is that you don't have to worry about a ding in it. It just looks like part of the piece, part of the history of the piece.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, your work — all of your work is alive with texture, and I was thinking of some of the silver vessels you've made that are just covered with cross-peen hammer marks and evidence of forging, evidence of making. It's like a record. It's an applied decorative surface but it's also a function of the making.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, I think a lot of the later pieces, too — see, that was one thing about the traditional way we were taught to raise where you raise a piece and you planish it to get all the — all the heavy hammer marks out, and then you file the planish marks out. And then you polish the final marks out, sand or polish those out.

And it's like you're denying the process of making — of the tools you use to make the piece. And I talked to Fred Fenster about that once because he hated hammer marks. He files all of his hammer marks out. He can't stand them. And I — and I don't like to file the metal, the surface. You know, I like the hammer marks.

And you know, that's just — that's great, you know, because I like his work, and I think he understands. I know Fred understands my attitude and what I'm doing. You know, he just prefers — his personal taste prefers no hammer marks. I prefer hammer marks. So I think that last series you're talking about with heavy cross-peen marks, those marks weren't really put in there as part of the forming process.

Those marks were added later as an expression of my own feelings. And the cross-peen marks, I generally make crosses with those, you know, cross-peen for Christ for instance, right [Laughs], and lots of them. [Laughs.] So the very aggressive hammering that I've gotten into in the last — probably the last 10 years, I finish a lot of pieces off like that.

They were well-controlled forms and then when I had the form nearing where I wanted it, I'd just take and sometimes be hitting it with the bad ends — bad edges of hammers, cutting it, marking it. And that one, the last

gold tumbler I made, I used every hammer in my studio on it because I wanted to — I wanted to deformalize the surface. The form itself is elegant. I think it's even nicer than the first gold goblet, which I liked a lot. I mean, that was a simple, natural form to raise.

The second one, the scale is a little bit nicer on it. It's smaller. It's a little bit smaller. It's a little bit lighter, and the karat's a little bit higher. And I think it's probably one of the nicer-scale pieces I made, and I'm glad it was, you know, the last major piece of hollowware I did. It's nice to know that you — or to feel that you made improvements.

MS. DOUGLAS: There's a couple of things I wanted to ask you about. One is the Kohler residency in terms of how that impacted your work and then go back and maybe talk about some of your students at the University of Georgia and the "Ring Shows." So those were just some details that I wanted to not forget to touch on. But — talk about the Kohler residency or when you did that and how that came about.

MR. NOFFKE: That was — that was just a good opportunity to work — to work with some serious larger-scale metal, different — I mean I hadn't done any cast iron. I hadn't done any large casting of any sort, and I went there. I was unprepared as far as understanding how the mold-making process went for those kinds of — for that kind of foundry work. And it took me a while to get that. And I didn't like the limitations of those two-part sand molds as far as undercuts and things. So what I did there for the most part, the first major piece I did was all done in plasticine just like lost wax.

And it had multiple undercuts. But when you take that thing apart, then you had to dig all of the plasticine out of areas where it didn't — where you couldn't pull the thing out because of the undercuts.

MS. DOUGLAS: You're destroying the mold at that point.

MR. NOFFKE: No, no not destroying the mold, just very careful like with a nutpick or a nitpick picking all of that — all of that plasticine out of recessed areas in the mold so that when you cast it, you don't have your — your hot iron's not running into greasy clay. But that allows you to do fluid work with undercuts and so on that you can't do in a regular mold.

Say, like you have a wooden model, you know, that thing, you can't have undercuts. Otherwise you'd break the mold when you pull it out. But the plasticine you can get in and around and under it and things. It was just very tedious, time-consuming work. And I did — I did a good bit of work there that I really enjoyed at Kohler. That was a great opportunity.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was it sculptural pieces that you were making, or was it vessels?

MR. NOFFKE: I did three coffee tables, more or less, small coffee tables. Have you seen those?

MS. DOUGLAS: No.

MR. NOFFKE: No, I've got — one of them is out on the screen porch. We'll go look at it after a while just so you can see it. But what it was, it's about 30 inches long and 16 inches wide and maybe 16, 18 inches high. The legs I made were the vents — were vents for the iron to vent out of.

And those were — those I did in the woodshop there. They were just sanded down, very thin, delicate pieces of wood that were stuck in this flat clay thing, which was — I think I did it on top of a piece of half-inch plywood with plasticine, and what I did was pretty much a three-dimensional rendition of Matisse's *Water Lilies*. And I went around there and looked at some water — I found some ponds that had water lilies and I looked at them and I studied them and I looked at that painting that he had, which was on the cover of a *Smithsonian Magazine* in the artist's house.

I was looking at that, and he says, "Okay, let's do — let's do that painting. Let's do Matisse's painting."

And I did it and I signed it one year before Matisse did his painting [The laugh] — so it would look like he was copying me.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, good. [They laugh.]

MR. NOFFKE: But I did three of those tables off the same mold, and Kohler has one there. I have one here and I gave one to Jim and Leanne that they have. Mine is all rusted now. It's out on the screen porch. I need to refinish it. But I made — I made two cannons there that shoot golf balls with black powder, have shovel handles.

I mean, they were tributes to Lanier Meaders, the potter — you know who Lanier is. I just have always liked his work a lot and actually consider him to be probably one of the more important sculptors ever that America has ever had [laughs] even though he makes pottery.

MS. DOUGLAS: The Georgia folk potter —

MR. NOFFKE: The Georgia folk potter, yeah, I think he was — I think he was a pretty important sculptor that just happened to make vessels. That's my feeling. Of course, everybody has their different ideas about that.

MS. DOUGLAS: Their heroes —

MR. NOFFKE: But he — yeah, no, I like — for some reason I just think he was a natural. And so I did these two cannons that are sort of tributes to Lanier Meaders. They were made with plasticine on top of a rock and their heads, you know. I think they both have a — both have a hambone jammed in the mouth. And you know, they're just — they're funny pieces. They were fun to work on.

MS. DOUGLAS: So when was that residency? Was it in the '90s?

MR. NOFFKE: It was '93. I remember because I bought my truck then to haul stuff up there and back with. So that was October of '93 I think that I was there, September and October, somewhere around there. I don't exactly remember how I got that time off from the university. It wasn't — well, it's not important.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, you had done blacksmithing, but this was totally different.

MR. NOFFKE: Oh yeah, it's totally different.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's cast iron —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: — at a foundry — at an industrial scale.

MR. NOFFKE: And those were — you know, those pieces, the first — the first one I made I was talking about with the plasticine was a window grate. You know, I just made it sort of like a — oh, I don't know what the size was — you know, two-by-three feet or so, not that large.

But it was, like, intertwined snakes and worms and peppers and leaves and things. You know, it was very organic, and all those pieces I cast in ductile iron there, which was — which was — all you had to do was ask. And I thought that would be better, stronger for everything I made. I wanted that. I think I did one piece there in regular cast iron that they use for enameling. I don't think they enamel the ductile stuff. I don't think it's a problem, but I'm not sure.

MS. DOUGLAS: Do you want to talk about some of your students that you've had over the years at University of Georgia or before?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, I've had — you know, there were, as I said earlier, generally two to three graduate students here through the years. And, you know, a few of them have gone — have gone on in, you know, academia here and there. Mark Moak is teaching in Rocky Mountain College, I think, in Montana, I believe, and he's the head of the department there.

And Mark was — you know, did both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Georgia. And he taught for a while out in the Mojave junior college system with Kidwell, with Jay Kidwell, who was one of my early grad students. They actually — I think Jay was maybe a year or two years — I think he was a year ahead of Mark because I think they were here at the same time.

And some of the early graduate students — I'm trying to think who else was here. Well, Barbara Mann has — probably did her graduate work in the second or third year I was here. And she and her husband Bill are good friends, and Barbara has a studio at home and has worked, you know, throughout, you know, the duration of our friendship seriously.

And Nancy Worden was a student during the ring shows, and I think Nancy's taught a little bit here and there. But she's, you know, pretty much — has gotten a pretty good body of work together and well-recognized, just recently had her own big show, I think, in Belleville Arts Center. Linda Ross was here then. Linda was probably one of the better or more talented, more creative of the students.

And I think she taught at San Diego State where — but she taught I think something other than metal. I don't think she ever taught metal anywhere. I think she was teaching drawing there. But she came here. She was one of Bill Harper's students from Florida State and a very good enamellist.

I mean, she was as good as they got. And then her work here was very loose. She was, like, trying to get away from that very tight enamel — you know, the requirements of making — of doing an enameled piece, a large

piece. She'd do a hundred firings on it. She was very good. The stuff looked like it was — like watercolors when she was through with it. It was very expressive work.

I can't — I was just trying to think right now, you know. I've had many good students here. And Kidwell, I think, probably was the one that surprisingly [Laughs] made it all the way through academia as far as, you know, teaching his 30 years and retiring and retiring out there. I think he's back teaching part-time again. It was —

MS. DOUGLAS: You mentioned the ring shows. Describe what that was.

MR. NOFFKE: That idea sort of came from Summervail, from talking to Cotter and Coulter and Pujol. We were sort of like all of us together in on this idea, and it started out we just decided we were going to do a show that we would travel around. So we could build our résumés. This was a résumé-building scam almost where, you know, everybody knew how important it was, you know, to build your résumé then.

And so we decided we would have the show, and I think I was the one that came up with the idea of the rings so that we would have — so that that would ensure content. If we just had a general crafts metal show, you know, people would send rings, they'd send goblets, they'd send belt buckles, they'd send, you know, whatever the usual object was. And just the fact that they made something that looked like a belt buckle, they could call it a belt buckle. But if it was an exhibition of just only one object, they had to think of content because everything was rings or about rings. So then, you know, we did the show at Georgia for three years. It was the first national, second national and third national.

And it was — it was lighthearted because we kept all the pieces. That was the idea too, that when you got in the show, you were in a permanent collection. And so it was a double — a double-head. And since we kept the pieces, you know, we got all kinds of materials and we got — we got serious work in gold with diamonds as well.

You know, people sent — people sent everything and actually responded quite well to what was a totally different approach to a show — no entry fees. They had to send their work, send their ring, a wearable ring. That was about the only requirement. Materials were wide open — and a photograph of themselves, which we thought would be an interesting part of the exhibition.

The photographs were probably just about as funny and creative as the works were, so — and we even kept the rejects for the shows unless the artist wanted to pay for the return shipping, which nobody did. So we have a — we probably had a collection of 200 rejects there as well as 350 or so pieces that were accepted in the show.

MS. DOUGLAS: And these became the property of the University of Georgia Museum?

MR. NOFFKE: Eventually. That was — that only happened a couple of years ago. I actually tried to give the collection to the Georgia Museum years and years ago because I realized that I wasn't the curator and it was just sitting around in boxes getting dusty, but they weren't interested in it at that point.

But after I retired, then, you know, the department decides to bring it out of the closet and get some more publicity. So they did sort of an extension of the ring show reshowing some of the pieces that were in the original three exhibitions and also then inviting those people that were in it to make a new piece for another exhibition, I think called something like "Then & Now."

MS. DOUGLAS: That was recently?

MR. NOFFKE: That was recently, and then after that happened, we got good publicity through that. And they did a nice catalog. So that — I mean, that was — that was good, and the museum did take that collection, which is — which is good.

MS. DOUGLAS: The original ring shows, did those travel?

MR. NOFFKE: They did. They traveled in some old Gladstone bags that I bought at an antique shop. And they ended up — people would make — would put various things on those bags to decorate them. And they were sent mostly by Greyhound bus from one — from one school, university, museum.

And they traveled — I think the first one went to, like, 12 different venues. And the second year we had — we had problems with traveling. You know, the suitcases were I think — it was the University of Kansas that screwed that up. And also a bunch of rings were stolen out of one of the shows. It was either at Virginia Commonwealth or RISD.

I don't know where it was, you know, because they didn't come back to us each time for an inventory. They just went to the next — to the next venue, which is not the professional way to run a show, I can tell you.

MS. DOUGLAS: But at the time it sounds very exciting for the students to participate.

MR. NOFFKE: Well, it was, and you know, those were just — those were just things that happened to do what — to do the show the way we did, and you know, the majority of them are still intact in there, and even the ones that are lost are documented in photography. So, they're not totally lost.

MS. DOUGLAS: But they were going, it sounds like from university —

MR. NOFFKE: Mostly from university to university, and the people that — the programs that participated, you know, got really their first choice. And then we tried, as far as when they wanted to schedule it or just getting it at all. But I don't think we turned anyone down as far as requesting that. But they probably got on the last end.

But we did try to make sense out of how we traveled it so it didn't go from — you know, from Virginia Commonwealth to California Arts and Crafts and then back to Florida or someplace, you know. So, you know, we tried to do the circuit reasonably so, you know, as far as the traveling part of it so it wasn't just going all the way back and forth across the country every month.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it sounds like there was a good community you were involved with in terms of the metalsmithing people through these university connections.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, there was — there were. We got a lot of — we got good responses from most of the — most of the — most of the metal programs in the country, you know, had students that participated in that, as well as faculty. You know, we had — you know, Ken Cory I think was in — was in all — was in two of those three shows, if not three. Bruce Metcalf, you know, participated in it. And strangely, there was a guy named Marvin Jones that sent a Xerox of a Masonic ring that he'd cut out of, you know, some kind of heavy glossy cardboard or something and then wrapped it around and sent a paper Masonic ring.

And the funny thing about that — Marvin was a student in the same high school that I was when I was in Sullivan. He was my brother's age. He was three years older. And he was — the only other person that I ever know from that — from that town that actually did anything in art was Marvin Jones. And he was a printmaker in some small college in Ohio but a very well — fairly well-known person that was into the mail art stuff at the time.

You know, he was — so he somewhere got the prospectus for that show, the invitation and sent that in. It was just really funny getting that from him because I knew — his father was my math teacher in high school. [Laughs] So that's how some of those connections went. So we had — we got things from places we never heard of, didn't know existed, as well as most of the major metals programs. So it was well-received.

MS. DOUGLAS: So this — the idea for the ring show came about, you mentioned at Summer Vail.

MR. NOFFKE: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: Could you talk a little bit more about Summervail, your experience there?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, yeah, that was — I don't recall the exact dates, but during the several years that that program went, I think it was what, 10 or 12 years? You might remember better than I do, Mary. I was out there most every summer. I think I missed the very first one. The next year, I believe they invited Ken Cory and I the same year the first time.

I don't really know the early history of that, although I did meet — I did meet Milhoan when he was visiting Penland before the program started. So, he was there just checking the school out trying to figure out what format he wanted to do in Summervail because it's a totally different thing. You know, they had facilities there. You know, they worked in that one small A-frame for several years and then moved to Minturn.

And that changed the nature of it a lot, but it still had the same flavor. You know, basically the same people came. And in some ways it was nicer being in Minturn outside of Vail. But there was also something neat about being in the town of Vail and doing that stuff there, you know, the way that it was done [They laugh]. You know, you end up, you know, on — a rooftop somewhere would be your studio for a day.

I remember Pimentel doing this thing. I think it was on top of a roof somewhere, a raising demo. And he had this cardboard box that he would anneal work in. He'd just put it in there, and put it in there for 10 or 15 seconds, then get it out and it would be annealed. It was mystery. You know, what he had was he had eight pieces in there that was every sequence he had that was already annealed and he'd just put it in there and get the next one out after a few seconds — [inaudible] —

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh no. [Laughs.] He was doing a magic show.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, he was. So you know, it was — I think Summervail was real important at that point because it was at a high-energy period. It was the beginning of the funk movement, and we were all young then [Laughs] and eager. And it brought a lot of people together from the East and the West Coast. I mean, it was just — the

location of it and the nature of it was such that there was an awful lot of exchange that went on in that place.

I mean, people came from everywhere there, and it was sort of an ongoing summer program but you know, it was — the symposium was always the big — was always the big deal for the metalsmithing symposium.

You know, and they did it for other areas, too. I think they did the glassblowing thing and maybe an enameling thing, but I didn't participate in those. I did go there once and worked with Fritz when he was doing the glass. I went as his assistant that time.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you met a lot of people there?

MR. NOFFKE: I met a lot of people there, and I think —

MS. DOUGLAS: In the metals field?

MR. NOFFKE: — I don't know that there was a whole lot of influencing one person over another there. It was just a — it was just a good place to see everything that was going on in the country and to meet people for me. I'm sure it was different from that for most everyone that went there.

MS. DOUGLAS: So the — did you make much work while you were there? The sessions were short, weren't they?
—

MR. NOFFKE: I was never there long enough to do a lot. But I mean, you know, the times — I would usually teach a short workshop two or three days or maybe even a week before the symposium. They were always good to me about that. Then, you know, I basically had my expenses paid and got to participate in the symposium, too, because a lot of people went, you know, at their own expense to that thing. And I never did. I mean, I always felt a little bit guilty about it but at the same time I didn't feel that guilty about it because it was actually extra work for not much money. It was well worth — it was well worth the time, anyway.

MS. DOUGLAS: To go back to the earlier discussion when you were talking about pieces you made for your daughter Sydney, there's been other pieces over your career that you've made specifically for a certain individual. Could you talk about that motivating factor?

MR. NOFFKE: Right, I think — I think when you're making things for people that you know, that the work just automatically has more meaning or it's more personal, and that's a great — that's a great thing to do, you know. I think — I think motivation and meaning in work is part of what makes — part of what makes something or breaks it.

And I think probably some of the best pieces that I've made I made for specific people, either commemorating or celebrating or something -- like my daughter's baby cups, those things, you know, just the motivation of making them to begin with, you know, it's not just another piece. It's a special other piece.

And at any rate, those things are much more fun than just maybe experimenting with making another spoon when I don't need any more spoons. And if I'm making one for somebody, that's more of a reason to make it and also gives me a little bit different direction. Like, I have one coming up soon, a commission. This is a funny one.

Cotter's son is having — you know, he and his wife are having a baby somewhere around Christmas. And Cotter wanted — he talked about either me making a spoon or a cup for the grandson, the new grandson. And I tried to get him to commit — commit himself a little bit.

"Well, what do you want," and you know, "can you tell me is this a boy or a girl and does it have — does it have a name yet?"

You know, I can't make a baby spoon for somebody that's not born that doesn't have a name, and I don't know the date of the birth. And so what we finally arrived at is he's going to call me as soon as that baby is born, and I'm going to start making the spoon as quickly as possible so that the spoon is made on the baby's birthday. So, I mean, that's just a little personal detail there but I think a good one, and it'll be fun making that spoon. So make it may be a bit more interesting plus there will be — there will be a name involved. It's nice to have the name to put on it. [Laughs.]

You know, otherwise what's the point of making a baby spoon? "Here's another spoon," or, "Give this to your kid." What's his name? Put "what's his name" on there. [They laugh.] "Born when?" [They laugh.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I mean, different pieces I've seen of yours over the years, like Fritz's beads in the Penland jewelry book, I mean, that obviously has information in it from your knowledge of who Fritz is.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, those beads have a lot of sort of interesting materials and things in them. For instance, you

see this tuft of hair down here? That's from my old Irish setter John that Fritz — that Fritz actually took care of out in California and kept a good bit when I was on the road. You know, he loved John, and so I had somebody that could — that would share my dog with me. And so that was on those beads.

And then I think there was a whale — or a tooth from a sperm whale down here, just any number of things. There was a lot of fabricated pieces in there. But they were materials — some of the materials Fritz gave me. So you know, they were things that he had to begin with.

Plus I mean, that was just — at that time he was just such a classic hippie. I mean, we both were. It was just funny, you know, him with that hair, you know, way down, you know, and wearing Hawaiian shirts with those beads. I mean, it was just a scene. So that's sort of the history of the beads.

MS. DOUGLAS: And you've made rings for people.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, maybe not many that specific — I did — I did a good number of rings for my daughter, you know, that were different, that were — that had a little bit more motivation, meaning behind them. And yeah, I did — I have done a few rings for people, and also through the years commissions for Gail Watkins. Her husband always calls me up, you know, like a week before Christmas.

So I have to really get on something — fast. But I've known Gail for, you know — since the first year I went to Cortona, since '81. And she's a painter and she's a good painter, a very good painter.

She's well-known for her work, has pretty good shows — major shows every few months or year. I get announcements all the time. But I love her work too. So it's always fun making something for her because there's no restraints.

You know, she just — you know, whatever you want to do is fine. And I've about made everything that she could possibly want. She probably has about 25 or 30 pieces of gold jewelry that I've made. And those pieces, even though they're commissions, are fun to do because I know her. And I have total freedom with them. You don't often get that with commissions. You don't often get commissioned by your friends to make something with no restrictions. It just doesn't happen.

MS. DOUGLAS: You mentioned the rings for Sydney. I recall one of them from a slide lecture, very thick shank of what looked like round stock or it was forged into a round section and then a large top with some very large stones set in it —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah. That was sort of —

MS. DOUGLAS: — green, some green stones —

MR. NOFFKE: — opal and emerald and —

MS. DOUGLAS: — glass maybe?

MR. NOFFKE: — aquamarine —

MS. DOUGLAS: But they're not —

MR. NOFFKE: — multiple things.

MS. DOUGLAS: — they're not cut.

MR. NOFFKE: No, those were — those pieces, they might have been cut. I might have cut them myself, too. I did — I do a bit of primitive stonecutting with diamond burs with the fleck shaft or diamond bits. They're not burs, but I don't remember exactly what each of those stones were.

When I can, I'll use natural crystals or pieces that I've — that I've found, and that was — that was sort of, in a sense, a return to that early juju ring I made that had the nice black opal in it, if that's the one you're talking about. But there were other rings I did for her, too, that had a series of many different kinds of stones in them. There was one that had diamonds in the rough and a fossilized opal seashell. Is that right? — a fossilized opal shell from Australia.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, they're beautiful pieces but they have a very primitive quality to them.

MR. NOFFKE: I think I've always liked sort of the medieval approach to setting stones.

MS. DOUGLAS: They look like stained glass in a way.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, they're put in there. I don't like to work with faceted stones much. There's something about it. And they — you know, they require — they require very precise setting techniques. And that doesn't suit my personality. You know, to make prongs for a big flashy faceted stone — faceted stones I'd just as soon see a piece of glass as a faceted diamond.

I mean, I just don't care about that. I mean, I know, I know the difference in the quality of the materials. But aesthetically I don't get much more from a 3-karat diamond cut perfectly, a perfect stone, than I do a piece of glass that's cut the same way. And I'd really rather see just a wad of glass that was melded even than a faceted piece of glass. So I don't like the aesthetics.

MS. DOUGLAS: So how were the stones set? I'm trying to remember.

MR. NOFFKE: They were set — I found a trick that worked well in Italy that I did some cameos with and mounting them in rings there. I would make them so they were more or less friction fits, and then — so you could snap them in.

But underneath that when they snapped in, I would put a little bit of dop cement, which is wax used for mounting stones to cut on a lapidary machine. And I would melt that — melt that — melt that dop cement with a Bic lighter. And you'd see it — you'd see the stone sit down in there and seal. So that — I mean, that's a good way to set something because it's a cushion for whatever it is you're setting. It locks it in.

The only thing that's going to be a problem with it is if you — is it if gets over 400 degrees, which means your house is burning down — [they laugh.] — or you dropped your ring in the oven and didn't notice and it was on high.

MS. DOUGLAS: But it has — the stones in the — in the ring have a — sort of a three-dimensional mosaic quality to them then they look —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah. You remember the little toys that we had when we were kids that were like plastic elephants that had all these different colored keys that fit together and locked? Yeah, that would have been — that would have been in the '50s probably. They made those things. Somehow those things always stuck in my mind.

I like a lot of Charles Loloma's work, the way he sets stones in those bracelets and things, very similar in feel. And to me it seemed medieval metalwork too. The way that those stones, they were roughly cut and roughly set but they were — to me that's the way to set a stone.

MS. DOUGLAS: It had real presence.

MR. NOFFKE: You know, and I don't — I don't care about technology when it comes to that. You know, I look at what I see and I know what I like. It's like I'm much more impressed with, like, those old Egyptian gold cups, and I'm not sure whether they were hot-forged or not, don't know what karat they were.

But they had soft surfaces that were, like, human, like they'd been beat over rocks with a piece of wood or something, not like they'd been hit with a shiny hammer on a shiny stake and then polished with rouge, you know, not that way — soft, you know, beautiful, tactile surfaces.

And I feel the same way about jewelry and about those stones that way is if you get too good with them, with the processes and the work all of a sudden starts looking like it came from Sears and Roebuck to me rather than being something that's inspiring to look at — Kay's jewelry. [They laugh.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well —

MR. NOFFKE: You can let that dog in if you want. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: — relating to the pieces you've made for friends and also other commissions, I wanted to ask you to touch on other people in your life that you've had creative relationships with like — especially from Penland, like Marvin Jensen and Yvonne Streetman.

MR. NOFFKE: I have a lot of good friends up there and those are two special, special ones that I met at Penland. Fritz I met at Penland. Yvonne and Marvin, you know, for many, many years, you know, one or both of them are there nearly all the time I go. Marvin lives there of course, so he's generally nearby. Even if he's not at the school, I get a chance to go out, usually stay with he and Katherine when I'm there.

We've done a lot of — we've done a lot of things together, and I don't know how it all has affected my work. I think we were talking about those knives up there earlier and it's like, you know, down in Suwanee with fishing with Yvonne. We'd go out on the Gulf, and we'd sit around. Some days it's too rainy and the weather's bad, and you can't go out — can't out in the Gulf fishing. So you'd make stuff. I'd make a birdhouse or I took an old knife

she had and sat down with a — with a file and made a bread knife. I mean, I sat there and filed grooves and notches, like I serrated that thing; couldn't tell whether it was a saw or a serrated knife when I was through with it.

But it was a neat piece that she uses a lot. So as far as influencing each other, I don't know that that's the case because our work is also radically different. Yvonne's a great photographer, and I'm the world's worst.

So I mean, how can she influence me with that, because I'm not really that interested? I mean, I try. I've always kept trying with photography but — you know, and I've made a few things for Yvonne, you know, here and there or given her pieces. And Marvin has as well.

Marvin and I really haven't exchanged that much work. I mean, but we both have a deep appreciation of each other's work because it's so radically different. I mean, he's a master machinist, and I mean, he can do stuff that nobody can do. I mean, people hire him to do scientific medical instruments because they can't find anyone anywhere in the world that can do the quality work on the scale they need to have done. I mean, he's like in there with those things.

MS. DOUGLAS: You both studied with Brent Kington.

MR. NOFFKE: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you had that in common.

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah. The funny thing about Marvin too is, like, he's a really great metalsmith, but his approach is totally different. But I mean, I've seen him raise big pieces. Like, I think one of the pieces I liked best of his was a huge copper vessel that he made just to anodize. Or no, he didn't make it to anodize. He has the big tanks for that, but he made it to do the patina — the Rokusho or whatever that is — for the mokume pieces he did. He had to have something, you know, like a vessel. He raised a piece bigger than anything I've ever raised.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, he made it to be a boiling vat?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, yeah, he just needed it.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh gosh.

MR. NOFFKE: You know, it's like making a bucket.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh. [Laughs.]

MR. NOFFKE: I don't think he even bothered with a handle on this one. And I looked at that thing and I saw it, you know, because he had it out during that last retreat that we had at Penland and thought, "Jesus, that's really a beautiful piece."

So that — you know, there are — in some ways, you know, yeah, I'm sure we do influence each other a bit. But because we do such radically different work, we're not in competition with each other. I mean, it's not that kind of thing. I think we both have — as well as Evon, we all appreciate each other's work, which is one reason why we're such good friends.

MS. DOUGLAS: One other thing I wanted to touch on is your experience with early craft organizations like SNAG and the American Craft Council and tie that into, you know, how the field of metalsmithing has evolved and your role in it and especially as a teacher in academia. So were you involved with SNAG early on?

MR. NOFFKE: Not really, not really — I was never very much for memberships in any organization.

MS. DOUGLAS: You knew a lot of the people that were in it.

MR. NOFFKE: I did — I did go to — I did got to some of the conventions, you know, not necessarily to participate as much as to be with some of my friends that were there. It was sort of a common meeting ground. And actually I used to go to — I went to a few of the early SNAG meetings just to boycott them because I couldn't — I couldn't boycott them here in Georgia. I had to go there and not participate and I did that.

MS. DOUGLAS: What were you boycotting?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, I wanted open membership, and they did that, you know, which I think was a really good thing because they were sort of going off into a guild direction, where you had, you know, people that were — that were — that would sit around and vote on whether or not your work was good enough to be a member of the thing.

And I know during those years one of my — one of my students that I had that — probably one of the weaker students that I ever had was the vice president of SNAG. And so he was on the jurying committee. He would have juried me in or out. And I wasn't going to submit my credentials to one of my students that I had no respect for. I mean, it wasn't I didn't have any respect for him. He was a good businessperson and he — and he was solid, you know, as far as his technical background and so on. I just — we never really got along or hit it off personally because of his — maybe because of that. I mean, he was very politically-oriented rather than art-oriented.

MS. DOUGLAS: So was the — so the organization didn't really impact your career or your teaching?

MR. NOFFKE: Well, I think through the years I've always had good support from people in SNAG. And I didn't boycott it because I didn't want to participate in that organization. I basically just didn't belong to it because I don't like organizations. I don't like — I had enough of organizations teaching at the university.

I had enough meetings to go through and sit and listen to somebody read something that should have come in a memo that you can read in five minutes and throw away. No, you had to waste an hour listening to some administrator babble about all they'd accomplished for you, which was virtually nothing. All you really heard about was the problems they had with their job.

MS. DOUGLAS: So was SNAG a — Society of North American Goldsmiths, I know you have some thoughts about all these different labels that metalsmithing is involved in. Do you want to talk about that?

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, that's — I think — I think that's — one of the problems in the metal field is that people don't know what to call themselves. They don't know what they are. It's like metalsmith catches sort of all things, you know, whatever metal you're working with, but blacksmiths work with iron or steel. That's pretty obvious.

Most of them forge. And the word smith itself, that — like a goldsmith, you know, is one who makes metalwork in their studio, but if you make hollowware in your studio you're a silversmith. And if you make gold hollowware, what are you then? Because a silversmith doesn't make gold hollowware, or do they? Maybe they do. But a goldsmith makes jewelry. They don't make hollowware, for the most part. I mean, definitions are different here than they are in Europe. In Europe, a goldsmith is the highest skilled metalworker, period. That's really what it amounts to.

Whether they're working in steel, copper, aluminum, gold or whatever, or whether they're just drawing, you know — you know, if you're the highest skilled, you're a goldsmith and that's an honor that is bestowed on you there, I think.

It's different in the States. And I think the confusion — just like the word "crafts" has so many different connotations, you know. I was watching a beer commercial on TV last night, and there was a beer commercial, and they had this painting, this — you know, which all the high-tech stuff, you know how all the work that's being done in the media now. This glass of beer, you know, was being painted by squeezing lemon on a — rubbing it with a lemon, and it would turn it different colors and so on.

But the term "artfully crafted" was stuck in there as describing the beer. That's a better terminology for beer than it is for art — "artfully crafted." Nobody in crafts or any art critics that I saw ever put anything quite so succinctly for what a craftsman is. We're associated with hobbies more than anything.

The word "crafts" has been a bastard through the years, you know. And so now we have — because of that I think there's this trend for people to move away from making functional objects, traditional functional objects, into making — into making art and being considered artists.

They're denying craft to be considered an artist. But there's still — you know, like, they're goldsmiths or whatever, silversmiths. Silversmiths haven't done that. It's happened in the SNAG organization, in the organization or the group of people, maybe not the organization. They're moving — actually moving away from metal. And some of them work with gold, making jewelry, and there may be — there may be a couple of people in that organization that have actually done gold hollowware. I don't know.

But they would be the only ones I truly would consider to be a goldsmith. But "smith" doesn't necessarily mean hammering. But you consider blacksmith, that's one of the most common uses of the word "smith." It's definitely — doesn't include people that don't know what a hammer is. [They laugh.] So smithing — and I'd always — and maybe I'd misinterpreted that. I thought smithing was, like, working basically with a hammer.

But it's really not part of the definition. So I think there's a lot of confusing terminology there with metalsmith, silversmith, goldsmith, jeweler. What's a jeweler? Oh, it's a goldsmith! Even if they don't work in gold, they're a goldsmith, but not by European standards but by what's considered, you know, an American — by the SNAG organization itself. You know, these people are all goldsmiths, even if they don't even know how to solder a

silver band together. You know, and there's a move now away from metal in general in academic programs, which is to me totally, totally unacceptable.

I just don't understand why you would have a program that was called jewelry design and metalsmithing and then not teach basic technique in metals to these people and actually require that they work in innovative materials, so to speak, when their idea of innovative materials is plastic, which was invented before the Civil War. That's not innovative materials, you know, nor is using plastic an innovative use of materials. You know, it depends on what's made. And I can see its place in jewelry. But it should not replace, you know, the traditional values that we have — you know, that have represented some of the best art in the world for over 5,000 years.

So the status of the goldsmith has gone from good down to being almost a trivial trinketer at this point, I believe. And I think the organizations are a bit responsible for that — a little bit too much popular culture in what — in what is accepted as fine art these days. And maybe that's why I appreciate some of the ancient work more so than a lot of the contemporary work, and respond more to those pieces — and more influenced by 3,000-year-old work than I am by work that I see in whatever the journal, *American Craft*, is. Is that what it's called now?

And that was — that organization did an awful lot of good in the '60s and '70s. They were part of — they were part of a revival of crafts. And I mean it was an exciting period of time. And what they had a museum and the ACC worked together. Was that the Museum of Contemporary Crafts? And what was the magazine, the journal?

MS. DOUGLAS: *Craft Horizons*.

MR. NOFFKE: *Craft Horizons*, right. Those were — those were the best years, I feel, for the — for the crafts and also for that organization, you know. I just — because they were — they reported. They were concerned about different parts of the country, what was being done all over the country, and those things were included, those articles, photographs documenting some of the exhibitions when there were no catalogs made in those days.

All that information, the only information you could get about contemporary crafts in America was in that journal, and it was a good journal then. And now I don't think they even — they don't have too many shows from what I've seen. I don't subscribe to it anymore even though I'm — you know, probably should just to see what's going on.

But I don't like picking up a journal like that and seeing an exhibition of some conceptual European stuff that I consider to be bandwagon art as being the cutting edge that's being done in the world exhibited in the Museum for American Crafts. Why not have a little bit of American crafts in the museum every once in a while? But functionality, if it's functional now, it's not popular. So I do have a problem with those things.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, do you consider your own work distinctly American in feel?

MR. NOFFKE: Not necessarily. I don't.

MS. DOUGLAS: Or having an American sensibility as opposed to —

MR. NOFFKE: You know, I don't know. I don't know that that's for me to say and I really don't — I really haven't thought about that as far as what my work looks like to someone else. I don't really know. I don't know. [Laughs.] What do you think? How do you see it?

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I could probably, you know, come up with an essay to discuss that, but —

MR. NOFFKE: Yeah, it would be interesting for people from different parts of the world to see that show out of context to see where they thought it came from. You know, if you look at those pieces in an American museum, you're probably going to assume that it's American work.

And it may smell so American that anybody would see from anywhere else in the country — they'd say, "Oh, those damn Americans," you know [Laughs]. It may come across that way in some places. I don't know. I haven't really thought about it.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, you know, you yourself, your personality has quite a bit of irreverence to it. And I can project that onto your work in some cases, and then in the '70s there was a lot of irreverence in American art in general. So I think that kind of speaks to an American sensibility but I don't know about overall.

MR. NOFFKE: It probably would. You know, I tried to — I tried to counter that with making things that were functional and also elegant at the same time.

MS. DOUGLAS: They are very elegant.

MR. NOFFKE: And that's a weird combination to work with.

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah.

MR. NOFFKE: And I don't know how successful I was at that. I think it's — that's — you know, maybe never know on that one because it's difficult to put some of those — it's difficult to combine funk with elegance.

MS. DOUGLAS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Well, your work's changed over time, hasn't it?

MR. NOFFKE: But it's — I think it probably has changed a little bit. I mean, maybe my attitude hasn't changed a lot but the pieces I make probably have developed. The scale is one thing I've worked on I talked about and then that business too of making things as functional as I can possibly make them and also to have a bit of elegance so that they're not too clunky but there's a clunky element in them.

It's hard to combine clunk and elegance, too. Those are also two contrasting things. And, you know, so it's difficult for me to say whether I've been successful at doing something so strange and off-the-wall. I don't really know. All I know is it was fun. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, talking about those — the recent body of work, the gold bowls that you forged out of billets, those are definitely beautiful objects. And they're gold so they have a certain quality to them based on the material. I think to me the irreverence, if there is any, comes in the way they're fabricated because it's such a — you described it yourself. You said, "I'm forging this with a sledgehammer out of a hockey puck-sized" —

MR. NOFFKE: That just — that just makes it more expedient to get there and possible to get there. You know, I mean, it would take you forever to hammer a sheet out of one of those billets like that if you didn't do it hot with a sledgehammer. It would take a month of working cold as hard as you could to get where I can get in five minutes with a sledgehammer.

I mean, it's just the facts. That's the way it is. And if you wanted to spend a month doing it cold to show reverence to something — the irreverence isn't with the process there. I mean, the biggest gold bowl I made for my dog. That's her dog bowl. That was *Sister's Bowl*.

MS. DOUGLAS: How big was that?

MR. NOFFKE: That was — it's about the size of that silver one, the water bowl down there. Now, that's maybe irreverent, but I don't see it as that way because I loved that dog. You know, I thought — I wouldn't have made that bowl for a human being. Nobody deserves a bowl like that, but that dog did.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I don't think irreverence is a bad thing.

MR. NOFFKE: No, I don't think so either, especially when you're dealing with very questionable values and directions in the art world. And so that actually made it fun. [Laughs.] And I wouldn't say that I look forward to offending people but I certainly don't mind when it happens. If the shoe fits — you know, that business — be offended.

Maybe it'll be good for you. I've certainly been offended, and a lot of times I had no recourse. What could I say? [Laughs]. You know, so this actually — this interview gives me a good opportunity to vent some of these things to people that may or may not appreciate it or understand it. It's just an opinion, you know. Everybody's entitled to their opinion, and I certainly have mine. And so I really appreciate the opportunity to speak openly about some of these things that I think are critical and important.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, going back to the discussion of different names for what it is metalsmiths do, how do you end up labeling yourself then?

MR. NOFFKE: I don't know. You know, I don't like calling myself an artist.

MS. DOUGLAS: Why not?

MR. NOFFKE: You noticed that when I was signing the paperwork. I think it's — I think it takes — it's a too much of an ego trip. I don't really even know what art is so how can I know that I am one, that I am an artist? I think art's one of those things by its own definition is undefinable, or not by its own definition. I just believe it is. It's a visual business and people don't understand. People don't understand things they can't explain. And I think art is one of those things that can't be explained. I think you can look at it and — well, I don't know that you can — that anyone even is capable of saying what is art and what isn't art, because that's — all that is is an opinion.

It's a visual experience. It's not — it's not literal. It's not — if you could explain what it was that you were doing and why you did it, it's — satisfactorily— it would become literature. There would be no reason to make it. And that's why I hate artist statements. People asking me to make a statement about my work, you know. I just don't like that because you can't explain it.

You can try. I mean, we've sat here, what, for four or five hours and gone through me trying to explain what some of these things mean to me when I'm making them. And it's difficult. I can't talk about all those things.

So I don't know what to call myself. And certainly the craft or art world doesn't know, either [Laughs]. I don't know. I would say — I would say I'm a craftsman probably first and foremost because I think you can define what a craftsman is. Whether a craftsman can call themselves an artist, I don't think — I don't think being a craftsman excludes you from being an artist by any means at all. I think all good artists are good craftsmen.

Otherwise they wouldn't get the work out there. And I could tell you who I think are the best artists but I don't see any point in going into that because that's simply an opinion. And a lot of that is also information that's filtered down through art history courses, and it's just common knowledge, you know, who the world's greatest artists have been. That's accepted, and I think it takes time to do that.

And I don't disagree with those people. I do know that there's been a lot of people as good as — as good a painters as Van Gogh that never had any exposure at all. I do know that. And some of them are working right now in the United States, and they'll never have exposure like he had and they may be every bit as good as he was.

So there's politics involved in who is an artist and who isn't as well, as people not understanding really what they're talking about, only what moves them. And a lot of people — the historians and critics I don't think really recognize it when they see it, anyway. That's why art-looking stuff is so popular: Because it's so easy to understand something that looks like art which has been accepted for 30 years, like conceptual work now. Oh, it's — all of a sudden it's the rage. It's an old hat is what it is. It's bandwagon stuff at this point.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, so what do you think is the future of metalsmithing as a field at this point in your career?

MR. NOFFKE: I don't know. You know, it's — I don't know what's happening, and certainly the possibilities for being a metalsmith depend on the existing market, which is pretty much determined by dealing with galleries and so on. I mean, that's been a — that's been a really funny thing for me through the years, not having dealt with galleries where — well, I don't have many very serious collectors of my work because of that.

And you know, a lot of times, too, galleries have more — you know, who sells big work in galleries has more credibility in the art world than even museums have as far as who's hot and who's not. You know, look at the major galleries in New York City, you know. The hot people now aren't people necessarily having museum shows.

They're people that are making money in galleries and they're people whose work is being hustled by gallery directors because they're making a lot of money on it, too. So it's — partially it's a, you know, market-driven, political activity to become a great artist in the United States, part of which I don't want any part of.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, just I might interject my own opinion right here, but it seems to me in America, in the capitalist society, the market is the ultimate validation of something.

MR. NOFFKE: It is, yeah. I think so. I think so, and maybe it should be. I mean, it certainly is a reality. I think you're right about that. And I don't know that that is wrong. I don't know that that's wrong.

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay, so is there anything else we need to discuss or that you'd like to touch on for the interview?

MR. NOFFKE: I can't think of anything now. I think we covered an awful lot of information, a lot of opinionated information. [They laugh.] But nonetheless, I mean, that's the point of these interviews, I think. And I can't think of anything now that we need to discuss further.

MS. DOUGLAS: OK, well —

MR. NOFFKE: If you do, you know —

MS. DOUGLAS: All right. Well, thank you on behalf of the Archives, and it's been wonderful to interview you.

MR. NOFFKE: Well, you're very welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]