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Oral history interview with Ann Wilson, 2009  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Ann Wilson on 2009 April 19-2010 July 12. The interview took place at Wilson's home in Valatie, New York, and was conducted by Jonathan Katz for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

ANN WILSON: [In progress] "—happened as if it didn't come out of himself and his fixation but merged. It came to itself and is for this moment without him or her, not brought about by him or her but is itself and in this sudden seeing of itself, we make the final choice. What if it has come to be without external to us and what we read it to be then and heighten it toward that reading?

If we were to leave it alone at this point of itself, our eyes aging would no longer be able to see it. External and forget the internal ordering that brought it about and without the final decision of what that ordering was about and our emphasis of it, other eyes would miss the chosen point and feel the lack of emphasis.

It is often at this point that courage comes in because with every picture with enough technical facility, we can play it safe at this point and conclude it without actually making it safe. Our decision about it, like the president issuing a no-statement statement, or we can take the chance of our full sight and burn it in or out. You can do that all along too.

Then sometimes that sudden seeing of itself comes first, foremost, because you have begun. Then is the chance for a big one on and it's more like running track to keep up with the bursting of it, the fireworks of it. But like midnight ideas and phrases in dreams, the conclusion of these sparklers often has the effect of rain. They or you or both are not up to the effort catching on, hooking in," and that's about painting really.

"I think the things called masterpieces are the result of steadiness and structure, pursued pretty relentless. It indicates a staying power or an obsession on the part of the painter about the world, the galleries, the private public of other painters and the special seeing people and the large public of degrees of success, there is first the being accepted by the private public.

This is most painful I guess to always be in the wings watching the other dancers, many younger, and your youth and strength starting out to sea and away from potential.

Then the galleries, which mean some support, a way of physically continuing the more expensive and expansive ideas, and which mean some evaluation of where you are and where you are going, to see your work in that cold interior to somehow be in your own eyes a professional. But there are other desires, a kind of monarchy or anarchy of emotion here arises.

This much pride, this much vanity, this much aggrandizement, this much avarice, this much completion and where the first are intellectually and financially useful in part, the second are nothing but a drain and absolutely the worst of all of us.

Having the shows, too, brings about cataclysms of emotion better reserved for life which pursues enough with real pain." So that's my thinking as opposed to Bill's. But we did have a dialogue.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right, right. Yeah. So let me—because we'll—

ANN WILSON: So that starts. That's a little bit on critique and on making art and this whole thing I have to type.

JONATHAN KATZ: And this whole thing we can—

ANN WILSON: That's in the '50s.

JONATHAN KATZ: We can talk about—there may be a way that I can see if people at the archive might be willing to do this. So we can talk about that.

ANN WILSON: I have to do my writing because I still write by hand.

JONATHAN KATZ: And your handwriting is—

ANN WILSON: I write often on computer but you think better, you edit more by hand, for me, for my generation. But I do write on computer.

JONATHAN KATZ: And your handwriting is hard to read?

ANN WILSON: [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay, fair enough.

So let me begin, if I can then, with a little background.

ANN WILSON: Okay.

JONATHAN KATZ: So we can sort of—so if you would, where you were born, what year you were born, what your early education was like and something about your family.

ANN WILSON: Okay. I was born in a very ordinary blue-collar family on the way up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1931 and it was the Depression, of course. So that mentality among the adults, which is similar I think to what must be going on now about who's going to lose their job.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: I think it's a very similar time, not similar because this is not the Great Depression. However, that economic fear is around at the moment.

JONATHAN KATZ: Were you from an arty family?

ANN WILSON: My mother—my grandmother did embroidery and I will show you this incredible French convent school embroidery. Her friend drew flowers and wove flax and she did French needlework on them. My mother was an artist, studied with Sam Rosenberg at Pittsburgh at Carnegie Tech and was an abstract expressionist, but always painted. We would go out together and paint.

My mother had been a librarian. So there was a lot of—and my father, both of them—unusual for Pittsburgh, both of them read a great deal and valued the written word and reading. I had five maiden aunt schoolteachers, two of whom were high school principals. So I came—that was from the German side of the family.

I came from for what in Pittsburgh at the time would have been people who were educated beyond their class in a way because the other people were out bowling and drinking beer in that time.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure, sure.

ANN WILSON: I went to Our Lady of Mercy Academy, a convent school, and then I went to Carnegie Tech for a year. I had a scholarship because I won 17 gold keys in the National Scholastic contest and got a scholarship and so went to Carnegie Tech and studied Bauhaus design.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: A senior at Tech at the time was [Andy] Warhol and Philip Pearlstein were at Tech when I was a freshman.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you knew them?

ANN WILSON: I knew them from Pittsburgh, PA.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, my God.

ANN WILSON: Of course, they got out of there the minute they graduated. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: And moved in together apparently.

ANN WILSON: Well, they were friends. Philip Pearlstein was not gay.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: And Andy was. In fact, Andy Warhol was possibly the only student at Carnegie Tech that wore a baby blue corduroy suit to graduation.

JONATHAN KATZ: [Laughs.] So it was not a secret to people at Carnegie?

ANN WILSON: It would have been because Pittsburgh was oblivious. People just thought "Oh, he's an artist." Andy's father was a mill sweeper. Andy also had a scholarship to Tech and his mother never spoke English. He brought her from Pittsburgh to New York to live with him. So it was Andy came from poor people.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: So he would have been the first in his family to go to college. He was Andy Warhola and it was a Polish family living in a Polish section. Pittsburgh prior to the war, there were Irish sections, Polish sections, German sections, Czech sections. It was a very international town actually and these were all people in the mills and the Scotch-Irish ran the place.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: The Mellons and Carnegies and they weren't too fancy themselves.

JONATHAN KATZ: Really?

ANN WILSON: Well, they would build an opera house. They would build a college. But that was millionaire's guilt. It really—I mean, [Henry Clay] Frick came to New York and made the Frick Museum. I don't think he sat around looking at art.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. Right.

ANN WILSON: I mean, he was a guy who built mills from Scotland. So the town of Pittsburgh was a very working class town. It wasn't—although it had the Pittsburgh International, which I went to with my mother. So I had this sophistication from probably eight years old on with going to the Pittsburgh International with my father.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you felt fairly apprised of what was going on in New York even in Pittsburgh?

ANN WILSON: No, no I knew that New York was where you went, to Europe where Picasso was, where you could be an artist. That's how innocent I was. I'm sure there were some, maybe Philip Pearlstein or Andy weren't as innocent. But I was a convent school who went to college and until I left Pittsburgh, I had to be in at 11:00 at night if I went on a date and my parents were waiting.

It was another—you don't—somebody in your generation cannot understand that I call Pittsburgh the outer Midwest. You can't understand it. There were good girls and there were bad girls. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. So in college, you majored in?

ANN WILSON: I was at Carnegie Tech just for the foundation Bauhaus year. I had straight Bauhaus. I studied color and became quite a good colorist. Really, that became my métier. Color is the thing that I live for.

I studied typical Bauhaus. You move the squares this way and that way—for a full year. I then went with a friend who was going to Tyler [School of Art, Temple University], talked my parents into letting me go to Tyler because I wanted to get out of Pittsburgh. I didn't want to come home at 11:00 at night anymore. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure, understandably.

ANN WILSON: My motives were not pure. [They laugh.] I just wanted to get out of Pittsburgh. So Dick Levine said it was a lovely school, it was an old estate because Tyler was out in Elkins Park in Philly. You know Elkins Park?

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure.

ANN WILSON: And those gorgeous old estates. I went to Tyler which was clueless about Bauhaus. Tyler was run by a guy named Boris Blai who was a Russian and all of Philadelphia in the '50s, which this was prior to '54. It was '50 to '54. They were still—it was still as if Eakins taught. It was draw from the model, draw from the plaster cast, learn techniques like etching. I actually learned Vermeer's technique of underpainting with powdered pigments and egg yolk.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God.

ANN WILSON: And I copied Memling in the Philadelphia Museum [of Art]. Now, it's curiously turned out good because when I got to New York and met the Black Mountain [College] people, I thought I had missed the train [laughs] big time.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, I bet.

ANN WILSON: However, to have had that, I had both the Bauhaus underpinning in design, which I understood, and then I had classical technique training, which allowed me to understand things about art that the Black Mountain people never understood. So I bridged the classical past and the contemporary present.

As I went on in life, that for instance—behind that light there—is a paint—I glue autumn leaves. I'm working with the seasons, the flowers now, bark in the winter, leaves in the fall. That is a Vermeer technique painting behind that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, sure. We're talking about a painting—

ANN WILSON: Behind the lamp.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: That is underpainting and glaze. But with me, there's a little bit of irony going on in that in that I use that technique.

JONATHAN KATZ: To different ends.

ANN WILSON: To different ends and I also then use collage technique to get my form and I paint on silk because I studied with a Chinese master in silk painting. So I am playing around with different techniques and different ends and I'm glad I had that technical training. Now, many of the young artists now are getting it. They're going back to that.

JONATHAN KATZ: To the basics.

ANN WILSON: Well, what they're doing is they're reprising the old masters. They're repainting them because I think what they came up with—after Abstract Expressionism, where could you go? I think they lost motive with mode.

So the young ones are realizing they can't continue being Pollock. But without the kind of education that I had, I don't know their realization is going to be really an innocent American take on the old masters, which is okay. But it's kind of like coming out of Kansas and looking at a [J.M.W.] Turner and wanting to do that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right, right.

ANN WILSON: Without any idea of how it evolved or where, you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. Now, after you got to Tyler—

ANN WILSON: Yeah, there I met Lowell [Nesbitt].

JONATHAN KATZ: There you met Lowell, okay.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah and Lowell was—Lowell had his eyes on the prize from the beginning and he had studied with who? Well, it was the Bouguereau of his time he'd studied with and you'd have to look up the background of Lowell.

But he had studied with a big New York painter in summers in Maine [at Skowhegan School of Art]. So he had—he was way ahead of the others in technique. Then he hit upon the flowers later when he got to New York.

JONATHAN KATZ: At this point, was he somebody that you identified then as somebody who was going to make it? He seemed—

ANN WILSON: He was somebody who'd take me to the prom because the other guys weren't interested in something that was nearly six feet tall that didn't know how to dance. [Katz laughs.] He was gay. He was a safe date. [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: That's great.

ANN WILSON: Even though I had a date, he had to pretend to be straight.

JONATHAN KATZ: [Laughs.] Everybody won.

ANN WILSON: Everyone won. It was a win-win. [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Then through Lowell, you met Bill [William Wilson]?

ANN WILSON: Lowell invited me to his parent's house in Maryland. He said, "There's a wonderful woman artist, May Wilson. You have to meet her," and he took me out to Freedom Hill and Bill happened to be there. Bill and I connected intellectually from minute one. He said something, I said something and that was it. It was over.

JONATHAN KATZ: Then you graduated. Did you stay in Philadelphia?

ANN WILSON: No. I graduated. I went back to Pittsburgh for one summer and sat around painting the mountains with my mother and I had my—

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, can I stop you for a second because you said your mother was an Abstract Expressionist.

ANN WILSON: Yes, studying with Sam Rosenberg at Carnegie Tech.

JONATHAN KATZ: So why are you doing mountains when your mother, who's a generation older, is doing—

ANN WILSON: No daughter is going to do what her mother does.

JONATHAN KATZ: Got it, okay.

ANN WILSON: Are you kidding? I was going to upset her as much as I could. [Katz laughs.] "For this we sent you to art school?" [They laugh.] Anyway.

JONATHAN KATZ: Bravo.

ANN WILSON: But I was interested in the—it wasn't quite simplistic mountains. It was like a little Henry Moore shape with a lot of—I have always been interested in the colors of nature. My journals are full. I have an exact description in here going to see Emily Dickinson's grave of the color of each blade of grass leading to it. Nature, color, light, I just—it's all in here.

So then I went to New York and as I told you the story and Ray met me because Bill knew Ray and Bill said that I was coming to New York.

JONATHAN KATZ: We're talking about Ray Johnson here.

ANN WILSON: Ray came to the Greyhound bus, fetched me to the Greyhound bus.

JONATHAN KATZ: You had not yet met Ray?

ANN WILSON: No and he said—but somehow we had signals of who we were and I had a big black portfolio and he took me immediately to Sidney Janis, that story.

JONATHAN KATZ: So tell that story because we weren't recording that.

ANN WILSON: All right. Ray Johnson, who was a wicked one if ever there was, I said I was on my way to Paris, which is where Picasso and the artists were. Ray said, "Well, you should consider showing in a gallery in New York," and I said, "Are there galleries in New York," [laughs] and he said, "Oh, well I will take you to one," and he took me immediately to Sidney Janis.

Sidney Janis, I opened my little portfolio with the mountain paintings and Sidney Janis put them all on his velvet viewing stand and very kindly looked at each one and then said, "You are a very young artist and the young artists are down on Eighth Street."

I went to Eighth Street to the Tanager [Gallery] and all of those galleries. Well, those were the bullsier Abstract Expressionists. Women were to sleep with. They were not artists in the mind of those guys. So that's dear old Ray, anyway.

JONATHAN KATZ: So did you then become friends?

ANN WILSON: Well, because Ray knew Bill, he would—well, I was fun. He would take me to parties in which everybody was stoned and sitting around the edges of a room and I was probably in black and white saddle shoes with little plaid skirts and little matching sweater set with the pearls [Katz laughs] and I would say things like, "Hi gang," from Pittsburgh. [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: So you were getting the feeling that perhaps this was a different universe.

ANN WILSON: It was a different universe and I thought, "How do you talk to these people? They're always staring into space." [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, at this point you're not yet married to Bill?

ANN WILSON: I'm not yet married to Bill, no. That would take three or four years. But we were corresponding constantly. We wrote volumes to each other because he dated a woman named Terry Howler who was a neighbor with Freedom Hill. But Terry did not want an academic.

She wanted a businessman. She was a sensible girl and Bill—you read Bill's letter. That maybe wasn't what she was thinking of going on a date.

So he was first engaged to Terry for about three months and he dropped Terry and I was on the next train to Yale because I knew that's who I wanted. So he was at Yale finishing his doctorate.

JONATHAN KATZ: He was doing his doctorate in what?

ANN WILSON: At Yale in the geodetic grammar and Chaucer's "House of Fame".

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned. Wow. This I didn't know.

ANN WILSON: Yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, so then you're in New York.

ANN WILSON: I was in New York living. I first stayed in the Y [YMCA] for a week and just serendipity and I think I had several goddesses on each shoulder. I was wandering around in the Village looking for an apartment, which in those days was \$30 and \$40 a month in the East and West Village. I got to Patchin Place and I said, "Oh, it's like Pittsburgh. It has trees." I went into Patchin Place and I knocked on a few doors and they gave me a phone number and I got an apartment in Patchin Place.

JONATHAN KATZ: Just like that?

ANN WILSON: Just like that, right across from e.e. cummings and Djuna Barnes was down on the end.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God.

ANN WILSON: Just like that. So I had a floor through in Patchin Place.

JONATHAN KATZ: And what were you doing in New York?

ANN WILSON: In New York I was teaching at Pratt [Institute] and I was painting. By this time I figured out that mountains weren't where it was at. So I was attempting—I thought with nature colors, which I continued. I was pretty consistent.

I would make abstract paintings and what I did was there was no money so I got paper rolls of watercolor paper, tacked them on the wall floor to ceiling and I would do color shifts and then I'd take a sponge to them and the water would roll down and merge those color shifts. That was cool in those days and I'd wipe things with the sponge. I was very into it.

JONATHAN KATZ: And they were fairly large scale then?

ANN WILSON: They were floor to ceiling, watercolor, not to be framed, to be tacked on a wall. But again you're talking about things like the Tanager Gallery. You're not talking about Sidney Janis.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: So I was on Patchin Place, I was teaching at Pratt and I was working for Harold McNeil, who was quite a fine painter and I was—the library had forbidden the art school any books because—particularly the teachers because they tended to take books back and the books never got back to the library.

So I was sent in as a decoy to say that I was in the engineering school. I would take out the books that Harold McNeil wanted and take them to him. It was the devil to pay to get them back to the library because it was on my library card. So that was my job. For that, Pratt paid me. Then I taught drawing at Pratt. I taught foundation drawing.

Annie Olveris [ph] was there at the time. I got to know her. I was teaching at Pratt and I was gradually getting into the swim of first meeting Johanna and Stan and though Johanna and Stan I met the entire Black Mountain group.

JONATHAN KATZ: We're talking VanDerBeek?

ANN WILSON: Stan VanDerBeek and Johanna. They had just had their first child. They lived in a loft down on Spring Street.

JONATHAN KATZ: So we're talking '53 probably?

ANN WILSON: Probably '52, '53 and Ray took me to meet Stan and Johanna, who as I remember had a bed on the floor on the ceiling on chains that they would bring down at night. Then they had the first baby, August. I called her August Moon. So through Stan and Johanna, I met Merce [Cunningham]. I met [John] Cage. I met everybody from Black Mountain, that whole—Karen, M.C. Williams, Karen Karnes, the whole lot of them.

JONATHAN KATZ: And did you like them immediately?

ANN WILSON: Well, I was literate and they were literate. There was no—and I was an artist. If you were an artist in those days, you were immediately accepted.

JONATHAN KATZ: Then you're still on Patchin Place at this point?

ANN WILSON: I'm on Patchin Place and the Coenties Slip group—Bob [Robert Indiana] and all of them—had something called the Coenties Slip Drawing School. Bob Indiana and Jack Youngerman taught—people would come and pay to do drawing, Wall Street wives I think. I'm not quite sure who they were that made it down there.

But part of that drawing school was to show slides at night of other artists who had visited places like South America. So somehow through somebody because you just were—the Judson Church was a big center then. Somebody said about this drawing evening, all people showing slides. I wanted to meet more artists.

So I went down to that evening where Bob Indiana took a shine to me. He really liked me, I think because we were both Midwestern. We spoke a similar language. I think at that time I was also starting to do the quilts.

So there was a marriage of interest between the sign painting and what I was doing and Bob liked me to begin with. He said, "There's another loft building opening up down there." By this time I'd forgotten about Paris, once I found out that there was art in New York.

He said, "There's a woman moving in and you'd better grab off a loft—because Ellsworth [Kelly] was already in the building." So I went and I got the loft above the bar, which was at that time was huge. It was \$40 a month.

Then I got Terry as a roommate because she was Bill's fiancée at the moment. Then later I had a succession of other roommates. So that was living on Coenties Slip and then from then on in it just mushroomed. I knew everybody in town in about five minutes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. And so we're talking now roughly—we move into the Slip '53?

ANN WILSON: '53, '54, around in there and then once I got to Yale, then it wasn't—Bill and I were married in '57. So Bill and I got together from about '54, '55.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay. So when you were on the Slip for the first time and at this point you're friends with Robert Indiana. You meet Ellsworth Kelly.

ANN WILSON: And Agnes [Martin] lives above me.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, Agnes is already there?

ANN WILSON: No, Agnes and I move in the same time and Agnes gets an old acorn stove a woodstove which is about as big as that wall and every morning Agnes makes blueberry muffins for all of us on the old acorn stove. Ellsworth is always there. He likes blueberry muffins and he and Agnes have a big exchange, very important exchange between Ellsworth and Agnes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Do they know each other before Agnes moves into the Slip or—

ANN WILSON: Ellsworth and Jack Youngerman and Delphine [Seyrig] came from Paris because when they—Ellsworth, Jack Youngerman and Bob Indiana were in the army and they had the GI Bill of Rights and that's how they got to college. A whole generation of—I don't like to say male but in those days artists were male mostly.

Agnes and Lenore [Tawney] and Delphine aside, which was quite an unusual combination and grouping of very powerful women artists. That was amazing and that Betty Parsons showed Agnes. Then Lenore had her first show on Staten Island with the weavings. But it wasn't the norm.



There were women artists but they weren't in the center of the swim. I mean, there were women artists in the club. But they were not the point at that time and you knew very well you were not the point. It was made quite clear to you.

JONATHAN KATZ: So now they came from Paris. So how does Agnes fit in?

ANN WILSON: Delphine and Jack Youngerman and Ellsworth had mustered out of the army and were studying art in Paris. Jack married Delphine. Her father was an ambassador, quite sophisticated, elegant man. So Ellsworth was part or had studied with a color field school of sharp edged painting in Paris. His work came from that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Really, so early on that was going on in Paris?

ANN WILSON: Oh that was—it came from Paris.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: So this was a French mentality and these were French artist. I'm not quite sure how Indiana got there. He must have met—he probably would have met Ellsworth.

JONATHAN KATZ: In Paris presumably?

ANN WILSON: No, Jack—Indiana was never in Paris. Indiana mustered out, went to college somewhere in America and I'd have to look it up in his book. But ended up on the Slip. He must have known either Jap [Jasper Johns] or Rauschenberg or also—what was his name—oh, this great—was it—

JONATHAN KATZ: A painter?

ANN WILSON: Yes, a very older painter. I'll have to go into my journals. But he was always a visitor on the Slip and he lived down there. He wrote the best description of the Slip that anyone has ever written and a very well-known—Barnett Newman. Barney Newman.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure.

ANN WILSON: Okay, Barney loved Agnes. Barney was always up there at Agnes' but Barney has written a description of the Slip that I'm envious off. He caught what the Battery was in those days.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. Now, this was—Agnes at this point is still doing sort of—

ANN WILSON: She's painting kind of Rothko-esque figures.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: In fact, it was Kenzo Okada who met Agnes. It was more like Okada. Actually I would say more like Okada.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sort of washed out that way?

ANN WILSON: No, there were funny little forms. The only one that is extant is in the Taos Museum and they would be forms, shapes suspended—a little surreal—suspended in backgrounds. But there'd be three levels to the background and it was very Kenzo Okada. Her work was very much like Kenzo's.

JONATHAN KATZ: And what do you think Barnett Newman saw in her at that point?

ANN WILSON: Oh, anybody would see in Agnes a grand woman. Agnes was very plainspoken but she was right there on the mark. Anybody would see and she was totally—Bob Indiana said to me—she gave it everything 24/7 and Bob said it was too much to pay. I mean, no, Agnes—anybody, you wouldn't miss Agnes. You just wouldn't.

JONATHAN KATZ: So but at this point it's more the persona than it is the work because I'm assuming the work didn't—

[Cross talk.]

ANN WILSON: Well, it's like Kenzo Okada's work and Kenzo came back and told Betty Parsons about this artist in Taos that she had to know about. Betty went out there and said to Agnes, "If you come to New York, I will give you a show." So Agnes came to New York because Betty said that. Then about a little bit after Agnes moved in, Lenore drove onto the Slip in her Bentley because she had married a wealthy Chicago—

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh God, I didn't know this.

ANN WILSON: A wealthy Chicago guy who was a pilot. She married three pilots and they all totaled themselves. She decided after the third marriage that she wanted to be a weaver and she went down to wherever that great school in North Carolina or wherever it is in the mountains and again—

JONATHAN KATZ: Not Black Mountain?

ANN WILSON: No, no, no for weavers—Penland [School of Crafts]. Penland and all the southern weavers came to Penland. She learned from a great weaver in Penland, I think a German woman and I have it all in one of these journals.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure.

ANN WILSON: So she came from Chicago and I'm not sure how she found the Slip. But then she moved into the Slip under Jack and Delphine.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, wow. So you're in the same building?

ANN WILSON: No, I am at 3-5 Coenties Slip. Above me is Agnes and above Agnes is Ellsworth.

JONATHAN KATZ: Got it.

ANN WILSON: Okay, they are at 25 Coenties Slip and that is Delphine and Jack and Bob Indiana. Under them is a bar that the people across the street is the Seamen's Church Institute. We all ate in the Seaman's Church Institute and took our showers there. I remember eating with an old seaman who said, "Oh, you remind me of my sister in Iowa."

JONATHAN KATZ: And it was allowed? You didn't have to sneak in or anything?

ANN WILSON: No, you paid 25 cents you got a full meal.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, and the showers were included?

ANN WILSON: The showers you paid something for, although I had one illegally in my loft. [Katz laughs.] But the rest of them didn't.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, wow, and at this point Indiana and Kelly are partners, right?

ANN WILSON: No.

JONATHAN KATZ: Not yet?

ANN WILSON: I don't think they were ever partners, to my knowledge.

JONATHAN KATZ: Really?

ANN WILSON: No, I don't think so. But Indiana would—Ellsworth was very cool. Ellsworth never talked about it. Indiana would tell me about going to parties where at a certain point a naked young man with a chandelier would come through and that was the key to when the party switched from being cocktail hour to orgy hour.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God!

ANN WILSON: Bob Indiana educated me in male gay life. I didn't know anything about this. I was convent school girl from Pittsburgh.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure.

ANN WILSON: So Indiana took it upon himself to let me know the full story and enjoyed it I think.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. Was he the only one going to these parties? Do you have a sense?

ANN WILSON: I don't think Ellsworth was. I think Ellsworth had—Ellsworth was very close. He's got a lover now but you never heard anything from Ellsworth. I heard more from Ellsworth than Agnes in their interaction.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah and then Agnes would make you said blueberry muffins every morning.

ANN WILSON: For everybody, in this old acorn wood-fired stove. Remember Agnes came from Saskatchewan. She was just a Canadian farm girl. Agnes was three levels. One was this Canadian farm woman who could probably plow the back nine and cook for all the farmhands, et cetera. That was Agnes number one.

She lived in this loft. She made her table with four boards, a long thin table, and she made little stools the hammer and the nails. She had a little bed in the back in a back room. She had the old acorn stove and that was it. Later in life she conceded to a Sears Roebuck rocker.

I'd go out there in New Mexico and there would be a Sears Roebuck rocker and a baby blue Sears Roebuck rug because that was the Canadian farm girl made good. The second level of Agnes was that she read haiku. She read Chinese painters. I mean, she could have been Arthur Whaley. She was not dumb and she was Columbia-educated. So the second level—although she came across as a farm woman from Saskatchewan, the second level was a woman who had gotten her degree from Columbia and who knew Asian literature and painting inside-out.

The third level of Agnes was this extremely sensitive painter and rather shy actually.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. When you met her and she's doing these sort of Okada, Rothko-esque paintings—

ANN WILSON: Yeah, more Okada.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, more Okada, is she, to your knowledge, dissatisfied with her work? Is she struggling? Does she feel—

ANN WILSON: She works 24/7. I wouldn't—I think Agnes was like you plow the field and you sow the seed. I never sensed from Agnes dissatisfaction with her work. I think that Betty, that she showed with Betty and that when I did the other tradition with her, I frankly think that's what put her on the map, not because of me, because it was her own words and everybody in New York went gaga over that text. Susan Delahanty sent me out and I stayed out there on top of a mesa.

She had lived at first in a trailer, which later when she moved to Galisteo [NM], she had adobe-ed it up. I went there and I said, "What is that rectangle with those little windows?" I said, "Oh, my God, it's the trailer."

So she lived in that trailer and then she built an adobe house. But I mean you got off and there was a truck stop for coffee. I went into the truck stop and there were two guys having coffee in the booth behind me and I'm having coffee and they're locals. I said, "Do you know where Agnes Martin lives," and they said, "Sure, she skins our," when they hunt, "Our deer, she skins our deer. We'll take you out there."

So they drove me five miles down the highway and you know New Mexico. It's mesa city. There's a stream running by and they said, "You wade across the stream and you walk up the hill and you'll come to," there were all of these wooden rails. They said, "You just take the rail down and go on up. Put it back up or she'll have a fit."

So I put down I think it was a mile up that mesa. I'd take the rail down, put the rail up and got up to the top and there was the trailer. Then, there was her adobe and I have that journal with a painting of that adobe.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God. So to clarify, this is now we're talking going back there, '61 when you're in—

ANN WILSON: It's when I did *The Untroubled Mind* from the Philadelphia ICA.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, which was in—

ANN WILSON: It's in one of the journals I'll get. Don't ask me dates.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, sorry, but I just want to clarify for people listening.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, she went back out.

JONATHAN KATZ: This is after she leaves Coenties Slip

ANN WILSON: When she left Coenties Slip. She showed at Betty Parsons and then she had the big show at Philadelphia ICA.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: The ICA show gave her enough money. She could buy a truck and at a certain point she decides that this is it, she's leaving New York. She drove around a year to figure out where she'd like. She went to the West coast. She went to California. She went up to Canada. She literally drove a year figuring it out and decided she loved New Mexico.

JONATHAN KATZ: And why New Mexico?

ANN WILSON: She had started out in Taos.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, but why did she go back?

ANN WILSON: Because she was pulled back. If you've ever lived in New Mexico, it's got a long arm. It's the most beautiful place in the world, simply.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah and then let me ask you this. Going back to—I want to give a sort of sense of the texture. So when you're sitting around the acorn stove having blueberries, are you talking art?

ANN WILSON: No, we're not talking art. We're talking about how we'll get enough lumber for the stoves, you know, like that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Regular life stuff.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah or Ellsworth would stand at the window and say, "There goes Agnes on her walk." Agnes would walk across the Brooklyn Bridge. She'd walk to the Metropolitan Museum. She walked.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: She was a hiker. She walked everywhere in New York. I tried once to keep up with her and decided, "Agnes, what's wrong with the subway?" Agnes and I—she loved—oh, oh what was that great—Amicort [ph]. She loved Amicort. We went four times to see Amicort. She loved John Cage.

JONATHAN KATZ: So at this point, she is not—she had not yet met Lenore. Then Lenore moved in?

ANN WILSON: No, Lenore moved in shortly after we all did and Lenore took a building on South Street. The top floor was an old sail loft. I'm talking 20 feet up. The weavings—well, I have the book that I wrote about Lenore. But the weavings spanned that loft, 20 feet tall. Actually Bob Indiana said to me, "If the truth be known, Lenore taught us all." Lenore was a great artist and had she been a boy and working in metal, like [John] Chamberlain—

JONATHAN KATZ: It would have been a very different story.

ANN WILSON: It was weaving 20 feet tall but they were abstract sculptures.

JONATHAN KATZ: Then did you know that when Lenore and Agnes became involved?

ANN WILSON: I know now. I knew later. I didn't know then. They went around a lot.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, but it was not something they would talk about.

ANN WILSON: Daimler, she had a Daimler. That was it. It was a brown and tan Daimler. That was what—when the top came down. Agnes loved to go camping and she would take us camping in the middle of the winter with the snow on the ground. Of course, you know she was from Saskatchewan. It was probably August to her. She could cook from a campfire like nobody's business. She made those eggs and that bacon and that coffee in the morning. It was fabulous. The rest of us were frozen to death. [Katz laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: And she would take people like—

ANN WILSON: She would drag us all out camping.

JONATHAN KATZ: Including Ellsworth Kelly?

ANN WILSON: Not Ellsworth, no.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, I can't quite picture him.

ANN WILSON: The girls, the girls.

JONATHAN KATZ: Got it, got it. Then talk to me a little bit about the larger social world. So you said you knew Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg.

ANN WILSON: Yes and I would go over there and they were quite generous to me. They were also, like Bob Indiana, I think it was Jasper was from down on the Louisiana coast or wherever that was. I don't know where Bob—

JONATHAN KATZ: South Carolina he was from, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Bob was South Carolina?

JONATHAN KATZ: No, Jasper was South Carolina.

ANN WILSON: Jasper. Well, then Bob was the one that was from the Carolina coast. He was from that coast—

JONATHAN KATZ: Bob was from Port Arthur, Texas.

ANN WILSON: Oh, so that was the coast where he was from? He talked a lot about that. But they were both from families that weren't art families.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: There was a very similar cultural background with us.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: So I had no problem talking to them. Ellsworth was from up here. Agnes was—of course, that was an original. There was never anything like that. Bob was from some farm family in the Midwest.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right and did you see their work at that point?

ANN WILSON: Always. Bob was painting this curious series of black images, very symbolic, like a chalice and things. I think some critic turned him on to the sign that maybe that was the direction he should go.

JONATHAN KATZ: So these are the black—the big paintings that came to be known as "The Black Paintings".

ANN WILSON: I would go there. Bob was the one that I had the most access to. I could quite—even while he was painting. Agnes, if she would invite you, you'd go to breakfast. But I never saw Agnes painting, ever.

JONATHAN KATZ: What about Jasper Johns?

ANN WILSON: No, I didn't see them painting. But they would invite me in and they'd give me tea and they'd be quite nice, both Jap and Bob.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you know that they were partners at this point?

ANN WILSON: I knew more about them than the others. In fact, the goat—you know the goat with the tire?

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, sure, *Monogram*.

ANN WILSON: That was Bill Wilson's goat. Bill had found that in an old woolen merchant and brought it home and it sat in our parlor. When I was pregnant I sat on that goat and was photographed al-fresco. Also, *The Critic Sees* [by Jasper Johns, 1964], those were Bill's glasses.

JONATHAN KATZ: I did not know this.

ANN WILSON: No, and he came and he got them, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: What was—?

ANN WILSON: And the stove that was in the Jim Dine. You know that?

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, sure.

ANN WILSON: That was my stove on Coenties Slip.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned. What was Jap doing in those days? What kind of work did you see?

ANN WILSON: I didn't see.

JONATHAN KATZ: Any of the work?

ANN WILSON: No, no. But they were both on another track. They were not—at that time it was more installation with Rauschenberg and Jasper, I don't know what he was doing. I don't think Jasper is the painter that they all want to say he's the be all and end all of painting.

Coming along with Agnes and having gone to Sidney Janis and seen, my God, de Kooning and all the whole run that Janis had, it's so small after what Abstract Expressionism was, for me. He can never be—I mean, I think he's

a good painter but I think he's more about a semi-surrealistic encoded message system.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you get a sense that later on, that Rauschenberg and Johns were talking to each other through their work or is that not something that—

ANN WILSON: No, no, no. I was closer to Lenore and Agnes and Bob. So I would go visit them as artists would visit each other. But it wasn't—they were never central. The Coenties Slip group that I was part of was central because they were excluded from the group because—

JONATHAN KATZ: Tell us that story.

ANN WILSON: I don't know. There was some fight between Ellsworth and them about something.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Ellsworth basically kept them from you all?

ANN WILSON: Ellsworth didn't want them to be part of the Slip group.

JONATHAN KATZ: And he had the power to do that?

ANN WILSON: He had the power to do that, yeah. He was quite a handsome man in those days. Now, he's a sweet older man. But in those days he had these button blue eyes and he was good-looking. He was very—but he was also—he was kind of Savonarola. He had moral standards and you knew it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Then you were seeing, at that point, Ellsworth's work or no?

ANN WILSON: Yes, I would go up. I remember seeing the drawings, the plant drawings in his studio. I remember seeing those in his studio. I never saw him working.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you never saw any of his portraits?

ANN WILSON: And I never saw any of his portraits, no. What I saw were the plant drawings at the time and I know that Agnes was playing with the top of one of those orange juice containers. Ellsworth took it and bent it and Agnes said, "You should make sculpture," to Ellsworth.

JONATHAN KATZ: And that of course—

ANN WILSON: Yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you get a sense of when Agnes began to move into the sort of more abstract work—the early—

ANN WILSON: She was doing that on the Slip.

JONATHAN KATZ: She was doing that on the Slip but that really begins in '58, right?

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah. My contention, but again, I don't want Sidney to know I'm saying this and Agnes certainly had hives once I said it to her. I think Lenore's loom went into Agnes' canvas, boom, because I did watch Lenore. Lenore would be—I mean we're talking a 20 foot tall loom that she was calculating mathematically and stringing. I watched her string those looms.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: And so did Agnes.

So you think that the grid structure is definitely—

ANN WILSON: Well, what I did see of Agnes' was on that long table made of the boards was an open book. It was as series of poems, little poems. I'd love to know what happened to that book. Nobody can trace it. There were a series of early drawings which were like her later drawings.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, wow.

ANN WILSON: There'd be a drawing of raindrops and then there'd be a poem about the rain.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow and that book has disappeared?

ANN WILSON: That book vanished. Nobody knows where that book—there's one person I've got to try to call who's a nice guy who was very close to Agnes who ran the Harwood [Museum of Art] and I have to get to him

before he dies. He's out there in Albuquerque now. He was a good friend of Agnes'. So he's the one person I've got to get to.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, we're going to have to change the tape here.

ANN WILSON: And I'm going to go and I will be back in a moment.

[END TRACK AAA\_wilson09\_7752.]

ANN WILSON: My Shinto figure will take umbrage. That's my payment for one production with Bob Wilson.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh really?

ANN WILSON: Yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: How old is it?

ANN WILSON: Oh, it's Shinto. It's probably 18th century.

JONATHAN KATZ: It's beautiful.

ANN WILSON: Yes. I'm going to just read you a couple of things to give you an idea of what I have to retype.

JONATHAN KATZ: So this is April 19, 2009, and this is Jonathan Katz talking to Ann Wilson.

ANN WILSON: Such as she is.

JONATHAN KATZ: [Laughs.] So Ann, do you want to begin with reading me or should I begin by asking you questions?

ANN WILSON: I'll read a little because I want to—in the '50s, of course I was married to Bill and I got a Yale education from my—I went to Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh and then Tyler and the last thing they did was teach art students to think and I learned from Billy Wilson about word, how to think.

JONATHAN KATZ: And while you're looking, just tell us how you met Bill.

ANN WILSON: I met Bill—how did I meet Bill? Oh, Lowell Nesbitt was at Tyler with me.

JONATHAN KATZ: As a student?

ANN WILSON: As a student and took me home to meet his very uptight family. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Lowell Nesbitt had an uptight family.

ANN WILSON: Yes, who was afraid that I might be leading their son to perdition or worse. They were churchgoers.

JONATHAN KATZ: Little did they know that their son was already in perdition. [Laughs.]

ANN WILSON: A lot of it, and so in fact here is Billy Wilson saying, "Still my spirit slumbers few responses. Lowell was here Sunday to swim, uneasy in that his life is not adventurous, bicycling through Europe or the equivalent."

Let's see, I am looking for something that Bill wrote about criticism that is gorgeous, just ravishing, and I've got to get somebody and type all of this, starting with the '50s. The '50s had a flood. I had a disaster.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, I noticed there were little—

ANN WILSON: Yeah, we had a big flood and I used to do these in these old ledger books. I would glue letters and I would write but I had found it yesterday and I am not together ever.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you met Lowell. Now, tell us how you met then Bill.

ANN WILSON: Well, Lowell and I went to college together.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: And hung out together. I was the straight girl who couldn't get a date that I would go with him to dances. [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Did people know that he was gay in those days?

ANN WILSON: I don't think he knew until he went to work in Ogunquit, Maine, doing set design. He might have known but I don't think he was allowed to let himself know.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, okay so now we've got you and Lowell together but we're still missing Bill.

ANN WILSON: Lowell invited me to Baltimore. Here's another—I think this might be the letter. God, I had these gorgeous letters from Bill Wilson. I couldn't believe that I learned—here it is. Yes, here it is.

JONATHAN KATZ: Lovely.

ANN WILSON: Okay, so he took me out to meet May, who was Bill's mother, who was a den mother if there ever was a den mother. They lived in Freedom Hill. Bill's father was—the Wilsons go back to God in Maryland, like the 17th century at least—old, old Maryland family.

His father was a lawyer and they lived in Freedom Hill, which was a gorgeous spread with a pool and the whole thing. A little girl from Pittsburgh didn't know about that kind of living. I remember the first time I was holding forth on John L. Lewis who used to sit at our dining room table because my father was a newspaper reporter and the Democratic Party and Bill pulled me aside and said, "My dear, women do not discuss politics at table in the South."

JONATHAN KATZ: My God!

ANN WILSON: [They laugh.] I had committed a faux pas big time and this was my first meeting with his parents.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, he was not endorsing this perspective.

ANN WILSON: Well, I don't think it wasn't that he wasn't endorsing. He didn't want his father to get hot under the collar. I don't think it was about endorsing. It was about don't repeat this.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay.

ANN WILSON: Right, I don't want to get in trouble. All right, this is—I can't believe—Billy was such a brilliant mind and Gene was a brilliant mind.

JONATHAN KATZ: Gene being Gene Swenson?

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah. "Dear Annie, Beethoven's 5th Symphony is sharpening its claws on the air and I'm trying to unravel what I tried to say the other night. I doubt that it will become clear but not knowing what causes might produce what effects makes me free which is also irresponsible."

The letters that I had from Bill—"To begin further back than we did then, criticism is illuminating and criticism begins in the margin. All ancient literary criticism is dead except the drawings in the margins of medieval manuscripts, the actual daisies sketched beneath the stylized fleur-de-lis, the monkey celebrating mass in the margins of the psalters.

The image is that there are actual pages which are illumined and these illuminations are criticisms and are in the margins. The idea is that criticism is illumination." Ain't that good?

JONATHAN KATZ: It's really good.

ANN WILSON: Is he good or is he good, "that painting is criticism and that criticism is marginal. Painting and all the arts advance by the marginal, coming to seem sufficient and displacing the central. Take the maiden out of the Gauguin and leave a Clyfford Still."

JONATHAN KATZ: [Laughs] Oh, my God! How old is he at this point?

ANN WILSON: He's getting his doctorate at Yale. We were 27 when we married. Okay, so this is 26. "Illumination begins in the margin and edges towards the center or the serviceable background becomes the foreground. So each—"

[END TRACK AAA\_wilson09\_7753.]

ANN WILSON: [In progress] "—the margin wants to be the center. The background wants to cross the color line."

[END TRACK AAA\_wilson09\_7754.]



ANN WILSON: [In progress] "—as little as they can from their parents, painters too. The picture leaves room for accidental effects. The next is willfully and completely accidental, the next of the willed accident, chance flowering into choice."

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: Incredible, "And so on, supersessions."

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, wow.

ANN WILSON: "When I wrote to you last year about those Christ pictures, I rambled about abstract painting. Then a trip to Washington was father of a whole new country and after the de Stijl and the Japanese book, I wrote and took everything back.

I'll try again and this time be smart enough to mean only you and your work, no one else's. The question museum paintings are going to have to answer is stunning. How were you ever enough? How did you suffice? Was anyone really looking at you? In their own time, Pollocks and de Koonings can't answer these questions or what is more important, can't—"

[END TERACK AAA\_wilson09\_7755.]

ANN WILSON: [In progress] "—their problem. They've made their foregrounds and they have to live in them."

JONATHAN KATZ: God!

ANN WILSON: "And it's been proved you can make coffee without a coffee pot. But now, back to words to try to let them do it for me."

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God.

ANN WILSON: How's that for courtship? He got me, hook, line and sinker.

JONATHAN KATZ: No wonder! Oh, my God!

ANN WILSON: All right. "The symbol is but the bodying forth of the infinite. Yet it is of the very life of the infinite to be bodied forth or as I tried in a poem once, God lives in each event. The foreground is but the bodying forth of the background. Yet it is of the very life of the background to be bodied forth. The center is but the bodying forth of the marginal. Yet it is of the very life of the margin to be bodied forth.

The Lincoln Squares come to free the margins. All margins shall be centers. Backgrounds of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains. Yet it is of the very life to be bodied forth. Bodied as a beach is bodied as a bed is bodied, as an embroidery is bodied, an incarnation.

There are three of you on that slip and I have written to Rita as the fourth for where there are three times will be four, a bodied forth bridge. Body is the literal image and the letter killeth. Actual bodies are a possibility but not a necessity and were they a necessity they would not be sufficiency.

So on to the spirit. As the margin displaces the center or replaces a new margin is born connecting with the center jealous of it smoldering with injuries, merit the understudy visiting in the wings. The margin there seems the center is tense. Relations strain between what is margin and what is central. The center innocent like a man in a Rembrandt portrait who never knows what surrounds him, like the girl in the Gauguin who does not know that the jumbling color in the background will replace her.

The margin ambitious, plotting, grasping but patient; then we saw that little full length portrait in the Frick of Theirbach I think. I said that the next time he painted that picture he would leave the woman out because the grey background would suffice.

But the woman who bodies forth, that dovetailing grey once gone, the grey would be the bodying forth of something else. A novelty would arise, some new margin or background or possibility, that novelty in the margin threatening to overthrow the center. With the promise of sufficiency so great that it endangers the center's prestige is what I don't see in what you're doing now.

You say you are painting backgrounds and I see you painting beautiful backgrounds or backdrops or pages which are all margin. But what is arising? Do these pictures contain the seeds of their own destruction?

All background is the same as all foreground, not in the center against Gaul sense or foreground background, but as lack of tension, give and take, question and answer, champion and challenger, star and understudy. All

margin is no margin." He was having a—[inaudible]—that I had no background.

"For the ballistic life of the moment, like the Trojan woman dancing on the shore while the ships burn, perhaps for the dreams of the moment you need backdrops. I haven't been to the slip. I don't know what the action there would do to pictures. If the life you all live needs backdrops, then paint them.

I asked Tallchief dance *Firebird* against Chagall's backdrop but perhaps too you were enlarging the margins of others paintings instead of your own. I don't see at the present work in your early work the little I have seen." Now, that's what I was living with. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: My God!

ANN WILSON: They're inarticulate today.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right, right.

ANN WILSON: There are no—they've done away—the language has become like the show in the Whitney of the neon.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: It's become a neon flash. It has ceased to be philosophy, thought, all of that, which is okay. That's now and I have a book full of these.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God. All right, now let me just—I want to stop us and make sure everything's going well.

ANN WILSON: Okay.

JONATHAN KATZ: So hold on one second. All right, so stop. Let's see.

[END TRACK AAA\_wilson09\_7756.]

ANN WILSON: I just want to widen your perspective a little bit. The interesting thing about New York in that era—other than the fact that the lofts we were living in did not have Jacuzzis—[they laugh]—and cost 40 [dollars] a month—we all knew everybody. Everybody knew everybody. So it wasn't just one circle. You have to realize that John Cage, the Judson Church, the happenings with the Jim Dine's Ray-Gun store, the painters—everything was interacting.

So this journal, just quickly to give you an idea here, starts out going to New Mexico to interview Agnes Martin, going to Roy Mont [sp], France, to design the levels of the mountain in Iran, to exercise materialism from patriarchal religion and return religion to the womb of the salt sea of the world. I was into that in those days. And here I am—[laughs]—interviewing; this is *The Untroubled Mind* original text.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: This is the mesa that Agnes lived on that I went out and did a buckeye—Paul Thek and I did what we called "buckeye paintings," which was, you know, really—this is another view from the mesa of Agnes Martin.

JONATHAN KATZ: Tell us what you mean by buckeye paintings.

ANN WILSON: Buckeye is, in Ohio or Pennsylvania, you would have regional painters. They usually had shows in the state fair. And I remember I was always complaining about having to go judge these things and it was often in the bottom of the football stadium that they'd put their barn paintings. So we did—Paul and I did what we called buckeye paintings, which was from Ohio, you know—

JONATHAN KATZ: Got it.

ANN WILSON: So this is, again, the mesa. You know, if I was somewhere, this was—again, this was all views—she was on top of the mesa, so this—out there there's a 365-degree angle. And this was Agnes' adobe which she built.

JONATHAN KATZ: Over the—you said the trailer.

ANN WILSON: On top of the mesa.

JONATHAN KATZ: But this is the trailer—

ANN WILSON: No, no, no. This is the adobe house, not the trailer.

JONATHAN KATZ: I see, got it.

ANN WILSON: She built that. And this is out the window of that adobe.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: And this is the interior of her house and that was it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, it was that spare?

ANN WILSON: It was that spare.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, let me ask you—oh, yeah.

ANN WILSON: This is the old acorn and the Sears-Roebuck rocker, which entered a sign of her age that she was going to soften enough to have a rocker. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: And so she carried that stove from New York?

ANN WILSON: Yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God. [They laugh.] On the truck?

ANN WILSON: On a truck it came out, yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God. [Laughs.]

ANN WILSON: And this is another view of that from that mesa.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: But this sketchbook can tell you a lot. There's lots of view of New Mexico, mesa, et cetera. There is —

JONATHAN KATZ: What is that?

ANN WILSON: That's a butte.

JONATHAN KATZ: Ah.

ANN WILSON: They just sit in the middle—

JONATHAN KATZ: Right out of nothing.

ANN WILSON: Right out of nothing.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: This is Steve Durkee and Baba Ram Dass had a commune. And that's a whole nother story. Well, I said—did I write to you or I wrote to somebody that *Easy Rider*, it very much explains this particular moment. And this is Steve Durkee's commune central room where they all danced at night. And I went from Agnes and hung out at the commune a few days.

JONATHAN KATZ: Would Agnes go to the commune or no?

ANN WILSON: No, no, no, no, no. Steve Durkee was a generation younger. This is the view from the commune.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, Agnes is a generation older than you.

ANN WILSON: Yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you feel that she was—

ANN WILSON: Agnes would be close to 100 [years old] by now.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: She and Ellsworth were closer in age.

JONATHAN KATZ: But not that much closer in age. I mean, Ellsworth is also, right, of sort of more of your generation than—

ANN WILSON: No, no, no. Ellsworth is 85 or 86. I am 76. We're a generation apart.

JONATHAN KATZ: But my question is, did you understand Agnes as sort of an older leading figure and you a sort of younger—

ANN WILSON: Agnes was my mother in art.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay, good.

ANN WILSON: You know, I looked up. Now, the next part of this story is designing the Shiraz Ka Mountain in Iran with Bob Wilson. I went to New York and flew to Iran from Taos. This is all within three—

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: This is three months. [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: What an extraordinary three months.

ANN WILSON: And I'm working on the design of things for Ka Mountain with Bob, just designing—

JONATHAN KATZ: Now talk to us about this project: What's the basis of it?

ANN WILSON: Ka Mountain was a seven-day, seven-night performance of the—Shahrina asked Bob to come to Iran to make—and we made a 24-hour, seven-day, seven-night piece. Somebody was always awake and on stage. I was one of the designers, also performing. This happens to be Picasso singing. And we took it to Opéra Comique in Paris after that and to the Musée Galliera.

JONATHAN KATZ: And played in its entirety?

ANN WILSON: This same—I was in the spring interviewing Agnes, *The Untroubled Mind*. I went and hung out a few days at the Durkee commune. I flew to New York and then flew to Paris and then from Paris to Istanbul and from Istanbul to Iran and then was working with Bob on this piece doing design.

And so this is all Ka Mountain in Shiraz. We went from Shiraz—and here is the, this is the seven-day, this is how we would outline seven days of the different color systems and what was happening, there were symbols. And then we went to Paris. And then from Paris I flew to Stockholm with Paul Thek to do the beginning of—so you see that within maybe a five-month timeframe, a lot was going on.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, so we're introducing now Paul Thek, so you could tell us how you—

ANN WILSON: And I am moving—well, I am moving between Bob and Paul at all times. I'm working with Bob and Paul.

JONATHAN KATZ: And where do you meet Paul? Because Paul has not yet come into the story.

ANN WILSON: Paul, when Billy and I were married, Paul and Peter Hujar showed up on my doorstep one day—somebody had told them that they should meet me—came up to see my quilts, which Paul proclaimed prayer rugs. So I became fast friends with—Peter and Paul were lovers at that moment.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, I didn't know that.

ANN WILSON: Oh, yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Huh. Okay.

ANN WILSON: Okay, so they came up to my studio and I met them both simultaneously and became very—they were very deep friendships.

JONATHAN KATZ: They were not friends of Bill's beforehand?

ANN WILSON: They had nothing to do with Bill. Somebody else in the art world had said to Paul—oh, there's the whole issue of Catholic artists. Lizzie Borden said to me in Paris—actually in this journal—I'm walking along the street in Rue de Praia Clara [sp] and crash into Lizzie. And Lizzie said, "I will kill you for *The Untroubled Mind*." She was pissed that I was revealing the numinous in Agnes' thought.

JONATHAN KATZ: Because?

ANN WILSON: Because Lizzie Borden was minimal art. Thou shalt have no graven images.

JONATHAN KATZ: I see, I see. Although—

ANN WILSON: I had blown—I had blown—

JONATHAN KATZ: Blown Agnes' cover.

ANN WILSON:—Agnes—I had blown Agnes' cover and I had blown Lizzie's criticism totally out the window. Gone. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. That makes perfect sense. Now, let me talk to you about—

ANN WILSON: So but then Paul and Peter and I and Joe Raffael were all Catholic. If you were born a Catholic, any dialogue you have is understood as other than the rest of the world. We could—Paul was obviously doing Catholic imagery. I was obviously doing Catholic imagery. Agnes was a Presbyterian from up there in Saskatchewan. They were all what we referred to as non-Catholic in the polite terms of our day. [They laugh.]

So Catholic artists had a rough time during the—after Abstract Expressionism because the critics were all pure art and there was no reference to European anything. Well, if you were a Catholic, you could not make no reference to European anything; you reinterpreted it. So Catholics got short shrift, which is why Paul never made it in America.

And I'm wondering if this show that's going up in the Whitney is going to make it for that reason because it's still—although now, if you're a Latino and Catholic, you can totally be out with Jesus on the cross and Mary at the foot and whatever you want. If you're—you know, if you're a South American artist or a New Mexican artist, that's cool. But not if you're an East Coast artist. It's still not cool to be white and Catholic. [They laugh.] Just not. So in critical—you know, somebody like Holland can get it. But most of them don't want to get it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. So well, two things we covered—

ANN WILSON: So there's that whole theme of the Catholic artists. And all of us who were Catholic knew each other. So there was a whole circle of Catholic artists that revolved around that. We were Other.

JONATHAN KATZ: And at this point, are you yourself interested in Eastern philosophy?

ANN WILSON: Yes, I am doing Zen. Zazen, up by—[Laughs]—to confuse you even further—at Hunter [College] was the Zendo. And when my knee went, I transferred from Zen to Tibetan Buddhism and had my initiation with Kenpo Carther [sp] on Mead Mountain up in—above Woodstock.

JONATHAN KATZ: And what was the conduit for you of Zen thought?

ANN WILSON: I started doing Zen meditation. I was attracted to Eastern art always.

JONATHAN KATZ: So we're talking—I just want to get clear on—

ANN WILSON: And Lenore and Agnes were totally into Eastern art. Eastern art came very early in the '50s.

JONATHAN KATZ: So we're talking '53, '54 and you're already doing it.

ANN WILSON: I'm already doing Zen.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. So this is early.

ANN WILSON: This is early.

JONATHAN KATZ: And did you go—

ANN WILSON: But it was all over New York.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you go to [D. T.] Suzuki's lectures at Columbia?

ANN WILSON: Yes. So did Agnes.

JONATHAN KATZ: And so did John Cage.

ANN WILSON: And so did John Cage. And Suzuki brought the Asian culture to all of us. Suzuki was the pivotal—just like Black Mountain was a pivotal point, Suzuki was—you think Cage, you think Agnes, you think just so many, I can't even go into everybody that then got into Eastern thought.

JONATHAN KATZ: If I asked you to speculate what was the attraction of Eastern thought to you and to those other figures, what would it be?

ANN WILSON: Well, for any artist, Chinese art or Japanese art and Eastern thought, it followed for Cage, for anybody, it followed that you can't look at that art and not know it's sublime and not be—and as you're attracted to the art, phenylophsa [ph] was important. And there was a vogue after Suzuki came, suddenly you could get—well, we all did the I Ching. Jill Johnston used to throw the Ching until she got what she wanted and I said that wasn't the point. [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: That's very Jill Johnston. [They laugh.]

ANN WILSON: But no, but we all did the I Ching. So that there was—it was simply an intellectual—and remember, *Rashoman*, remember that whole—I mean, what was more painterly than that?

JONATHAN KATZ: Right, right.

ANN WILSON: I mean, there's so many currents that got mixed in and this journal here—this one little journal—is a very great symbol of that mixing of—I mean, there were so many aspects. Bob Wilson wouldn't have known Zen if it hit him over the head. But he knew Cage and he knew that that was important. Then later he went to Japan. And the Noh and the kabuki were his stage set, but that was before he knew about the Noh and the kabuki that he was making those stage sets. I mean, he was a natural, but he didn't know it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: I mean, he is an original genius. There is no doubt about it. And yet he pulls in every artist he can and does a riff on them. But Bob is a great original and almost intellectually—when he came to New York, I would say that he had gone to school in Texas; what did he know? But he had it in him.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

Let me talk briefly to you about the making of *Untroubled Mind*, which is perhaps the most reproduced text—

ANN WILSON: Well, it's right here, dear.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay.

ANN WILSON: It's right here. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: So the first question that a lot of people would want to know is, did she actually talk that way or are you editing it?

ANN WILSON: She talked exactly that way. There was a bit of editing. There was restructuring. I would take a theme and put it with another theme that was analogous. But every word is Agnes. Every word. And she went on to make many other lectures. There's Agnes Martin: Schreiben. I have that book of all of her writing. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. No, no, that was—and she talked that way all the time. That wasn't anything unusual. I just sat at her feet and wrote this. But all of the years at Coenties Slip she was talking that way.

JONATHAN KATZ: Even in the '50s?

ANN WILSON: Even from the minute I knew her. That's how Agnes talked.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: Well, the "Willie Stories." I mean, it was just—I think, I contend she was as much of a writer as she was a painter. But she didn't know it either. She'd write this stuff down in notebooks, but when she wasn't writing it in notebooks she talked that way.

JONATHAN KATZ: And for the "Willie Stories" and other such stories, they're so rich in—

ANN WILSON: Humor. And the humor—

JONATHAN KATZ: In humor, in metaphor.

ANN WILSON: Well, eh? It's Canadian, eh?

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. [They laugh.]

ANN WILSON: You know? But this is the original *Untroubled Mind* before I edited it.

JONATHAN KATZ: And was she trying to change people's minds? Was she trying to say, "Think this way"? Because there is a kind of hectoring thing—

ANN WILSON: No, she was saying, I think this way, I paint that way. You know? No subject, no object, no—you know, that whole thing.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right. And when you interviewed her for this—

ANN WILSON: But the thing—[laughs]—that I kept trying to explain and nobody would understand is Agnes talked that way 24/7, always.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. That must have been extraordinary.

ANN WILSON: That was Agnes.

JONATHAN KATZ: That must have been an extraordinary experience.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah. Ellsworth would know that. I mean, that was Agnes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. And why did she not write it herself?

ANN WILSON: She did write it. She wrote it in hundreds of little spiral notebooks. When she took a fit to write, she had hundreds of notebooks. Piles of them. Sydney probably has them.

JONATHAN KATZ: So why is it "as told to Ann Wilson" rather than directly from her hand?

ANN WILSON: Because I sat there and handwrote it here. Every word I handwrote. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: From her cards or from her—

ANN WILSON: From her speaking.

JONATHAN KATZ: From her speaking. So let me just to get this right—

ANN WILSON: It took us four days.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God. And you'd sit there and she'd say—[inaudible, cross talk]—

ANN WILSON: I'd sit there and write and when my wrist fell apart, I'd say, "Agnes, we got to take a break."

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: This is it. I sat at her feet and handwrote every damned word.

JONATHAN KATZ: And it comes out that articulately.

ANN WILSON: Yes. She was that clear, that straightforward, that straight ahead. She spoke slowly. And there are tapes of her speaking. You can get a hold of some of her taped lectures and you'll hear it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, do you think she is writing this stuff, you know, months before, memorizing it and then reciting it to you or this just coming off the top of her head?

ANN WILSON: This is coming off the way Agnes talked all the time.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay. Wow.

ANN WILSON: I mean, there's a difference when I write to Bill or he writes to me and Agnes doing this. This was Agnes. I mean, she was possessed. Agnes was possessed.

JONATHAN KATZ: So let me talk to you then briefly about that moment when she starts to make the grids and she's—at first, she's scavenging—

ANN WILSON: The first I saw was this little notebook about that—that to that—with a grid on one page and a poem on the other, a little short poem, the rain—you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: Some of those survived, but not that book, nobody knows where it is. I keep asking people.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. And she's reading at this point—

ANN WILSON: See, here is—these are—here, here we go. And when I went out there, I have a number of texts about Agnes when I went—here we go. And these are my sketches of two of her drawings, just—

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, wow.

ANN WILSON: Here it is. The original *Untroubled Mind*.

JONATHAN KATZ: Amazing.

ANN WILSON: The original Ka Mountain. The original Paul Thek. All in this little black book.

JONATHAN KATZ: Needless to say, the Archives of American Art is going to be very happy should you decide to give it to them. [They laugh.]

ANN WILSON: I would imagine. They ain't getting it yet. [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, so just really, really briefly—

ANN WILSON: And this is Paul and I on Ponza thinking about what we were going to do in Sweden.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, so let's—we've got now—you seem closest to—

ANN WILSON: This is the stag in Sweden. And this book is Sweden and—where else does it go? The thing you have to understand, I was moving at the speed of light between one and there's a typical kind of Catholic—

JONATHAN KATZ: Mandorla—

ANN WILSON: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. This is Sweden. This whole thing is Sweden.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, you knew—Peter was a photographer early on.

ANN WILSON: Peter was always a photographer when I knew Peter. A great—I think the greatest one. I think Peter, of all, has not gotten his due.

JONATHAN KATZ: No, I think that's true.

ANN WILSON: I think he's right up there with [Alfred] Stieglitz. And I don't know what's held it back because now there's the wonderful book and I know very well the guy that is his—you know, has—Peter was very smart in picking that guy who was an English teacher, wrote a beautiful essay about him. So I know that guy.

JONATHAN KATZ: So all right, so one day Peter and Paul Thek show up at your—

ANN WILSON: Knocked on the front door, said that they had heard I lived there and that somebody on the Lower East Side now gone in the sands of time who sent them, but they thought Paul and Peter would like me. And I'm sure it was another Catholic artist. It may have been Joseph Raffael.

And then they came up and I was doing the quilts and we talked and we were Catholic kids, it was instant recognition, no problem. And they became probably my closest friends. I wouldn't say that Agnes or any of the Slip people were friends because I was the kid on the block. These were peers; this was different.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. And you knew them—were close to them for how long?

ANN WILSON: Till they died.

JONATHAN KATZ: Till both died.

ANN WILSON: Yeah. I was the person that was with Paul when he died in the hospital.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, they broke up—

ANN WILSON: Oh, they broke up about a year or two later.

JONATHAN KATZ: But they remained friends or no?



ANN WILSON: They remained friends. Peter was always in the parks howling around for sex, but he also had a series of serial romances. Paul would have somebody, but it never went well with Paul was—A, he'd get paranoid or then he'd have a woman, then he'd have a man.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, I didn't know he had women.

ANN WILSON: Oh yes. Oh yes. Lily. Lily Nova, who is on the West Coast somewhere. I wish I could find Lily. There are pictures of Lily. And there was Michelle Collinson [sp]. I wish I could find her. She went up to Canada. And there was Sergio [last name?]. There were a bunch of guys. I don't know what happened to Sergio.

These I haven't been able to track. Michelle got married, don't know her married name, went to Canada, taught for a while. And Lily, I think in the West Coast there must be some way to get to Lily. But no—and I want these people because in my writing about Paul, I need what their, you know, what they knew.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure. So starting off with Paul and then we'll turn to Peter. What kind of work was Paul doing in those days?

ANN WILSON: Paul was at the end of the wax pieces, had just done the hippie in the Whitney and the flower children out in the park would come and leave flowers outside of the—

JONATHAN KATZ: We're talking *Death of A Hippie* [1967]?

ANN WILSON: Yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. So we're talking—

ANN WILSON: And they lost—that figure got lost.

JONATHAN KATZ: We're talking, what—that's '67, right?

ANN WILSON: Yes, around hippie time.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you met them then around '67?

ANN WILSON: No, no, no. I met them—it must have been—see, Bill and I broke up over Gene Swenson in '65. It would have been when we bought the house on 458 West 25th Street, we were up in [boat in Maine?]. We were married in '57, '58, '59 we came to New York, '60 we bought that house. It would have been '60, around in '60.

JONATHAN KATZ: So in '60 what kind of work is Paul doing?

ANN WILSON: Still working on the wax with the dead hippie. He's moving out of the—

JONATHAN KATZ: Wait, so he's doing the dead hippie—

ANN WILSON: Moving away from the meat pieces and into the dead hippie.

JONATHAN KATZ: But in 1960? That early?

ANN WILSON: Yes, yes. It was just an extension of the wax pieces. It was the corpus. But it was an extension of the face and the hands and the pink—

JONATHAN KATZ: The hippie, though, wouldn't have happened until '65 or '66, right?

ANN WILSON: It didn't get to the Whitney till '65 or '66, but Neil Jenney is the person you have to get to about this because Neil cast the first hippie.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, I didn't know that? Really?

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned. Cast it on—

ANN WILSON: Paul.

JONATHAN KATZ: It was Paul's body.

ANN WILSON: Yeah. Neil gave that wonderful piece that's in—the hippopotamus—that's in MoMA in my honor. [Paul Thek. *Hippopotamus Poison*, 1965]

JONATHAN KATZ: Huh. So briefly, how do you understand those meat pieces?

ANN WILSON: The meat pieces are, I think, a layering of three themes: One is certainly Christ-on-the-cross kind of theme. The second is the meat rack, a gay metaphor, I think.

JONATHAN KATZ: I never got that.

ANN WILSON: But nobody has ever said that.

JONATHAN KATZ: That's very good.

ANN WILSON: But if you look at the Brillo box and you look at where he got the Brillo box from and you realize that all of this was before AIDS, so all of those S&M places downtown—I can't remember what the famous one was—so I think meat definitely had a gay allusion. And I think that the third thing about the meat pieces was Rembrandt.

JONATHAN KATZ: The cow.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah. Paul worked on a lot of burners at once.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. And he was really—it seems those pieces are very much an attempt to refuse the sort of—

ANN WILSON: Well, Paul was in your face.

JONATHAN KATZ: He was.

ANN WILSON: He was in your face. And what he was saying was Andy Warhol wasn't being out front about what he was up to.

JONATHAN KATZ: Uh-huh, uh-huh. [Affirmative.] So he wanted the body, he wanted the material.

ANN WILSON: He took on other—the whole story about Paul, he was always taking on another artist. You know, as he lay dying, he was taking on *Tilted Arc* [Richard Serra, 1981] saying that this thing is going up in a workers' plaza where they want to have lunch and they can't even see the sky because of this thing. No, no, no. He always took on other artists. You know, that was his *métier* is he took on other work. And I'll give you what I've written about Paul.

JONATHAN KATZ: Great.

ANN WILSON: You don't have to ask much about that because I haven't done—I can't stop. I'm obsessed. And I got to stop sometime because I've—I would like to write about Gene's thinking. I would like to write about—oh, there's so many things I want to write about.

JONATHAN KATZ: Well, let's talk—we're just going to chat. So talk to me if you will about Gene and how Gene is implicated in your breakup with Bill.

ANN WILSON: Gene and I were lovers. And passionate lovers. We were deeply in love. I was in love with Bill. You know the story. You've been in love with two people at once. But I also had three children. [Laughs.] So I was a very sinful Catholic girl. [They laugh.] To say the least. [They laugh.] Oh, my God. And Bill was at the time a lover of Ralph Humphreys [sic], although I didn't know it then.

JONATHAN KATZ: Humphreys of tea room trade?

ANN WILSON: No, Humphreys the painter.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, really? Ah. I had no idea.

ANN WILSON: Yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Huh. So at this point—now, let's go back. Where do you meet Gene?

ANN WILSON: Well, he was around. I was going to the galleries and god knows where I met Gene. But you know, there were these big loft parties. I had one night off a week, one day off a week because I was at that time the mother of three children. And so I had a woman—Morris Graves had given me \$10,000. He came back from Ireland. He saw my quilt painting, said, "This is the only painting I've seen in all of New York," and handed me a check for \$10,000.

And once I picked myself up off the floor, I thought, "I will hire somebody so I can go to the galleries one day a week." And that was fine with Bill. So I hired a Latino girl to take the twins one day a week and Andrew and I would go around to the openings. And that's where I met Gene.

JONATHAN KATZ: And so this is—

ANN WILSON: And we just fell in love head over heels, boom.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, now this is a new wrinkle. Morris Graves bought your—

ANN WILSON: Came back from Ireland and was touring the studios of artists in New York. And he said, "This is the only painting I have seen since I have been back; here's \$10,000."

JONATHAN KATZ: Why \$10,000?

ANN WILSON: I have no idea where he got it or why \$10,000 or—

JONATHAN KATZ: That was a big sum of money.

ANN WILSON: Or why me—he got me into the Willard Gallery. He thought I was the cat's meow. In those days that was enormous. And I banked it and I hired this Latino girl and that allowed me to go to the galleries. I was missing the openings.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you didn't know Morris Graves at this point.

ANN WILSON: I knew Morris Graves' work. I had always—

JONATHAN KATZ: But you didn't know him.

ANN WILSON: I didn't know him, but I always loved his work. It was metaphoric. It was—you know, it was an easy to love.

JONATHAN KATZ: And equally interested in Eastern—

ANN WILSON: And he showed up at the house because he was touring, going around looking at artists in New York.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God. All right, so this is—[Wilson laughs]—I'm still processing this. This is amazing. All right, so—[laughs]—Morris Graves gives you \$10,000. You go to the galleries, you meet Gene Swenson.

ANN WILSON: Yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: And then?

ANN WILSON: And then Gene and I began a correspondence and began, you know, talking about art. And unfortunately it went further than it should have.

JONATHAN KATZ: Gene was interested in men and women?

ANN WILSON: Gene was brilliant. Gene was—he was possibly the most brilliant. But he was schiz [ph], so that that got him away of his—or maybe it fired his brilliance, you can't tell. But to hear Gene talk was like nothing else. Unbelievable.

JONATHAN KATZ: As good as Bill?

ANN WILSON: Better than Bill.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: Unbelievable.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: But he was Midwestern and he had this simple—Bill was this high-class Easterner. I was this kind of little girl from Pittsburgh, PA—[laughs]—naked as the wife of Lord Wilson. [Laughs.] And Gene was from my background. So he was at once a simple Midwesterner but with this mind that could—Jill Johnston said he was sent out of Kansas to be a genius. And a genius he was. His talking was better than his writing, I think. His ideas were first, first drawer. Bill I think was the better writer. But to hear Gene talk, you'd be dead on the floor. I

mean, unbelievable.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you became involved with him and then how many years later ended up—

ANN WILSON: I think it was '65 when we broke up. And I knew Gene '64, '63, '62. And Bill was getting his pleasure elsewhere. And so—

JONATHAN KATZ: Which you did not know at the time you said.

ANN WILSON: I did not know at the time.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you know that he was—

ANN WILSON: And I wanted some action.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure. Did you know that—when you met him, did you know that he was inclined towards men or no?

ANN WILSON: No. No. I was a good Catholic girl, you know. What did I know? Nothing.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. And Gene was inclined towards men as well, no?

ANN WILSON: Gene was AC-DC.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay, okay.

ANN WILSON: He had a lovely girlfriend from NYU art history institute, red hair. She was beautiful. I think she's still around. They were both Peter Blanckenhagen's students. And I hope her name is in one of my journals because I'd like to track her down.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. And talk to me a little bit about how sexuality figured in. I'm curious because a lot of people like me who are sort of looking at sexuality in history wonder if people knew that Morris Graves was same-sex-inclined, if that was something people talked about.

ANN WILSON: Within the gay world, they all knew everything. You're talking to a Midwestern girl who came very late even to my own sexuality, you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: And how would you define your sexuality?

ANN WILSON: Well, I was a virgin the first time I married.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: And I married at 21.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so—

ANN WILSON: So I was clueless.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. And in the—

ANN WILSON: So I am, like, not a New York subject. I mean, New Yorkers woke up a lot earlier, I think. If you look at the history of somebody like [Allen] Ginsberg or you know. And men in general—remember also we're talking the '50s. It's an era that if you didn't live there and you weren't a woman in that era, you wouldn't understand.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. But did you know for example that Merce Cunningham and John Cage were involved with one another?

ANN WILSON: I knew later. I knew after the fact. I didn't know nothing when I came to New York about that. I mean, I wouldn't have even thought about sexuality when I came to New York. I was going to Paris to be a famous artist like Picasso. [Laughs.] I can't stress that enough.

You know, I became sophisticated real fast but not sexually sophisticated. I was brought up to be a good Catholic girl. You either became a nun or you married. There was no in between. In fact, the priest that came to give us our sexual education essentially said, "You become a nun or you marry. And if you marry, you better have five or six children for God." [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: But I can't help but notice that the circle of friendships that you embraced—your world, your

social world was disproportionately—

ANN WILSON: No, no, no. There was Stan and Johanna Vanderbeek. There was Wolf and Emily Kahn. There was a whole nother world that we haven't even touched on yet.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay, okay.

ANN WILSON: And when Billy and I were married, we moved in heterosexual circles. I didn't know what was going on—

JONATHAN KATZ: Privately.

ANN WILSON: Yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. All right, so when you divorced Bill—

ANN WILSON: That's when I moved into the greater—by that time I was hip about everything. Then I knew about everything.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you had discovered that Bill had another side to him that you didn't know.

ANN WILSON: Yes, later. A little later—even later because Bill said that here I was the bad one. It was maybe Peter Hujar said, "How dare he treat you like, you know, some evil woman when he was out." Peter turned me on to what was going on with Bill.

JONATHAN KATZ: Earlier he hadn't told you?

ANN WILSON: He hadn't told me. But all the gay men knew it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: So when Bill was standing around saying, "She cannot come back into my house, that Bathsheba"—[Katz laughs]—Peter said, "Wait a minute." [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. And so with Agnes—

ANN WILSON: Bill was wandering around with the wounded whatever it is on his sleeve for anybody in New York to see him crying that he was left with these three children. Well, he wasn't left with three children. He put me out of the house and locked the door. He couldn't wait. He admitted as much later.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. Yeah. And Agnes' sexuality you said you didn't catch on to till later.

ANN WILSON: Clueless. Clueless. Agnes and Lenore did not talk it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. And so only Indiana—I mean, you knew about Kelly.

ANN WILSON: Indiana was the one—I didn't know about Kelly.

JONATHAN KATZ: You didn't know about Kelly?

ANN WILSON: No.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: I knew Bob was gay because he announced it and told me all these stories. You know, it was like late night TV. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: And you said you sensed something about Jasper and Bob Rauschenberg.

ANN WILSON: Well, everybody knew about them on the Slip.

JONATHAN KATZ: Everybody knew.

ANN WILSON: And I think Ellsworth didn't like that they were so publicly out. I think Ellsworth was very closed. I suspect he still is.

JONATHAN KATZ: So in comparison to Ellsworth, Johns and Rauschenberg were fairly open?

ANN WILSON: No, I wouldn't know that because I didn't—you're talking to the wrong one. You have to—gay men

were—knew everything. I didn't know. And I was from the Midwest. You're talking—I was clueless.

JONATHAN KATZ: Got it.

ANN WILSON: My knowledge was after the fact. Now I can look at the whole scene and see it very clearly, you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: But I'm looking at, for example—

ANN WILSON: I think sometimes Paul Thek would bed a gorgeous young man and then say, "Can you use a hammer and nails?" when we were doing the installation. I mean, I swear to God, he'd pick good carpenters. [They laugh.] You know?

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, Thek was fairly open about his life and I assume—

ANN WILSON: Not with me.

JONATHAN KATZ: Not with you?

ANN WILSON: No.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. Hujar was?

ANN WILSON: Hujar was much more open with me. Yeah. Peter was more honest. Thek, Paul was Catholic and more—I think more guilt-ridden than Peter. But also Paul chose me—I was—he often wanted to marry me. Paul was ambivalent, you know. But Paul was like D. H. Lawrence. I think Paul really wanted a harem that he could—in as many places as possible so he could visit here and there and there. Paul had another psychology than Peter entirely.

[David] Wojnarowicz was very much like Peter. It was good they ended up together in a way. He was a kid that the mother had remarried in both cases and tossed these gay sons out because whatever they married was probably two inches to the left of Stanley Kowalski, you know. They had hard youths, those two.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. And you knew David Wojnarowicz as well?

ANN WILSON: Yes. But I knew him quite late as Paul—Peter's last lover.

JONATHAN KATZ: Through Peter.

ANN WILSON: I didn't know him the way I knew the others. But sexuality in America—when I think of what gay men must have had to have overcome, given our society, I don't think that there was as difficult a stereotype for gay women. A, I don't think straight males understand that there are gay women because their egos won't let them understand it. [They laugh.] I mean, they understand it intellectually now. But when you look at [New York Governor David] Paterson trying to make the law he's trying to make today, look at the world we're in.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. No, absolutely.

ANN WILSON: I mean, and in those days just to murmur the thought was—it was *Easy Rider* city.

JONATHAN KATZ: And was there a difference, can you characterize the difference between—

ANN WILSON: I mean, the reason Paul worked in Europe was, in *Easy Rider* when they went into the restaurant and the way the straight guys would look at those long-haired faggot kind of thing. I mean, the way they were, you know—that so much to kill them. But that the one—what's his name, a great actor—and he said, "It's the freedom that they're afraid of. It's not"—But I think it was the long hair. I think it was the, some kind of an implication that terrified them.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. Did you feel any kind of difference—I realize that I'm asking the wrong person, but you're one of the few people—

ANN WILSON: I mean, you just have this proper picture of me with my knees together. My God. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Right. Yeah, no, no. It's true. And I totally get that. But I just want to know if you sensed a difference between the '50s and the '60s with regard to gay life.

ANN WILSON: I think that the '60s—I think a lot of gay men in the '60s merged with the hippie culture because the hippie culture was open to all kinds of sexuality so that if a gay man looked like a hippie he could get away with being gay without—I think it was still shielding from the heterosexual—from that *Easy Rider* scenario.

JONATHAN KATZ: Got it. Got it.

ANN WILSON: I think. I think. So that they folded into the hippie scene, as cover.

JONATHAN KATZ: Makes sense. Makes sense.

ANN WILSON: That's what I think happened in the '60s.

JONATHAN KATZ: And did you know, for example, that Agnes Martin was reading Gertrude Stein?

ANN WILSON: Oh, yes. We were all reading Gertrude Stein. Everybody in the world was reading Gertrude Stein. Gertrude Stein was in. It was the—Gertrude Stein was like the I Ching.

JONATHAN KATZ: Really?

ANN WILSON: Yes. [Laughs.] It didn't have to do with—

JONATHAN KATZ: It had nothing to do with lesbianism?

ANN WILSON: *Tender Buttons*. I think that Lenore made many little collages on *Tender Buttons*. She knew for sure. Agnes probably knew, but we were all reading Gertrude Stein. She was an abstract writer. It was an abstraction. It was just like Asian art. And Bob Wilson read Gertrude Stein, based a lot of his dialogue on Gertrude Stein.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. And was it then Gertrude's formal play that compelled people or the sense—and this is the thing—

ANN WILSON: I don't think most Americans had a clue about Gertrude Stein's sexuality. What it was is that she became very fashionable as a writer. I don't think it was Gertrude Stein's sexuality that put her in the forefront.

JONATHAN KATZ: Even for your circle?

ANN WILSON: No. It was the abstraction of it.

JONATHAN KATZ: So when, for example, Agnes in '61—

ANN WILSON: A rose is a rose is a rose. I mean, that's straight Agnes Martin. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right. Right, right. So when Agnes does a painting in '61 called *Cow* and Gertrude Stein makes—

ANN WILSON: No, I know all about *Cow*.

JONATHAN KATZ: Talk—talk to me—

ANN WILSON: But I don't—I don't know. I know Lenore knew because she was making all these *Tender Buttons* references.

JONATHAN KATZ: So let's talk, just—

ANN WILSON: So that possibly Agnes and Lenore could have known. But I didn't know that then.

JONATHAN KATZ: And we're referring to the fact that *Cow* is used for orgasm and—

ANN WILSON: Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ:—in Gertrude Stein.

ANN WILSON: And it could have come from—Lenore was more hip in that way. I mean, Agnes was a Canadian farm girl.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you saw—and then of Kelly's—like, Kelly would take these nude photos of himself with his paintings and send them to men. You never saw any of that stuff.

ANN WILSON: I wouldn't have known that and Kelly was hidden. If anybody was a closet case, it was Kelly. But don't write about that. And don't say I said it, Jesus Christ.

JONATHAN KATZ: No. [Laughs.] And do you have any sense of the texture of the conversations that Kelly and

Agnes would have?

ANN WILSON: All about art.

JONATHAN KATZ: All about art.

ANN WILSON: It wouldn't have jumped the sex line. The men might have known they were gay, but male—the male gay world and the female gay world was very separated. Very segregated. There might have been instances, which I don't know about, but the male gay world was, I mean, there was much more sexual content, thinking, talking. I mean, it was nonstop. If you find *Flare* magazine, that was certainly—did you find it?

JONATHAN KATZ: No.

ANN WILSON: It's got to be somewhere.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: It's got to be in MoMA.

JONATHAN KATZ: Or in Beinecke.

ANN WILSON: Yeah. I mean, that was the subrosa gay world right there. I mean, that was the gay mafia. And men talked it nonstop, thought it nonstop. The lesbians were a little more—one of the reasons may have been they were all teachers, was much more circumspect. Betty Parsons was gay and showed a lot of gay women artists. Chrissa [sp], for instance, was gay. So that there would have been a female gay mafia, but they didn't talk it.

JONATHAN KATZ: And do you think—I've always wanted to know if in offering—I mean, it's a very strange thing.

ANN WILSON: There was a gay, male gay language then. Things like Q-ducky [ph], things like that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Q-ducky?

ANN WILSON: Q-ducky was like you'd go to the ballet and you'd see a cute guy and you'd say, "Q-ducky." [Katz laugh.] They had a whole language. I mean, but it was complex. You got to talk to a gay guy that's my age to find out about that gay language. It was a subrosa hidden language. They could use it publicly and the rest of us wouldn't get it.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned.

ANN WILSON: Oh no, you've got to talk to a gay male of my age to find out—preferably a hairdresser or somebody like that because it was that kind of transvestite, cross-dressing, have a lot of fun with it—that group. But there was an entire—you could have written a dictionary. There were secret words that they could throw into any sentence and did.

JONATHAN KATZ: So there was a sense then, is it fair to say that there were—

ANN WILSON: I mean, the in-the-closet and the out-of-the-closet happened with Stonewall.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. What was it—at that point, there—

ANN WILSON: In one of these journals, I write about Peter talking to—writing Paul—Paul and I were on Ponza during Stonewall. And Peter—either he came or there was some dialogue about what Stonewall represented. And Peter went every night and photographed it.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned.

ANN WILSON: Oh no, there's—it's in the archive.

JONATHAN KATZ: Where are those photographs?

ANN WILSON: It's in the archive with—and I've got the name of the guy that has the archive.

JONATHAN KATZ: The Hujar archive?

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah. He went every night. The Stonewall went on for I think four or five days.

JONATHAN KATZ: Those photos have not been published, I don't believe.



ANN WILSON: No, no. Well, he didn't—Peter got precious little out in his lifetime, as you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. My God, those are so important.

ANN WILSON: Yes. He went every night.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned. God, there's such an important history here.

ANN WILSON: Yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. Okay. At this point, your erotic interests are exclusively male.

ANN WILSON: Yes. Yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: And when did that change?

ANN WILSON: When I met Harmony [Hammond].

JONATHAN KATZ: When you met Harmony. Which was roughly—

ANN WILSON: When did Harmony and I get together? It was—now, wait a minute. It was after I left Bill and after Gene died. It was after Gene died.

JONATHAN KATZ: So '80—

ANN WILSON: And I was off of men at that point. I had lost Gene. The marriage breakup had been horrendous because I was guilty and had these kids and it was hell. And then Harmony had left her husband. What did we call him? He was a sweet one. Tanya's father. And he was a jeweler. We called him "Cupcake." [Katz laughs.] And Cupcake introduced me to Harmony. I went to—we had Oakleyville. Paul and Peter and I had the cottage in Oakleyville. And I was going out to Oakleyville with Peter.

JONATHAN KATZ: And I'm sorry, where's Oakleyville?

ANN WILSON: Oakleyville is on Fire Island conveniently below Cherry Grove. It was a little clapboard fishing community. Paul and Peter and I rented a clapboard house. I believe we paid 400 [dollars] a summer for June through September.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, God. [Laughs.]

ANN WILSON: It was a clapboard, up-and-down, straight-shingled house and it had been—people on the shore—the Greeks owned it. And people who lived on the shore—the guys would come over to fish. And it started as a cottage and then it became a summer grouping of these clapboard houses. There were Marge and Wally [ph] and there was Mrs. Greek and Mr. Greek. She was called, "Dink." And Steve Lawrence, Paul Thek and Peter and I rented this cottage and they could walk up to Cherry Grove at night.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you knew they were doing that?

ANN WILSON: I knew what they were doing at that time. Yes. And so gay men that Peter knew would—because Paul went to Europe and didn't really come back. So then it was Peter and I with the cottage. And Peter would invite that he had met in New York. And one weekend out came Cupcake. And Cupcake was very sweet. He was a jeweler. I loved him. He was the sweetest man. And he was Harmony's husband and he and Harmony were just getting a divorce at this time.

JONATHAN KATZ: So Cupcake was gay too?

ANN WILSON: Cupcake was gay and Harmony was gay. And he and Harmony had Tanya. And they were just divorcing and Harmony was pregnant with Tanya. And Cupcake said to me, "You would love Harmony." And that's how I got to Harmony, from Cupcake.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you were together with Harmony for how long?

ANN WILSON: Harmony and I were together about a year. And I wasn't hip enough for Harmony. I mean, likes her girls hip.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. [They laugh.]

ANN WILSON: She said it wasn't the bed part. [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Well, that's good to know.

ANN WILSON: No, but I wasn't cool. I wasn't in the art—and I wasn't, frankly, as I read those critical articles to you, I wasn't as interested in making it as Harmony was. And that was a big part of it. Well, quite frankly, the next girlfriend had a car and Harmony wanted somebody that had a car. Harmony would—you know, that sort—I missed the boat. I should have bought. When Harmony bought that loft, she showed me the upstairs loft I could have had in that building for \$10,000 and I didn't have the sense to grab it. I never had sense.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. All right, so talk to me a little bit about after you and Bill married, does he talk to you about his ideas in his work? Are you collaborating?

ANN WILSON: Oh, it was this dialogue that I read you. Very much so. And that was what the marriage was about, was the dialogue. I don't think that I was ever sexually appealing to Bill, although we had three children. And he loved me. I mean, he was devastated when I had the affair with Gene. And he desperately loved me; there's no doubt about that. But like I was on a pedestal. And I got off that pedestal real fast. [They laugh.] And it was a very tough time.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. It sounds like he was really angry.

ANN WILSON: Oh, furious. He's still angry.

JONATHAN KATZ: Really?

ANN WILSON: Oh yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Are you in touch with him?

ANN WILSON: I can't go into the house. He's still pissed as hell.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God. [Laughs.]

ANN WILSON: I mean, other people's exes, you know, if a child is getting married or something, they show up. But not him. No.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. All right, I need to change the tape.

ANN WILSON: But it's hard, the—once Stonewall happened and it was okay in New York City to be out, there was no problem. It's just out here in the hinterlands there's still the problem. I mean, like up in Albany.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. But how would you characterize the refusal on the part of people who have nothing to fear?

ANN WILSON: Oh, the goddamn Christian church. I mean, the Catholic Church. All of them.

JONATHAN KATZ: But if they're not believing Catholics. Like let's just—

ANN WILSON: It's the same as *Easy Rider*. Those guys are still in that restaurant saying, "Look at that faggot with the long hair." I mean, they're—A, it's a lack of education. I would say that in America—having been a teacher, having been a college teacher—you've got the five kids at the top of the class, you have the 10 below those five and the rest of them are not exactly what you call intelligent—unless you're going to Yale or Harvard or one of the five or six top colleges in the country, where it's hell to get in. You're going to be an engineer or you're going to be a what or a what or a what.

Although in this town everybody knows that the two guys who run the coffee shop are gay and everybody loves them. And they're wonderful; they give a lot to the town. But you have these, like these—Yocknatawba [sp] County next door and backstreets here. They're totally stupid. I mean, not only are they uneducated, they're just plain dumb. [They laugh.] And I would hate to tell you, but I think that's 60 percent of the American public. Ignorance.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure, sure. But why does somebody like Kelly or like Bill or Agnes feel that they—I mean, why do they worry about the judgment of people who are stupid. They don't worry about the judgment of people's stupid in other respects.

ANN WILSON: It hurts. It hurts. It's painful.

JONATHAN KATZ: But aren't these the same people who said—

ANN WILSON: If you're excluded by the culture and our stupid political system—it's painful to be excluded by your culture. Especially if you're one of the most intelligent and creative and giving members of the society, that the stupid mass is allowed to call the shots. I think it's painful.

JONATHAN KATZ: It makes sense. But do you think—

ANN WILSON: In my day, it was downright dangerous.

JONATHAN KATZ: No, well, that makes sense.

ANN WILSON: You could be killed on the docks cruising.

JONATHAN KATZ: No, that makes sense. But I guess my—

ANN WILSON: I mean, I'm talking about a threat to your life.

JONATHAN KATZ: Life. No, I understand that.

ANN WILSON: If you're going to go cruise on the Jersey Turnpike and you cruise the wrong person, you're going to end up dead in a field. It's still possible in this country. Looked what happened to that boy out West.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, no. Absolutely. Absolutely.

ANN WILSON: I mean, it is not only painful; it's scary.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. We're talking about Matthew Shepard. Yeah.

ANN WILSON: We're talking about people who are murderers, who would murder a gay person.

JONATHAN KATZ: But do you think that's there is also, on top of that, that—say, let's just use—

ANN WILSON: But, I mean, just visceral fear.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. But let's use Ellsworth's work as an example. Do you think that there's also something about, for example, all those forms that almost meet but don't quite touch in Ellsworth's work that has some relation to—

ANN WILSON: I know, I think that's a bit arcane. [Laughs.] And I think you have to study that French school he came out of. And like he and Delphine and Jack Youngerman were patricians.

JONATHAN KATZ: Ellsworth was a patrician?

ANN WILSON: I mean, in their thinking, in their way of being.

JONATHAN KATZ: Ah.

ANN WILSON: Ellsworth did not use gay terminology. He was never public about it. He's still not public.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right, right. Yeah.

ANN WILSON: Some things one does not deal with.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Bill is the same way?

ANN WILSON: No. Bill is not the same way, but Bill is certainly—I don't know where he is now on gay issues, but in those days he was certainly not out.

JONATHAN KATZ: He's not out now, to my knowledge.

ANN WILSON: Oh, okay. So—

JONATHAN KATZ: I mean, people know, but it's the gulf between knowledge and acknowledgement.

ANN WILSON: I think he and Ray must have had a relationship, but I can't tell you.

JONATHAN KATZ: Early, presumably.

ANN WILSON: Oh, very early. Yeah. I can't tell you.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, you told me a story about seeing an altar. Could you repeat that for the tape?

ANN WILSON: Oh.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh wait, I'm sorry. We have to stop.

ANN WILSON: Okay. I think it's tea time. We have to have a cup of tea and a piece of cake.

JONATHAN KATZ: Fair enough.

ANN WILSON: [Laughs.]

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ANN WILSON: We don't have gay marriage in New York—not that everybody wants to get married, but I think that the patrician powers that be don't want it to happen because they're tied with politics. And that's what I think it is; it's politics.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. And I think you're right that there's also an economic—that they're worried that they won't be collected, that the boards won't buy—

ANN WILSON: Exactly. Exactly. Or they won't end up in the museums they want to stay in.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Because the Rockefellers or—I'm using them as a symbol—but those collectors, those big people have to do what the politicians in Albany and the politicians all over the state. It blew my mind that Iowa—where? [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right.

ANN WILSON: Huh? [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Exactly, exactly.

ANN WILSON: But I don't think Iowa has much of a museum to grind against another museum, quite frankly.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right. Right, right.

ANN WILSON: There's the writers thing at the University of Iowa, but that's about it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, that's certainly true.

ANN WILSON: So they don't have politicians and wealthy people that have—and also with these wealthy families, there is always a gay son or daughter. But whatever it is, I think that that—the political-wealth connection keeps it quiet with the artists who have made it big, who don't want—who want after they die that their paintings still be in the Met.

JONATHAN KATZ: We'll have tea in a second; I just want to ask you one last question just so we get this down: You had mentioned that you came in and saw your first altar. When was that and where was that?

ANN WILSON: That was in Jasper Johns' studio in that marvelous old building that had been a customs at one time, it had been a jail at one time—17th-century building. And there was a little alcove in the wall, probably had been a closet. And there was a Buddhist altar. And I said, "What's that?" being a good Catholic girl. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: And we're talking here probably, what, sometime in the '60s?

ANN WILSON: Fifty—

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, the '50s, he was doing—

ANN WILSON: We're talking '55, '54.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. Wait, so now I'm confused. So this is after the building in Coenties Slip?

ANN WILSON: This is on Coenties Slip.

JONATHAN KATZ: On Coenties Slip?

ANN WILSON: That building was the end of the Slip.

JONATHAN KATZ: I see. I see. I see. I see.

ANN WILSON: It's no longer there. There's a big plate glass something or other there.

JONATHAN KATZ: And he had a Buddhist altar.

ANN WILSON: Yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you ever get a sense that he was an active Buddhist?

ANN WILSON: He had an altar. What do I know?

JONATHAN KATZ: It's not in—you know, it's amazing because this is not in the literature. Nobody knows this.

ANN WILSON: Yeah. Well, there it was.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, so let me ask you one other question and then I'll shut up. There's a painting in the Philadelphia museum that dates from 1954, even '53. It's the earliest Jasper Johns painting we know. And it consists of a man wearing trunks covered with tattoos, like a Coney Island kind of thing. Do you have any—did anybody ever talk about this work? Do you have any idea where it comes from?

ANN WILSON: No. Uh-uh. Uh-uh. [Negative.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay. All right. Great. Ann, I want you to know that about 75 percent of what you're saying is utterly new to art history.

ANN WILSON: [Laughs.] Really?

JONATHAN KATZ: You're going to change things.

ANN WILSON: Well, if you look in the bedroom and look at all those journals and if I opened each of—

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ANN WILSON: At my age you don't have memories. Your mind is gone.

JONATHAN KATZ: [Laughs.] So I am talking to Ann Wilson, age 79, on July 11, 2010 [2009], at her home in Valatie, [NY].

We are just sitting down and Ann, I want to begin by talking to you about where you came from and how you ended up in New York.

ANN WILSON: Well, I was the only child in the '30s of a conservative Catholic family that was one step away from immigration. My mother's father had come from Ireland and my mother, I would say, "Where in Ireland," and she would wave her hand and say, "Somewhere near Dublin." [Katz laughs.] The Irish when they got here didn't want to know from what it was there because on that level it was probably too horrible.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: My mother was the youngest of I believe eight brothers, all of whom were glassblowers, as was the father. The minute they got their paycheck, they went to the bar. My mother, when my mother's mother died when she was 18, she went upstairs, packed her bag and left and went to live with her high school teacher, Haley Baird [ph] and never darkened the door again.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned.

ANN WILSON: Well, they were drunken men.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right.

ANN WILSON: She was—her mother was—her mother's mother was from Alsace and she made—I can show you some of the embroideries. So the mother's family had been more refined and married this probably charming Irishman. But that charm doesn't last past the barroom floor.

JONATHAN KATZ: [Laughs.] Right.

ANN WILSON: In any case, my father's family—my father's father was educated in a German gymnasium in the Lower Rhine and I went to the town, which is upstairs somewhere, its name, and found the family name indeed.

His father had immigrated to America I believe with two brothers and they came to Pittsburgh and they didn't have English. So the only job he could get was incline operator because he had some engineering and they had to keep the—the inclines were built by Goethals who had built the Panama Canal.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right.

ANN WILSON: It's how the laborers got down to the mill and back because they lived up on the hill above the smoke. The Irish lived down by the smoke and all died of TB. The ones that didn't die of TB like my mother's family were either pickled or total survivors. [They laugh.] Pittsburgh was a raw, raw place in my parents' day, you know. It was a mill town.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and an immigrant town.

ANN WILSON: And an immigrant town, a tremendous immigrant town.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: My father's family, however, there were five maiden aunts named things like Wilmina and Gertrude and I can go on but you don't want to hear all that. But they were all high school teachers and two of them were high school principals. They were ramrod straight, in black to the ankles and were unbelievably devout Catholics and gave all their money when they died to the Church, every last cent.

JONATHAN KATZ: Of course, of course.

ANN WILSON: They had one brother, Father Paul, who was my father's first cousin and he and Paul played together as young people. They said to my father that they would send him to Notre Dame if he would become a priest but my father had met my Irish mother, who had put herself through library school. She was a smart one and a clever one.

My father would have gone to college but his father, fixing the incline, fell off and died when my father was 17 and he had two sisters, Aunt Wilmina and Aunt Marie. He had to take care of his mother and the two sisters because in a town like Pittsburgh, somebody who ran an incline lived from paycheck to paycheck, carefully.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: They were German. They were precise. They were careful. In fact, my mother said when they were in the courting she would say, "Oh John, look at the moon." She had Irish whimsy and he would say, "Now, if we save a dollar a week, we will be able to buy a flivver in two years."

So anyway, but she married him because she had a suitor who was an artist. But my mother was Irish from the bottom and she was going to the middle class. She was going to be sensible about such a thing as marriage. She never varied from that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: She was—both of them, my father got a job at 15 or 16 I think on the old *Pittsburgh Sun*, which was the Pittsburgh newspaper, as a reporter. I have his diary, which is quite charming, in which he said, "I thought I would get murders and instead they're sending me to church teas." [They laugh.] Later on, I think he got a little more.

But so he was very articulate. Both he and his father spoke middle German. They spoke both regular German and middle German. So there had been education in that family and all of them loved classical music, as long as it was German.

So I grew up—my father understood [Robert] Schumann. He understood Beethoven. He played the piano beautifully. He explained to me the phrasing, the passages and all of that. My mother was a painter and a good one at that. She had studied with Sam Rosenberg who was a wonderful Jewish artist in Pittsburgh who did—he worked in glazes and they were a little bit whimsical.

He was a wonderful teacher at Carnegie Tech and she studied with him and I think she was—for her era and for that day she was a good abstract expressionist and showed always in the Pittsburgh—the Pittsburgh Associated Artists. She was a member of that.

She was the champion golfer. Every woman in every club in Pittsburgh was waiting for her to fail and she never

did until she got too old. She won the championship year after year after year after year; fantastic tennis player also.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh my goodness.

ANN WILSON: She was beautifully knit. Her body—to be good in sports, your body has to be in perfect proportion. I have my father's German body which is bottom heavy. [They laugh.] Anyway, and he—probably about the time I started school, and I went to Our Lady of Mercy Academy—at the time I started in the convent school, he was hired by Ketchum, MacLeod and Grove and he was one of the first public relations men in America.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned.

ANN WILSON: And developed that field and became highly successful because both my mother and my father had a very strenuous work ethic, especially my father's family. That's all there was. You worked and you went to church on Sunday.

JONATHAN KATZ: So would you have been middle class by Pittsburgh standards?

ANN WILSON: Upper middle class.

JONATHAN KATZ: Upper middle class.

ANN WILSON: Because my father's success in Ketchum, Macleod and Grove, although they came, my father—you would have called it upper lower class, the incline operator family; my mother's family, definitely. They were glassblowers. They weren't on the bottom but they were skilled labor.

JONATHAN KATZ: Labor.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, because you had—they blew milk bottles in those days and at noon the glassblowers would blow for all the children beautiful little canes and a story about who and what my mother was—and I have pictures somewhere.

These canes were like candy canes blown in this way, two or three colors. My mother, she said all the other children would play with theirs and break them. She took hers home and she hung them in her bedroom. She had every single cane by the time I was a child. I wasn't allowed to touch them. So that's a story about her caution, her care, her precision about things like that.

JONATHAN KATZ: And an artistic household, then?

ANN WILSON: I would say my father was extremely, a great—he suffered because he hadn't been able to go to college but he was one of the brightest men certainly I had met until I went to New York because he was an omnivorous reader.

They belonged to about nine book clubs. Because my uncle—the interesting thing about my uncle, he had a mission in Hunan, China. He was the head of a mission and my father would contribute heavily to that mission.

So every holiday would come a package from China and China in my childhood was Kismet because you'd open this package and there would be a Chinese robe for me or little slippers, hand embroidered. There would be a Chinese panting for my mother. There would be some kind of a carved ivory something or elephants. I think he knew my father, [they laugh] elephants in ivory I remember.

But the house, we had many things from China and my mother—in Pittsburgh they had—I can't remember. I think it was Reims Cathedral and they had Greek sculpture that was cast. It was a brilliant man who could cast anything and he had gone to Greece and he had gone to Europe. He cast the entire façade of a cathedral in the Carnegie museum because that was in the historic section.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: There were all—the discus thrower, life-size. They were fantastic things.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: What do they know in Pittsburgh? So my mother—we had always in the living room this woman fixing her sandal. It's a classic Greek sculpture that was always there. She bought paintings from Sam Rosenberg.

So we had those paintings and we had Chinese paintings from my uncle who would write these fantastic stories from Hunan. He had traveled on Chiang Kai-Shek's wives' train to get out of some war or other. I didn't remember which war that was.

But he had known a lot of the whole history of China. He didn't come back. They finally arrested all the priests and put them in jail. So he spent 10 years in a cell that you couldn't stand in. He was a tall man like my father.

They would let them out about twice a week to walk. He survived by remembering every piece of music and every piece of literature he had memorized, Shakespeare and things. He survived by turning that through his mind.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: He dreamed in Chinese because he went as a young postulant of 18—got his priest, whatever it is when they become ordained, in China and then was the head of this mission in Hunan Province. He came back. They finally—there was a very high up cardinal who had went to China as an emissary of the pope and gotten quite ill and they let my—Father Paul out to bring this cardinal back to America.

So that's how he got back and he was a little sweet red-faced man when I—quite old when I met him because he had gone back to the monastery in Pittsburgh with wonderful tales of his life in China.

JONATHAN KATZ: Let me ask you something. When you were a child, did you dream of being an artist? Was that your goal all along?

ANN WILSON: My mother was an artist. So I would say that I—and I was always the best in the art class, every art class, probably because I was an only child and I was given paint. I was given crayons. That was a privileged childhood.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: I was taken to the opera, to the theater. Because my father had been a reporter, he had an interest in theater and music, especially [Richard] Wagner or Beethoven or all of that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure.

ANN WILSON: I remember I was eight years old going to the symphony because my father was on the funding society for the symphony. He raised the money for the Pittsburgh symphony, which I think at that time was Max Reinhart—Reiner?

JONATHAN KATZ: Reiner.

ANN WILSON: He also raised the funds for the Stephen Foster memorial, which is this little neo-Gothic church attached to the University of Pittsburgh which is the skyscraper thing. So he raised the money for that. He knew Stephen Foster's daughter. She was quite an old woman. I was taken to the Foster house to meet her at about nine I think, eight or nine. I remember that.

The house had been kept exactly as the master left it with the piano with the music open and all of that and you couldn't touch a thing.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, yeah.

ANN WILSON: So I do recall that.

JONATHAN KATZ: You went to college where?

ANN WILSON: I went first for one year to Carnegie Tech and got—people were coming out of Chicago at that time and Bauhaus design was just being introduced.

JONATHAN KATZ: We're talking what year?

ANN WILSON: From Yale, from [Josef] Albers went to Yale and I can't remember who it was went to Chicago. But I met Albers as a student at Carnegie Tech. He came to give a lecture. I said, "Wasn't it wonderful to have gone to school in Germany," and he said, "You have the best you can have here." In other words, Germany wasn't so—because I think probably he had been put out.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure.



ANN WILSON: The Bauhaus, I think Hitler thought of it as beyond the pale.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right, absolutely.

ANN WILSON: I was clueless about that aspect of what had happened during the war. I knew the war was a bad thing but I didn't understand what had happened to the artists and intellectuals.

JONATHAN KATZ: So this would have been roughly what, '53?

ANN WILSON: '53, I think. I think '54.

JONATHAN KATZ: '54?

ANN WILSON: Did I graduate in '50 and then graduate from college in '54? I think it was more like '50 at Carnegie Tech, one year Bauhaus training because there was—I stayed in the dorm and we had to be in by a certain hour and young ladies were kept on a very short leash, although some of the young ladies managed to be bad. I didn't because I'd been brought up as a good Catholic girl.

The fact that both of my parents were the last children of a long line of Catholic children—my mother I think had these eight brothers. They were brought up as Victorians. So they were really—the mentality was Victorian.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: They didn't really have a modern—although they had done the Flapper thing in the '20s and I suppose they were modern for Pittsburgh. But they were really—there was something very—my father never was without a tie, a shirt, a vest, a jacket with the pocket watch and dressed like that for dinner.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Well, it was German, upright, stiff-spine German. Also, the ethnic culture in Pittsburgh, the German section, the Irish section, the Polish section, the Ukrainian section, the people—the generation that was immigrants, those women never learned English.

The women in the Polish section, the old women spoke Polish because I remember Marie Tovolyak's [ph] wedding where I danced through three pairs of heels [Katz laughs] and all the old ladies who had provided this incredible groaning table with unbelievable—none of them spoke English.

You were used to the old women not speaking English. That's how much of an immigrant—of course the upper classes—I knew Wendy Heinz very well and I would go home with her and she was very lonely, she and her brother, because the parents were always somewhere else.

JONATHAN KATZ: Heinz as in Heinz food?

ANN WILSON: H.J.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now how did you meet them?

ANN WILSON: Carnegie Tech. She was in theater and I was in art and we became good friends. I would go home with Wendy and the maid would bring us—set this huge dinner table for just the two of us and there was a breakfast room for breakfast. But the parents were never in sight and had never been in sight. Wendy went to New York finally and became an actress. But she was tremendously lonely because the upper classes didn't exactly mix until they got to college.

So here was this lonely child brought up by nurses and maids and that was the upper class. You never saw them. So I just happened to know Wendy. It was the only—the others, the Mellons, they were a—they had a compound like the Kennedys. They were very unto themselves and they were into horses only.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and horse pictures. [Laughs.]

ANN WILSON: I think they bought all of Yale. That's all that's at Yale. But I think the Scaifes the same way. The wealthy classes kept themselves unto themselves. My father worked for E.T. Weir, Weirton Steel.

He finally ended up working as a PR man and E.T. was a self-made man. So my father's class was the next class down. They were the managers or the PR men or something like that. My father would go to New York for conferences to do things about whatever he did about steel. I never understood.

So that was—I was literally the next class down from that. So there was the country club and there was a mode

of behavior, et cetera and no daughter of ours kind of thing and a Catholic family so that there was—

JONATHAN KATZ: Which was not unusual in Pittsburgh, right?

ANN WILSON: No, because they were all either Eastern Europeans, Irish or German. My grandmother was the only exception. My grandmother was a relative of General [Richard] Montgomery. I guess it was her great-great-great-grandfather had fought in the Revolution. There were five or six brothers in that family. At muster out, they weren't directly related to Montgomery but it must have been—it was something.

They were from the East Coast somewhere at the time of the Revolution. They fought in the war and at the muster out they were given land in Pennsylvania on the Ohio border on Wolf Creek Road. Every one of the houses on World Creek Road was land-grant, muster out Revolutionary War families. I went and their Bible matched her Bible, the Montgomery family Bible, exactly matched it when you got back to that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, yeah.

ANN WILSON: All the houses were post right after the Revolution. They all had very prosperous farms with lots of cows and they had had to pull down the original house because they had built a new cow barn and by Pennsylvania law, in their wisdom, they were pulling down 17th century houses if you got a new cow barn because you were only allowed to have so many structures per land. Good old Pennsylvania! Anyway, can you believe? [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: So then you did one year and then what happened?

ANN WILSON: So after that year, I had a friend, Richard Levine, and Richard was going to Tyler, which wasn't probably as good as Carnegie Tech actually when you come to think of it. But it was this restricted good Catholic girl go to the country club every Sunday and don't misbehave because it will get back to your parents whatever you do.

So I just went on strike, locked my bedroom door and carried on until they let me go to Tyler and they were very worried because there wasn't a dorm at Tyler. Girls lived together in apartments and my mother said, "You know what that means." [They laugh.] "The boys have free reign, and art students," and indeed it was true.

But I didn't even know about sex in those days. I was brought up to be the Virgin Mary and hopefully a nun or marriage, one or the other. There were two vocations for a girl, period.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: So I got to go with Richard to Tyler, which was—there were rather—it wasn't the kind—I mean, Carnegie Tech had a lot of money and you had excellent teachers, especially in the theater department. They brought in all the great playwrights of the day would come and direct the students.

I saw some incredible theater there at Carnegie Tech because they were bringing directors not only from New York but from England and Ireland. But Tyler was run by this Boris—what was his name—Boris, he was this Russian who had started Tyler and I think Boris' objective was to sleep with every female student in the college. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Lovely, lovely.

ANN WILSON: Boris said, "Oh, would you pose for me? You have such a magnificent stride." I thought, "Oh yeah." But anyway, Boris did get it off the ground to get this art school. There were excellent—there was an excellent ceramics teacher. There was a fantastic print teacher, a good sculpture teacher and the kind of Philadelphia—what was his name.

He had something—it began with an E. He lived on Rittenhouse Square. He was old Philadelphia nobility. I remember painting a naked lady with—and I thought, "Well, she just can't be standing there nude like that," and so I put a jungle behind her and he said, "That is in such appalling taste," [they laugh] and he was an old guard, silver spoon Philadelphia, you know?

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: "Appalling, my dear," [they laugh] and I would go—sometimes I would go to the Philadelphia—the main academy. I would take a figure class or a drawing class. But they didn't know in Philadelphia anything that was happening in New York.

I had to go to New York to find out about Black Mountain. They knew nothing. I mean, they were probably the wealthy third sons of mainline families who went into art and taught, teaching was a reasonable and decent

profession because Philadelphia was even as straight-laced as Pittsburgh in those days.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and you finished at Tyler?

ANN WILSON: I got my master's at Tyler, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: So wait, you did your undergraduate degree and your master's at Tyler?

ANN WILSON: Yeah, all but the first year and thank God I had that Bauhaus design because when I got to New York and met Black Mountain people without that, I would have been painting nude figures or still-life or landscape from Tyler.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and in school you were a painter? That was what you were doing?

ANN WILSON: I was studying painting and my father and mother insisted I take teacher's ed for my master's degree because what else would a young woman do? [They laugh.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Of course.

ANN WILSON: I didn't want to take teacher's ed. I wanted to go to Paris and be an artist and wear a beret.

JONATHAN KATZ: Of course.

ANN WILSON: Because that was how innocent my thinking was at that time. Then I got a job when I got my master's degree and went back to Pittsburgh. In those days, it was rather rare for a young woman to get a master's degree. My father said, "Marvelous, you can teach kindergarten," because his view of what women could do was somewhere—

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God.

ANN WILSON: [Laughs] It was pre-feminist and I wasn't about to teach kindergarten. That was too—

JONATHAN KATZ: Appalling. [Laughs.]

ANN WILSON: I sent to colleges and my father said, "Oh, no one would have a woman teach in a college class." Well, lo and behold the University of West Virginia in Morgantown needed a drawing teacher. Guess what? So I got the job and I went down to Morgantown which was pure West Virginia in those days. On hunting or fishing season there would be no male on campus.

The first time I was teaching art history and I said, "Where are all the boys," and the girls who had mainly come to college in West Virginia so they could find a husband because if they stayed in the boondocks they wouldn't [laughs]—they said, "Oh, it's hunting season," and that was sort of the University of West Virginia.

JONATHAN KATZ: You were there how long?

ANN WILSON: I was at the University of West Virginia for two years and then at the University of West Virginia I started reading *ARTnews* and all of the art publications because they were there—they were in the art library—and realized that there was something more brewing than I had been educated for.

I set my sights. I thought, "Well, I'll go to New York and then I'll go to Paris." So I went. I wrote again for college jobs and Staten Island University gave me a bid, as did Pratt Institute.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: So again, foundation drawing and Anni Albers was there at Pratt. So I went to New York city and I lived on Patchin Place and e.e. Cummings was still living there and thousands of college students would be out front every night trying to get a glimpse of e.e. and Djuna Barnes was at the other end.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: So Patchin Place—and I am from Pittsburgh and I stay in the Y two nights and I am walking around to find an apartment in New York. I went down to the Village because that's where of course the artists were in my mind and I walked past Patchin Place and I said, "Oh, what is this charming little Parisian street with trees," and it was Patchin Place.

I went and there was indeed an apartment.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God.

ANN WILSON: I got an apartment under a guy named Mr. Rose and Mr. Rose was with one of the big—I think Scribner. He was one of the chief—

JONATHAN KATZ: Publishing execs.

ANN WILSON: Publishing people at Scriber, yeah. So Mr. Rose had books all around his apartment and I had kind of my first introduction to intellectual New York through Mr. Rose who knew where all the lectures were. Then I thought, "Well, I must have a studio," thinking Paris with the skylight, and I also began—as a college teacher at Pratt we could get reduced membership in all the museums.

So I took all the museum memberships and went religiously and that's here my education stated, went to all the openings of everything and looked and looked and looked and went to the Met. That was what I would do on Saturday and Sunday.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, by this point, I just want to get the chronology right. By this point we're talking 1950?

ANN WILSON: '54.

JONATHAN KATZ: '54?

ANN WILSON: '55, 1956 when I went to New York, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: '56, okay, after two years in West Virginia. At this point now, you are not involved with a man?

ANN WILSON: I had married a man named John Osborne that was a fancy Chicago family, lasted about a month. He ground the ball bearings in my wedding present blender that I was very happy about and when he ground the ball bearings in my blender, I thought a little bit like my grandmother would have felt about all those Irish men and I thought, "No, no, no, no. I want out." [They laugh.]

So my father arranged an annulment on some pretext because they were never happy about John. He wasn't the right stuff as far as they were concerned.

JONATHAN KATZ: Despite the fancy family.

ANN WILSON: Despite the fancy family. It was Chicago. It wasn't Pittsburgh and they weren't Catholic.

JONATHAN KATZ: There we go. [They laugh.]

ANN WILSON: Might as well have been a Hottentot. How could I marry an—oh, I won't even go into that.

JONATHAN KATZ: So then in New York, you are teaching?

ANN WILSON: I am teaching at Pratt.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: And I am going every weekend to the museums and on Eighth Street were all the abstract expressionists, the Tanager Gallery. So I found out about that. But they were all boys who delighted in crunching beer cans and riding around on the back of motorcycles with chicks. I found out about chicks.

I wasn't chick material, as you may—I would say to any male that came near me, "Do you read Rilke." [They laugh.] That took care of that for several years, especially with the abstract expressionists. [They laugh.] That wasn't what chicks did. In any case, I never did master chick.

So I was at Pratt and at Pratt I met a number of very interesting people. The head of the department was somebody and now I'd have to go back to my journals. They had all done something. Anni Albers was the tip of the iceberg. There were good people at Pratt and I met them, faculty people, and entered another realm with those people.

So then what happened? Then I heard about—I said, "I want to live in a studio, like artists are supposed to do." I wasn't interested in the abstract expressionists. I liked [Yves] Klein very much and de Kooning. I got it. I would go always to Betty Parsons and learned a lot at Betty's.

What happened at Betty's is she couldn't—they wouldn't—she picked all of the good ones because she was a painter and she was well-educated in art. But Sidney across the hall offered them a bigger cut.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sidney Janis?

ANN WILSON: So they all marched en masse to Sidney, leaving Betty with people like Agnes Martin and that wasn't bad either. That's where I first met Agnes actually.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Agnes at that point was doing what kind of work?

ANN WILSON: Agnes at that point was starting her grids and ending up with kind of—Agnes was brought to New York by Betty.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: Because—and again, I have to go to my journals because I'm an old one—but who went out there? It wasn't Sam Francis. It was somebody else. I'll get it out of my journals—had gone out there and said, "This is something special," and took Betty to New Mexico to meet Agnes. Betty did think Agnes was good and Betty was always right on. She never missed a beat. The other people in her gallery were equally good.

So she said to Agnes, "If you will come to New York, I will pay your keep for two years." She in other words would pay for the loft and pay for the money and things. Agnes was teaching school and living hand-to-mouth up in Taos at the time.

So Agnes came to New York and she went to Coenties Slip and that's how I found out about Coenties Slip.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Agnes, right, was going to Columbia in those days, right?

ANN WILSON: Agnes went to Columbia prior to that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Prior to that, this is the second trip to New York?

ANN WILSON: The first—she studied at Columbia for about a year or two and then went back to New Mexico to make her living as a teacher.

JONATHAN KATZ: I see.

ANN WILSON: Because even Agnes had to teach when there was—you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: Sure.

ANN WILSON: I can't remember who it was. It wasn't Sam Francis. Oh, Kenzo Okada. Kenzo Okada and Agnes' work was a little like his. There'd be a—there's one of them. She destroyed all of them except they got one at the museum in Taos.

They have one. They were kind of very smoothly painted backgrounds with sort of amorphic shapes a little bit. But they're not as brightly colored as Kenzo's. But there was a relation between her and Kenzo.

JONATHAN KATZ: And surrealist tinged, right, or no?

ANN WILSON: I don't think with Agnes. She was too northwestern for that. I think it was simply a movement of shape. Agnes, as a young woman, had slept on Georgia O'Keeffe's doorstep because she was just totally gone for Georgia O'Keeffe. If you think of some of Georgia's kind of mid- to late work—but I don't think Agnes was ever influenced by anybody. She was an original. She was totally authentic.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. So at the point that you meet Agnes, she's already moved to the beginnings of the grid. Is she doing—?

ANN WILSON: No, she did the grid prior to that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Prior to that?

ANN WILSON: But smaller.

JONATHAN KATZ: So this is the full grid? She's not doing the railroad ties in a grid form but actually drawing grids?

ANN WILSON: Actually I remember the first thing she did was—she and Bob Indiana. You could get a lot of flotsam and jetsam down there. You could get planks from docks and things. The first things she did were these square pieces of wood down a plank, those early sculptures. I don't think she ever did that again. But she made all of her furniture.

She made a long table and little benches. The only thing—two bought things, three, that she had in that loft

were an old Acorn coal stove that she cooked blueberry muffins for us all on, a Sears Roebuck rocker—

JONATHAN KATZ: Which she bought in New York?

ANN WILSON: It must have come from somewhere up on the Lower East Side. We heated those lofts with potbellies.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: My loft, the loft I had at 3-5 Coenties Slip was heated with a potbelly this tall.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: And we would go up to the fish market and take the old crates, which were somewhat aromatic.

JONATHAN KATZ: I can imagine.

ANN WILSON: That's how we heated. We all had potbellies. There wasn't heat and I put a shower—I took out—there were two toilets because it had been—those lofts had been some kind of fabric manufacturing lofts.

Over one of the toilets I installed a not so stable metal shower, which happened to be about Jim Screen's [ph] bar, which was on the ground floor. If I didn't—if I took a shower at the wrong time, there would be a lot of swearing and banging on the ceiling; totally illegal. We would hand the investigators who would come around about once a year a bottle of bourbon.

JONATHAN KATZ: And that was all you needed to do?

ANN WILSON: And that's all we had to do. We bribed them.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you pay rent to somebody?

ANN WILSON: Forty [dollars] a month.

JONATHAN KATZ: You had electricity in these lofts?

ANN WILSON: We brought it in from the hall.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God.

ANN WILSON: We brought wires. They had a hall light and we screwed one of these and put the plug and stapled—long stapled it and brought it in through the corner of the door. We only had light at one end. We worked in the daytime and nothing—the floors weren't sanded. You had to wear shoes or else.

JONATHAN KATZ: These were old industrial lofts.

ANN WILSON: These were old—you know—I was effete. I painted mine white and so did Bob Indiana and Jack Youngerman. But most—I don't think Ellsworth did at first and I don't think Agnes did. They were just old industrial lofts.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. So you move into this because you've heard that Coenties Slip is interesting?

ANN WILSON: I heard that artists lived on—Agnes said artists were living on Coenties Slip.

JONATHAN KATZ: But now you've got to tell me how you meet Agnes.

ANN WILSON: Betty Parsons.

JONATHAN KATZ: From Parsons?

ANN WILSON: I went to the Parsons Gallery and she was there and she had this farm woman—she was just like four square, right there. I said I had wanted also to live where the artists lived. I was a painter," and she said that Bob Indiana and Jack Youngerman had something called the Coenties Slip Drawing School by which they made their money.

They were having that weekend a slideshow because some artist had been to South America and was going to show Brazil. So I went to that slideshow on Coenties Slip where I met Bob Indiana, who liked me a lot. He was another Hoosier and again, very—working with the stencils that you put on the coffee sacks because this was the edge of the coffee section. The air was permeated with the smell of coffee roasting.

JONATHAN KATZ: Nice.

ANN WILSON: And the Seaman's Church Institute was there, which is where we ate. Seaman's Church Institute had a sailor's cafeteria in the basement and it was baked beans and ham hocks and things like that.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you could eat there even though—

ANN WILSON: It was 25 cents a dinner.

JONATHAN KATZ: To anybody?

ANN WILSON: To anybody. Not anybody, we knew about it and the men, like Ellsworth and Jack and Bob would take their showers there. Of course we couldn't. But they had a library that they let us borrow from and sailor's, you would be amazed. They read a lot and not all of them are stupid.

So there was one sailor who adored me that thought I reminded him of his sister back in wherever. It was just a basement cafeteria, stainless steel thing and go down, stuff like lemon meringue pie and things like that. They actually had people cooking, women cooking.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. Now, you said the men took their showers. You're telling me there was no running water?

ANN WILSON: There weren't showers. I put a shower in above Jim Screen's bar and I think Agnes did. But Ellsworth, who was on the top floor and the water pressure wasn't all that great—[laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: Bob lived—they lived in a simpler building, Bob and Jack Youngerman and Delphine Seyrig lived down on the other end of the Slip in a smaller—really the slips had been outfitted the clipper ships. So they were all triangular. My building is still there.

But Bob's building and Jack's building and Delphine's building was on the corner of the slip and it had been one of the old ones that had the hook coming out to load stuff onto ships.

Mine was quite a big building, a wider building. Theirs was like a narrow brick building, you know. Bob was on the top floor. Jack and Delphine were on the next floor and Lenore Tawney was on the floor below that. Then there was a bar under them.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and Agnes lived where?

ANN WILSON: Agnes at first lived next to Lenore and then moved above me. Those were long, narrow lofts. Lenore did her weavings and Lenore was the only one that had money and later she moved around on South Street to a glorious loft building that had these great soaring ceilings. She'd hang those weavings. I'll give you the book I wrote about Lenore.

JONATHAN KATZ: Let me ask you something. At this point, Lenore has money because she's selling?

ANN WILSON: Lenore was married to a very wealthy Chicago businessman who was a pilot and managed to total himself. So she inherited and she came to the slip in a Daimler. She was coming up from—I think it was—not Black Mountain but wherever they learn weaving down south. She was coming up from there. She was a fantastically—Bob Indiana said to me—and Ellsworth said to me, that everybody had learned from Lenore.

Lenore had studied in Paris. Lenore was worldly and sophisticated and had a collection of artifacts that were gorgeous.

JONATHAN KATZ: And a little older than you all, right?

ANN WILSON: Lenore—yes, Lenore was probably 60 at the time. And that loom, we're talking 20 feet tall. I watched her string those looms. You have to have in your mind when you're stringing a loom what's—how many colors and how many things for the warp and the weft. You have to have it all together.

It was like a mathematician. It was extraordinarily, stringing a 20-foot-tall loom. These weren't little—[inaudible]—looms. This was the real thing and she worked always in black and tan.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and Agnes at this point is in her 50s I would imagine, right?

ANN WILSON: Agnes, no, is in her 40s. Agnes is young. But Agnes and Lenore got together as close friends. They

were naming each other's paintings and all of that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. Now, at what point did you come to realize that Agnes and Lenore were together as a partnership?

ANN WILSON: I never knew it.

JONATHAN KATZ: You never knew it was a partnership?

ANN WILSON: And nobody ever told me.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned.

ANN WILSON: This was still the late '50s, the early '60s. You didn't—

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, you didn't talk about it.

ANN WILSON: Gay was very—even with the man.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you didn't know about Ellsworth and Robert Indiana either?

ANN WILSON: Nobody talked about it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you pick it up?

ANN WILSON: No. I was from Pittsburgh. [Katz laughs.] I didn't even know what it was.

JONATHAN KATZ: That's great.

[End disc three.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, who else—now, first thing, the geographical confines of the slip, how big was it?

ANN WILSON: The slip—well, you can go down there and see it for yourself. The slip comes to an end like this. My building is here. I'll take you down there.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, I'd love to see it.

ANN WILSON: Because there was Peck Slip, Coenties Slip. There were slips all the way up—Johns Slip—and the clipper ships would come in there and there were still some beautiful old nautical instrument shops down there, I mean, really gorgeous stuff, sextons and things like that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, wow.

ANN WILSON: And because of the war, because of the Second World War, the big buildings had not gone in. The building had not started. When Ellsworth—Ellsworth moved from the slip and Bob moved up to Maine and everybody moved because they were knocking down the buildings to build the glass buildings, the big skyscrapers.

JONATHAN KATZ: And this is around 1960?

ANN WILSON: '65.

JONATHAN KATZ: '65.

ANN WILSON: They didn't take my building nor did they take this beautiful little corner building which had been a flower shop. Actually there are two loft buildings—floors above there that I have tried to get for years but they won't rent them because there's no plumbing. It's still the same as our lofts were.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. When you were in this area and you were friendly with Lenore and Agnes and Jack, were you aware of the other inhabitants, other artist inhabitants at the slip?

ANN WILSON: Who was on the slip at the time I was there? The top floor on the opposite side of the hall was Ellsworth. There was a married couple halfway down and I have to go to my journal to get their name. They were artists but they never—they were never picked up on.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.



ANN WILSON: But Barney Newman was around the corner and a good friend of Agnes' and he would come over and talk. My God, could Barney talk. Oh Lord, he'd go—and he was fascinating but he would go on and on and on and on and on. So he always came to see Agnes. He was a good friend of Agnes'. Then there was Agnes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wait; sorry to interrupt, just he met Agnes through Betty?

ANN WILSON: Barney, I don't know how Barney met Agnes. But Agnes and Barney were very good friends down there.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned.

ANN WILSON: Maybe because he was living down there. I don't know. Ellsworth or somebody might have brought him in. Ellsworth and I would have muffins and coffee with Agnes every morning because she made them on the old Acorn stove.

JONATHAN KATZ: She was a cook?

ANN WILSON: Things like blueberry muffins. I wouldn't say that it was Escoffier, no. It was whatever Saskatchewan produced.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah and so your social circle at this point, you were saying was this couple?

ANN WILSON: Yeah, was—and remember I was teaching at Pratt—was all the people on the slip. Bob Indiana was probably my closest friend. Delphine and Jack had a little boy named Duncan who worked with Bob Wilson. He's quite interesting and he's a musician. They had a dog named Orange and that was the slip.

JONATHAN KATZ: And the other famed inhabitants of the slip, people like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg?

ANN WILSON: They were at the end. They had had a hissy fit with Ellsworth.

JONATHAN KATZ: Do you know what it was about?

ANN WILSON: I don't know what it was about. As I say, I was from Pittsburgh. What did I know? Actually, but I had been in Rauschenberg's and Jasper's studio because they were friendly with me. Actually, Rauschenberg's, that building had been the old—a jail probably in the 17th century and you went into that building and then the hall went this way. In all the rooms there were 17th century fireplaces.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God.

ANN WILSON: I mean, there was classic 17th—the windows were like these 17th century windows that went this way.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, sure.

ANN WILSON: It had originally—among other things, it had been a jail. But I don't know what all it had been. It went through to the street behind it. It got got when they built all these big massive buildings.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: I remember seeing my first altar in Jasper's studio was some kind of an inset, like a window that backed onto the hall. I don't know what—it probably had been a cupboard. There he had a little Buddha and a bunch of stones and things and I said, "What is that," a good Catholic girl, not having any clue. He said, "That is my altar," and I didn't dare ask him further but I thought, "He's pagan." [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: And Bob didn't have that? Just Jasper?

ANN WILSON: Just Jasper had that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, I'll be damned. Cage, Merce Cunningham, did you know them?

ANN WILSON: Cage I knew very well through Jill Johnson. But that was later and John—also because Johanna and Stan VanDerBeek, who were close friends of mine, and Ray Johnson had taken me—when I was married to Bill Wilson, I then—it expanded. Ray Johnson had taken me to Stan and Johanna's loft which was on Spring Street.

They had just had—was it Max or was it August? It was August. They had just had their first baby. They had been to Mexico and come back. They were just married and they had August. I said, "Oh, her name is August Moon," because it was the August moon. So they called her that.

But Johanna and I became fast friends. Stan was hail-fellow-well-met blonde and very charming. Stan was a wonderful sweet guy and quite bright and totally obsessed with—he and what's his name who started the Film Forum, that guy.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right, Jonas Mekas.

ANN WILSON: Jonas, and Jonas and his brother, who were definitely immigrants from the East in—I don't know where they're from. But it's Bratislava or somewhere. They wore identical raincoats always and they would be sitting there every time I went to see Johanna and Stan. Stan had gone to a secondhand shop to find something.

He made those cameras and he was always looking for parts. He made those cameras mostly from the military stuff that was on Canal Street in those days, handmade cameras.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

MR. WILSON: But he was in some junk shop somewhere on the Lower East Side looking for parts for his cameras. He was always looking for screws and this and that and the other thing.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: There he saw a little kind of fallen apart framed drawing and it was a de Kooning and he knew it was a de Kooning.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned, yeah.

ANN WILSON: And he bought it for 25 cents. [Laughs.] He took it to de Kooning and he said, "Would you sign this please," and de Kooning was a good guy and signed it. He then sold it for \$10,000 and with that \$10,000 Johanna and Stan were able to buy on Cherry Street, which hadn't become—they later made those welfare housing.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: But they hadn't taken—Cherry Street was still a 17th century street. They bought a little 17th century house and Stan somewhere had found all of these glass photo plates that were from the '20s, photos of people in their cars. Probably an advertising agency had put them out or something.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: Every time one of the windows fell out, [laughs] he would make another window with these glass photo plates and that house was in—and Johanna was color city. If it was orange, it was hers. So the whole place was hung with orange fabric and they knew everybody. If you sat there, you had a movable feast of anybody who was Black Mountain coming through there.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: I met thousands sitting and Johanna was a great cook and made handmade donuts and things because she was a Southern girl.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, wow, now—

ANN WILSON: They were all—that circle was all Black Mountain. The whole of Black Mountain moved en masse to New York.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, including Johns and Rauschenberg? Were they part of that circle too, because they were Black Mountain?

ANN WILSON: Well, Cage was Black Mountain. Rauschenberg was Black Mountain. I don't know if Johns was.

JONATHAN KATZ: Johns was not. Johns was not, yeah.

ANN WILSON: I don't think so.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, that's right. Wow, and let me ask you this. You're single when you—because you've divorced.

ANN WILSON: Right.

JONATHAN KATZ: When do you meet Bill? Who's Bill? Give us the whole story.

ANN WILSON: Bill Wilson.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: I had gone to school with Lowell Nesbitt.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: Lowell was—he was something. But we were good friends. Lowell had studied with this guy in Maine who was a realist and I can't remember his name. It might be in one of my journals. But he turned it into that thing with the flowers.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, which he made a lot of money on, right?

ANN WILSON: Oh he was—Lowell, if anything, was as businessman and good at it. Lowell and I were good friends because Lowell was intelligent. He swished around a lot but he was really a smart one. Lowell and I would do the Philadelphia Museum every weekend or the Penn.

We loved the Pennsylvania Museum because they had the lieder there on Saturdays. I don't know if they still do that. But they would have a concert every Saturday and it was lieder; curious, isn't it?

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, I bet.

ANN WILSON: We would go to every one of them. He was casing out the boys. I was thinking, "Oh, this culture!" Anyway.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, Lowell at this point was a student? Was he working?

ANN WILSON: He went to Tyler.

JONATHAN KATZ: He went to Tyler?

ANN WILSON: Yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you were both at Tyler at this point?

ANN WILSON: I think he probably had a scholarship. I'm not sure. But he was mulatto. As Bill Wilson's father said, he was brushed with a tar brush. His mother had had somebody in her background because she was mulatto as well. So I think probably the reason he went to Tyler is in those days in Baltimore, if you were mulatto, you weren't accepted.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: It didn't matter in the north.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right, right, right.

ANN WILSON: So I think that's—because he never went back to Baltimore.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, all right, so you meet and become friends with Lowell.

ANN WILSON: Lowell and I are good friends because we both like the—not every art student likes museums but we liked the museums and we liked the concerts. It was at the archeological museum, which I lived for. I loved that museum, with that standing up goat from Mesopotamia.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yes, exactly.

ANN WILSON: I love that thing. Anyway, so we would go every Saturday. So that's how I knew Lowell and Lowell knew music. He knew a chaconne. He knew Diesbach [ph] like my father had known music. He was the only other peer that I had ever met that knew music that way. He really knew it and he loved it. So I think we also connected on the fact that he knew music.

So Lowell knew May Wilson and May was this artist who—she glued things together and she corresponded with Ray Johnson because Bill had met—when Bill was at Yale, somehow he met Ray. So May corresponded with Ray and of course Ray Johnson knew everybody in the world.

JONATHAN KATZ: Because of Black Mountain. He was another Black Mountain boy.

ANN WILSON: No, but he knew everybody. Diana Vreeland, you name it, Ray knew them all. Ray made it his point to do a circuit of New York every night and he hit everything. He knew everybody in New York that was anybody.

The whole Correspondence School, my husband wrote that "Paper Snake" which is somewhere here. Problem with the books is I never can find the one I want when I want it. But Ray knew everyone. He was a policeman's son. He had a lot of angst about that.

JONATHAN KATZ: What was his personality? He always seems a little bit off.

ANN WILSON: He is a little bit off and he was totally—he was a prankster. So he was always a punster and a prankster. You loved Ray but Ray—he was Bill's closest friend. He was a brilliant, brilliant guy. But he was—and he hated me because I think he loved Bill. He was never nice to me, ever. He was nice to Johanna. But I think he loved Bill and I think that he resented—

JONATHAN KATZ: You got in the way.

ANN WILSON: That I got in the way, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, so how do you meet Bill?

ANN WILSON: So Lowell knew May. So I went to see—visit Lowell in Baltimore, to go to his house. They lived in Olney, which was a middle class suburb, in a very nice house. So I went to visit Lowell in Baltimore. His parents fell all over me because I was possible indication that their son might not be queer. But that wasn't why I went to see Lowell in Baltimore. I went to see Baltimore, anyway.

JONATHAN KATZ: Not a bat out of hell chance.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, you know, and so Lowell said, "I know this fabulous woman, May Wilson." Bill's father had bought Freedom Hill and Freedom Hill was this gorgeous spread. Bill's father was Eastern Shore, Talbot County gentry.

He became a lawyer and they owned half of the Eastern Shore, the family. The combined family owned every piece of land. I would drive around with Judge Wilson and he would say, "Well, you see that field, you see that house, you see that road." They owned it all.

Judge Wilson had bought Freedom Hill, which was out beyond the suburbs and it was up on this hill and the sister lived next door, Betty Jane, who never got anything. Betty Jane was very sweet, nice, non-Catholic girl who went to church every Sunday. I didn't understand non-Catholics at all, but anyway. She was in the choir and she had two nice boys.

It was up on this hillside that looked out over all of the beautiful Maryland countryside with the roses over the fences. It was a modern house but it had a balcony. So it was built kind of traditionally and there was a swimming pool and there was a huge living room and a huge kitchen. May had a huge studio and upstairs were big bedrooms.

So he took me to meet May and Bill was there, sitting outside reading a book. Lowell was dealing with the fabulous May and I met the fabulous May but wasn't—I was underwhelmed. I liked May but I was underwhelmed. There was Bill and I thought, "Oh, who's that," and I sat down and we immediately, because I was a literary young lady, we clicked.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Bill at this point is how old?

ANN WILSON: Bill is—is he still in graduate school at Yale? I think he's in his last year of graduate school at Yale.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you're roughly the same age.

ANN WILSON: I think we're exactly parallel. But we clicked on literature. We wrote each other letters and I could write a fantastic letter in those days because I had a good eye. So I would describe what was going on in the museums and what was going on in this and that and the other thing. But I met Bill—I was still—when I met Bill I was still at Tyler. So it was a long process of writing letters. It was a number of years.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you didn't marry him then until you got to New York? When did you marry?

ANN WILSON: Bill and I married in '57.

JONATHAN KATZ: So well after you had gotten to New York.

ANN WILSON: September. Oh yes, I was on Coenties Slip.

JONATHAN KATZ: By that point.

ANN WILSON: I was on Coenties Slip in '55, '56, '57.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, wow.

ANN WILSON: The only reason we married is he got a job in Brunswick, Maine, and they said they wouldn't hire anybody that wasn't married. So he proposed.

But otherwise he probably wouldn't have married at that time because he did say to me after we parted and were snapping at each other, he said, "Well,—" because he had also—it was someplace like Swarthmore he had also been accepted. No, it was Goucher and he said, "Had I gone to Goucher, I would have married a Baltimore girl." That was after we were done with each other.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: So in any case, he only married me really, which didn't come out until later, because they wouldn't hire an unmarried professor at Bowdoin.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned.

ANN WILSON: Probably were afraid that their boys would be tarnished by English professors who spouted Keats.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and who seemed a little bit too effete.

ANN WILSON: Yes. Well, Bill is not effete. If you meet Bill, he's not effete. He is kind of noncommittal if you meet him and he dresses in a very conservative kind of way and he is witty as hell, brilliant, brilliant mind. That wit is like—we connected on that wit because he said, "If I had said something or voiced displeasure at something, the dead and wounded lay for miles."

JONATHAN KATZ: Was Lowell in love with him or no?

ANN WILSON: No. But he thought May Wilson was fabulous.

JONATHAN KATZ: Lowell loved May.

ANN WILSON: I don't know if Lowell was capable of love. I know he had affairs.

JONATHAN KATZ: Affairs, yeah.

ANN WILSON: But Lowell I think was too—he was a Nubian prince.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yes, yeah.

ANN WILSON: I don't think Lowell—I just never felt that façade was ever laid down. You have to lay down a façade if you're going to have love.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: And Gene—I was taken with Bill, this Yale man who was so brilliant. I don't think I ever loved Bill. I thought it was love but I don't think it was love because when I met Gene, that was love and that was crash, bang, boom. I'd never experienced that.

JONATHAN KATZ: You met Gene through Bill?

ANN WILSON: No.

JONATHAN KATZ: You didn't?

ANN WILSON: I went out.

JONATHAN KATZ: We should say we're talking about Gene Swenson here.

ANN WILSON: Yeah. I met Gene because Bill and Ray Johnson did probably the gay bars on Friday or Saturday night. I had opening night off, which was either Thursday or Tuesday. So I was given opening night. Bill would come home from teaching at Queens and I could go out that night. What I did was hit the galleries.

I knew Diane Kelder at the time. I knew a lot of the art historians, the people in the art world, because I had begun writing a little bit and I met—when you went to the openings in those days, the art world was not as big as it is today. There were a few major galleries.

There was the Stable Gallery was Eleanor Ward Stable. There was the Castelli Gallery. There were fewer big galleries and everybody in the art world went to those openings. So I met Gene on one of those art opening nights. I think it was because I was from the outer Midwest and he was from the Midwest. Bill was always a patrician.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did Bill know Gene from Yale or no?

ANN WILSON: No, they were different years.

JONATHAN KATZ: Got it.

ANN WILSON: They were different years.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, so at what point—what year—

ANN WILSON: Gene wasn't on the map at first. It wasn't until he wrote about pop art and Rosenquist that he got on the map at all. Gene would not have been known to Bill. Bill knew Marks at Yale. He knew all these Yale intellectuals. Those were his friends. He knew the upper echelons of literary scholarship.

His thesis was the "Exegetical Grammar in 'The House of Fame'" and my daughter's doing the same damn thing. She's writing about English grammar. Anyway, I couldn't wrap around it. I tried. I just couldn't get—I mean—

JONATHAN KATZ: So you meet Gene what year roughly?

ANN WILSON: When did I meet Gene? Now, one of the things you don't ask old ladies until they get to their journals is dates.

JONATHAN KATZ: I mean, are we talking—

ANN WILSON: I had had the children. I had three children. So it is like '62 or '63. It's in the '60s and pop art is just beginning to be ascendant and that was where Gene was throwing his intelligence. He was brilliant. But he wasn't brilliant like Bill.

It wasn't—Gene didn't talk in high Yale. He went to Yale but he never stopped talking Kansas. It wasn't his dialogue. His writing was fascinating. His insights were fascinating but he wasn't—Bill was you better know I'm brilliant and Gene was not like that. He didn't—all the Yalies are like that, I mean, the Yalies that are from the East Coast and from better families.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, you met Gene, you connected.

ANN WILSON: Big time.

JONATHAN KATZ: Gene's gay but you were—

ANN WILSON: No, Gene is not.

JONATHAN KATZ: Not gay?

ANN WILSON: He's half-half because he had a redhead at the time, a beautiful young woman. So Gene was bisexual.

JONATHAN KATZ: Bisexual, okay.

ANN WILSON: And not like—he wasn't Richie Gallo and he wasn't Bob Wilson. He wasn't that—you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and then you—

ANN WILSON: Bill I think married because the Wilsons had to have an heir.

JONATHAN KATZ: Otherwise you don't expect he would have?

ANN WILSON: Otherwise, he was the only male in a distinguished Southern family. There had to be an heir. It was his duty.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: And he liked my bone structure. He thought that would be good for his heir.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: I was married for my horsey bone structure. I wasn't bad looking in those days. Now, I look like an old crow. But in those days I was fairly decent looking.

JONATHAN KATZ: I know, I just love the idea that not your mind but your bone structure.

ANN WILSON: No, no the letters did it. I could seduce anybody like Bill with my letters.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, so then you become involved with Gene after the marriage ends or before the marriage ends?

ANN WILSON: No, no, no, no before the marriage ended, after I had had Andrew. It occurred gradually. It wasn't the first year. We liked each other. We loved each other. But we weren't—Gene was aware that I was married and had children. He wasn't a housebreaker at all. It just—it was a thing one—you were impelled. It was inevitable.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. Gene is younger than you, right?

ANN WILSON: Gene is I believe two years younger than me. Again, I have got to go to my journals and look.

JONATHAN KATZ: Understood.

ANN WILSON: I was born '31. I think he was born '33 or '34.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay, okay, so eventually the two of you become involved.

ANN WILSON: Well, we were involved but we hadn't taken that—or even contemplated that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, and then—

ANN WILSON: Talk about Catholic guilt, oh, my God. Oh, my God, that was awful.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Bill found out about this or no?

ANN WILSON: We became indiscreet or we became so involved that—

JONATHAN KATZ: You didn't care anymore.

ANN WILSON: When Gene went full throttle, he went full throttle and I had fallen in love. I wasn't in love with Bill. I thought—I mean, my God, I respected him, that mind. But it was inevitable and I didn't know about passion. I'd never known passion. I was a well brought up Catholic girl. I wasn't supposed to know passion. But when it happens, it happens. It wasn't supposed—I should have figured out how to be discreet and I didn't.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah and when you meet Gene, he's not yet the famous Gene but he's writing already, right?

ANN WILSON: I think he's still working with—I think he's in his last year with Blanckenhagen at the NYU art history institute because Blanckenhagen was very much on the scene I think. But I've got to go to my journals to get—the dates aren't here.

JONATHAN KATZ: Understood. So what I'm trying to ascertain is this. Is it Gene who introduces you to sort of the artists who would become famous as pop artists or did you know them?

ANN WILSON: No, everybody was there.

JONATHAN KATZ: You knew them already.

ANN WILSON: I knew Red and Mimi Grooms. I knew everybody and Les Levine, Jill Johnson, all. Everybody knew everybody because it was a small—the thing that has to be understood is two things hadn't happened.

The first thing, except with Pollock, de Kooning and Klein, the money hadn't come into the art world yet. The art world was still—things were not cheap but it wasn't—right now the art world is all about money. In those days, it still wasn't—that hadn't happened yet.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah and in the circle that you met—

ANN WILSON: Ten circles, the Judson Church Theater people.

JONATHAN KATZ: That was one circle.

ANN WILSON: That's Bread and Puppet. That is Carolee Schneemann, who I performed in *Meat Joy* with her. That was—I was the lady handing out the fish and Bill wouldn't let me be photographed because he'd, "No wife of mine is going to be seen in that kind of production," not that he didn't go.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned.

ANN WILSON: But I was in *Meat Joy* and I performed with George Deans and George Brecht. It was this marvelous production somewhere on—they'd rented a theater somewhere up in the theater district and I remember there was a white ladder in the middle of the stage and George and I on either side doing some kind of a dialogue that he had written, a script.

Alison and Dick Higgins lived down the street from us and had twins when we had twins. Dieter Roth, all the European artists started coming to the Chelsea when we were living at 458 and Bill and I gave a lot of parties with bread and cheese and wine. All New York—I still meet people who say, "Oh I remember being in your house," hundreds, Cage, Cunningham.

That's another—the whole dance and music group, that's another and all the Black Mountain people, especially through Stan and Johanna, Remy Charlip. No, everybody, but each circle was different. The theaters, the Judson was different. The Cage music circle was different. The writers, writing people were different. Bill knew everybody that was writing anything then.

JONATHAN KATZ: But now in Coenties, were you living with Bill or are you living there alone?

ANN WILSON: No, no, no, no, Bill and I were properly engaged when he said that he wanted to marry and go. Bill and I did not sleep together until we got to Maine. We were married in City Hall. My father came to be sure I wasn't going to live in sin.

Bill didn't have the \$5 for the marriage license and my father pulled it out wryly and handed it to him and we took off for Maine. So Bill and I—I was—I had married John so I wasn't an innocent and Bill certainly wasn't an innocent. He was a Yalie.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right. He may have been innocent with women but he wasn't an innocent.

ANN WILSON: So neither one of us were innocent but it was a proper Catholic girl marriage in City Hall, although my father said, "He's not a Catholic." But they were happy because he was a decent Baltimore family. Research had been done and they figured I was classing up.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, so I want to get one other question out of the way. One of the things that people have talked about—

ANN WILSON: Although Bill loved me, which is sad because although he wasn't exactly being celibate, which I later found out, he did love me and that was—which he's never been able to deal with it since.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: If I feel any guilt other than leaving the children, which imagine a good Catholic girl like me, and I didn't want to leave the children, but Bill was going to own something.

JONATHAN KATZ: So the children were raised by Bill?

ANN WILSON: He wouldn't let me near them.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Then finally I was allowed to visit them once a week and then finally he'd bring them to me on weekends. But that was his punishment and because I had been an adulteress, in those days it was scandalous.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right. You were married to Bill then how long then total?

ANN WILSON: Seven years.

JONATHAN KATZ: But together, 14 almost, right?



ANN WILSON: No, we were married in '57 and it was not until '64, late '64, that the flap over Gene happened.

JONATHAN KATZ: But you'd met Bill way back at Tyler, so—

ANN WILSON: I met Bill for years and years and years and years and I think I'd been in the back of his mind that he had to have an heir. I think that had just been there since then. But I was a good—when I met Bill, I was still a good Catholic girl.

JONATHAN KATZ: So when you moved to New York, you weren't thinking, "I'm going to eventually marry Bill?"

ANN WILSON: No, I was going to go to Paris and be an artist and wear a beret and live in a garret and paint great paintings. Little did I know—the thing I didn't know, which is very interesting, most of my friends—women friends like Johanna knew it. I was a total stupid innocent. I didn't know women didn't have a chance. I mean, Agnes was probably the first one that stepped up on the big stage.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Really, think about it. That was very late.

JONATHAN KATZ: No, absolutely, absolutely.

ANN WILSON: I didn't know women didn't have a chance.

JONATHAN KATZ: Well, nobody was talking in these terms, right?

ANN WILSON: Women who were attached to famous men, like Elaine de Kooning, could squeeze into a gallery. Women who were not attached to famous men, until A.I.R. Gallery happened, forget it. I didn't know that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: I was going to Paris to be Picasso. What did I know? Europe would have even been—Europe is still bad.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: The only one I ever knew that ever made it to the top in Europe was Mary Bauermeister and I don't know how she did it because you still go to Europe and they now show women and they give it lip service. But in terms of who is the artist, it's still the pool seal [ph].

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and going back to Coenties period, you said that Lenore Tawney was important because she was sophisticated and well-traveled and older.

ANN WILSON: And as Bob Indiana and Ellsworth have said to me, if the truth be known, it was Lenore who taught us all.

JONATHAN KATZ: That's what I wanted to get at. What do you mean by that?

ANN WILSON: Well, two things. Lenore was sophisticated in terms of color, design and art. She'd studied in Paris. She was brilliant. She was about this tall, a little twee thing. She would have every month—she had Harry Partch to her studio with all those instruments.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: Those extraordinary instruments he made.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, sure.

ANN WILSON: Every month she would have a concert, a reading. She brought the best to Coenties Slip. So she was sophisticated in that way. She had the money to do it. She would have—I saw some extraordinary things at Lenore's loft and she had an extraordinary circle, both wealthy women who could afford a lot and artists who respected her. People respected Lenore.

JONATHAN KATZ: Was she showing and selling?

ANN WILSON: Well, weaving—she sold things to churches, 20-foot tall weavings. I can't remember, Riverside I think. She did big commissions for modern architecture. They were gorgeous. They were extraordinary and they were abstract.

They were shaped weaving that nobody had ever done before. She'd figured it out from Nazca slit weaving that they did to weave the ponchos, how to make a shaped edge to these 20-foot tall things. The Nazca didn't do 20-foot-tall.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: But so that they were—if she had been Archipenko they would have been sculpture or Calder. I met Calder at Lenore's. She knew everybody.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. Lenore takes Agnes to Europe for the first time, right?

ANN WILSON: Now, how did Agnes get to Europe? I don't know. I don't know. I don't think they went together.

JONATHAN KATZ: They didn't go together, okay.

ANN WILSON: No, no, Agnes did that. She did a round-the-world tour. When she was either—did she leave Coenties Slip and then do the round the world tour? How did it happen? But she had a nervous breakdown in India and they brought her back to that psychiatric hospital.

I know her psychiatrist and he's written for me about her. He's kind of an amazing and interesting man, respects her deeply. So she—Agnes had a mental handicap. I never knew what kind. But she was maintained on medication.

JONATHAN KATZ: But from the moment you met her she was on medication?

ANN WILSON: No, she had this breakdown when she took this world cruise.

JONATHAN KATZ: So before then she was fine?

ANN WILSON: It was after she made a lot of money. But I think there were always—Agnes would not want to see people or not want to talk to anybody for certain periods of time. So I think it was always there.

JONATHAN KATZ: For people who were very close—

ANN WILSON: We didn't know. Lenore might have known. Ellsworth might have known. I certainly didn't know.

JONATHAN KATZ: Agnes and Lenore and Agnes and Ellsworth were the two most important relationships in Agnes' life?

ANN WILSON: She was very close to Ellsworth and I think very important for Ellsworth. I think those simple shapes and forms—remember Ellsworth at that time was a very young man and I think Agnes was significant in his formation.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, although he was doing those in Paris before he meets Agnes, right?

ANN WILSON: Yes, well both he and Youngerman were in Paris together after the war and I have the rundown on that in one of my many straight writings. They studied in some school in Paris with—it was a Parisian—it was kind of like the—not the—[inaudible]—but another group.

There was a Paris hard-edge group at the time that I think turned both Jack and Ellsworth in that direction because when they arrived on the slip they were there in that direction. But I think Ellsworth and Agnes, that relationship was very important to Ellsworth, although Ellsworth always had his eye on the prize, from get-go. I think he was born with his eye on the prize.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, now Agnes at this point is showing at Betty Parsons.

ANN WILSON: Right.

JONATHAN KATZ: By the way, did you know—you knew Bob Herbert from the Parsons Gallery?

ANN WILSON: Yes, I knew Bob and I knew Annie Laurie from there.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: I knew Annie very well.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and Agnes is having these shows. Are they successful at Parsons?

ANN WILSON: Well, Agnes had a show at another gallery also after Betty and I can't remember the name of that gallery. It was up—going up towards the stable. Then she was picked up by Arne and used to say to me, "I don't know what it is about all these feminists. I never had any problems." Well, if you're picked up by Arne. She never understood. She was clueless.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, talk to me about the context for your relationship to her, when you start writing down the things that she tells you. When does that begin and how does that begin?

ANN WILSON: Oh, I think I was writing down the things everybody told me from the moment I got to New York. I thought I'd better get this down. But it wasn't—I didn't refine it and I didn't really understand it. It took me a good 10 years to mature into writing with discipline. I was just somebody said something and I'd say, "Oh," and I'd write it. That early writing in the journals is not good.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and when—

ANN WILSON: Something I remember about Agnes is Agnes had kept journals with poems in them. There would be a poem on this page and a drawing on this page. I don't know what happened to those journals and no one else does.

JONATHAN KATZ: So Arne doesn't have them?

ANN WILSON: I asked Arne. I said, "She kept in all the Coenties Slip years these small books." I'd go up there and they'd always be open and there'd be a poem on this side and a drawing on that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Her poem?

ANN WILSON: Yeah, her poem. Some of the drawings were like those small drawings with the little triangles with the lines.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: That would be what the drawings were like. But I said, "Arne, she was keeping these books of poems." She always wrote, if you've read her many, many writings.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, sure, yeah, yeah. We're going to stop it here because we're running—

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ANN WILSON: Then you won't have to—you'll have more lieder [ph].

JONATHAN KATZ: There we go.

ANN WILSON: Oh okay.

JONATHAN KATZ: Can you just make sure—talk.

ANN WILSON: Hello.

JONATHAN KATZ: Perfect. All right, this is tape two on the 11th of July and I'm talking to Ann Wilson. Ann, I wanted to ask you about the circumstances for doing the Agnes Martin transcription. Talk about how that came to pass.

ANN WILSON: Susan Delehanty asked me to go out from the museum in Philadelphia to make the transcription. I went out and went to Cuba and went to a diner in Cuba and said, "How do I get up to Agnes Martin's," and they said, "Oh, you go down the road and you take the rail off the fence and you ford the stream and you go up and you'll have to take the rail off of five fences going up there."

I did that and I got up and at the top was the adobe that Agnes had made herself, which was a simple, small rectangular adobe and outside of that was her trailer that she had driven West in where I stayed. In the adobe was the Sears Roebuck rocker, her own handmade table with little benches, one bed and a cast iron stove.

She had a window that was screened and you opened the window and there was screening all around a small strawberry patch. She gave me fresh strawberries from her small strawberry patch, which she reached out the window to get.

She had a bell outside on a stick. She had a patio in front and at the time she was laying the patio and I tried to help her lay the patio and I would put a stone down and she would laugh and laugh and laugh.

Then after I tried about 10 times she picked the stone up and just lay it perfectly. So I was hopeless when it came to laying a stone patio. Indians still were nomadic on this land that would come and go. She knew them all.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, wow and was the stove the same one that you knew from Coenties Slip?

ANN WILSON: No, it was another cast iron stove from out there. She made her living out there because the guys I asked the diner how to get up to Agnes', they drove me back down in their truck. They said—one of them said, "Oh, she skinning my,"—I think they were shooting deer. So she skinned animals. She cleaned the skins outside.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God. She needed to worry about money?

ANN WILSON: She needed to worry about money at that time.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: That was before Arne Glimcher.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: Susan Delehanty had sent me out there to get the text. Remember, the Philadelphia ICA was her first museum show. I sat knee-to-knee with her for about five days in two sessions a day and she dictated completely that "Untroubled Mind".

JONATHAN KATZ: Did she then edit it and cross out things?

ANN WILSON: Nothing. She spoke it, just sat there and spoke it and I didn't tape record it. I handwrote it because I wanted to get the cadence of her speech in paragraph form. She spoke like a plainswoman, like Saskatchewan. She had that wonderful Canadian accent and she spoke each word very clearly.

There was special thing to her speaking and I wanted to catch that rhythm as I wrote it, although I think when I got it back to Philadelphia, it was totally—Susan had a wonderful man doing topography and layout and they laid it out.

I think probably the only thing that changed, and I think it was with her approval, was the form in which it was laid out, not the paragraphs that I was putting down, to try and get the rhythm of her speech.

But I handwrote each word that she spoke and because Agnes—beauty is unattached in that way. But every—none of that is mine. There was no editing except for spelling, which I'm not noted for.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: That was it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you have a sense—because it reads so perfectly.

ANN WILSON: All of her text, if you have read all of her Agnes Martin—[inaudible]—that published in Basel I think.

JONATHAN KATZ: I've read all of her, yeah.

ANN WILSON: All of her texts are like that. The *Willie Stories*, I love the *Willie Stories*.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. Let's just use *The Untroubled Mind* as an example. Did she write it in her head, memorize it and then speak it to you?

ANN WILSON: She wrote it on little—well, she spoke it to me.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: But she generally wrote on little spiral books that secretaries used for dictation that flip over this way.

JONATHAN KATZ: But what I'm trying to ascertain is did she come up with *Untroubled Mind* as she was speaking it or had she prepared it in advance?

ANN WILSON: That I don't know. She spoke it to me.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay.

ANN WILSON: And I never asked Agnes questions like that. You just didn't.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. So even though you were friends now, at this point you'd known Agnes almost 10 years.

ANN WILSON: Since 1954.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, did she still strike you as formidable?

ANN WILSON: Not formidable. She had this essence of a woman who had grown up in the country. As I say, she built her own adobe.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: She could drive. She would take me for rides around New Mexico and she would say, "This is a six-wheel shift," or whatever that is.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: And she'd say, "Not that you'd know from that," and one of the funny stories she told me on that trip is she said to me, "Ann, you have to have depreciation," and I said, "What's depreciation," and she said, "I'll show you." We're driving around the New Mexico countryside.

We pass the governor's ranch and next to the governor's ranch is this entire lot full of cultivators, reapers, everything, piece of farm equipment you could use, although there were 10 of each. She pointed to it and said, "That's depreciation." The governor knew what was depreciation. But the possibility of me, a little college teacher, having depreciation—

JONATHAN KATZ: Did she get the sense—did you get the sense that as history would subsequently prove the ICA show would be the turning point in her career?

ANN WILSON: I wasn't thinking that way then.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah, no that makes sense. Did you own any of Agnes' work?

ANN WILSON: Never, nothing.

JONATHAN KATZ: Do you have a sense for why she chose you for the transcription?

ANN WILSON: Well, she knew me from the loft, had known me for years. I had done—I think I had written a text about her in *Art and Artists* from London that she approved of.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, but since she was herself a writer, do you have any idea why she didn't turn in a text herself?

ANN WILSON: I have no idea. I just know that—I think Susan sending me out there, I think in Philly they were a little—Agnes was—you didn't approach Agnes lightly and I think they weren't sure that they'd get something. They knew certainly that I could get it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and I did note—

ANN WILSON: Not that many people knew Agnes as I had from the slip from a number of years. There weren't that many people. There were some out West. There was a wonderful woman that lived next to her in the retirement home who had been a longtime friend.

There were people up in Taos who had—Bea Mandelman had known her. She had gone to Bea's every night for cocktails for years and years and years. So there were people up in Taos that knew her very well. The guy that did the show in Taos for her 80th birthday had known her very well.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and did she ever talk to you about her work prior to the advent of abstraction?

ANN WILSON: Never.

JONATHAN KATZ: About her portraits?

ANN WILSON: Agnes mostly gave you advice.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Always.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, unsolicited advice I gather.

ANN WILSON: Well, remember, I was a very young artist. So I wasn't asking. But she would give advice of all kinds.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, often though with a spiritualist edge, right?

ANN WILSON: No, you need depreciation.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right, right.

ANN WILSON: Agnes was a pragmatist.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: But she would give me emotional advice, things like that, "Do not feel guilty because you left your husband and children." She did that a lot. She was concerned. But she was an advice giver, not that I would ever ask her.

JONATHAN KATZ: There is a way in which almost all of her writing is in some sense advice giving, isn't it?

ANN WILSON: Agnes, for me, was a sort of grandmother figure. I'd go there. She'd make muffins. She'd give advice. You didn't posit things with Agnes. I mean, she just—she was there-there and for me she was there-there. I didn't pre-think it.

I didn't go with any calculation in my mind to ask her anything. I observed very closely. She would always show me her work and the series at that time, she was working in a garage that was closed because she didn't, at that time, have a studio and she had this garage space. She was doing a series of square drawings and she took me and showed me these.

Then, when she built the studio in Galisteo, that's an interesting story. She built the studio in Galisteo as the sun seasonally goes around that area so that she had clearstory windows all around and she had two doors on either side. The room was not as big as this room because she didn't store her work there.

At that time, Arne would send—when she'd done a number of paintings he'd come fetch them. The sun by season was coming through those clearstory windows so that it would light up her painting at either end. She had two ends to work on there. But that's beautiful, the idea that the sun went around seasonally and that there was always light coming in.

JONATHAN KATZ: Coming through.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: When you met her first, she was not—we were talking about the fact that she was still doing scavenge work and you saw gradually—

ANN WILSON: That was just the first pieces on Coenties Slip that I observed. It wasn't that she was doing that as a series. It sticks in my mind because—and so was Bob Indiana. They were working on these marvelous 19th century pieces of wood that were very thick.

I would say that they were five inches thick, four inches thick and they were probably between five and six feet tall. They were pieces of dock or pieces of buildings. They were taking down some of the coffee district and Bob Indiana as well, those things with the wheels on them.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yes, yes, yes

ANN WILSON: He did one for my twins actually.

JONATHAN KATZ: I know those works, yeah.

ANN WILSON: When the twins were born he made a piece dedicated to them.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. Do you know where it is now?

ANN WILSON: I don't know. I would have to look. I have an Indiana book.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'll be damned. What about Agnes' reading? Did you have a sense of what she read? Did she ever talk about literature?

ANN WILSON: I know that she was reading Chinese scholars. She read Cage and she adored Cage. She thought Cage was hilarious. She'd go to Cage concerts and laugh and laugh. She liked Amicort. I went to Amicort with her and I think she saw it three or four times.

JONATHAN KATZ: She liked lustiness?

ANN WILSON: Well, I wouldn't say that. Everything was funny. She'd laugh. But she was reading—both she and Lenore, and I've written about what they were reading. It's in probably my Lenore text.

But they were Chinese scholars and I think at one point she had read—I think Lenore said they were reading St. Teresa of Avila. But don't—the problem with Agnes is people always want to make it kind of an airy-fairy mysticism. She had her feet on the ground.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: She knew how to use a ruler. She knew what was two inches and four inches and six inches. She mixed the exact measure of paint that she was going to use for that today, but I mean to the drop. She was a practical plainswoman from Saskatchewan although I think that there was a vulnerability there.

I think there was a response to nature that was not—it was not about accurate nature. It was about the veils and the mists, especially if you—somebody said to me if you go to Saskatchewan and you stand there, the light in Agnes' painting is the light in Saskatchewan on the plains.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you feel—two questions, first thing, it seems pretty clear that she was reading especially the love poetry of Gertrude Stein.

ANN WILSON: I was never aware of that.

JONATHAN KATZ: You weren't aware of that, okay. All right, I wanted to ask about it.

ANN WILSON: And she never talked to me about Stein. Bob Wilson loved Stein and Kenneth King loved Stein. They worked a lot from it very clearly. But no, I never heard a word about Gertrude Stein from Agnes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay. Let me ask then around the time that you're meeting Agnes, you are sort of deep into your relationship with Agnes. You meet Gene Swenson. Can you give us a rundown?

ANN WILSON: Gene and I went to see Agnes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Together?

ANN WILSON: Yes, I took him to meet Agnes.

JONATHAN KATZ: What years? Do you remember?

ANN WILSON: And Agnes took a long stick and drew it in the dirt and she said, "I see a boy behind the barn making—drawing figures in the earth."

JONATHAN KATZ: What do you think that meant?

ANN WILSON: I think she was talking about his creativity.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: She always honed in on something like that. There was some accuracy there.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah and how did Gene take to Agnes?

ANN WILSON: Well, he was thrilled to meet her and she took us to dinner. She took us for a steak dinner in Lamy.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. All right, so you become friendly with Gene and eventually that friendship turns to love and I think that's a fair word, right?

ANN WILSON: Oh, it was to begin with.

JONATHAN KATZ: Through Gene—

ANN WILSON: Love is a burden, especially if you're a married woman with two children.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yes, yes, yes and through Gene you started to meet artist—

ANN WILSON: No, everybody in New York knew everybody.

JONATHAN KATZ: You knew them already.

ANN WILSON: Wesselmann, all of them. Of course I knew Thek intimately. Thek and I had known each other for a while.

JONATHAN KATZ: So now how does Thek enter your life?

ANN WILSON: It's in the yellow book in the other room. I went up to his—he came to see me with Peter Hujar, when he and Peter were together when I was living with Bill at 458 West 25th Street.

They had heard that there was this woman painting quilts, which he called my prayer rugs. I wasn't thinking of them as prayer rugs. He and Peter came because they had heard about me. I remember them coming in the house and up the stairs and came into my studio and were both very wonderful about my work.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you obviously then knew Peter before you even met—

ANN WILSON: No, Gene and Peter heard about me from somebody and called up, said, "Can we come and meet you," and that's how I met them both.

I was with Bill Wilson and I had a studio on the top floor of that house and up they came. We sat around and talked. I have no idea what we talked about. But from then on we were—at that time Peter and Paul were together. I said, "Too bad my name's not Mary."

JONATHAN KATZ: I know we're—I'm not going to pin you to the wall on dates, but we're talking roughly when, roughly when?

ANN WILSON: Early '60s probably.

JONATHAN KATZ: Early '60s, okay.

ANN WILSON: I think it was that they had seen a quilt of mine somewhere, that I was in an exhibit somewhere and they had seen it. I think that's how they—and then they were curious.

JONATHAN KATZ: At this point you had no idea of either of their work? You had just met them.

ANN WILSON: I had just met them and then I went to Peter's studio and saw his wonderful photographs and then I climbed up in the tenement where Paul lived. I have that description I can read tomorrow of meeting—of going and seeing his work.

JONATHAN KATZ: Great, great. When you encountered both Peter and Paul—God, it sounds strange to say that—there is a sense—I mean, I don't know—

ANN WILSON: They were both devout Catholics. I'll tell you that.

JONATHAN KATZ: That exactly what I was getting at, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Absolutely, absolutely, hands down. But they didn't talk it or walk it. It was private. I mean, I knew it.

JONATHAN KATZ: But it's in the work.

ANN WILSON: Oh of course it's in—it's all—Paul was between a rock and a hard place because he had what Catholics called a vocation. He truly had a vocation to be religious. He was also gay and he was always—at the end of his life, he went to a Cistercian monastery in Vermont and asked to be admitted and he had AIDS.

It was a very small monastery and of course the Cistercians, they never talk. They're the most cloistered of all the male—it's the toughest monastery. It's like St. Teresa's order, the Carmelites.



They sent him back to New York because he had AIDS and they were a very small monastery and had no way to take care of anybody with AIDS. Remember, that was when it was the plague. Nobody knew. People thought they could get it, seriously.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did this wound him that he was sent away?

ANN WILSON: Yes, it did very much. He went finally at the end of his life. But the problem was he was 50 by then and he did have the vocation and as he become older he got more and more intensely into Catholicism. He should have, I think when he moved more intensely into it, but the other thing was he wanted to be a Cistercian.

He couldn't have been an artist. So it wasn't just the gay issue. It was having to give up sexuality and it was having to give up art. I think the art was the more profound of the two by the time you're 40 and the fires have somewhat banked. I think that it was the fact that he couldn't see his way clear to giving up the art because the Cistercians pray. That's all they do.

JONATHAN KATZ: At this point, Peter's not a celebrated figure yet, right? Nobody knows who Peter is—

[Cross talk.]

ANN WILSON: Not even in his lifetime.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, really, is that true?

ANN WILSON: No, the first show is this wonderful man that has taken over his estate that was a beautiful friend of Peter's and is a nice guy, wonderful guy, organized the shows after Peter's death. Peter had a couple of shows, one at Gracie Mansion. But they never—I still don't think MoMA owns one.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: I wonder if the Whitney owns one. He should have a show. I said to the woman. She's aware that he should have a show and I said, "Wouldn't it be nice when Paul had a show if you could give Peter a show?" But of course there's so much floor space and this kind of thing takes 10 years to organize.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. So Paul was the better-known artist?

ANN WILSON: Peter was never really known in his lifetime. He was an insider. All of us knew. The artists all knew he was great. I mean, I think he's the—after Stieglitz and [Edward] Steichen—hands down.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, great photographer.

ANN WILSON: Mapplethorpe, who knew how to do PR, I don't think should have been a bigger figure than Peter. Peter is obviously to me the great artist.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, and certainly there's an enormous emotional range in Peter's work.

ANN WILSON: He was such a refined fine man, gorgeous, brought up by—he was brought up by a Slavic grandmother and grandfather on a farm in Western Jersey because his mother Rose remarried and the husband kicked Peter out at 15.

So he went to this farm and I think that they had some kind of a beautiful Middle European sensibility that came through in him that was decent and pure and wonderful. Peter was always just. He was very, very good.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you knew Peter throughout his life?

ANN WILSON: Yes, since I met him in the early '60s.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and they were together, Peter and Paul were together for how long?

ANN WILSON: Yes, maybe two or three years after that.

JONATHAN KATZ: At this point, Paul's career is beginning to start getting known, right?

ANN WILSON: Paul's career never got known to the point of making money, ever. The Europeans loved his installations. He did the installation in Stockholm at exactly the right time and they called it the new Walden.

Then it caught fire through all the European museums and the Europeans—the Americans still haven't—he's not known. He did the dead hippie in the pyramid in the Whitney lobby. He did in the Eleanor Ward the gorgeous *Fishman* was strung in the tree and my painting was the only thing in the gallery.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: The Martin Luther King's mountain which was a sepia—it was from an old sepia stereopticon.

JONATHAN KATZ: And the boat in the *Fishman* installation—

ANN WILSON: The *Stag in the Boat*.

JONATHAN KATZ: *Stag in the Boat*, where does it come from.

ANN WILSON: That was in Europe. That was mine.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: That was because I was on—at our house in Oakleyville, which is in the Paul Thek book that Peter and Paul and I shared. We always had that house in the summers. I think we paid \$500 to be next to Sunken Forest on Fire Island and we paid \$500 for from May through September and it was a two story old fisherman's clapboard house.

We got it from Marge and Wally Wackland [ph]. The three of us managed \$500 and that wasn't easy. Peter and Paul would come out on weekends. If Paul was there, they would alternate because after that they didn't come together. But I was always there. I got to stay there all the time.

JONATHAN KATZ: And they were friends after the end of the relationship or no?

ANN WILSON: No, I don't—no.

JONATHAN KATZ: It hurt.

ANN WILSON: Something hurt I think and Paul was paranoid. Paul would think—would get crazy.

JONATHAN KATZ: Can you offer any kind of reading of the *Technological Reliquaries*?

ANN WILSON: Yes, during minimal art Paul said it was a spoof on minimal art. Both of us said you'd go into the gallery and there'd be the railroad tie across the floor. So we made fun of that. So the *Technological Reliquaries* was his—he was sending up the railroad tie on the floor of the gallery.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and the Catholicism, again, absolutely front and center.

ANN WILSON: More and more and more and more. It increased. It increased. Europe I think increased it because there he was—America's not a truly Catholic country at all. It's not an anything country. But in Europe, how can you avoid it.

JONATHAN KATZ: So in some sense you think that one of the reasons he was more successful in Europe was because they got it?

ANN WILSON: Oh, they got it. Oh, for sure, what with the "Fishman" flying and what is the fish, yeah, yeah. Americans didn't get it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Catholics are still a demi-class and they're mostly foreigners.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right, sure, and why specifically Germany? Do you have a sense? It seems Germany was such a rich—

[Cross talk.]

ANN WILSON: The Germans wanted him. I mean, it's where they would ask you to do an installation. He went also, remember, to Switzerland.

JONATHAN KATZ: And do you think the [Joseph] Beuys was a major influence, though?

ANN WILSON: No, but when they met—I was there when they met at documenta and we had dinner together with Beuys and his—he had a whole bunch of people.

JONATHAN KATZ: Entourage.

ANN WILSON: Well, they were working with him and there was a group of us working with Paul. We went to dinner together and Beuys and Paul recognized in each other a similar vein, although Beuys, having been through the war and that plane crash, that was grown up morality really.

Paul was doing some of this in a Bojangles, tongue in cheek, off the cuff American sassiness some of the time, wonderful sassiness. But Beuys had great levity. His art was about levity. It was about death.

JONATHAN KATZ: And did you get a sense that Paul recognized that distinction between the two of them?

ANN WILSON: Paul said Beuys could have done with a little humor.

JONATHAN KATZ: Fair enough, yeah.

ANN WILSON: But he respected him.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: Just a curious question, but I'm struck by the fact that so many of the works are owned by the archbishopric of Cologne. How did that come to pass?

ANN WILSON: I don't know that I can say this. But the archbishop was gay and perceived in Thek I think that aspect, although I think he was a devout man. I don't think he was—

JONATHAN KATZ: There was never a relationship.

ANN WILSON: I don't think so but I think he probably met Thek and he also knew about modern art a great—he was highly educated in modern art. He collected a great deal for that Cologne museum and I think if they had known the truth, it's sitting there in that museum and they are tight-assed about lending anything.

JONATHAN KATZ: Tell me about it. I've tried to borrow some of it.

ANN WILSON: Nothing. Nobody had been able to get anything out. No, no. I've gone there. I've met with the woman who is the curator of the thing. I've been allowed to look at the works and write. But that's as far as it goes. Nobody's ever going to get anything out of that museum, period, nada.

JONATHAN KATZ: Talk to me about Bob Wilson. I want to be clear that we were talking previously about Bill Wilson. Now, we're going to talk about Bob.

ANN WILSON: Yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: How did you meet?

ANN WILSON: Jill Johnson was living with me on the Bowery in between her—she was peripatetic. She was here and there. At one point she was driving all around everywhere. She also had children that she would see on weekends so that we had a bond over that. We had a bond over writing and she brought Bob to the loft to meet me one day.

Bob and I—I think Bob took one look at the loft and said, "This is where I can put the company and it's only \$300 a month," but don't print that while he's still living please. If he ever gets wind of that it'll kill me.

But also he realized that I had a—I could write and that I had—I understood his vision in terms of if he needed anything anywhere in the world, I knew before he said it what he needed and I'd go out and find it. So I was a good finder. I mean, we would go into some town and have to do a performance and something wasn't there that had to be there and I knew what it was.

JONATHAN KATZ: So what was your role, then, with—

ANN WILSON: With Bob? Everybody's role was to do his bidding and we loved doing it because it was like living—it was like living—you know the sparklers the kids have on the Fourth of July? Well, it was like being six years old and having a handful of sparklers to be around Bob.

He's very witty, very humorous, telling wonderful stories always and then very serious about this gorgeous theater. What artist wouldn't want to be part of that? I said I ran away with the circus.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you work collaboratively or were they Bob's ideas that you executed?

ANN WILSON: It was always Bob's ideas. He would accept something that I or anybody else—not just me, everybody—if something came along that he appreciated. He'd put it in and remember we're talking wonderful people and 30 and 60 and 90 people at once. So there was a lot of input. But Bob could stage the phonebook and light it and it would be gorgeous.

JONATHAN KATZ: We're talking roughly when you met I would assume early 1960s, right?

ANN WILSON: When did I meet Bob? I was in the second *Deafman Glimpse* [1981] I was in. So again I have to go to my journals. I don't think I remember anything. But I started touring with Bob—I think it was when I went to Europe.

I think it was something—maybe Peter Hugar and I went out to BAM [Brooklyn Academy of Music] and we saw *Deafman Glimpse* [1971], the first one. We walked all the way back to the Lower East Side from BAM talking about it. We were so taken with it. Then Jill—I said to Jill, "We saw this, I've ever seen anything like it. It was amazing," and then Jill brought Bob to my loft and I was in the second *Deafman*.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'm struck by the fact that Agnes' work, Paul's work, Peter's work, Bob's work are very different kinds of work. You seem to respond equally—I mean, they're all great works but you seem to respond differently.

ANN WILSON: There was a common thread.

JONATHAN KATZ: And what is that?

ANN WILSON: That is that they could take something and set it in a metaphoric symbolic way. They were all symbolists.

JONATHAN KATZ: No, I can see that. That's interesting, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Bob—I mean, Peter's photographs were essences of the symbol of the beings he was photographing, when he brought out an essence. It wasn't—it could have been 100 faces there and he went for the essence if he was photographing you and it was amazing to be photographed by Peter.

[End disc five.]

JONATHAN KATZ: One of the things that's interesting is that Peter's work is consistent. I mean, it covers a whole range but it has an emotional—

ANN WILSON: I went to West Virginia with Peter. He wanted—he loved animals and he wanted to photograph animals on farms. We drove down to West Virginia with—I can't remember who his lover was then.

But again, it's in the journals. I can get the exact name. We drove to West Virginia. This was—I think Peter was taking me to West Virginia because he was concerned because when Gene died I went into a tailspin and he thought by taking me to West Virginia, which was near Pittsburgh, that he could—that that would help me.

Peter was always looking to help people. We went to West Virginia and I remember Peter standing on the edge of a field photographing that horse. I own that photograph. It's up there somewhere.

JONATHAN KATZ: It's also the cows, the dead cow? Is that from the same trip too?

ANN WILSON: No, that's not the same trip. This is that horse, that iconic horse on the edge of the hill. He talked to that horse. He talked to that horse and the horse turned and paid attention to him. It was standing sideways. But Peter stood there and in a very low voice just talked to that horse. It was like he was casting a spell; amazing to see that.

JONATHAN KATZ: With Paul's work, there's so much. The thing that's striking about Paul's work is it's so diverse.

ANN WILSON: Oh, Paul had a mind that—both Bob and Paul had this extremely productive metaphor development. Both of them could develop metaphors like that and switch a lot, although Paul had a certain consistent. That pyramid was a consistent thing to anchor everything with. You know that *Deafman Glimpse* had a pyramid in it.

JONATHAN KATZ: I didn't.

ANN WILSON: They hadn't met. It had a pyramid center stage that had a back structure that was a stairway. There was a little girl named Jessie, now a grown woman, an art historian, who was S.K. Dunn's daughter. Jessie walked up the pyramid like a little old woman and at the top of the pyramid was the eye that's on the dollar bill

and at the end of that act, the eye flew, turned on and flew.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: That was the first act of *Deafman Glance*.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. Of Paul's work, can you explain the relationship between the *Technological Reliquaries* and some of the graphic work that seem so distinct from that?

ANN WILSON: What graphic work, for instance? Lots of graphic works.

JONATHAN KATZ: The paintings of swimmers for example, how do you—

ANN WILSON: That was Paul on Ponza swimming. That was his constant baptismal fount. He was always in the water. We had a big rowboat. Those Italian rowboats, which were fishing boats, are this high out of the water on the floor. Let me tell you, it's something to crawl into one of those from the sea. In those days, I wasn't in the state I'm in today and we would go out all day, reading [Marcel] Proust.

JONATHAN KATZ: Seriously?

ANN WILSON: *Swann's Way* [New York: Holt, 1922]. I have a gorgeous picture. Paul has given me five or six journals and there's a gorgeous picture in one of those and we—the signorina in the pensione where we stayed would make us a lunch. We had Swiss cheese. We had grapes. We had figs. We had a loaf of bread and we had a bottle of wine that they made there at the pensione.

That was our lunch in the boat. I have a gorgeous photo of that upstairs that I can show you. Day after day after day we'd get in the boat about 8:00 and we would come back an hour before sunset so we could make it up because the pensione had a terrace that was whitewashed.

You know how the Italians whitewashed the floors and everything in sight? The terrace was whitewashed and we would sit on the terrace in the evening and watch the sunset, what Paul called God's light show. It was gorgeous over the Tyrrhenian Sea, just gorgeous.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and you knew Paul then. From the moment you meet Paul until his death is a good 20—

ANN WILSON: Oh, that was forever.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and you were close the entire time?

ANN WILSON: Yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you ever fight?

ANN WILSON: We were brother and sister. Sure we fought. But he never got paranoid about me because I was a girl. How could you get paranoid about a mere girl? But he let me—I'll say something about Paul as a male artist of that time. The *Stag in the Boat* was the biggest thing in that show, the biggest object. I mean, that again was a Swedish fishing boat oceangoing. That boat extended from this chest to that wall.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: Stags aren't all that small. He let me put a big work in that front and center facing the pyramid.

JONATHAN KATZ: But was it marked as your work?

ANN WILSON: No, we didn't—none of us marked our work.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, because people have mistaken it as—

ANN WILSON: No, of course it was the male artist.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: Which was—that was the plight of the female artist. But I didn't mind that. The thing that I appreciate is he allowed me to do that, that he wanted me to do that. So he respected what I did and he was marvelous about it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you ever work together at other points?

ANN WILSON: We would work together on verbal things, writing text and things. But it was again—that was what it was with Bob. There was this—I think it was generational. Paul and I having come from intensely Catholic backgrounds saw alike. We saw the same things and we were doing with art the same things.

Assemblage was quite new then because my other assemblage was a skeleton and a plow, which I did with Wilson, in the theater, in Det Ny Theater. I never got to do it in America and it's a skeleton with an old plow and the skeleton was hung from the ceiling pushing the plow through fossils. It was an early environmentalist statement.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: It was a showstopper.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, no it sounds fabulous. Photographs of it I assume exist?

ANN WILSON: I have them upstairs, yeah, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: Good.

ANN WILSON: That was in the theater gallery at Det Ny Theater in Copenhagen was the first time I did that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Around the time, then, that you meet and work with Bob Wilson, you're also working with and friendly with Peter and with Paul.

ANN WILSON: I also knew—oh and now I've got to remember—the guy who played the piano so well, begins with a C. Oh, he was marvelous. He was like Phil Glass but not. Oh, and the wonderful dancer.

JONATHAN KATZ: You're not thinking of David Tudor?

ANN WILSON: No, no, no, no I knew David Tudor because he was on the land where Johanna and Stan were living.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: No, it was C, Charlemagne Palestine; Incredible. He did with the piano what Phil did with the whole orchestra.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. Give me the name one more time.

ANN WILSON: Charlemagne Palestine. You've got to hear some tapes of that music.

JONATHAN KATZ: I have no idea who that is.

ANN WILSON: Extraordinary, extraordinary and he was with this woman dancer who has gone on to be quite successful doing things with the ballet at the City Center.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. I'm just trying to place—

ANN WILSON: Simone Forti and Charlemagne were together.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay. I'm just trying to place things because you're involved with Gene. You're friendly with Paul. You're friendly with Peter. You're doing stuff with Bob.

ANN WILSON: And with Agnes.

JONATHAN KATZ: And with Agnes.

ANN WILSON: I was moving around a lot.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, clearly, you were busy.

ANN WILSON: I was busy.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: And I was making art with all of it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and then we talked a little bit over dinner that Agnes occasionally had mental problems.

ANN WILSON: I think, though, I don't want to talk about that. It's not been talked about. It's not been written about and the thing I worry about discussing that is once people get a Van Gogh thing in their mind about somebody, that supersedes seeing the art.

JONATHAN KATZ: No, that's fair. That's fair.

ANN WILSON: They don't need to know that because that was not about the output.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Some things you have to be careful about.

JONATHAN KATZ: Although she does talk about it herself actually.

ANN WILSON: Yes, but it hasn't ever been—have you ever heard it played up?

JONATHAN KATZ: It's been published in articles.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, but we don't want the public to look at Agnes and say, "Here's Van Gogh."

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, that's true.

ANN WILSON: I doubt that half the general public has ever seen Van Gogh because they're looking for the crazy man.

JONATHAN KATZ: No, that's absolutely true.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: Talk to me then about the trajectory of Gene's career is a funny one because he establishes with "The Other Tradition" a fairly substantial footprint. People are really starting to pay attention to this guy. Then what happens?

ANN WILSON: Well, because of pop art. He was the first person after abstract expressionism that could clarify anything in another direction and that direction was about an American art form that somebody like Jim Rosenquist exemplified or Bob Indiana exemplified. He was the first one to pick up on this, to understand. He was the first one to understand that there was a surrealist element to it but it wasn't French surrealism. It was more Freudian juxtaposition.

JONATHAN KATZ: This idea of juxtaposition, of things that don't belong together—

ANN WILSON: Well, *F-111* [1965] was of a piece.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: That's not necessarily so. I think that all—Bob Indiana was of a piece. *The Figure of 5* [*The Figure 5 in Gold*, 1928] for Charles Demuth, that was of a piece. No, no, no there wasn't. But who would have ever put five against those red in that way, the red five, you know? What they were doing was referencing things in a way that had never been referenced before.

JONATHAN KATZ: Does Gene—

ANN WILSON: Of course the fact that the new American sign painters, which was what he first called it prior to pop art, that they were dealing with after abstract expressionism where the literal was not acceptable, that suddenly here was the literal that was going back to Sheeler, Demuth, Marsden Hartley, all of it, Georgia O'Keefe.

JONATHAN KATZ: Deep American roots.

ANN WILSON: Deep American roots.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: Here it was again as abstraction.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: That was the genius of it.

JONATHAN KATZ: But it's striking to me that Johns and Rauschenberg aren't front and center in this story.

ANN WILSON: Sure they are.

JONATHAN KATZ: You think?

ANN WILSON: He wrote about them and Johns doing the critic's glasses.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, that he writes about, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Rauschenberg doing my husband's sheep that he found in some kind of a store that was going out of business that the children used to ride on with the tire around it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, *Monogram* [1959], yeah.

ANN WILSON: Who did the stove?

JONATHAN KATZ: Stove?

ANN WILSON: The stove, it was the kitchen stove. It was another one.

JONATHAN KATZ: Johns or Rauschenberg?

ANN WILSON: No, not Johns and Rauschenberg. It was still another one. I'll think of it. I'm having a senior moment. But it'll come to me.

JONATHAN KATZ: Blessedly few.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: Then so his career develops and then talk to me about the famous protest at MoMA. What do you think that was about?

ANN WILSON: It was that Dada was an outsider art and here were these wealthy people getting out of limos to go see Dada in MoMA which is why, as you told me, Dali and who else—

JONATHAN KATZ: Dali and Duchamp.

ANN WILSON: Loved the protest because the protest was the fact that art in museums was a dead fossil and that that spirit of Dada should never be a dead fossil, particularly with Gene's interest in Kennedy.

I think this is something I very much wanted to talk about and I had it prepared all week. You have to realize that the demonstrations against the Vietnam War were at full tilt. When Dean Rusk came to New York, the crowd in the demonstration went from Central Park to Times Square body to body.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God, wow, all right. So for Gene—

ANN WILSON: When King died and we went down to the courthouse in Foley Square, people with candles were coming as far uptown and that was—that was the whole of America was on fire and Gene went to the funeral.

JONATHAN KATZ: And for Gene therefore there was always a politics animating.

ANN WILSON: Exactly.

JONATHAN KATZ: A moral or ethical politics.

ANN WILSON: A moral, a Kansas—I mean, where he was, that Kansas Bible-belt cloth, it was that it wasn't right.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. I'm trying to pace—

ANN WILSON: And that Kennedy was also from Yale and being from the middle of Kansas, no Yalie would have ever believed in a Golden Age. They would have studied the Golden Age.

They could have spouted every Greek poet in Greek to you but they wouldn't have believed that it ever could happen. Gene believed that Kennedy was going to usher in a Golden Age. He believed it. I mean, I didn't believe in a Golden Age. I thought you've got to be kidding. This is the 20th century.

JONATHAN KATZ: It's so interesting because Gene is in some sense the obverse of Paul because I always read



Paul. Tell me if you agree. I read a kind of humor, a kind of tongue in cheek, a kind of campy resistance. But the one thing I don't read is earnestness in Paul.

ANN WILSON: Paul was earnest.

JONATHAN KATZ: He was?

ANN WILSON: Oh yes. He was totally earnest. But it was about Catholicism.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay, yeah.

ANN WILSON: I mean, that was a vocation.

JONATHAN KATZ: But traditional forms of political engagement did not interest Paul.

ANN WILSON: Yes they did but he wasn't—Gene was—that was one of the things that did Gene in because the wealthy and the museums didn't want to be involved in politics. His great speech was on the steps of Leo Castelli's gallery.

JONATHAN KATZ: Talk about that, will you?

ANN WILSON: Well, that was the speech of your ignorance—you're ignoring what is going on in the country, vis-à-vis half the country—the ghetto is burning when King died and these people were going to openings in their limos with the champagne and not wanting to know that Paul Thek's gold bricks in the doghouse and the collector saying to me, "Well, 'Guernica' was Picasso's least interesting painting," that was the opinion.

They did not want their art sullied by politics and they probably knew plenty about politics because they probably bought a lot of politicians. They're still buying them.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: But they didn't want their art because that was still kind of a 19th century thing of art was refinement and high aesthetic.

JONATHAN KATZ: In some sense, Paul's work has a complicated relationship to the collector and do you think that—

ANN WILSON: Well, what collector is going to collect that kind of thing really?

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: He sold some things. I think that the gallery did well by him, especially the bronzes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. Talk to me if you would about Gene's death and how it happened.

ANN WILSON: I was going—he asked me not to leave and I was going to Paul on Ponza because Paul and I were planning the exhibition in Sweden. I think that was the—it was one of the exhibitions that would have been concurrent with Gene's death. Again, I've got to go to my journals.

JONATHAN KATZ: Understood.

ANN WILSON: I said, "But I'm going because we're planning a museum exhibition and this had been in the works for a long time. I can't stay here Gene." He went to Kansas to see his parents, to see his family. He and his mother were going to see an aunt in western Kansas and a truck jackknifed. They were in a line of cars. A truck jackknifed in front of them and totaled five cars and the people behind them. It was instant death.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: For five families, not just Gene and his mother.

JONATHAN KATZ: My god, wow.

ANN WILSON: There were children involved in that awful, awful accident.

JONATHAN KATZ: How horrible.

ANN WILSON: I didn't know—I was at the time in Delphi in Greece because I had gone from Ponza. I had gone from Ponza to go the monuments in Greece where I'd never been and I was going around—

JONATHAN KATZ: Of all the places to be, my God.

ANN WILSON: I was in Delphi when Gene died but I didn't know he died then. I went back to ponce and Peter Hujar flew to Europe to tell me because he didn't want to tell me over the phone.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God, my God. That's Peter Hujar, wow, wow. In the aftermath—

ANN WILSON: Well, Paul and I were just on the ocean for a month, every day in the boat.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. I'll check on this.

ANN WILSON: Peter didn't have money. I don't know how the hell he got that together.

JONATHAN KATZ: That's a remarkable kindness, remarkable kindness.

ANN WILSON: He was with everyone, with everyone.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, wow.

ANN WILSON: I mean, his pictures of children are so extraordinary, his pictures of animals.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: He had a reverence for the dignity of life, Peter did. He understood it.

JONATHAN KATZ: David Wojnarowicz talks about how Peter took him seriously and made him who he was.

ANN WILSON: I think Peter saw in David himself as a young man because David was coming from similar circumstances of being rejected by his family and I think Peter—because David was much younger. I only met David once toward—at the end of Peter's life I met David. I didn't know David because it was very close to the end.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. So talk about, if you would, Paul's career.

ANN WILSON: He was with Eleanor Ward and I've got a hilarious thing in one of my journals about that. Eleanor, he showed at the Stable. Then he showed with lolas in Paris and lolas made this wonderful book that he made with the photographer. I love that book.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: I think the show in Stockholm where they said it was the new Walden, that was what put him on the map was the Stockholm show. When he showed with Eleanor Ward, first he did the dead hippie in the pyramid that you know Neil Jenney was the person who cast that.

JONATHAN KATZ: I didn't know that.

ANN WILSON: Oh yes, and Neil came when Paul was dying in the hospital. Neil came. They were good friends.

JONATHAN KATZ: I had no idea.

ANN WILSON: Yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did he ever talk to you about the dead hippie and sort of what he was trying to get at?

ANN WILSON: No, he was joking all the time. He didn't allow it to be taken seriously. He took it seriously. But he didn't allow—he wanted an atmosphere of—he was a prankster.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. There were moments in his career where he was fairly celebrated and moments of his career where he didn't seem to have much of an audience at all.

ANN WILSON: When he came back—in Europe he was celebrated, not exactly making money on the newspaper pyramid. He'd sell a bronze now and then, one of the—I love the mice and a piece of cheese. Those things were selling in Europe. I would imagine Paul, for most of his life, lived on about \$10,000 a year, \$8,000 to \$10,000, Peter even less.

Until when he finally got with lolas in New York and then I think he had—when he went into the hospital, no he had \$10,000 a year because the doctor said to me, "Well, why doesn't he take AZT," and in those days, AZT cost \$10,000 a year. I said to the doctor, "Because he lived on \$10,000 a year. How could he afford AZT?"

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, yeah. You told me once about his painting the furniture in Italy.

ANN WILSON: He painted in the pensione. The signorina in the pensione and little Ansel, I bet little Ansel is your age by now—and I loved the signorina. She was just a typical—she could have come out of a Fellini, the lady running the pensione and always making this lunch for us and adored Paul. There would be a table.

We had a little apartment with two bedrooms. His bed was this big old iron bedstead. His bedroom was down a flight of stairs and in the back. Again, the floors were all painted white and he had this old iron bedstead which he had—he painted like the sea, blue, and he had shells hung from the bedstead and he painted on the floor.

I have photos of all this upstairs. Then in the front room was a little kitchen and he painted the table like the waves, blue, and the chairs like ocean painting. My room was a kind of a little cell right off the kitchen through one of these beaded curtains they have in Italy. But then he proceeded to go into every room in the pensione and paint all the furniture like the ocean and she'd go, "*Ah, Señora Paul, qué bella,*" and produce another bottle of wine. She loved it.

JONATHAN KATZ: She loved it.

ANN WILSON: Well, I think maybe it made the pensione—European probably middle-class families or husbands and wives that came there mostly, although a lot of our friends came there, Diane Kelder and I can't remember. A lot of people that we knew were coming through all the time.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you stayed at this place year after year?

ANN WILSON: Year after year after year, yeah, yeah. He finally—he had always wanted—there was a little square house up higher that had a well that you had to get the water and that's what he really wanted because it had a three-degree view of the sea. He finally got that. But that was the last year he was going there. He finally was able to rent that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Your work, at the time that you're making all these—

ANN WILSON: The quilts.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: But I couldn't exactly transport them. I did a lot of painting and drawing, generally in the sketchbooks and I couldn't—when I was working with Bob, you worked 24/7. I'm telling you, start at 10:00 in the morning and it ended at 3:00 in the morning and you were lucky to get a little bit of sleep.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, and were you showing in those days?

ANN WILSON: I showed with Marion Miller.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you feel like—you seemed to be thriving particularly in relationships with others. Did you find this true?

ANN WILSON: Women artists, as I say, you only existed through male artists. But I wasn't with Paul or Bob because of that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: I could have made it when I was with Paley-Lowe Gallery [ph] painting the quilts and I was with Bob. If I had given Bob up and painted those quilts then, that was fairly late in the late '70s. I could have made it.

I could have been Lynda Benglis and I ran away with Bob because people—I was beginning—they were selling me. I was beginning to be known. It was kind of foolish on my part and not not to be done.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. But you went away with Bob because?

ANN WILSON: I was just enamored of the stage. It's the proscenium, the biggest picture frame in the world. He let me direct sometimes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh really?

ANN WILSON: Yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: When you look back over your career, one of the things that's striking is in the relationships with men, we hear a lot of deep and profound emotional relationships but this is a moment that's also seeing the advent really for the first time of women—

ANN WILSON: But I was with A.I.R. Gallery. I was part of that and I was working on Heresies magazine.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh you were?

ANN WILSON: Oh yeah, I wasn't unaware and don't think the girls didn't get after me. Don't you think Harmony didn't say, "Boys, boys, boys, oh it's boys, boys, boys, boys."

JONATHAN KATZ: What about in the '60s? People like Yayoi Kusama, did you know Kusama? Did you know any—well you said you were in Schneemann's work.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, I was in Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy*.

JONATHAN KATZ: How did you meet Schneemann?

ANN WILSON: Who knows? I was hanging around the Judson and again I worked with George Brecht in his pieces and I think that's because of the literature aspect of things.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and how did—there's a lot of debate about the—

ANN WILSON: And also remember the Happenings, remember the ray gun store, remember the Oldenburg's tires, which I watched that night. So the Happenings were—I had been doing the quilts. My form was always collage painted on. So the Happenings were just collage that was theater, big time.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, and did you see—I mean, retrospectively *Meat Joy* became this epic defining work.

ANN WILSON: I didn't see it at that time.

JONATHAN KATZ: You didn't see it that way.

ANN WILSON: I was just throwing fish to the people. I was the maid throwing them the fish.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: I thought it was interesting. But remember, I knew Wilson, and Carolee was small potatoes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right, yeah, and did she talk to you about meaning in that work? Did you all sort of process?

ANN WILSON: Carolee wasn't like that. Carolee was—used her sexual aspect to get through life, I mean, to get her spaces and to raise funds and things. I remember she came to get a job at the University of Maryland where I was teaching and during the interview she pulled grapes out of a very exposed—she didn't get the job, needless to say. The boys were twittering about that for quite some time.

JONATHAN KATZ: And the *Meat Joy* that you were in was in the New York—

ANN WILSON: It was in the Judson Church.

JONATHAN KATZ: So it had earlier been in London and in Paris, right?

ANN WILSON: I think it was later in London in Paris. It moved out from New York because the Europeans got onto us and then we moved out to Europe. It started with the abstract expressionists going there as sort of a lend-lease piece. We aren't barbarians at the end of the war in Germany and the State Department paid to take abstract expressionist paintings to Germany to show that we weren't—

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, that we had free—

[Cross talk.]

ANN WILSON: We weren't these awful conquerors. So American art first came to Europe large scale with the abstract expressionists going in after the Second World War saying, "Hey, we've got culture, too," and of course the young ones cottoned to it and then after that there became this vogue. Diderot came here. There was an exchange going back and forth, a big one. He was a wonderful guy. I liked him.

JONATHAN KATZ: You knew him fairly well?

ANN WILSON: Yeah, he was at the Hotel Chelsea. He came to our house. Bill invited him over.

JONATHAN KATZ: Let's go back to *Meat Joy* for a second. In that work, did you rehearse it?

ANN WILSON: Oh yes, there were rehearsals prior to the work, yeah. I was in another performance piece that was—and I can't remember who that was—but it was down the street a ways with somebody else. I can't remember who.

JONATHAN KATZ: Judson affiliated or no?

ANN WILSON: No, I think it might have been Alison Higgins and one of the Bing, Bing bathtubs or something like that. I can't remember. I was in some of those and I was in the Rauschenberg, that marvelous thing. Gene and I were in it together, where he rented up in the 20s, that what do you call it, where the soldiers meet.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, the drill hall.

ANN WILSON: That one, where the cars were driving around.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right, yes.

ANN WILSON: Gene and I were in that one together.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh wow.

ANN WILSON: That one was—whew, mind-blowing.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, one of the debates about *Meat Joy* is the relationship of gender to the piece. Some people are claiming that the piece is about the—

[Cross talk.]

ANN WILSON: Oh, Carolee was all about tits everywhere, pardon my French, and Carolee was consciously about sexuality.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, but was she consciously about sexuality because—

ANN WILSON: She knew that she could do in your face sexuality and get away with it. If she was a guy, you'd have said she had balls. But she had tits, big time, and that's what she was about. She was working with—I think probably the first woman, although Harmony would probably cut my head off—but Carolee, because it was a heterosexual sexuality. But she was the first woman that put it out there in that way.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah and did you know her? Were you just in the piece or were you sort of friendly with her?

ANN WILSON: No, I knew her. She was around. Carolee was about Carolee. She was like Jill. There was no interchange.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: There were some like that. She was one of them.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you were not close friends, I gather.

ANN WILSON: Nobody was close friends, except maybe what she was going to bed with and I don't know that you call that friendship; anyway.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: But I don't know that I should say that for the Smithsonian. I don't want to say things like that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Well, we can strike that.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, I think that's just for your humor.

JONATHAN KATZ: We'll strike it.

ANN WILSON: But I think I don't want to say things about other artists. I think what Carolee did with female heterosexuality was a breakthrough and she knew she was powerful and she used her power.

JONATHAN KATZ: Was it true that *Meat Joy* was originally planned with everyone naked and it's only because—

ANN WILSON: Oh for sure.

JONATHAN KATZ: So it was just because of law that you had to wear—

ANN WILSON: Oh you didn't want the cops closing the place down, no, no. Bob, we had at first—we had Adam and Eve and we got away with it for a few nights at BAM and then the cops—

JONATHAN KATZ: A real Adam and Eve.

ANN WILSON: A real Adam and Eve. I know Lucia Ruedenberg and Andy Degroat and then the cops said, "No more of that."

JONATHAN KATZ: So nudity was—

ANN WILSON: They'd get you, for sure.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: It wasn't until *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* that you could get away with that kind of stuff.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. How are you making a living through all of these years?

ANN WILSON: I'm a college teacher.

JONATHAN KATZ: You were teaching—

ANN WILSON: I taught at Parsons. I taught at Pratt. I taught at Cooper. I taught at Hunter. I was one of the subway teachers. You know about them in New York? They never give you tenure.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you don't make a lot of money.

ANN WILSON: And you don't make much money at all. I made enough. My loft was \$40 a month or eventually it went up to \$300 a month, that highway robber. In fact I remember Loretta Dunkelman and I discussing in detail whether we should stay there if he was going to be so uppity as to up our rent to \$300 a month. Really!

JONATHAN KATZ: My God. You got medical insurance and all of that?

ANN WILSON: No.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: Medical insurance—the young people today, at the end of my teaching years, could not understand, not thinking primarily medical insurance, primarily retirement insurance. I didn't start thinking that until I was 40 and came up to Dutchess Community college because I said, "I'd better get off the mattress on the floor because when I get old I'll have no old age, nothing." I didn't think about that, 45 when I came to Dutchess.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you taught at Dutchess how long?

ANN WILSON: Yes, and there was no life after New York. But by that time everything had died down by the time I had gone to Dutchess. But I went to Dutchess so I would get retirement and medical insurance. Prior to that, you didn't have it as a subway teacher. You still don't have it. My daughter doesn't have it teaching for Hunter.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. It's an exploitative system.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah. I mean, there is some talk of giving adjuncts health insurance. Just now it's coming up.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. But I just want to sort of end on this, the sort of early feminist, if one wants to use this word, feminist artists, people like Kusama, did you know them?

ANN WILSON: I knew Harmony. I knew everybody at A.I.R. and the quilts that u was working on—

JONATHAN KATZ: But that's already '70s. I'm talking '60s. Did you know any of the—

ANN WILSON: In the '60s it wasn't cohesive. That wasn't a movement yet. Women weren't out from under yet. But I had been doing the quilts really since I was with Bill. I got those first quilts down in Tillman and for me they were a history.

That little book that I gave you has the whole—all of that *métier* about the quilts being the history of who made them, the history of what the garments were that went into them, were they a bridal gown, were they a man's work shirt, were they a pair of blue jeans, what went into the quilts, were they—several of the beautiful quilts I got were African-American quilts.

That wonderful Gee's Bend show shows that all the black women were quilting as well and I got several of those because we were on Tillman and there were black towns and white towns. The blacks had their own church and they lived down a little road in little houses and I would go to their yard sales and pick up their old tattered quilts for 30 cents.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: So there were—I experienced that, the pre-Martin Luther King South and I remember Bill and I went to Martin Luther King's *I've Been to the Mountain*. That was probably the most significant day of my life to have experienced that. We got there and the Washington Mall was wall to wall people and everybody on Tillman, which was the south—

JONATHAN KATZ: Unreconstructed South.

ANN WILSON: Unreconstructed South and they said, "Oh, you'll be killed," and we got down there and there were these beautiful black kids, very proud in new jump [ph] jeans and bare feet and they brought them up in buses from churches in the South.

They had a little tent city for them and these kids had never been out of whatever county, five miles away from where they were born. They were so sweet. They were so pure. Dr. King was everything to them.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: It was just an amazing thing because I am meeting—talk about unreconstructed. These are little farm kids that are—the family that owned the farm had owned the slaves that were their grandparents and these kids had never moved a step beyond that.

JONATHAN KATZ: This is a little bit—

ANN WILSON: This is amazing to have witnessed.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, I imagine, such a seminal moment in American history.

ANN WILSON: Well, that also, that these children who were brought up on the buses represented the fact that the black was not free and this was the moment when it all changed.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: And the Washington Mall was wall to wall people as far as you could see in any direction.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah and how do you understand Faith Ringgold's quilts? Do you see relationship to yours?

ANN WILSON: They were later.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: They were well after what that text said because mine started in the '50s.

JONATHAN KATZ: And so that's what I'm asking. Do you feel a—

ANN WILSON: No, not at all because I think she was coming from a different—she was coming from a feminist point of view that women had made these. But I think her quilts were political. She consciously was constructing statements, don't you think?

JONATHAN KATZ: Yes, I do think.

ANN WILSON: I was talking about American history, the history of the farmyard, the history of the family, the history of—and the fact that the women were the first abstract artists in America, I thought, through the quilt. I

was talking Moby Dick, the quilt on the ship.

So I was living with Bill Wilson also. So it was a very formal, classical—it wasn't Americana. It was American history that I was dealing with and the woman's part in it. I wasn't conscious that it was a feminist act. It was just something that for me it was also Jacque Guillon did quilts. They weren't quilts. He didn't think of them as quilts.

But I was also making an art context with that. I was repainting them. I've always been—Ellsworth Kelly said that he was a nature artist and Agnes was a nature artist. Well, I was always a nature artist. So the colors in the quilts—I have one upstairs I can show you. The colors in the quilts are the colors of the seasons, just as I'm working with the leaves or the flowers.

I have always—that's been my theme and it probably comes from having grown up in western Pennsylvania with those marvelous old stone houses that you'd walk through the woods and here would be a stone house deserted by a stream with the coal cellar still there.

I was deeply impressed in my childhood and youth with that. Where we lived was on the edge of farmland that was about to become a suburb. But it wasn't yet and the farms were deserted and there was a pathos about that that was so deeply moving. I think as an adolescent I grasped that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Last question, because we're running out of time, talk to me about Ray Johnson and how you know him, how he and Bill met.

ANN WILSON: Well, he came along with Bill.

JONATHAN KATZ: So they'd known each other?

ANN WILSON: Oh, forever, yes and I went around. I would do several nights with Ray going around the city from parties to people's houses to people's studios to meeting somebody in a café. Ray was always making the rabbit pun or there was always some pun on something with everybody. It was he was—it was like Commedia dell'arte. It was a performance. Ray was a great performer.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you ever sense the man behind the performance?

ANN WILSON: Ray was an enigma. He wasn't to Bill. But to me and to many other people, he did not reveal himself as a person. Although once somebody attacked Bill outside the house and he ran out and built the guy up.

JONATHAN KATZ: Ray beat the guy up?

ANN WILSON: Yeah,

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh my God.

ANN WILSON: Because somebody had thrown a blanket over Bill and was going to try to steal. Bill screamed and Ray went out and beat the guy up.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh my God, I can't imagine Ray beating anyone.

ANN WILSON: He did, he did.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh my God.

ANN WILSON: He was a policeman's son.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: Ray was a large and strong man. He wasn't any kind of wimp.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. When you knew him, did he ever talk about—

ANN WILSON: Ray talked in puns. Ray did not dialogue. It was always some kind of pun on what you were doing or what somebody else was doing. Dorothy—[inaudible]—cat, something like that. It was always a pun.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you never felt like you could actually have a talk with him about meaning in his work?



ANN WILSON: I wouldn't have thought of even talking to him about his work. You looked at his—I remember going to Ray's. He lived next to the Brooklyn Bridge and Bill and I walked up God knows how many flights. It was above the level of the cars on the bridge. That was a tall building, with these slate hall floors in one of those three-room tenements.

In that tenement was a refrigerator in which he had—I think he kept his tea box in there and a lemon in there and three cups and saucers because he would serve tea if you went to see him, and honey.

He had a worktable in that front room and all around that apartment were stacks of collages going up to the ceiling. He would take a collage down and show it to you and then put it back. I remember that day very, very well. Those at the time were the thin yellow strip collages.

I traded one of those with George Ashley to get Bob Wilson's first watercolor about this big—I've got it up there somewhere—for *Deafman Gance* because I wanted that very, very badly and Bill had a huge Ray collection.

JONATHAN KATZ: How did Bill get that huge Ray collection? Did he buy it?

ANN WILSON: He bought them and he paid for the mailings. He essentially helped Ray survive. Ray wasn't exactly a nine-to-fiver.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, I kind of noticed.

ANN WILSON: Until Ray got the gallery—and Ray wasn't too cooperative with the gallery in terms of having shows and things. But things began to sell late in his life. But Bill was I think largely responsible for his economic survival.

JONATHAN KATZ: Did he do any correspondence with you? Did you do any correspondence with him?

ANN WILSON: I have somewhere these funny little letters, "Please send this to somebody," yeah and there'd be seven rabbits on the bottom or something. Yeah, I had a bunch of those.

JONATHAN KATZ: Stupid question, but I just have to ask it, rabbits in Ray, rabbits in Paul, any relationship?

ANN WILSON: None.

JONATHAN KATZ: None whatsoever.

ANN WILSON: None and I don't think Ray and Paul knew each other at all.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh really?

ANN WILSON: Nor would they. Paul you could talk to about his work and Paul was—it's interesting they were both from the working class. Paul's father was a working class man and so was Ray's, a policeman. They were both from the same level in society.

But they were two different types of people. Ray had this specific wit and intelligence but it depended on punning in another kind of way. It was a play on other people, other people's work or something, although I remember after I had left Bill, Gene had sent me—Bill had sent me—Ray sent me a skeleton when I left Bill. Gene got angry at Ray's implication and tore it up.

JONATHAN KATZ: Talk to me about the implication.

ANN WILSON: Well, it was that I was dead, that I had left Bill and the children and I was in essence dead. So Ray sent me this skeleton and Gene got very angry and tore it up.

JONATHAN KATZ: Gene and Ray were not close generally?

ANN WILSON: No, they wouldn't be. It was two different kinds of mind. Ray wasn't exactly writing *The Other Tradition*.

JONATHAN KATZ: Ray also seemed to be—how do I put this, but Ray seemed to be—

ANN WILSON: And also because of Ray being close to Bill, that would have been an impossible connection.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. But also tell me if you would agree from this. From my sort of sexuality studies perspective, Ray represented a kind of earlier moment about sexuality where you never talked about it, right?

ANN WILSON: Well, he would do—he did all these things of James Dean. He did a lot of obvious homoerotic male

imagery. You couldn't miss it, all these guys with gun holsters.

JONATHAN KATZ: No, no it's true.

ANN WILSON: No, no I mean it was homoerotic imagery and anybody at the time would recognize it as such. But again, I wasn't picking up on those metaphors then.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: I wasn't even picking them up with Paul until much later when I figured out about the gladiator. But it was when I started writing about him that I started thinking about that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Explain what you mean.

ANN WILSON: I wasn't considering the gladiators, the cut-apart gladiator. Paul was doing two—three things. One was the Catholicism. One was an autobiography. His work was always an autobiography and there was a definite strong homoerotic aspect to the body. But it was his body. He was a gladiator as an artist. So there were a lot of levels to what—Paul wasn't doing specifically just homoerotic camp at all.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right.

ANN WILSON: But it was always layered. But it was there.

JONATHAN KATZ: I guess what I'm trying to get at is how do you understand the specific resonances of the gladiator. Sure, the gladiator is a homoerotic figure. But there are lots of other potential homoerotic figures. Why a gladiator?

ANN WILSON: I think his image of the gladiator was to be an artist in society was that you had to be a gladiator or that you were in combat to survive. But the gladiator, if you look at the foot of the gladiator or the skin or the body or the butterflies coming off the arm, there's a definite homoerotic aspect. But I only came to that much later, the understanding of that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, but there's also a lot about death in that and sacrifice.

ANN WILSON: Yes, well that's Catholic.

JONATHAN KATZ: Catholic, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Can't be a Catholic and not not look at that man on the cross.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: So there's also—and the Roman gladiator took place in the Colosseum and they were martyrs.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, all of which were—

ANN WILSON: It just was so complex.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, this is great. Thank you.

ANN WILSON: All right. Is that enough?

JONATHAN KATZ: No we're going to do tomorrow. But that's enough for today.

[END TRACK AAA\_wilson09\_7760.]

ANN WILSON: I work. All my writing comes from my primary texts.

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay.

ANN WILSON: So now first some pictures, where I got the pictures—

JONATHAN KATZ: It is July 12th. I am with Ann Wilson and she will be reading from journals—

ANN WILSON: Reading and extrapolating.

JONATHAN KATZ: And extrapolating from journals. And you will tell us what date the journals are because then we can get a little—

ANN WILSON: I have got dates; I have got names, all kinds of things. Yeah, here is George Brecht.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, wow.

ANN WILSON: Let's see if I can find what I want to show you first. And then I will—and then in those—one of those, hopefully is some stuff. I will just be Xeroxing—Peter Hujar made a gorgeous picture of Gene and I. And so you shall have that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Great.

ANN WILSON: And I have things in here like Virgil Tompkins [ph] original production, Bob Indiana with Bob Indiana's staff.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh my gosh.

ANN WILSON: I mean, these journals—I just glued it in.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: Who knew?

JONATHAN KATZ: Note to Smithsonian, fabulous journals.

ANN WILSON: Little stuff. These fabulous journals they are getting is Lucy Lippard is busy boxing all of hers. Now, those, that is something precious because Lucy wrote about everybody and was involved in—

JONATHAN KATZ: Knew everybody.

ANN WILSON:—and was a good writer and a wonderful thinker. I talked to her the other day. There is a Gene as a Yaley. And these I will get to you. Somewhere—I think that girl moved it—I have these—this one of Gene in here. This one was [paid ?] or towards the end. I have to put that back. This is the Yippin [ph] at Grand Central. So you have to understand that his talk at Castelli, Gene Swenson's talk at Castelli came with the Yippin at Grand Central and the Vietnam War protests, which were thousands of people. So it was in the air of the time.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Stuff like this.

JONATHAN KATZ: I am looking at 1967, John Giorno, Chromosome by Jerome [ph] with Brice Marden, Anne Waldman, Tony Musman [ph], Michael McClanathan and then a Deborah Hay piece, another Giorno and then my goodness, Rauschenberg with everybody. [Laughs.] Brice Marden, Mel Bochner, wow.

ANN WILSON: And how simply it was printed.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: I will give that back. It goes—I have got to glue it back in. I have got to get out the rubber cement. And this is—this is the protest that was happening when he was doing his MoMA protest.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God. Wow.

ANN WILSON: That is the Dean Rusk, one part of it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: And you noticed black white.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON:—which for that, you know—

JONATHAN KATZ: It was notable. Yeah.

ANN WILSON: And there is Gene with his question mark in front of MoMA. You shall have that. And here is *Oh, Dada, Poor Dada, MoMA is Hanging You*.

JONATHAN KATZ: [Laughs.] Bravo.

ANN WILSON: And somewhere I have taken some of this, but I will have to get it—those are the twins—

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: The babies. Wait, where is it? There was all this stuff. It must have been—the dada is dead, MoMA is dead, celebrate in *The New York Times*. He took out this whole series of ads. This was what we handed out for the MoMA protest.

JONATHAN KATZ: A call to cultural revelation. We call on all groups to join us on the evening of March 25th in front of the Museum of Modern Art from 7:00 to 11:00 p.m. The evening will be dedicated to the ritual disestablishment of dada and surrealism. MoMA is dead. Dada is dead. [In French]—celebrate the rites of spring. Recreate with us the first ritual act, the transformation.

ANN WILSON: And look at how that was simple. And then here is another one of those *New York Times* ads.

JONATHAN KATZ: And how did he pay for *The New York Times* ads?

ANN WILSON: Probably with every cent he had.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: And Freud is dead, so too is Marx and modern art. And this is the list of what was in the galleries that week. The way of art.

JONATHAN KATZ: So he was doing a number of these?

ANN WILSON: This was all around that question mark when he was picketing MoMA.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: In one of these articles, Gregory Battcock writes that—I will take that where that goes—Greg Babcock writes about that MoMA was—Museum of Modern Art hires guards to keep Swenson out. That is a Babcock review.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God. And that is true?

ANN WILSON: Yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow. And how long did the protest go on?

ANN WILSON: One night we were all wearing blankets and dancing in a circle. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: It got a lot of press.

ANN WILSON: Well, it was a big fancy opening, where, you know, the ones that loved it, those two surrealists—

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, Dali and Duchamp. Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Of course, all of the well to do wanted to meet him. Now, I will start to read—[inaudible].

JONATHAN KATZ: There you go.

ANN WILSON: I will just read some. I will come, of course, across Jim's after you have left. Is it in here? Which one was it? Something I am looking for. This was the year Gene died, but this is not the one I want to read. This is about Peter—[inaudible]. Oh, yes. This is—there is Thek's. This is Gene—he could be joyous. This is Gene and I on Fire Island at a bonfire. Here we are on Fire Island.

We were—[inaudible]. Walk on the moon was gray television and dreamlike. Today I fly to Italy. Just something here. Took a masculine trip yesterday, Sunday, to separate out that school year from myself. It didn't work at first, but then it did very much. Asked Gene questions about the crucifixion. Thought about Christ on Palm Sunday as ritual for me. I find the fact of the crucifixion itself, the violence of it obscures what Christ himself was. Thought about Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, as well as Christ, or the same as. Felt separated from people probably because of the exclusive homosexual cast of the scene. But I myself really felt no erotic impulses on the trip, though eroticism was fairly florid all around me, feeling beyond it.

Looked at the book of medieval illuminations. They were very, very lovely. The gradation of soft color with hard form and the inclusion of words. Thought briefly about making a prayer book and also had met Bob Indiana for breakfast on Saturday, who mentioned putting the prayer cards on wood. We went out to the sea and I walked

down the beach really finally not wanting companionship. Felt more inside myself, more complete. The walk by the ocean, nature seemed indifferent to my humanity.

I did not feel a sense of romantic communication with it. The sea seemed lovely, but immense. I thought for a while of Sartre, existential thought that nature and I were without a god, without a contact. Then I thought how Buddha and Socrates and Plato and Christ had all said it was all about love. Gene pointed out some strange sea anemones, half plant, half animal, which moved rhythmically with the brine. Just brute nature moving all their parts alike, moving in some inexplicable way alive like I am alive, but so far away.

The sea was blue, the sky clear blue, the moon out, a vast empty rhythm. A fishing boat on the sea, Christ the fisherman. I thought of the 20th century, how it was beyond the wildest Roman dream of an empire, then of the 10th century, the last millennium, the Crusades, the Holy Grail, Romanesque art, that period of greatest spiritual fervor. And then the Renaissance, how Florence was such an elegant city designed with the grace and art and eternity in mind. Then back to the sea and its wildness.

Then I thought of Picasso's blue period, Madonna by the sea and what 20th century thing that was to do to put her by the wildness of the sea by the overturned boat. Peter took pictures of me as I came out of my thoughts about the sea. I felt more whole, more autonomous, less in need of human contact. I wanted to absorb the simplicity of the clear blue sky, the white moon and the wildness of the sea.

When we returned toward the boat, there was an iridescence on the ocean. The sand was red in the evening sky. And a cloud arched up like the dome of one of those Renaissance ceilings. A kite up in the sky carried the sunlight down on its line.

So that is one.

JONATHAN KATZ: And that is 1969?

ANN WILSON: This would have been—this book was 1968.

JONATHAN KATZ: '68, okay.

ANN WILSON: But drugs were a big part.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: They were an art supply for everybody.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Now I have—[inaudible]. This is from the loft. An altar I made in the corner, to some South American Indians, I might add.

JONATHAN KATZ: It is enormous the loft.

ANN WILSON: Oh, yes. It was over 150 feet long, 30 feet wide. It was on the corner of Canal Street. And here are the incredible string band, which Paul and I—that was our mantra music. This is what was on the altar, this kind of thing.

JONATHAN KATZ: And did Paul have sort of non-Catholic spiritual beliefs?

ANN WILSON: Not to my knowledge. He was too much of a—

JONATHAN KATZ: Catholic.

ANN WILSON: And remember, he came from a working class family.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Gene, what were his—

ANN WILSON: Gene was involved in Martin Luther King. But he wasn't at all Bible Belt. He didn't have any—I don't think he had a religious impulse in the way that Paul and I did. Once a Catholic, always a Catholic. I think Gene wanted out of Kansas only. And that was not what he—[inaudible]. We were on the beach. [Inaudible.] I had a wonderful description of Gene in one of these things.

JONATHAN KATZ: While we are waiting for that, Ann, can I just ask you when you moved away to New York for the first time, what year was it, from the city? Sorry, I am asking you a date again.

ANN WILSON: [Laughs.] I think it would have been '73, around in there.

JONATHAN KATZ: Seventy-three. Did you know Gregory Babcock?

ANN WILSON: Very well. I lived across the hall from him in a summer sublet before I found the loft.

JONATHAN KATZ: Can you describe him in those days? How did he strike you?

ANN WILSON: He was intense. He was very sophisticated. He had a high energy and the apartment was filled with young people because he taught a class, I think, out at City College.

JONATHAN KATZ: And he was openly gay, right?

ANN WILSON: Oh, everybody that was gay was openly gay. There were no secrets in New York.

JONATHAN KATZ: Because the archives have his papers and they are quite remarkably clear about sexuality.

ANN WILSON: Oh, yes. Well, there was the baths. There was no restraint before AIDS. And nobody in New York City in a sophisticated art circle would—you know, it wasn't under cloaks as if you lived in Pittsburgh.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah. And that was true for gay men and lesbian communities?

ANN WILSON: The lesbians were quieter about it. And people were quiet about it if they worked for MoMA or things like that. Allen Rosenbaum, I remember. You had to be quiet about it if you were working at Princeton. You could do it, but you didn't talk about it with your bosses. But out on the streets and in New York, you know, there was that job—[inaudible]—you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, sure.

ANN WILSON: And I think that is still pretty much obtains [ph]. Gene said he hoped Jim Rosenquist would go back behind Monet, in general behind, he said. But I suddenly saw something in the scale or the way Monet blew up shape that could be used. So Gene saw things—I think he still saw things from an art historic—Gene—Gene's dress or Gene in blue at his time, faded blue jeans, loose worn more as a countryman than a city man. Brown socks and tennis shoes. Their off-whiteness with the blue, a jumping stick contrast contributing a slight buoyance to the otherwise subdued figure.

He was a blue Russian Cossack in a cotton blouse with this, a priest's neck and vertical stripe halfway down on the right side of blue peasant embroidery. This blue was dark blue. His face in this shirt has the look of an aristocratic student somewhat neurasthenic with an unstudied aesthetic bone structure. The whole effect looks as if he were an aristocrat posing as a peasant. But we are an America in the late era of the hippie. He wears a string of apple seeds as a necklace. His face is white or pale. His eyebrows brown-blond, his eyes pale blue, but tautened from the Kansas plains somewhat.

Sometimes there is a horizon-scanning squint. The essence of this personality is a shy bright boy from Kansas with the fire of an aristocratic Eastern scholarly education and the moral force of a fundamentalist preacher. He was charm and drama and a lack of self-knowledge. Really he enters ideas as a fundamentalist and refines them as a classicist. But many times, the fundamentalist force is confused by the source. His Dionysius misplaces his Apollo. He has not got the antithesis worked out.

His voice can be tender, vehement, raving, tired or delicate. It is quiet and he pronounces words in an Eastern manner, but somehow extends them to the length of the plains and maintains the simplicity of his childhood address, a pale fury. "This has taken too long. I will have to try again." Sometimes he looks frausley [ph].

JONATHAN KATZ: That is great, Ann. That is just great. You are a writer.

ANN WILSON: I don't think he knew I was up to that. Let's see.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, you were telling me earlier that you had a bunch of similar journals about the '50s, but they were sadly destroyed.

ANN WILSON: I have one in there that I can show you that—

JONATHAN KATZ: One remaining.

ANN WILSON:—will give you—here is Duchamp's' death and we are—well, there is our date here, November 13, 1968, Duchamp's' death. I met Duchamp at Teeny Duchamp's because Jill was a close friend of both Teeny and Duchamp. And he invited me to his studio—

JONATHAN KATZ: Jill Johnston?

ANN WILSON: Jill. And Duchamp at that party invited me to his studio on 14th Street, where I went, where there was just the chessboard, a skylight and four chairs. That was it. So Teeny had been a very wealthy girl from Ohio and very polite, but an Ohio simplicity about her, very sweet. I liked Teeny a lot. And so with Teeny, he maintained they had a house. They owned an entire house I think on 10th Street between Avenue of the Americas and Fifth Avenue. So it was a luxe living life, but then he maintained his own aesthetic in this loft on 14th Street.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you went to visit him at the loft?

ANN WILSON: He invited me to come when we met at dinner. And we had a long conversation, which I didn't record stupidly because, you know, this Frenchy [ph] artist. Who knew? [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: And at that point, was he a hero to you?

ANN WILSON: Not to me. It wasn't my sensibility. I had come off of—[inaudible]. Agnes was my hero, heroine, and Lenore. And Ray adored it and Ray went up there a lot. He was a boy's thing, you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: And was he more forthcoming in person than he was in his art?

ANN WILSON: He was warm, personable and charming. He was a charming Frenchman, a hand kisser, an utterly charming Frenchman, brilliant, of course, and very open to women, as well as men. I mean, he didn't discriminate that women were not equal intellectually because he was European and they didn't—Europeans understood that women could be intelligent. Americans never did. Oh, my God.

So let's see. Now, where are we here? Went to a meditation session. This is just giving you a circle of what was going on in the '60s. This is January 29, '69. Went to a meditation session with some Indian guru who played the tambura and found it hard to keep my mind quiet that long. It kept making pictures. And besides, my ankle fell asleep and incense always reminds me of my Catholic girlhood. But I did get something or other out of it since I haven't gone to work for two days. [Laughs.]

I am thoroughly high these days. Work keeps me even. But I have got enough painting started that I could close the door and not go out a lot. Nice people around me now, the miracle people and pure again. I find miracles recur once in a while. Everyone is going away. I hope I can keep this spirit high.

And here is a little bit about Basel [ph], but let's see. Basel is desperate about his art, which was never picked up on. So that you will know if you go there. He is a panting dog about somebody who has never seen his art. So you have to diplomatically deal with it. But Martha is—she helps him, helps him with it. But they are—they will be clear. On an aspect, Gene was always at their place or my place, so they will be clear on Gene. But you have to separate it from what Gene thought of Basel's paintings—[inaudible].

JONATHAN KATZ: I do, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Reading *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *Creative Mythology*, William James, Joseph Campbell, *Masks of God*, Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, *The Ladder of Perfection*, *Penguin's Cloud of Unknowing*, *Protestant Mystic*, *Tibetan Book of Great Liberation*, Isuzu [ph] Taylor, *Protestant Mystery*, *16th century of practical mysticism*, *Loyola Spiritual Exercises*, tantric text at Riverside Museum. Abraham Maslow, *Toward a New Psychology of Being*, *Bead Game* [ph], John Cage's *Silence*, *Education of Henry Adams* and *Dr. Faustus* by Thomas Mann.

So the fact is you kind of walk—

JONATHAN KATZ: The range.

ANN WILSON: That was floating around. That was what was floating around among everybody.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. I noticed other sort of famous figures of the period—Goodman, Marcusa [ph] were not on that list. Were you not reading them?

ANN WILSON: They were political males and they were not—they were not within art circles. And art circles were political about the Vietnam War, the protests. But that was coming out of Brilk [ph] or Hess or Mann and an idea of humanity that didn't include slaughter. Goodman was more about an establishment of a perfect society. He was like Bucky Fuller. Good god, Bucky Fuller, that was fabulous to go to a Bucky Fuller lecture, which could go on for days. And Bucky Fuller—well, he was a wonderful one. He was just so, so passionate about everything.

JONATHAN KATZ: Were you convinced by him? Did you think he was a real guru?

ANN WILSON: We knew he had—he wasn't a guru. He was too funny to be a guru. But he had a vision of a

utopian society. There were a lot of them floating around in those days with the farm communes and all of it. So that vision of what Gene referred to as a golden age, that vision obtained with a lot of people. I was too cynical. I was a girl from the steel town. You know, I couldn't be that—that kind of idealism. I could have Catholic idealism.

The broken bottles at Tompkins Square Park and I wear two colors of purple. People came up through the cracked cement, white faced from winter, streaming capes and necklaces and garlands. I will buy something pretty today to remind me of butterflies out of cocoons and resurrections.

JONATHAN KATZ: I remember seeing drawings in these. These are your drawings?

ANN WILSON: These are just me scribbling around. That is the altar. But remember, I was also doing the full-sized quilts are all against the walls. It was like my reading. I was omnivorous with imagery. Let's see. Paul Thek came back from Holland with a flying figure covered with fish hung in the tree in the garden of the stable gallery and his nothing was to go in the gallery. He took my mountain painting and I felt like a harmony. In fact, while Paul was here, I felt some of the old gorgeous magic and sweetness to life between us. It was hard when he left. This was the beginning of April.

There were so many stories at the time. Paul telling about being a boy laying on a golf course holding a flashlight up to the stars, creating a line between him and them. Gene's story about the tears on the mirror when a tear formed in a man's eye.

Holy Saturday, it rained. We went to the peace rally. Thousands of people with umbrellas, daffodils, a procession of red flags moving beyond head tops. People following a drummer, lots of people following a drummer. Lots of people sitting on the high ledges of rocks down Madison Avenue to Jim Rosenquist's show, soft lovely, soft blue. Butter sliding down it. A rainbow of phone wires. Silver canvases at the corners of the room reflecting the colors.

I look at the reflections in the rain. Paul says later why can't he admit he is making a chapel. We go in the rain getting quite wet to the Fillmore East to hear the Chambers brothers. We decide to make a church. That is not the right word. There is no word for what we want to make.

The Javanese were happy gilding their temples until we told them about coffee beans. We went backstage at the Fillmore East. There were three tiers of electronic equipment. Flower children in beads, long skirts, working the light show on the giant canvas stretched in front of them, which swirled in time to the music. I said what would have Degas have done with this?

Later during the Easter celebration, the band vibrating up into infinity, we stood and clapped within an hour. It was a revival meeting, I realized.

And there was that aspect of those of the—[inaudible]—of the concerts. And if it was in the American grain, it was Americans gathering in some spiritual ecstasy. Let's see.

JONATHAN KATZ: And was Gene closer to one of these artists over another?

ANN WILSON: He loved Rosenquist best. And it wasn't about erotic love. It was that he really thought Rosenquist was Manet. [Laughs.] Gene is always harking to some golden age, something like that. And there is Thek with the stars—that's an etching he made me. I showed you, I think, the journals before, so we don't waste time on that.

JONATHAN KATZ: I loved that idea of holding a flashlight up to connect to the stars.

ANN WILSON: Well, he always had the stars. That was a central moment for him. Let's see. Went to Basel and Carl's [sp] show. Two painters painting villas of space in opalescent colors. Their paintings flow into each other. It was dedicated to Carl's child who had been killed by a truck four weeks ago. We were all swung into the thing. Then a group came to the loft and we ate an Easter supper of eggrolls and ginger. Then we dedicated the altar. The altar was for Carl's son. The altar is two old clocks, one on top of the other, with a third on pillars on top of them and a narrow box full of shelves supporting it. The pictures stand around the base. Four candles, red, blue, yellow and green, burn in front of it. And incense, there are flowers and on the shelves are things given me.

Your egg is there and some of the Civil War buttons I gave Paul, the package. Jill gave me a little ceramic picture from the Indians. And Gene gave me a John Cage script, which is on the door. Paintings are in the cloth door circles. Two painting scrolls hang on either side of the altar, red and yellow. It is yellow ochre.

Paul and I talked of doing a chapel. People with butterflies coming out of their heads.

JONATHAN KATZ: Why butterflies? What did butterflies signify?

ANN WILSON: Resurrection out of the cocoon. I hate to have been so Catholic. Thank god I found out about



Buddha. I begin to see paintings again. The prayer cards begin to shape themselves. Carl at dinner gave me Dura [ph]. And tonight I saw him with a relevance I have never seen. Of course, I must study how he painted detail in oil. Carl was a good painter. He died, unfortunately, but losing that son killed part of him.

The Peaceable Kingdom, which I want—I must get a print of from the Met. I saw The Peaceable Kingdom flowing out of Dura. It must be a study of Dura and Blake and Odilon Redon and, of course, I must etch again. But I had never seen The Peaceable Kingdom genuflection of the Christ. Of course, I saw Mary Mother, but the tender Christ, I must investigate the crucifixion, the darker theme. And Dura has also the reaper. The first line of my first prayer card will be in the Dura wings and 1512 then A.D. on either side. The line in the middle will be the angel wing calls again.

I think the mood will be dedicatory. Dura's self-portrait looks like Paul. The moon with the wing on it. You know, there it is. And Paul's attitude toward Buddhism was when they have such glory right here, why would they go all the way to India? [Laughs.] That is my—[inaudible].

I can see in those days. Gene said I have been climbing mountains and coming down the same side, never getting over the cliff. Susie Best [ph] said they had a leak in their apartment and no one did anything about it until Joseph tied a rope to the leak and the water ran out into the hall and the hall flooded and the janitor turned off the water in the building because of Susie's leak. And the tenants called the landlord and said they wouldn't pay their rent as long as the hall was flooded because of Susie's leak. And the landlord called the plumber who fixed Susie's leak, so the water could be turned back on, so the tenants could pay their rent. Typical New York story.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, Susie here is—

ANN WILSON: Susie Best.

JONATHAN KATZ: Best.

ANN WILSON: She was a little roommate, very sweet young child. I don't know what happened to Susie. There is too much seriousness of—[inaudible]—in here. That is what I mean. They should be selective. I think the whole thing should be entered, but then there should be editing.

JONATHAN KATZ: Well, I think what we can do here is we can enter everything and you can block out what you —

ANN WILSON: I just think you know about the twins or a lot of this ruminating of my interior thoughts is not—

JONATHAN KATZ: Well, there I disagree with you. Your interior thoughts are an emblem of the age.

ANN WILSON: This is Kate and Errol [ph] listening to Paul play the guitar. He loved kids. He was wonderful.

What is this? Jill Johnston's dance journal. Now, these were very—these were cult writing. She just went out at night and wrote from the minute she stepped out the door, on. And this is a typical thing. And everybody was reading Jill. She lived in the loft with me.

Holy christometer. She had had it with Paul and I. Dance journal by Jill Johnston. A lady at Jasper Johns' house last night, where a black-tie thing was going on as a benefit for Merce Cunningham who also danced for the contributors, told me they didn't understand my writing anymore. I used to be so good. At the black-tie dinner beforehand uptown, the president of the Whitney said who reads the Village Voice anymore? He didn't care for my velour Garbo hat or my crushed velvet pants. And he tried to take my drink away from me when we were going into dinner.

At dinner, I was stranded with five of them, all bending my jugular over goodwill cultural intentions their money organizations, Whitney, et cetera and trying to find out at the same time if I could possibly be happy in a pair of silly-looking pants. I wanted to tell the story about Jung telling Joyce that the difference between him, Joyce and his daughter was that Joyce was jumping off the bridge and his daughter was falling off the bridge. But I got to thinking instead about what my friend, Ann Wilson, said of how she suddenly understood what South American coups were all about. She said it must happen that the governor of a province is giving a dinner and six revolutionaries walk in and the governor doesn't have enough dessert plates. And pretty soon the governor isn't running the mansion anymore.

Something like that happened at Ann's house one night when six of us were gorging ourselves on a French

friend's cuisine and six other weird-looking people, Latin types in low hats and wild colors unexpectedly entered and appeared to feel at home. We offered them some food and they accepted. We got up so they could sit down and they accepted. Then a little later, we could be observed as a party of six Anglo-Saxon types enjoying ourselves talking on the floor about 10 yards from the table where our new Latin friends were holding forth with food and a conversation on their own.

And at that point, Ann gave us her astonishing revelation on the nature of a coup d'état. I also thought to tell my black-tied dinner companions about what I had read in the Times on the German Krupp dynasty.

JONATHAN KATZ: And at this point, we are talking here, this is again '69?

ANN WILSON: This is December 19, 1968.

JONATHAN KATZ: '68. And at this point, you have known Jill Johnston how long?

ANN WILSON: Jill lived on the Bowery. And then she got thrown out of her loft for non-payment of rent. And so she came to live with me. That was fairly easy because I was up in the morning at my painting and Jill was out all night and sleeping until she went out all night. And she wouldn't take me with her on these jobs to these black-tie dinners because she said I was socially impossible. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: By which she meant what?

ANN WILSON: She meant that she wasn't going to take me to a black-tie dinner with any richies [ph] where she could dominate the scene as the only bohemian. She was famous for jumping into wealthy people's swimming pools. [Laughs.] Jill was brilliant, absolutely brilliant. Now more about Gene. I have lots and lots—

JONATHAN KATZ: And while you are looking, let me ask you why did you leave the city in '73?

ANN WILSON: In '73, I got a job.

JONATHAN KATZ: That was the Duchess.

ANN WILSON: Seventy-three—wait a minute. Was I with Paul then? I went to Woodstock. Gotta look it up why or when, but I got the job at Duchess. When I retired from Duchess, I moved. I bought the house in Woodstock to be near the monastery. But '73, '74, I was with Wilson. And I didn't give that loft up until '75 because I think Bob forgot to pay the rent. But in any case—I should never have given it up, although the knee would never have made it to the top floor of that loft. But I was touring with Wilson.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you toured with Wilson for how long?

ANN WILSON: I toured with Wilson '74 to—I think he broke the company about '79, '80, when he was going with a professional company. That is a whole 'nother story.

JONATHAN KATZ: The professionalization of Wilson.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah.

JONATHAN KATZ: And do you have idea why that happened?

ANN WILSON: Because he could have Jessye Norman instead of me. Are you kidding? [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Fair enough.

ANN WILSON: See, there is the loft on the corner of Canal and Bowery. This is right on Chinatown. There is the loft, fixing it up.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: And I generally had two lovers at a time. So I had Jules [sp] who helped me fix things up. And we liked Daiba [ph] and made love like fish. And then I had Gene and that was the intellectual side of life. So there were always two.

JONATHAN KATZ: And did they know about each other?

ANN WILSON: Yes, that was the hippie years. Everybody was sleeping with everybody. Are you kidding?

JONATHAN KATZ: And yet, not far from you were people like Jasper Johns. I mean, he had a studio in the Bowery. Did you know?

ANN WILSON: Well, the whole Bowery project at the New Museum. You can go look in the archives. They are looking up everybody that lived on the Bowery and what they did. When I told them that Gene Swenson, Paul Thek, Jill Johnston, myself and half of the Bird Hoffman [ph] troop lived and worked in my loft on the Bowery, they said wow. [Laughs.]

Oh, yes. Of course, Jules and I went to Gene's this afternoon and he gave me a mattress, which we brought down in a cab. I brought my suitcase and a bag of groceries and Jules spent the night. Well, that was the hippie years. Gene wasn't exactly being celibate either. And, you know, we were throwing all that over. That was the big deal then. Sexuality at that time—although we weren't doing it as like a conscious—we knew that we were breaking the middle-class boundaries. We were doing that consciously. But thinking about who we were sleeping with was the furthest thing from our minds because we were stoned, you know. It was like chocolate.

JONATHAN KATZ: Gene included?

ANN WILSON: Everybody. I mean, we were not contemplating the aspects of sexuality. We were thinking we were breaking bourgeois boundaries. But the aspects of sexuality now with all the sexuality studies is much deeper than that.

JONATHAN KATZ: And the golden age that Gene talked about—

ANN WILSON: Greek.

JONATHAN KATZ: Greek. He thought Kennedy was going to bring in Pericles' golden age. I mean, he was always being a Kansas boy. He was infusing the best in art history with what was happening then, which wasn't what was happening at all. It was in his mind because he was a Kansas boy and classical art was religion. And he was studying with Blanckenhagen. Don't forget Peter von Blanckenhagen.

Let's see. I bought a duck egg as a memorial to my agrarian feelings for Valentine's Day.

JONATHAN KATZ: I'm sorry. You bought a what? I didn't hear.

ANN WILSON: A duck egg.

JONATHAN KATZ: A duck egg, got it.

ANN WILSON: For Valentine's Day. [Laughs.] I met Ray at the Willard and had a hard time seeing him separate from the old life because he was Bill's best friend and a harder time seeing the work. He has some splendid shapes, a hat, a gun, lots of cones. Picasso with a square collage hat smoking a cigarette. Maryann [ph] Moore with a round collage hat smoking a cigarette. Cones and triangles.

I have some ideas about writing. Gene thinks I shouldn't. [Laughs.] Typical male. [Laughs.] Who was it? It was—who was it that said Alma Mahler. Mahler told Alma she couldn't compose. You know, she had really some music being played. And then he wondered why Alma went off with, I think it was Yorkie [ph].

The lovemaking with Gene and Jules, a curious essay in tenderness. How it can sometimes hit like the red fringe on a crabapple—the red tinge on a crabapple and the apricot sudden experience of three months instead of two. So that is—

JONATHAN KATZ: Apricot?

ANN WILSON: Apricot color. I thought in colors. I mean, colors were emotions for me.

JONATHAN KATZ: Got it.

ANN WILSON: Or how the taste of an apricot might be.

JONATHAN KATZ: Metaphorically.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, it is not clear as I thought. Art is an act of mutilation. She mutilates the fiber in the paper with crushing of the crayon. Museums are sanctioning loafing. I want to do a drawing dedicated to Meuf and Schiler [ph] of the logarithmic spiral, an exact and precise drawing of a pineapple and a sunflower in hard color, in black and white on a quilt and a soft literal drawing of the black and white and color on a quilt. The idea of being the tension between the literal image and its intrusions of fallibility, the local, the specific and the hard, classic, mathematical, precise image. Idea of Thek's and combining with him.

JONATHAN KATZ: Can I ask you about something real quick here because I am struck by—and we have talked about it a little bit—but I am struck by the fact that in all of the ways that you went to work with other people

from Thek to Wilson—

ANN WILSON: It was everybody. It was the commune hippie era.

JONATHAN KATZ: But did you ever stop to think wait, why are they not working with me on my stuff?

ANN WILSON: I was a woman. Why would they?

JONATHAN KATZ: And did you ever say—

ANN WILSON: That is the difference between somebody like Harmony [ph] and Niki de Saint Phalle who realized that the goal had to be only them.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: I never realized that because I was, remember, an earlier generation.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: The first woman that I met that was totally dedicated to her own art was Marisol and, of course, Agnes. But Agnes was, you know, my God, how could she be anything other than what she was?

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: And Lenore. And Agnes and Lenore said not to get mixed up with men because I wouldn't be an artist. When I married Bill, they said don't get married. You will have children and you will never be an artist. So that was very clear. And remember, Lenore was earning something. And the two of them sitting there urging me not to marry Bill.

JONATHAN KATZ: And did you—

ANN WILSON: So they understood—they clearly—but they were 55 and 60. I was 24. What did I know?

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, right, right, yeah. And when you—

ANN WILSON: I was brought up as a good Catholic daughter.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: The pope was infallible.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you never had any moment while you were working with Bob or—

ANN WILSON: Jillen Lowe of Palley-Lowe would send me postcards saying paint, paint, paint, paint, paint. Don't work with Robert Wilson. I mean, there were warnings all around.

JONATHAN KATZ: And you didn't listen.

ANN WILSON: And I didn't listen. I just followed my heart. My God, that stage, that presidium stage. Wow, how could I not?

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah, sure.

ANN WILSON: And I was sort of the only literate one. There was Edwin Denby and there was Stefan Brecht, neither one of—Edwin was very sweet and very, very lovely.

JONATHAN KATZ: Much older than you, right?

ANN WILSON: Oh god, much older. And, of course, a woman didn't figure, you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right, right.

ANN WILSON: Although Edwin was wonderful to me and told me marvelously funny jokes. But then there were the younger—I have pictures of them, all the dancers, Andy [ph] and all of the—they were non-literate. I was the middle-ground literate person in that company. They were ordinary people or people will dance skills or acting skills, but they weren't writing, thinking.

JONATHAN KATZ: And the one figure missing in this conversation that is in almost every other conversation of

this period is Frank O'Hara. Was he not—

ANN WILSON: Frank O'Hara was before us. He died—you know, he got run over on that—

JONATHAN KATZ: In '64.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, yeah. And he was in a poet—he was in the poet's circle. And the poets—I knew Diane Waldman very well who, of course, knew Frank O'Hara. And I knew Ginsberg. And Jill knew Ginsberg very well. She had slept with Peter Orlovsky, if you can believe it.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: Gender lines were crossed—I mean, gay gender lines. Paul—all of them—crossed those—it wasn't strictly gay, although they were gay in orientation, but they sure crossed a lot of lines.

JONATHAN KATZ: Paul included?

ANN WILSON: Paul included. Paul had Momsa [ph], this beautiful French girl with red hair. Who could resist Momsa? She looked like the lady on the shell in the Botticelli. You know, he had a good aesthetic. [Laughs.] But, you know, it wasn't as cut and dried. It became more cut and dried after Stonewall because then it was a fight for gay rights. But it hadn't been formulated until the cops attacked people at Stonewall.

JONATHAN KATZ: And was there a recognition that being gay—before Stonewall—that being gay was a politicized identity or no?

ANN WILSON: I think certainly with some people, there was. But I don't know if Edwin Denby thought that. And Edwin had been married. A lot of them had been married. That great filmmaker—oh, and I know the son very well—Yvonne Jacquette and—I am having a senior moment. I will have to look it up.

JONATHAN KATZ: And can I just ask—you mentioned Marisol. You knew Marisol well or glancingly?

ANN WILSON: Nobody knew Marisol well. Oh, isn't it a lovely drink?

JONATHAN KATZ: Did you like the work?

ANN WILSON: The work was very interesting and she was brilliant. There was no denying it. But she came across with this—I don't know—this kind of weird projected persona.

JONATHAN KATZ: It felt phony to you even then?

ANN WILSON: I think she was European or Spanish or something.

JONATHAN KATZ: She was actually Venezuela, I think.

ANN WILSON: Whatever she was. But it was like this—she was gorgeous, drop-dead gorgeous. Sam Green knew Marisol very well, so he may have known her more. But it was always, "Oh, so glad to see you." Now, what can you get out of that, especially if you are from Pittsburgh and have a high gang mentality. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: And she wouldn't engage in other kinds of conversations?

ANN WILSON: No. But she sure knew how to move politically, you know, the ones that were successful. You know, I had a chance. I had the Willard Gallery and the Palley-Lowe before women showed art. I had a big chance and I blew it. And I now realize I blew it. And I think what was all that fuss about, although I wouldn't have given that stage up for anything.

Pollock really tripped me into Europe the way Daisy Miller tripped me into the Coliseum, like Tom Wesselmann doesn't trip me into Europe because he started there. Somehow he must be the other side of tradition. The way if you hear a song or ballad sung in West Virginia, you can be in the 17th century faster than you can if it is sung in England as a scholarly tradition.

Oh, but that choice of line. I saw him there having to make it. And in the flat face of Mondrian and Miró and Matisse and then the Picasso's trip up on Gorky, though because I knew he was there, that is the net my mind might get snagged in. There is something in line interwoven between them, a nervous, irritable, in stable, controlled, in stable that takes a kind of courage I would never have unless I had a grid to work it out in. To do that line with nothing else there to hang onto, not a tree, not a rock, anything could pull him into the ocean where it was all line. Anything could have drowned him.

Well, I saw that about the choice again in that face out of what it was that Picasso was throwing up where he was rooting around. That was the line, another indifferent El Greco thing. That baffling line or lines thrown up by Picasso and Matisse never did solve that. Was too young at the time to answer into what they were kicking up.

At anytime in terms of my own, but the lines in my fingers were jumping around beginning to stir. Forty-eight or 49, everyone was looking at that Picasso woman in the mirror and that Matisse two goldfishes in the bowl. And the lines in the Picasso went around the color like stained glass. Some of the lines were colored, but the line and the color, they were two things. And I remember so many of us doing back then and how heavy it was like laying out marvelous domino sets or like eating licorice candy strips with the pink and yellow buttons down them, an absolute and solid thing.

It wasn't anything, but it absolute and solid to do it. And looking at the Pollock this way, it was easy to confuse his decision about the line with what Picasso was doing there, especially since Pollock decided to do some archeology there, too. It was puzzling then to separate Europe and America, not about patriotism, but how everyone was all mixed up in the same digging. And then the Matisse thing, the goldfish, they are there in the water. Well, these lines define the areas, but they weren't there when you looked at the colors.

And I remember doing that then, too. But that wasn't as clear as the comfortable as doing the thing Picasso was doing line around color. But that, like the Matisse, was line in color, like a fishnet in the sea. Line in color, now you see it, now you don't. And seeing Pollock that way sometimes led me to see areas between the lines as shapes instead of spaces. And all this history rushed over me. And even a little of Toby [ph] who didn't have the courage to let the lines stand alone in space like a whip cracking, but had to embed them in atmosphere, taking the easiest of Turner and the Orient to backdrop for his lack of courage.

And I wonder what is the difference between Toby's use of the literal stick figure face kind of imagery and Pollock's. And there is where Gorky gets in at my craw again. I guess Gorky's nihilism, his use of obscenity, of blatancy about his figuration confuses me. I am not sure that Pollock's need of figure isn't the pitiful of his inside. Being vulnerable and so strong is embarrassing to take somehow.

I guess if it had to be a figure, I would have preferred Gorky's "fuck you to Blachet [ph]" to Pollock's open pain. He had gone so far, I guess, that he didn't care about a public front or perhaps wasn't even aware anymore. But it was that choice of line and empty space with absolutely nothing to back him up, no saving curtain to fall, no theatrical lights to soften. Paint couldn't be more naked, more obvious. He had to be awfully tall to be so stark, tall enough to break off at the stem, snap every jump out of the line and wind and twist and flow and climb and fall and spin out and come back full stop, halt, god, to have come back.

I have to go back. I couldn't get those other paintings out of my mind that kept jackknifing onto my eyes every time I would go look at a whole flow of history would happen. I have to go back and get through to him. But what did come was this choice between line and form as clear as between ego and God and the devil. Everything is contained. But it is the container you choose, depth. Now, this is where he really screws me because if you choose to paint with line, then unless you are awfully, painfully conscious of your drawings and paintings, but inversely, your mechanism of painting becomes drawing.

Now, to do a drawing is like taking a ruler and drawing a line along it. To me, the line drawn above a ruler is the perfect act of line on surface. But Pollock broke into that surface. It wasn't as simple as one grid overlaid another like a chess game on a series of glass tables. He dove into the surface as if it were sky or water. He dove in as if there were no canvas there at all. It had to be that in his mind he wasn't painting on a surface. That is all I can see. He was in something, in some place. I kept saying seeing water like a diver with lines attached to him in slow motion flowing and floating in some bottomless sea. But that is not it.

His line was not on the surface or even in a dialogue with it. His mind seemed as if those paint lines in air alone supported like even when I want a strand of decay to flow down or up I draw it sideways because I kick on the surface. My mind is a weaving machine going in and out with the woven ends of the canvas. I don't think that there was any canvas for Pollock. And if there was, I can't get to how he saw it. How did he get the courage to start so deep and stay so flat? It is like layers of water, but all the same molecule. Maybe he was the surface. Maybe he could come outside his body and paint on himself, like himself, in himself.

If he was the canvas, then line was what he was doing. I know I am the line, so the surface gets to be what I am doing. Maybe Jackson Pollock was the canvas. How else could he link all the levels like a dye [ph] instead of an overlay? It is as if I had bird's nests stacked on one another in a glass cylinder and I couldn't see how a mouse could know its way through these rather heavy vertical slatted shots on some of them as if they were to hang the massive line onto someplace in the sky or to give your eye a catwalk over the fathoms. The hard thing was the distance between myself as the art student hungry for size and in that first faultless energy of innocent I pursuing art new. And where I am now, having worked into the discipline, an illusion of it.

She kept getting in my way with echoes of youth. Seeing the Pollock then as I saw him in the early '50s and now

I see he left all this history behind or maybe it could have been the modern in the first room that he went into it and nothing existed. Then I guess he said I am nature. Then when he returned, there was history again. They seemed so large in size then and now not so much in the context of pop like Rosenquist.

He was the roller coaster making the track in front of him as he pitched and climbed. I think there isn't fashion in art, so much as the air we breathe implies the combination of molecules of the moment. Right now it is fetish and shamanism. Well, I think the air changed on Pollock while he was in the deep—just to add to it. And the new air, the implications of, say, Barnett Newman of flat space or even Al Held of beyond flat into frontal caught him, so that in keeping the shallowness of the line, he couldn't bend them to the surface of the space between. The forms of the lines couldn't become form.

Matisse resolved that between the ivy and the space of his red room, his line in his rooms. Maybe Matisse killed Pollock. But I think—and this is heresy—that as the era, he was outrun. The era outran him into flat space beside the line. He couldn't pull his diver's lines up close enough to the surface and he suffocated. The lines couldn't be in something and the spaces between themselves, too, because he didn't have enough of himself left over to take the necessary gulp of air to force them to extinction. Seaweed on the surface washes up on the beach and then the water is clear, vast, endless, empty again.

I have to go back and look at the individual paintings again. The nihilism of oversight might be in the way of the flowers of evil make the flowers possible, outrunning history, history ensnares us. Pollock with glimpses only fed on his own vision. And so he didn't pick up into history. Women nurse those fierce invalids home from hot countries. That is my take on Pollock. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, I have to ask you. That is so literary, yet it is in a journal. Did you intend to publish this?

ANN WILSON: No, I was just writing what I thought. I had no—I mean, I was with Gene Swenson. I had been with Bill Wilson. Why would I publish? As Gene said, I shouldn't write. But the problem with me is you caught it actually. I was literary through Bill and I was critical through Gene and I was writing literature, not art criticism, which I think was Gene's injecture [ph]. I mean, I was just flowing along.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, you were doing an artist's take.

ANN WILSON: Yeah, I was always writing and consciously now. My writing about everyone is as an artist.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. I mean, it is remarkable prose, though. It is just remarkable prose.

ANN WILSON: But I was seeing as a painter, as somebody who drew. I wasn't seeing it with a critical—and I was seeing everybody else—as a painter, I was seeing Matisse, I was seeing Picasso because you have to remember in our era in the '50s, what was there was Matisse and Picasso and the modern, which will all fed on.

JONATHAN KATZ: But also, are you not picking up and critiquing Greenbergian formalism? You don't mention it, but—

ANN WILSON: I wouldn't have known Greenbergian formalism if it hit me over the head. Gene knew that kind of stuff and I never knew what he was talking about. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: That is interesting.

ANN WILSON: There were big dialogues about that among the boys. I wasn't thinking that way. I was incapable of thinking that way. I didn't have a Yale education. I went to art school for god's sake. I mean, what did I know? [Laughs.] I knew how to draw. I knew how to paint.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. And the cooperative endeavors that you engaged in that you found more sustaining than your individual career that the—

ANN WILSON: Oh, the artwork was like a metronome for me. It was like breath. It was like swimming in the ocean. I couldn't not do it. The same with the writing.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: I would no more have read that to Gene than fly.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you had no expectation of anybody reading that—

ANN WILSON: And I don't think Gene had any—I think a lot of the critics of that time, Babcock, Gene, all of them, I don't think they had a clue what it was to draw, what it was to paint. And I think every art critic, every kid I taught, I said if you want to be a critic, you take drawing and painting, so you are writing from the inside, not

from the outside. I mean, at the outside, at the history, but be sure you know what craft you are talking about.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: And I think that was the lack of—

JONATHAN KATZ: Can I turn down—there is a radio that is making this a little bit loud. Can I—

ANN WILSON: Oh, go get it, go get it downstairs.

JONATHAN KATZ: All right, one second.

ANN WILSON: Go downstairs.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_wilson09\_7761.]

ANN WILSON: Note to John Cage. I had three mushrooms. I was drawing and I went into the studio this morning to find them all melted. Mushrooms melt. That is what comes with getting into close contact with biology. I usually draw nature from the 19th century prints. I dropped that off. He used to love to get my notes. Anyway, let's see.

Oh, the Beatles, the Beatles. Gene showed up with the Beatles album. And the Beatles, my god, we all went mad. Everybody in the city went mad. The Beatles album, such an imprint. "When I'm 64," what a joy to have them for the summer. [Laughs.] Let's see. I just remember that first hearing of the Beatles.

JONATHAN KATZ: And were you friendly—when you say that Cage liked getting misses [ph]. Were you friendly with Cage?

ANN WILSON: Yes, through Jill. Everybody was friendly with Cage. And John was so witty. John telling a story, you have got to get—there is a record of him telling his stories. And if you haven't heard it, you have to. John was a miracle.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Merce not so much?

ANN WILSON: Merce was in the studio dancing, dancing, dancing. He was passionate. He was consumed by dance. And he was brilliantly working out the declension from Martha Graham—from ballet to Martha Graham to him. He was creating contemporary dance.

JONATHAN KATZ: Not a talker like John?

ANN WILSON: He was a dancer. He danced. What he did was brilliant. He took contemporary dance from ballet to Martha to him. And it was all about creating those dances. There are many books about Merce. And, of course, we all went to Merce's concerts and everybody did backdrops for Merce.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: I think Rauschenberg and Johns, both.

JONATHAN KATZ: Right, and Warhol.

ANN WILSON: Everybody, everybody. I met Ray side by side with Toby on the street last night as I was thinking these things. Ray leads art forward by taking it back to its primitive source. The image of the animal on the walls of Lascaux. And Ray, how image making can gain in degrees of strength by making use of its own process by incorporating the natural sights that occur around us every day, developing an image out of indigenous-related shapes, sizes and coincidences. He is sophisticated, also using the primitive instinct for image with full knowledge of its 20th century tradition. A subtle mind with a love of detail. Obscurity due to extreme concentration of symbol and image.

I always thought that Pollock wouldn't have had such trouble if only a trusted friend had asked him what he saw in Eakins and Homer for discipline. Look at American painting and remove it in your mind of everything that is provincial.

JONATHAN KATZ: What year is this written?

ANN WILSON: 1966.

JONATHAN KATZ: Ann, we are going to have to take a break—



[END OF TRACK AAA\_wilson09\_7762.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Okay.

ANN WILSON: Okay. Ray sent a letter with a pyramid and the dead rabbit and a hare, which made me see my pyramids as tombs. Gene told me Ray suggested ways Gene could upset both Bill and I. In that way, Bill once set my love letters to Ray. How is that as wicked?

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: To see how Ray—however, you must go to Bill for Ray. Bill is the person you have to go to for Ray. Absolutely. Don't mention me. Don't mention Gene. I see how Ray interferes with destiny by interpreting people's symbols to them in a more or less demoniac—way, humorous demoniac. I see Ray clearer in my former life. He was bad for me in his interpretation of symbols. Gene said about the TV ghost truck not just claiming things, but for the whole cosmos.

Ray—how Ray traveled with a lot of people, who went over the line, went crazy. In a way, Ray was like Warhol in that—and I think maybe picked it up from the factory.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you see a dark side in Ray because—

ANN WILSON: Oh, he has a very dark side toward women, very dark. And he has a very light whimsical side. He was the trickster, Ray. But Bill will see him the most clear. And Bill is brilliant. You go to Bill about Ray. And also, he is sitting there with him 10 rooms full of Ray.

JONATHAN KATZ: Were you surprised by Ray's suicide or did it seem of a piece?

ANN WILSON: We were all surprised. It did not seem as a piece, although he drew images of it and indicated it for months ahead of time. I don't know why. I think he was depressed. I mean, they made a fetish out of it. I think he was a depressed man that needed help. Anybody that suicides, you cannot make a fetish out of it. You know, all those numbers and all of that stuff that they wrote. I think there is a very bad example in writing art history so that it is a dramatic situation. I think one has to write from what artists say and what is right in front of you that they did.

I think to imply in Ray's suicide anything other than a tragic figure in a deep depression is ridiculous. So does Johanna Vanderbeek who was also a friend of Ray's. I mean, it is nonsense. Bill was furious when Ray suicided. How could he do that and not tell him, his friend, that he was in trouble? And Bill went out there with Toby to the house, everything stacked up neat and things. But people just loved to read symbols into that, which was just dumb.

JONATHAN KATZ: And a little cruel because it—

ANN WILSON: Not cruel. People are fascinated with drama.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: No, I don't think it is cruel. People are children in sandboxes playing with life. No, no, it is just absolutely stupid. If somebody suicides, they are depressed and somebody should have helped them.

JONATHAN KATZ: And I have one other quick question before you read. Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between Cage's, Judson's [ph] church sort of—

ANN WILSON: He influenced everybody. I mean, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, all of them.

JONATHAN KATZ: What about Wilson? What is the relationship between Cage and Wilson?

ANN WILSON: Bob Wilson? Bob Wilson took—remember, he is much later and much younger.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: It was all out there on the table by the time Bob came along. And he took and he chose what he wanted. And I would say that Bob's closest friend as a young man was Jerome Robbins. Bob's stage came from Jerome Robbins' stage. He would watch those ballets, so that it is a ballet stage with lines of entrance from the wings and with lighting moving figures, moving tableau of figures. Bob took it from Robbins and Robbins took it from Balanchine. It is that simple.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Wilson was not part of Cage's social—

ANN WILSON: Bob had this marvelous sense of humor and this marvelous ability to create these tableaux. But the tableaux are staged like ballet.

JONATHAN KATZ: And I guess in part because they are so fixed, they would have not been necessarily part of Cage's aesthetic. They had—

ANN WILSON: Oh, Bob wouldn't have known Cage's aesthetic at all. He was not an intellectual. I mean, people like Stefan and many brilliant people, Denby, gave him the intellectual take on things. But he let them speak for him. He wasn't—he went to Pratt. He studied interior design and he was probably—I don't—I can't—I shouldn't say this for the archives. Let's say he was close to Jerome and he learned his staging from—

JONATHAN KATZ: Literally close to Jerome.

ANN WILSON: I don't know. I wasn't there. I don't ever like to say anything I don't—

JONATHAN KATZ: Know for a fact.

ANN WILSON: Know and nobody has told me. If somebody tells me something—I knew Andy Degroat and Bob were partners. That I knew because I was there. But what I don't know—and again, it is like Ray's death. Any of this subjective stuff, you have no right to say unless you knew it, unless they told you because the rest is a waste of art history's time. It should be about the work and where did the work, what were its antecedents, how did it grow? That is my opinion. But people like Stefan were giving Bob constructive ideas and Edwin a great deal, many, many ideas, lots of people.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: Wonderful French intellectuals. I mean, Louis Aragon for God's sake.

JONATHAN KATZ: My God.

ANN WILSON: Louis Aragon put Bob on the map. Louis Aragon went to Death Man—Vlance [ph] in Paris. There was a little park and there was an old theater that had been a belle époque theater where we put on Death Man. And it was on the—it was on the West Bank, I think. I know I would walk from the theater and a long way down the boulevard and I would cross behind Notre Dame because our cheap hotel, the Hotel de Lille was across from the Louvre. So it was that artist section where we were living. But the theater was in some weird section that was no longer central. It had kind of a wonderful Parisian architecture. But it was no longer—it was a mercantile section by the time—

And Louis Aragon went to see Death Man Vlance. And he wrote an open letter to Andre Breton saying Andre, remember when we said one day there would be—you know, I am not paraphrasing it right, but it has been quoted. You can find it. And he said do you remember when we conceived of the perfect art? Well, I saw it tonight.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow, wow, wow.

ANN WILSON: And Louis came every night and he gave Bob lots of ideas.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: And, of course, Susan Sontag was always there. She was Paul's best woman friend, I think.

JONATHAN KATZ: Really?

ANN WILSON: He wanted to marry Susan. He had a ring made for her and she wisely turned him down. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: And did you know Susan?

ANN WILSON: Very well because she was Paul's best woman friend.

JONATHAN KATZ: Aside from you.

ANN WILSON: Well, I was his sister, his younger sister that he could bat around—[Laughs]—and tell what for. You didn't tell Susan what for.

JONATHAN KATZ: No, I bet. Yeah.

ANN WILSON: Susan was one smart cookie, brilliant.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Jack Smith you didn't know?

ANN WILSON: Yes, I knew Jack Smith. We would go all the time to those—Bob Wilson took a great deal from Jack Smith. And he would do in these floating lofts. Somebody would lend him a loft and he would do these events at—Jack Smith was a kid who had gone to the movies. Let's put it that way. And you went to this loft and there would be Christmas trees in December hanging all down from the ceiling. And Jack would be there being Myrna Loy, you know. And he would have these screw-in colored light bulbs, red, yellow—I mean, very—and I know Bob Wilson once said to me, Jack Smith knew more about lighting than anybody in the world. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: And Jack was utterly just out of the middle of nowhere this incredible genius. And we would all go. It was word of mouth. It was never advertised. And you would know that that on 10th Street, he had found a loft and put together yet another—you know, who was he, Marlena [ph], Myrna, whoever he was being that night. But he was brilliant. He was absolutely brilliant.

JONATHAN KATZ: And the people who played with him who were in Flaming Creatures.

ANN WILSON: [Inaudible]—you know, floating around New York gay life. Flaming Creatures, of course, set the gay world on fire when it happened. I mean, who had ever done such a thing? When you look at that movie today about these two lesbians that my daughters wouldn't approve of because it is Hollywood and they are blonde—[Laughs]—not intellectual at all, not the truth at all. But in any case, when you think of that movie and you think of Flaming Creatures, that is a good one to write. Compare that with Flaming Creatures. That would be a—and if anybody is smart enough to do that.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah. Flaming Creatures, to this day when I teach it, people's eyes roll back in—

ANN WILSON: Well, get a hold of a book about Jack Smith because you have to know about that that it was just—there was a lot of pickup—also, the happenings were that way. Some space would empty out and it would only be for one night like Claes Oldenburg stacking all those tires in one of those vacant yards where a house has been torn down. And that one night, you know, and he stacked these tires up as high as the buildings would go. It was Claes Oldenburg and why I was talking about the stove—

JONATHAN KATZ: Kaprow—the tires, not Oldenburg.

ANN WILSON: Kaprow. Pardon me. But it was either Oldenburg or Kaprow—I have to go find it somewhere—we had a stove on Coenties Slip and the stove was down near the bathtub, very stupidly put together with gas that we were borrowing from the bar beneath coming in through the window and down behind this old stove. And it was one of those stoves that was like this, went that way and that way and it stood on legs. And every time I lit it, it would jump four feet. And somebody said, "Ann, that is not safe. You had better get an electric stove. You know that could blow the whole building up." I said, "It could?"

And so it was—I can't remember whether it was Oldenburg or it was Kaprow, but it was one of them who showed at Sidney Janis. Whoever showed at Sidney Janis said oh, I want that stove. Wesselmann—maybe it was Wesselmann. I don't remember. I have to go back in my notes. Took the stove and put it in Sidney Janis. It was a great American work of art. It was at the Grain Gallery. It was the Grain Gallery where he showed it. The stove was shown as a work of art.

JONATHAN KATZ: By itself.

ANN WILSON: By itself.

JONATHAN KATZ: With no intervention.

ANN WILSON: No, he just had the stove there. I think it was Wesselmann. It sounds like Wesselmann. But I have to—it is somewhere. But that stove literally jumped—like this thing jumping four feet every time I made a cup of coffee. Boom. [Laughs.] Somebody said that is dangerous. And I said why? [Laughs.] Pulling a gas line up from the bar below that I had a friend go down and somehow—I think it was even an old gas line because there had been gas lights in that building. I somehow shoved it through and up.

JONATHAN KATZ: So you didn't even have a plumber do this.

ANN WILSON: Oh, no. We did midnight lighting and midnight plumbing. Everything was done by us in the first loft days.

JONATHAN KATZ: Wow.

ANN WILSON: But I probably didn't want to be blowing up Ellsworth and Agnes.

JONATHAN KATZ: No, no, I can imagine.

ANN WILSON: Once I figured out that might not be cool—wait a minute.

JONATHAN KATZ: And did you get a sense—you have mentioned several times that this world was one in which everybody knew everybody. But did you get a sense also of discrete crowds that didn't mix?

ANN WILSON: Yes.

JONATHAN KATZ: And can you talk about who didn't—

ANN WILSON: Yes, absolutely, like you asked me did I know about those two.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah.

ANN WILSON: They were not involved with the artists.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: But on the other hand, there were people like Larry Rivers and his band that would throw these big loft parties to which everybody came.

JONATHAN KATZ: But, for example, Sontag and Cage, were they—

ANN WILSON: I doubt their paths ever crossed. But I could be wrong because she was certainly casting her searchlight everywhere to think. So I can't speak about—I was scared to death of Susan because she was so smart. And I thought she thinks of me as a Western Pennsylvanian country bumpkin. What is Paul doing with me? Because, you know, I was in awe. Here was this great intellectual who knew Sartre. Good god.

Actually I know Paul and I would always go have coffee with her in Paris. And the conversation was never intellectual between us. You know, but it was—I went with Bob to see—she made a movie about a man on a farm in Holland. And that man was Paul. The figure—it was her metaphoric—and I can't remember the name of that movie. But he ended up murdering a child in the movie.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, my God.

ANN WILSON: It was a very dark movie. She made movies that I think she was—her criticism was the important thing.

JONATHAN KATZ: And talk to me about Jack. The pop artists were interested in Jack.

ANN WILSON: Jack Youngerman was—

JONATHAN KATZ: No, I am sorry, Jack Smith.

ANN WILSON: Oh, Jack Smith. Bob was interested in Jack. And the art world vaguely knew about Jack when the happenings came along. But they never picked up on them. I mean, it was a gay subculture, Jack.

JONATHAN KATZ: Too gay. So somebody like Rauschenberg wasn't in a play.

ANN WILSON: It wasn't considered art.

JONATHAN KATZ: Oh, really?

ANN WILSON: It was a gay subculture thing. It was camp—I mean, for the art world. Thomas Hess at *ARTNews* would not send somebody down to review Jack Smith.

JONATHAN KATZ: But what about artists like Rauschenberg?

ANN WILSON: Well, he was an artist's artist. He was a painter. He was within the canon. Jack Smith was not with the canon, nor did he—you know, he didn't have the cred.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, yeah.

ANN WILSON: He had something so original and wonderful. Bob Wilson knew it.

JONATHAN KATZ: And Oldenburg and Kaprow likewise didn't—

ANN WILSON: There was a division between straight men and gay men, you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: So it was too gay for them.

ANN WILSON: It just wouldn't come into their sight line. If anything came into their sight lines, it was a cute chick, if they came out of the studio at all and weren't concerned with their careers. It wasn't anti-gay. It is just that they lived on another planet.

JONATHAN KATZ: Understood.

ANN WILSON: I moved between a lot of planets because I was insatiable. I had to know what was going on here, there and the other.

JONATHAN KATZ: And I just have to ask. You said you didn't know why you were tapped to transcribe Agnes. Did Agnes read these journals? Did she know what kind of stylist you were?

ANN WILSON: I talked with Agnes a lot. But mostly, it was her giving me advice. I think Agnes thought that I knew her work from the slip and that I knew everyone on the slip. So I knew the context from—I have no idea why she did that. I could ask Suzanne [ph]. Dan Dietrich might have had a hand in it because Dan was collecting my quilts and maybe Dan equated my quilts with Agnes and the plain [ph] somehow. You never know how museum stuff happens. Somebody is funding it and I think it was Dan funded that first show at the ICA of Agnes because he was tremendously perceptive of what was fabulous art. But he didn't want to know from politics.

JONATHAN KATZ: He was a young man at that point.

ANN WILSON: Very young.

JONATHAN KATZ: My goodness.

ANN WILSON: Younger than me.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, wow.

ANN WILSON: But very into Mahler, totally into Mahler. And very, very sensitive. There is an artist in Dan. Dan has made movies about artists. He made one about Agnes. Went up and made the House of Hopper [ph], things like that. Dan has made a number of movies—you ought to look them up—about artists—himself. There is an artist in Dan.

Paul Thek showed me his work. Wax hands and legs cut out of and false teeth painted in pattern and shoes like organisms, one with wings and a face with a metal piece sticking through the tongue. Terrifyingly hard for the physical body to look at the work and yet lyric at the same time. The hand and wax, so that you could touch its skinliness [ph] with its bones and blood showing at one end and a butterfly on top of a hand with the pattern of a butterfly painted down on the hand.

So if the hand were turning into a butterfly transmigration. I must try it in a work. How well I remember each of his images, an arm encased in a Roman kind of arm protector covered with iridescent blue butterfly wings. Doesn't God make wonder, he said. He gave me to keep for him a drawing he made for a friend now dead and a painting of his own 10 years ago in Florida and a Joe Raffaele. It turned out very beautiful for me and Paul.

Gene is going to parallel his novel to two noble kinsmen.

JONATHAN KATZ: Gene was writing a novel?

ANN WILSON: Gene was writing a novel. It is in those journals. Today dreams of oil paintings done from iron casts came into my mind while I painted. Perhaps by the time this painting is done, I will have begun again. Paul Thek took his pyramid and I gave him a blue-glazed frog. Today I did picture research for Stan Vanderbeek.

Gene has challenged Henry Geldzahler for solving a riddle for \$10,000. He openly challenged Henry Geldzahler to some kind of a riddle like the question mark. I didn't quite understand what that was all about. What was challenging Henry Geldzahler's ownership of the Met, I think, or when art went and—

JONATHAN KATZ: And how did Henry respond?

ANN WILSON: Martha will tell you that. Martha has written about that. I never understood half of what Gene was up to. [Laughs.] I just loved him. I mean, what can I say? [Laughs.]

Gene brought me dinner and we drank a bottle of Spanish wine Jim had given him. Then he took the glasses and bottle and he stood in the hall, green and maroon walls and cracked terrazzo floor, a glass in each hand and asked me to look at him. His eyes and face were a young man full of will. He broke a glass for Henry Geldzahler, a glass for Jim Rosenquist and a bottle for love. We talked of Chinese art, of art history. I spoke of Coenties Slip. We drank to Gene that he may always have wisdom in his actions.

JONATHAN KATZ: Let's see. And the year on this again?

ANN WILSON: This would be probably October 1967. Here is December '67. Being in Steve Paxton's piece, somebody else did move me toward painting again. Going to the Brooklyn Museum with Gene and seeing American painters helped, too. I really did see something very large in Winslow Homer. Yesterday I read the symposium. Today I will try to write about it. I bought Elizabeth Holt's *Documentary History of Art and Sources and Documents of the 20th Century Art, Style and Painting, a comparative study*, and *The Way of Chinese Painting* by Mai Mai Sze. I think I will do and try to run through some of the major conventions in painting: portrait, landscape, et cetera. Perhaps copy one of each. Read history, philosophy, art. It is so hard to begin everything.

Let's see. I am trying to find people here. What I have to do is probably go through these and type what I am looking for is when I am talking about other artists because a lot of it is about my art, which is not important.

JONATHAN KATZ: But, you know, this—if you are willing to have these transcribed, then these can exist, of course, in the archive and anybody can—

ANN WILSON: Well, Sam was transcribing. I mean, I would have to sit there.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, sure.

ANN WILSON: I am telling you my writing. The record of the 20th century as shown in the Modern is thin compared with the Met. And how France documented our eyes, the Hudson River paintings really has enabled me to see American landscape. Let's see. Then I write about landscape, driving through some landscape.

Oh, we took Gene to Buffalo. I don't know what he was doing in Buffalo, something. And the guy at the desk said to Gene, "Are you a hippie or have you any drugs? We have to be careful and so underground about that." And Gene said, "I am a hippie and a respectable member of society." [Laughs.]

And *In Circles* by Al Carmines is here with the whole.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, did you know—

ANN WILSON: A tycoon and his wife gave a dinner for Jim Rosenquist. They had their dinner at their Fifth Avenue apartment. The dance was in a loft on Lafayette Street not far from the Bowery. Mrs. Scull, like Mrs. Lasker [ph], had what she called a very, very small party. There were nearly 200 guests. And she, too, had music. The Scarecrows dressed to match their names and played amplified electronic guitars. And flowers, brightly colored little paper ones that were sprinkled over neon pink, green or yellow satin tablecloths. "I tried for something vulgar, something haphazard on purpose," said Joel Schumacher, who did the decorations. I wanted it more sleazy than vulgar. When you are dealing with a dance, it has to be elegant or like a discotheque. I hope it is night clubby.

It was—and Ms. Susan Stein, whose father heads the Music Corporation of America and who also goes to Mrs. Lasker's, adored it. So did Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*. "But you have to grow up knowing this sort of thing to appreciate it," Ms. Friedan shouted over the boom, boom of the music. Nathan Cummings, chairman of Consolidated Foods Corporation, grew up before the invention of whatever form of rock and roll the Scarecrows were playing and long before the era of the so-called psychedelic movement. But even he was out on the dance floor for a few minutes gamely hopping around beneath yards of kitchen aluminum foil that had been suspended in panels from what apparently was yet another of Mr. Rosenquist's neon sculptures.

Aside from what onlookers diagnosed as a great talent for the African twist, Ms. Stein's chief contribution to the evening was the remarkable way in which she hitched up her full-length black and white zebra-striped evening dress. "It goes like this," she said, doubling the long skirt up under a miniskirt. I can wear it either way. Guests were impressed, too, with Mr. Scull's sideburns. My son told me to get with it. And his floppy black velvet tie with Larry Poons, the artist who identified himself as Jack Daniels with Rauschenberg, Robert Rauschenberg, the artist, who managed to dance with two women at once and Mrs. Scull. The hostess was in a ruffled white organdy daisy-trimmed bolero. She had a Pinkerton man and two men from her husband's taxi company at the door to keep out crashers.

And when a man she didn't want got through, she herself publicly told him to get out. "We had a party like this,"

said Mrs. Henry Berger [ph], who is Anita Loos, the actress. "I don't know what you would call it, but it was a black tie and hot dogs and chili affair and Eskimo pies, Mrs. Berger said." It was loads of fun. And everybody at Mrs. Lasker's thought her party was fun, too. And this was in the Times. But this gives you a picture of who had the money in the art world and where they were at. Not Dan, not Dan. He was classic.

JONATHAN KATZ: And I assume because of his friendship with Rosenquist, Swenson knew the Sculls.

ANN WILSON: Everybody knew the Sculls. They were Bulgarians and nouveau riche. I mean, he had a taxi cab company and decided to up his class—

JONATHAN KATZ: But he had a good eye.

ANN WILSON: Great eye. Scull came to my studio, looked at my quilts. He referred to them as my ties. [Laughs.] He was a smart man. They were both smart. But they were definitely parvenu in terms of New York—there were levels to New York society. There were people like Dan who were fourth-generation money. And then there were people like the Sculls who had just made it because they were smart. But this is so—this is like at the happenings. These would all be there.

So it is so much the dialogue on that level of the art collectors that hung around, you know, the galleries and things or that went to the Met or that Gene had the question mark. So that is a marvelous little piece of social history writing. I don't know who wrote that.

But anyway, Gene has his question mark. We began to dance in the chapel hung from the ceiling with silver foil above which hung neon lights reflecting both the skylight above it and the silver foil falling below it. The chapel is really half a chapel in a bisected building. The band was a hippie group in Whiteface with black torn costumes and painted black hats. Their face had emphatic black marks on them. They played loud, restless rock. The men had on tuxedos and turtleneck sweaters, pom-poms on their shoes.

Roy Lichtenstein wore a brocade jacket. The women had overdone hair falls. And Mrs. Scull was grotesque in a ruffled-and-laced Gibson girl kind of dress, a dress for a young girl. We stopped dancing with them under the tinfoil when we realized they were playing a requiem in that half chapel. I said it was like 1914. Bob Indiana said it was more like 1903. They spun around in that silver-foiled chapel like unreal dolls. We were in hell.

JONATHAN KATZ: That is great.

ANN WILSON: And then there is this, which I am Xeroxing for you.

JONATHAN KATZ: And did Gene talk to you about the protest at all, what sort of animated him?

ANN WILSON: Yes, all the time. [Laughs.]

JONATHAN KATZ: And have you written about that?

ANN WILSON: Tonight Gene was at the Modern with his black coat and black scarf around his eyes, a black scarf around his hands, a black scarf in his mouth and had a sign which said, "I am a liberal, I have made it." It was a lecture evening. He was moved so as not to disturb the old folks.

JONATHAN KATZ: He was out there.

ANN WILSON: In every way, in every way. Let's see, psychedelic art is rooted in that music rather than the spiritual American art like Ryder and Toby and Graves and Kline. I root my art somehow in literature—Williams, Whitman, and Melville and Dickinson rather than art. And Bob Indiana is a very verbal artist, so is Steve Durkee and Ray Johnson. However, seeing Cole, Autobahn [ph] and [Frederic] Church, I see a possibility of joining my art literature to art art. Catlin, why Catlin?

Gene made a drawing of a urinal with gold dust in it and signed—[inaudible]—Goldwater and inscribed "the Midas touch at your local mausoleum of modern art." I sent out the first fliers today. Kennedy announced his challenge to Johnson today. I have a feeling that had to do with Gene's challenge to Geldzahler. I mean, he was picking up and replaying stuff.

Gene's paper on Goldwater for gold strike. We went to Princeton to Jose and Miriam Arguelles who you have to get in touch with. He was getting his doctorate at Princeton. And I think what you will have to do is call up Princeton for what—

JONATHAN KATZ: The alumni?

ANN WILSON: Nineteen—and, of course, I have something glued over it—1968, Princeton. So you will have to

call them and find Jose Arguelles and see if they have a forwarding address, Jose and Miriam. And Jose was South American and they were close friends of Gene's. And he was a brilliant art historian, but he was very much involved with this protest with Gene. We went down to Jose and Miriam's and Jose and Gene constructed that little flier.

So Jose was involved. And I think because of that coffee [ph] with Steve Paxton. He is a friendly soul. I am reading now *Art in the East and West* by Benjamin Rowland, a book comparing Eastern and Western painting. I bought it because he was comparing Autobahn and a Sung [ph] master.

JONATHAN KATZ: Now, you were friendly with Paxton as well then?

ANN WILSON: Paxton lived right around the corner. I watered his plants and fed his cat when he went off on dance concerts.

JONATHAN KATZ: This was again in the late '60s?

ANN WILSON: Yes. And Al Hansen lived right across the roof. And Al and I had the Robert E. Lee rip-off company. We were planning to get trucks and go get junk for art. He was making all those Hersheys, you know.

JONATHAN KATZ: Yeah, sure.

ANN WILSON: Al and I were great pals.

JONATHAN KATZ: That is enough.

ANN WILSON: I do have a few more things. I have a few—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]