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Oral history interview with Sandra Jean Blain, 2009 May 19

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Sandra Blain on 2009 May 19. The interview took place at Balin's home in Tempe, AZ, and was conducted by Lloyd Herman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Sandra Blain and lloyd Herman have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

LLOYD HERMAN: This is Lloyd Herman interviewing Sandra Blain at the artist's home in Tempe, Arizona, on May 19, 2009. This is card number one.

Sandy, I would it appreciate it if you would—this is almost like being in court or something—I want you to state your full name and where and when you were born. And tell me a little bit then about growing up: do you have siblings, things of that nature.

SANDRA JEAN BLAIN: Thanks, Lloyd, for this opportunity. My full name is Sandra Jean Blain. People do call me Sandy. In fact, it seems so formal when someone says Sandra; it's always like there's something wrong. [They laugh.]

I grew up in Chicago and resided there through my undergraduate degree time period. Well, high school was in Chicago, and then on to undergraduate degree. I received a B.S. in education from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois. I am an only child. My parents owned, with my grandmother, a flower shop in Chicago. Then my father went on to teach horticulture at Chicago Vocational High School in Chicago. And my mother did freelance floral arranging with her sister, and worked at her mother's floral shop. So I guess there was the creative spirit around me and involvement around me throughout my early days.

After Northern Illinois, I went on to teach high school in Racine, Wisconsin, for five and a half years. While I was in Racine, [I] started my master's work at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, receiving an M.S. there at UW-M, in 1967, and did complete that degree later in 1972. It was an M.F.A.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, an M.F.A. I was going to ask you if the degree was in education—in arts education?

MS. BLAIN: It was an M.S. in art. And then my M.F.A. was in 1972, also from UW-M, and that was M.F.A. in ceramics.

MR. HERMAN: As a child, were you encouraged to draw, or was there an interest in art in the home? Did you go to any events or art classes?

MS. BLAIN: Yes. It's an interesting question. There was a strong interest in art, but primarily three-dimensional art. I actually loved to work in my grandmother's flower shop, and I was always involved with terrarium kinds of little installations. But even in elementary and high school—sounds silly to say—but paper mache and dimensional objects were things that I was constantly working on.

There was a little art school that was privately owned a couple of miles from the house, and I went there and took classes after school. I also helped the older lady—you think of her now as older [they laugh]—teaching classes for children. And so I would work there after school a couple of days a week and in the summer some and also Saturdays.

MR. HERMAN: Did you, as a child, draw, or did you discover clay at an early age? Or what kind of other art things did you do?

MS. BLAIN: I was involved in drawing and painting. In those days we were talking about using tempera paint, and it was out of the bottle. Things were somewhat controlled in terms of what you did and the size of the paper that you were working on [laughs] and so on. But that was fine. But like I said earlier, I really got involved in some 3-D work. I had a couple of very good high school art teachers, who just gave us a real strong stimulation to move on into 3-D.

MR. HERMAN: But it was pretty much urban life.

MS. BLAIN: Correct.

MR. HERMAN: You grew up as an urban person.

MS. BLAIN: Correct.

MR. HERMAN: Did you go to museums?

MS. BLAIN: The Chicago Art Institute, often. There weren't as many galleries then. But the Chicago Art Institute, Museum of Science and Industry were two places that were frequented often.

MR. HERMAN: Yes, yes. How did you first get interested in clay? Because I think of that as your medium.

MS. BLAIN: Correct.

MR. HERMAN: It may be one of several, but that's certainly the one I know best.

MS. BLAIN: When I was teaching with this little private art school for the children, we were doing some clay work. It was very intriguing to me. Those were primarily sculptural forms that the kids would be doing: animals from memory, and maybe images, dimensional images of kids and their family or friends or whatever. So I started then. But I really became involved in clay work when I was a student at Northern Illinois.

MR. HERMAN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. BLAIN: That was in the Art Education Program. At that time, you really didn't specialize. You were in art ed, and you knew when you started to teach, you were going to be teaching all areas. So I had the drawing, the painting, all of the different—the dimensional classes of weaving and metals and fibers and clay. And there was just a strong—

MR. HERMAN: So you learned to do it all because you had to be able to teach it.

MS. BLAIN: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: Exactly. And then my first teaching job was at Horlick High School in Racine, Wisconsin. I was very fortunate to be part of a program where there were five art teachers.

MR. HERMAN: Wow!

MS. BLAIN: That was between '64 and '67. And we kind of taught everything. We just decided that we would be burned out teaching every day, maybe, our own particular medium. And so we decided that, in my case, I would teach maybe one or two classes in clay, but then I had a drawing class, a painting class, a weaving class. You were teaching several classes a day.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. And this was what age level you were teaching?

MS. BLAIN: High school.

MR. HERMAN: High school. It's hard for me to remember what education was like in the '60s, other than the fact that there were more art classes offered in schools.

MS. BLAIN: Well, it depended. Some areas of the country had a lot to offer in terms of art programs in the high schools, the junior highs or whatever, and in other areas they didn't.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: We were very fortunate in that area. There were art teachers in the junior highs in Racine then.

MR. HERMAN: Wow!

MS. BLAIN: And even elementary.

MR. HERMAN: Because you had five teachers, did you tend to specialize in different media? Or did you all teach pretty much everything?

MS. BLAIN: We taught pretty much everything. But we could teach our particular medium. It's just, we didn't want to get burned out. We just really wanted—

MR. HERMAN: And you had that job right after your M.F.A.?

MS. BLAIN: Actually, no. I actually had that right after my undergraduate degree from Northern.

MR. HERMAN: Were you required to keep your credentials active by going for further degrees?

MS. BLAIN: That is true. And that's actually how I started going to Arrowmont [School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN]. That's a real good question, a real good leading question [laughs].

MR. HERMAN: Okay, well, let's go to that.

MS. BLAIN: Because what happened is, we had to have five—I think it was five—hours in credit every five years, and it had to be with an accredited institution.

So I had an aunt and uncle that lived in Nashville [TN], and when I was growing up, we would travel down our spring break. I remember going to Gatlinburg in those early years, in the '50s. I always saw this place called the Settlement School, Pi Beta Phi Settlement School, and it was like, what is that? And then when I was teaching at that time, Craft Horizons was the magazine which we were all reading. And there was an ad for the school. And it was like, my goodness, that's Gatlinburg! So during the summer, two different summers, I actually took classes at the early school [Summer Crafts Workshop].

MR. HERMAN: In those first classes, do you remember what you studied and with whom?

MS. BLAIN: Yes, I do. I actually studied ceramics, but you took two classes at that point, two classes each day. I was interested in baskets from early on. I think it was just that dimensional quality and that functionality that was of interest. And the patterning, the beautiful patterning. And so I was going over both summers. I was doing just a loose class structure with Marian Heard, the director, for credit. But I was going over to Cherokee, and I was meeting with the Cherokee Indians. I actually photographed them working on some of their baskets and did quite extensive research into that at that time.

MR. HERMAN: Was this unusual for a student at Arrowmont [school's name changed to Arrowmont in 1969]?

MS. BLAIN: Yes, it was. Because everybody - when you were a student, you worked at Arrowmont. And when I proposed that I do that, it was questionable. But then I guess she realized that I'm kind of an independent thinker and could do it and was really serious about it.

MR. HERMAN: So that first year you went to Arrowmont would be what year?

MS. BLAIN: Let's see, it was 1964 and—1964.

MR. HERMAN: Sixty-four.

MS. BLAIN: And then again in '66. And the other class, well, actually, that was an independent. Then took a textile printing class there in another term during the summer, along with clay. I was really interested in screen printing and block printing. And again, I guess that whole idea of surface came up, which is what my own ceramic has and continues to be involved with.

And then the other summer that I was there I took a weaving course. It was with—I remember this distinctly—it was with Glen Kaufman [they laugh], and he was trying to teach a double weave, but didn't quite remember how to teach it. [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: And he's a renowned textile teacher.

MS. BLAIN: He is. There was a friend of mine who was going there at the same time, Dick Daehnert, and the two of us worked with Glen. And it was like, Oh, yeah! That's how it works! [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: But who were the ceramicists who taught you?

MS. BLAIN: Well, it was primarily Ann Van Aken, who was Marian's assistant—not really assistant but in an unofficial capacity. Yes. Because she was her student at University of Tennessee.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: So then she kind of carried her over to the summer. And Phil Ward was also—from Florida—was also a ceramic faculty member. Phil and Jackie Ward.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, sure. Yes. I know the names.

MS. BLAIN: From Florida. Gainesville, I believe it was.

MR. HERMAN: I want to come back to those early days at Arrowmont, but continue right now with your teaching in high school. But were those sessions at Arrowmont, what, two-week sessions or one week?

MS. BLAIN: The ones I was involved with were two-week sessions. Then there was an in-between, one-week session. And so the total at that—in the '60s—the total program was like a five-week-length summer program.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, the total program.

MS. BLAIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It wasn't until the '70s when the 10-week program actually began.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, that's really interesting.

MS. BLAIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, Marian was so involved—Marian Heard, the director—was so involved with what was going on at the University of Tennessee, she couldn't do any more.

MR. HERMAN: Well, I do want to get back to that, too, and then your relationship and her with UT-Knoxville.

So how many years did you continue to teach in that school? Did you then go to other schools, or what was the next step?

MS. BLAIN: No, I really haven't had very many different careers. [Laughs.] I was actually there for five and a half years. In high school.

And what happened, basically, was Marian then asked me in 1968 if I would serve as an assistant director to her, strictly in the summer, because she had known me from my previous attendance as a student. So I did. And while I was there, the person who was teaching at the university resigned and took another position in art education. And so I gave up my teaching at the high school, which it was kind of difficult to do because already this was like the beginning of July, and to all of a sudden announce I was resigning was a little difficult. I also enjoyed my position in high school. I guess the grass seemed greener teaching at the University of Tennessee. So I was hired on as an instructor in those days. People aren't hired that way today.

MR. HERMAN: In the Ceramics Department?

MS. BLAIN: Teaching ceramics.

MR. HERMAN: Was that in the art department by then?

MS. BLAIN: This was in the College of Home Economics.

MR. HERMAN: Still Home Economics then, yes.

MS. BLAIN: It was Home Economics until 1978.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes. And was that a great change for you, in terms of teaching at the college level? And of course, living in Knoxville as opposed to Wisconsin would have been a cultural shift for sure.

MS. BLAIN: Yes, I just want to have a clarification in here—when I was at this Horlick High School in Racine, it was from 1964, and I left in the summer of 1969. I think I said '68, but it was the summer of '69.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes, '69.

MS. BLAIN: Sixty-nine, correct.

MR. HERMAN: So '69, you started at University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

MS. BLAIN: The fall of '69, that's right.

MR. HERMAN: How many instructors were in the home ec department dealing with art, what we might think of as the arts?

MS. BLAIN: Well, I think if I remember correctly, it was called Related Art, Craft, and Interior Design. And I think either at the time or afterwards, they included "Housing" as part of the title. But I was hired as a Related Art, Craft instructor, not the Interior Design component. I was the ceramic faculty member. Marian Heard was there. There was a jewelry faculty member, and Marian taught weaving. Right after I entered the program, Joe Falsetti joined—and that was in '70-'71—in wood, teaching wood.

MR. HERMAN: It's interesting, though, in the home ec department, because I think of Falsetti as a wood sculptor.

MS. BLAIN: Correct.

MR. HERMAN: And what would he be teaching?

MS. BLAIN: He was teaching wood sculpture. He was hired that way. And I think Marian Heard knew him. And Robbie Blakemore, who was the chair of the department, also knew him from the art and home economics conferences. He had taught in Missouri, which was a land-grant institution. University of Tennessee was a land-grant institution. And that's typically where the arts—particularly the dimensional things and crafts—were taught. There were many schools in the '70s, '60s, that those programs were taught in home ec. He also taught design classes, too.

MR. HERMAN: But you were teaching clay only then? Or did you have other disciplines?

MS. BLAIN: I was teaching clay. And then I was also teaching design classes.

MR. HERMAN: Was part of your contract—I assume it would have been a contract—with UT - did that include then teaching at Arrowmont in the summer? Or was that a separate—

MS. BLAIN: When I was assistant director [of Arrowmont], my contract was a teaching contract with the University of Tennessee for nine months, and then I had a contract with Arrowmont, Pi Beta Phi, to receive a summer stipend from them.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: And it was separate from UT.

MR. HERMAN: But you were there before you became assistant director, or did that start immediately when you first went to—

MS. BLAIN: It started immediately as assistant director.

MR. HERMAN: So you were always assistant director.

MS. BLAIN: And then it carried on as a summer program for me.

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

MS. BLAIN: During the year I would answer to Marian at different times. She'd call and ask me to look at her lineup of faculty, or assist her with maybe a title of an exhibition that she was thinking about putting on, or talk about that. But there wasn't any extra remuneration for that. It was just kind of as a help to the program.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. Thinking about Arrowmont at that time, and the program, you said it was only a five-week program,

MS. BLAIN: Well, that was prior to 1970.

MR. HERMAN: Prior to 1970.

MS. BLAIN: Correct; 1970 is when the new building opened on campus. This was the big addition to the program, the Centennial Project of Pi Beta Phi, where now we had this wonderful studio facility, including a library; all the offices were all together, and the gallery, were all together.

MR. HERMAN: Auditorium.

MS. BLAIN: And the auditorium. So now at this point you could have classes that could be longer. They could even have some classes during the year for some people in the community and so on.

MR. HERMAN: I'm curious about the credit aspect at University of Tennessee for work done at Arrowmont. Did that precede you, or did that happen while you were there? Did Marian already—had already started that?

MS. BLAIN: Marian had already set that up. It was a credit program since the program's inception in 1945.

MR. HERMAN: Wow!

MS. BLAIN: And the credit program was through the College of Home Economics, University of Tennessee. The students would fill out appropriate paperwork at Arrowmont. Then Marian in the early days, would send it in, and the students would receive credit. She quite often would work with the faculty on the appropriate grade for the student. And she and the faculty member would sign off on that credit for a student.

MR. HERMAN: It's really an interesting thing to have gotten started, I think. But she started at Arrowmont, do I remember, in the late '30s?

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

MR. HERMAN: Amazing.

MS. BLAIN: She started in 1938.

MR. HERMAN: Thirty-eight.

MS. BLAIN: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: I'm hoping an oral history was done with her, and I wish I had read the transcript before this. It would be very interesting.

MS. BLAIN: She was there—actually, Marian was with the University of Tennessee from 1936 through 1977. Retired in the summer of '77.

MR. HERMAN: Amazing. How did you feel after this first year doing that? Did you like that career move? Obviously, you stayed there for a while, so it must have been okay.

MS. BLAIN: Stayed there for quite a while [laughs]. Right.

Yes, I enjoyed my summer work with Arrowmont because, you know, we were finished teaching at the university. At that time it was a quarter system. I think we finished in June sometime, and then we started back in September. So there were still three or four weeks, later in September or early on, to get a complete break and get a vacation or whatever.

But, yes, I guess I could see, from those early days, how many students' lives were being affected by the programs at Arrowmont. It was always intriguing to hear the testimonials from the students as to what brought them there. Often it was for credit reasons; just like for me it was a credit thing when I was teaching high school. However, there were so many students who came with no other reason than for self-fulfillment or for just gaining more technical information or just wanting to share creative concepts with other people.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that's interesting because my sense of Arrowmont was, the way it grew out of the Settlement School, and in the 1940s the summer workshops, [it] gradually grew from what was teacher training or additional teacher training into a more professional kind of program. Included always there seemed to be a kind of a nonprofessional hobbyist opportunity for people there, too. Could you address the—if I'm right about that—the diverse needs of people, from a hobbyist to professional teaching?

MS. BLAIN: Well, first of all, you're absolutely right. I don't think it's changed. To this day—and I shouldn't be speaking: I retired from there in '01; I probably shouldn't be speaking about today as much—but let's say, when I left, there still were many, many people who could be classified as hobbyists that would be taking classes. But that's the case with all of these programs throughout the country. They're people who are hobbyists, but they're still trying to either find themselves or to advance with their particular area of interest.

And I think that was what was so interesting about Arrowmont - that working with Marian Heard, she really was concerned about that. She wanted a program that would fit the needs of basically all people. She wanted something at the beginner level that wasn't so threatening. She wanted programs that the absolute rank beginning could come in and feel comfortable and feel a sense of accomplishment.

She wanted classes that, if you took it for credit, you were in maybe a four or 500 level number from the university, versus a 100-level number for credit if you were a beginner. That would be classes that would be to really enhance what you already knew and to carry on that creative spirit.

MR. HERMAN: It must have been hard to kind of figure out at the outset. I don't know how students would apply and how much they would tell about their level of experience - how to fit them into classes, and [inaudible].

MS. BLAIN: That was always a question [laughs].

MR. HERMAN: Yes, yes.

MS. BLAIN: For the most part, the classes were listed as beginning to intermediate or from intermediate to advanced. And a lot of people kind of fell in that middle ground.

MR. HERMAN: They would self-select.

MS. BLAIN: They would self-select.

MR. HERMAN: Because they wouldn't know, really, necessarily.

MS. BLAIN: No, except by the course description—and I really worked hard on this, because I felt like you had to be true to the student about what was being taught. And so when I was writing up the course descriptions, I really worked with the faculty member to say, okay, is this language that a rank beginning student can understand and can fit themselves into and feel comfortable with? Or is this language that signifies that this class is more at an advanced level? And I think Marian worked with that pretty much, too. Because you sort of could just read the way—the wording—to tell what it was.

MR. HERMAN: I'm curious to know how the offerings of the school changed. You said that it was only a five-week program initially, and that, of course, grew. But how many disciplines were taught? And were those pretty much dependent on who was teaching at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville? How many other instructors were brought in to supplement that UT faculty?

MS. BLAIN: Really, it had nothing to do with who was teaching in Knoxville.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: Marian hired people from outside. They were international figures, national figures teaching. In many cases, very well-known people were teaching. Just as the case in visual art schools, craft schools, that we know of. And once in a while a faculty member from UT would teach a class. But that was not a regular thing.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, oh.

MS. BLAIN: She really brought in other people.

MR. HERMAN: So Joe Falsetti was not a regular [inaudible].

MS. BLAIN: He taught. But he didn't necessarily teach every summer. He was one of several people who'd be teaching design or teaching wood or whatever.

MR. HERMAN: Well, I'm curious: as the craft field has continued to diversify and change, how you could see through what students wanted to come to learn and what you were offering them, how that reflected these kinds of changes in the field?

MS. BLAIN: The offerings initially—and I'm talking about pre-1970 when I first was taking classes—I felt were a little bit more at the beginning level, a little more technique-oriented. And Marian really tried to get faculty who, again, could relate to that level. That faculty quite often taught two classes a day. So then maybe the afternoon class would be a little bit more advanced. But maybe a morning person would just continue on.

After 1970, there were more faculty that were hired, the offerings were greater, and the content was more specific. So, for instance, in clay, earlier it might have been just a ceramic class, and it might be just classified as hand-building, or another might be wheel. Now, it might be related to a particular type of firing: gas firing, electric firing, or—well, they didn't have soda at that point. But it could be working with stoneware or working with porcelain and the intricacies of that. Or a particular glaze calculation class. So that now you'd be enrolling for something very specific. But if you were a beginner, you would not be taking a glaze calculation.

MR. HERMAN: No, no.

MS. BLAIN: There was still an option for you to take another more generalized beginning class.

MR. HERMAN: When did you begin to host Elderhostel groups at the school?

MS. BLAIN: Elderhostel was a very strong program for us during my tenure. There were four to six weeks of offerings in the spring and in the fall. That program started in 1981.

MR. HERMAN: Was that Marian's initiative?

MS. BLAIN: No, it was actually my initiative.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, really!

MS. BLAIN: I worked with Clare Verstegen, who was our assistant director at that time, to get that program together. And actually, Clare was a program coordinator, and so she kind of headed that program up. But it was a program that was very unique at that time because the class offerings were all creative and art-related. Most

other programs across the country were a little bit more academic and related—well, just were different.

MR. HERMAN: What was the reason that you went with Elderhostel? I'm curious. I've done a whole lot of Elderhostels and enjoyed them, but it is a little unusual.

MS. BLAIN: University of Tennessee had had an Elderhostel program. And I felt like that was—it's just a beautiful time in the fall and in the spring in the Smokies location of Gatlinburg, Arrowmont - and I just felt that a lot of older people traveled at that time of the year, and wouldn't it be nice to have some class options for them? Not only would we be enhancing and enriching their lives as older individuals—it was at that point 60 and over, and then I think they decreased it later to 55; or one of the two, one of the couple, had to be at that age - but it also gave us classes in the fall and in the spring that would help our enrollment and helps us with enrollment throughout the year. Because if parents—grandparents—were there, maybe their sons or daughters or grandkids or neighbors would hear about the program, and it was a way of advertising.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes.

MS. BLAIN: And it really worked for us.

MR. HERMAN: Did that also help pay the bills?

MS. BLAIN: Oh, no question about it. Yes, it did. And actually, we got a sizeable amount of what's called Friends of Arrowmont donations from that group of people.

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

MS. BLAIN: But I saw it as more of helping those individuals, in terms of their quality of life. But also as a PR program.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. Did you have then, while the Elderhostelers were there, people of all different ages?

MS. BLAIN: No, we didn't—

MR. HERMAN: And how young could Arrowmont students be?

MS. BLAIN: One of the individuals had to be either 55 or 60.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, for Elderhostelers, right.

MS. BLAIN: It was 60 when it first started, right.

MR. HERMAN: But I mean for the other students.

MS. BLAIN: At the time when Elderhostel was there, that was the only program.

MR. HERMAN: Oh. So those would be the early part of the—that would be a way of extending the summer season?

MS. BLAIN: The summer. Summer would end, let's say, second week in August, because school started back, including Tennessee. Also a lot of younger students, they couldn't come in the fall. So now into September, October, we're teaching the Elderhostel.

And those people were from all parts of the country, and there were even international students. We became very well known for our Elderhostel programs because we had top-notch faculty teaching. We dealt with all levels of students. And it was not broken up by having other students of other ages there. It was for Elderhostel.

And I felt another good thing about that program was we always had a host and/or a hostess there, and the hostess was a Pi Beta Phi member. And that individual was often a person who had served on our board in the past or on Grand Council or had been to the school for some other reason. And she would carry that information back firsthand to the club, the chapters, Grand Council, the board, whatever, about what the programs were. And that individual also—or the hostess, and then sometimes a husband would come, or a friend would come—they would also take classes. So they were in the studios with the students and could hear the comments directly. They were staying in the dorms with the students; they were eating with the students. So they were one of them, and would carry direct information.

MR. HERMAN: That sounds like more of a hands-on role for Pi Beta Phi than I realized happened. So that was—

MS. BLAIN: It was a wonderful program, absolutely wonderful.

MR. HERMAN: Yes, yes, Obviously.

MS. BLAIN: And it also extended those individuals who really cared about Arrowmont, but now their term was up as a board member or Grand Council. It kind of extended their interest in the school. And in all honesty, we received quite a bit of money from those individuals who really understood the program.

MR. HERMAN: Now, at the time you first went to Arrowmont, was the program exclusively a craft program, or was there also photography and painting or—

MS. BLAIN: When I went there, it was exclusively a craft program. Marian was in the College of Home Economics, Craft-Related Arts. And that's what a land-grant institution was all about. At the University of Tennessee, the School of Art was in the College of Liberal Arts. They had some different names, but it was basically in the College of Liberal Arts. Marian really didn't have anything to do with the College of Liberal Arts. She was Home Economics. And so you didn't have the drawing, the painting, the photography at that time.

MR. HERMAN: So you would have—weaving, I assume, would be the principal fiber arts.

MS. BLAIN: Fiber arts were big, and ceramics was a sizeable program. And early basketry. Marian also had—this kind of started because of her own background; she was a ceramic major. But also her background included a lot of metalwork and weaving. And so she, right from the beginning, had jewelry classes. So fiber, jewelry. And then there was always a class—and I actually taught it a couple of times—called "Recreational Crafts." And that was a very beginning-level class for people who, maybe just like it said, are dealing with teaching individuals who are recreational center or through a health-related organization or center. And those were very popular courses. But they were primarily dealing with dimensional work.

MR. HERMAN: Did that have to deal with credit of another kind at the university, if it was really vocational training for people who were using craft for rehabilitation?

MS. BLAIN: No, actually, at that time they would still be getting the same type of credit through Home Economics.

MR. HERMAN: Yes, yes. So maybe the credit was what was important, not what part of the university it came from.

MS. BLAIN: Right, right. Exactly.

MR. HERMAN: How did you, after you went there to work, begin to see the field changing and the need for maybe more diverse offerings than, say, dealing with an instructor who would be a specialist in, oh, surface design? I'm thinking about the movements that really came about in the 1970s beyond the surface design movement. Of course, you've mentioned basketry, which probably would have been fairly traditional then before basketry became more sculptural.

MS. BLAIN: Correct.

MR. HERMAN: I was thinking as you were talking about the hobbyist point of view initially, and how basketry, really, and wood turning, which is one of the school's strengths now, really came from a hobbyist form, not from a university or art school tradition.

MS. BLAIN: Well, I think what was happening in 1970, the first couple of years when that new facility was built and being used, there were so many students that were knocking on the door. It was just amazing the number of students that were interested in the program and that came in the summer. It was a summer program at that point, 10 weeks. And the offerings, I think, became more and more diverse as the program continued on into the '70s. We were still part of Home Economics, but even in ceramics, the head of the School of Art and I had talked about possibly joining together, getting out of Home Economics and joining the School of Art.

That was something that was a little bit behind the scenes. Marian would not have been interested in ever hearing about that. But you could see changes going on at Arrowmont, with more interest in carrying ideas out, as well as more just technical expertise. And I think that was happening in all of the areas. You could see weaving being carried out—just as an example—beyond placemats and table runners and pillows to things that were much more intriguing and personal statements. But there was still a very, very strong interest in how to accomplish that.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: And the technical aspects.

MR. HERMAN: Well, it's interesting because that seems to go hand-in-hand with the opening up of the crafts field

beyond functional objects only, which we think of the—

MS. BLAIN: Correct.

MR. HERMAN: —studio craft movement, post-World War II, the kind of designer craftsmen, as they started being called, in the late '40s and '50s. Still functional, but moving to more of a contemporary design. And I guess the next step then would be moving away from function.

MS. BLAIN: Correct. True. Except that when we were a part of the College of Home Economics, certainly in the way I was teaching in ceramics, we were doing some functional and sculpture, the two. We did not make the distinction. But we rarely used the word "sculpture." These were just clay forms, ceramic forms. Maybe we'd say, a three-dimensional form—but we didn't say, a sculptural form. And we probably didn't have a whole show of figurative ceramics, let's say. It just was something you didn't do in Home Economics. And I guess because of my more traditional background, I was okay with that.

I just figured that I was pushing the students, and I think we kind of went with the flow and gradually changed, rather than any kind of an abrupt change. I think the abrupt change—if you want to say "abrupt," "more abrupt" maybe—was when we moved from the College of Home Economics to the School of Art. And then you were working with more sculptors and more of that orientation.

MR. HERMAN: Did you find that the students began to change when that happened, too?

MS. BLAIN: Oh, yes. Oh, there was no question about it.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: Sure. Right. But in between, there was a time when Marian was getting ready to retire. She was interested in having somebody succeed her, and I was not particularly interested in succeeding her.

MR. HERMAN: How many years you had been there when Marian retired?

MS. BLAIN: Oh, let's see. Marian was there until the summer of 1977. I had served as assistant director for 11 years. So in the summer of 1977, the person who was to succeed her was—they did overlap that summer—Ray Pierotti. And I was still the assistant director that summer.

MR. HERMAN: So did you remain assistant director after Ray came in?

MS. BLAIN: I did. I was there '77 and '78 as his assistant director. And then I was interim director after Ray was no longer there. I was interim director from December '78, and became director in December of '79.

MR. HERMAN: This has been said to be a period of great transition, and Ray has talked about being a transitional director and how that's always a difficult job. Did you have a sense that Pi Beta Phi wanted any kind of change in the program when Marian retired and Ray came in?

MS. BLAIN: It's always difficult to follow somebody who has been there, and with such a reputation, for so many years. So I'm not certain that whoever that person might have been—it could've been me—would have been as successful as maybe they would have liked to have been under those circumstances.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: I think that there wasn't the appropriate communication with Ray right from the start, as to the history of the school, as to what Pi Phi wanted, maybe as to what the university wanted in there. But particularly with Pi Phi.

In thinking back to who even served on Ray Pierotti's search committee, it was kind of interesting because there were a couple of faculty members, the department chair, another ceramic faculty from Home Ec, because we were still part of Home Ec when he was hired; Marian herself was on the search committee. That's unheard of today. You don't have the outgoing person serving on her search committee. But that was the case then.

To me, Ray was sort of handpicked by Marian. I think all along she probably wanted a woman because a woman. She always probably felt that a woman would get along better with the Pi Phis. But on the other hand, I think she felt Ray had the credentials to carry on, because of his work with the American Craft Council, in particular. But I don't know if she really looked into his background that well and really if they talked much about what his philosophy was and was going to be. And what was he going to do with the school?

I have the feeling—and I've never really talked to Ray about this—but I have the feeling that little was discussed about the future of Arrowmont and his position on things.

And I think that when he came in, he wanted to do some things that related to—he wanted to move fairly quickly, I think, and make some changes. And I think he wanted some things dealing with performing arts as well as the visual arts. And something in poetry, too, and music, which was his background. I'm not sure if that was really discussed at length with the hiring committee or with Grand Council of Pi Phi. So I don't know if, right from the start, maybe the appropriate communication was laid for a successful career.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. How did the offerings of the school change during that period? Did he offer performing arts? Quite apart from that, I'm more interested in the craft disciplines and the kind of people that he brought in. Or were you selecting faculty? How did that work? How did the two of you work together and divide up the duties?

MS. BLAIN: Well, what was also happening at this point was we were in sort of negotiations. The people in the College of Home Economics were in negotiations with the School of Art, art department. So that that major was going to take place, and there we would no longer be part of Home Ec. Marian had retired, and such a heavy craft emphasis was in the past. And now we're kind of starting over in the School of Art.

I think Ray brought with him some really good ideas about having things that were being taught in the School of Art become part of Arrowmont. Those would be the drawing and the painting classes, even more of a sculptural emphasis. Maybe even getting involved with printmaking. Ray had some friends who were interested in some glass; he wanted to pursue that a little bit.

So there were other offerings that were starting to take shape. Now I don't think he really pursued the—he had some poetry readings, and there were some musical programs. But as far as having a major emphasis in those areas, that did not happen.

MR. HERMAN: Well, thinking about performances, did this involve the Gatlinburg community at all? What was the school's relationship to the community, both before and - if it changed during the time he was there—after?

MS. BLAIN: It was always difficult. Gatlinburg is Gatlinburg as we see it today. They're very much of a tourist area. And the small population that did and continues to live there always seemed to be interested in making that almighty dollar, and in a sense could care less about some of the cultural things around them. And that was unfortunate. When Marian was there, she was trying to get some children's classes together, which she did do, and those were very successful. Marian was not necessarily a joiner. And when Ray came on, he became part of —it was either Kiwanis [International] or - what's the other?

MR. HERMAN: Rotary [International].

MS. BLAIN: Rotary. He was part of Rotary, right. Thank you. He was part of Rotary. But we started getting some grant money when Ray was there through Kiwanis as well as Rotary. And that continued on.

MR. HERMAN: So did that support, then, activities that would serve the community?

MS. BLAIN: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: Those were for activities, like for children's classes or for some of the night classes for the community people. Ray also, with some interested people in the community, started a Gatlinburg Arts Council, which I felt was very strong and very needed.

I think that we worked together quite well. I was part of that. But I was still only in the summer. And so during the school year, again, I worked with Ray sort of like I worked with Marian: I would meet with him once in a while to discuss the faculty or discuss some programs, but basically it was Ray's thing—it was Marian's thing.

But Gatlinburg Arts Council was something that Ray did, and we started to have a Sevier County exhibition every year—we now have this great gallery space—and could have that kind of an exhibition during the school year. The Gatlinburg Arts Council gave money for awards, and there was additional money that was coming through to the school for children's programs or whatever.

MR. HERMAN: When you became director, was that as easy—what would be perhaps a kind of an old-boy network—for a woman to participate in the way that Ray did?

MS. BLAIN: In terms of the community?

MR. HERMAN: Yes, yes.

MS. BLAIN: I was not as socially involved with the community as Ray was. And not a member, as he was, of that organization. But we kept the Arts Council going a little bit longer. We used the money again for awards for the

children's classes. Those classes actually increased, because people could really see the merit of those Saturday mornings and afternoon things. Even some after-school things with the kids. And so also then some evening classes with the community members. So those classes, the enrollment definitely [inaudible].

MR. HERMAN: And the community, the users of those programs, paid tuition to go those?

MS. BLAIN: They did.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. I'm curious about how the finances were looked at from the Pi Beta Phi point of view. But I think we're almost at the end of this memory card. So perhaps we should take that up on the next one. So this is the end of card one, interview with Sandy Blain.

[END CD1.]

MR. HERMAN: This is Lloyd Herman, card two, of an interview with Sandy Blain on May 19, 2009, in Tempe, Arizona.

Sandy, we were just talking about the Arrowmont School and the community, and I'm curious about how finances were handled with the school. Clearly tuition would come in. But I'm not sure of the relationship with tuition, whether it would come to University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and then to the school, or whether the school shared that. And what role the director had, if any, in fundraising. Or whether Pi Beta Phi was the principal source of support for the school.

MS. BLAIN: Pi Beta Phi was the principal source for the school because they really believed in the school. And through the sales of Arrowcraft products, a percentage was coming back to the school. And by a mandatory donation for chapters and alums, a percentage of that was coming to Arrowmont.

MR. HERMAN: Mandatory?

MS. BLAIN: Correct. And so the school really had strong support from individuals. There were donations in honor or in memory of individual Pi Beta Phi members.

I think it's really important to say that Marian Heard, Ray Pierotti, and myself, we all had dual accountability. We were all three involved with teaching at the university. And you could only do so much. In the early days, including Ray's time and including my earlier days, we did not have development directors working with us. We would try to obtain some additional money in addition to the Pi Beta Phi money. However, that was really not our main emphasis.

Our main emphasis was getting students to the school and having a diversified program and carrying out the mission of enriching lives through art. So when, for instance, Ray would be involved in Rotary, sure, there were people that maybe would make a donation. But it was really trying to get those people just to be more knowledgeable about the school, to see if they or friends or relatives might want to attend, and the importance of the school in the community. The same thing with me for the initial years.

However, as time went on, I started applying for grants. Ray actually applied to the Tennessee Arts Commission for a grant. I followed up on that, and we received yearly grants. That was something that had not been done prior to this time.

MR. HERMAN: Would those be grants for general operating support or for specific programs?

MS. BLAIN: They were for general operating, and, in some cases, we would put them towards particular programs. But sometimes a particular program would pay for itself. Like if there was a conference that would be at the school, basically the conference, we would hope, and they did, paid for themselves.

MR. HERMAN: I know there have been a number of important conferences at the school—when did those begin? Did that begin before you came as assistant director to Marian Heard or after you were there?

MS. BLAIN: The conferences actually began with Marian. I remember when I was actually away for one year, finishing up my M.F.A. degree in Milwaukee, Marian called me back that spring and said that Arrowmont was going to be hosting NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts], and this was in 1971. And all of a sudden it became extremely overwhelming for her.

We had just moved into the new building. The ceramics facility had been there for a number of years, but now there was a major gallery exhibition; there would be 600, 800 people in attendance. They had rented the coliseum downtown, and people were staying at the Mountain View Hotel and other hotels in the community, as well as Arrowmont. And the facilities at Arrowmont were going to be used for studios and so on. But it was totally overwhelming for her. And so would I come back for a week, week and a half? Which I did.

So conferences actually started way back during her time. Art in Home Economics conferences started in 1970, probably. There were other conferences that she also did. So those were not new.

In answer to a question that you had earlier, which I don't think I fully answered, and that was in relation to tuition money. Students would pay tuition to the school, to Arrowmont, and that would be Arrowmont's money. If they were taking a class for credit, they would pay credit fees to the university. We would collect those credit fees at Arrowmont and send them back to the university. And those went to the College of Home Economics or later to the College of Liberal Arts.

MR. HERMAN: Did the university provide any kind of support to Arrowmont other than just that relationship? It doesn't sound like they're paying the school for any of the use of facilities other than just the credits.

MS. BLAIN: They weren't paying for the use of the facilities, but they were paying partially for the director's salary.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: And for the amenities in relation to that. So for instance Marian would have—and I'm not sure of the exact percentage here—but maybe during the summer her total salary then would be paid for by Pi Phi, but during the year it maybe was 50-50. When Ray was hired, again, his total summer salary was paid by Pi Phi, and then during the year it was probably a 50-50. When I took over, my salary was paid for by the university as was Ray's and Marian's. But Pi Beta Phi reimbursed the university for 80 percent of my salary.

MR. HERMAN: How about as assistant director?

MS. BLAIN: As assistant director, it was strictly Pi Beta Psi's money that would pay me, separately.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: Because it was strictly in the summer, and I was not teaching in the summer.

MR. HERMAN: How much oversight did Pi Beta Phi give to the whole financial situation? With building new buildings and everything, I would think that that would—

MS. BLAIN: It was like their thing.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: [Laughs.] There's no question.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. But did they have to plan far in advance to come up with building funds?

MS. BLAIN: Sure. The Centennial Project, which was basically for the new, large facility, the Emma Harper Turner Complex, which was opened in 1970, that started at the convention in 1965, called the Centennial Project. It was announced then, and funds were starting to be raised at that point. And it continued on through future conventions and future programs for the active and the alums by selling shingles for the roof, shingles for a dollar apiece. Or chairs for the auditorium for $20 each. Things like that. So there was fundraising going on with Pi Phi for that building, for instance.

MR. HERMAN: But not within the community of Gatlinburg.

MS. BLAIN: But not within the community, right. There wasn't any active fundraising within the community, no. Nor were there any responsibilities—and you being a recent board member, you can answer this—but through my tenure there weren't any specific responsibilities for board members to give to Arrowmont. I have served on boards where it is strongly requested that you make whatever-amount donation to the organization. And that was not the case at Arrowmont. In fact, in the early days, the board members' ways were paid to Arrowmont. And then, of course, that ended well before I left.

MR. HERMAN: Actually, I think when I was on the board, which was after you left, we were offered reimbursement. But I didn't really feel that that was appropriate, to ask for reimbursement when we were—

MS. BLAIN: You were offered reimbursement, because I had served on the American Craft Council and on other boards, and you had the option of requesting reimbursement. Some people took it; some people didn't, because of whatever reason. And I just thought that this was an appropriate way to go and suggested this, and the board agreed to that before I left.

MR. HERMAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I think probably the only requirement when I went on the Board

of Governors—it wasn't a requirement—but rather that when the Signature Circle was formed as a support group, we were then expected to pay in a thousand dollars each. The suggested amount. Everything, of course, is always suggested.

MS. BLAIN: Right.

MR. HERMAN: I'm very interested in the Arrowcraft Shop, Arrowcraft Industries I would call it, because I think it's a remarkable outgrowth of what I understand was initially, when Pi Beta Phi established the school, that the mountain people, to thank the teachers, started bringing down their homemade things. And that then became more of a retail opportunity. But that had to have grown considerably over the years. I remember being told, I think by Frances Fox, who was from one of the early weaving families, that at one point there were as many as a hundred looms in houses in Gatlinburg.

MS. BLAIN: Yes, that's correct. It was a program that started in the '20s because the children at school were talking about how their parents were weaving or making baskets or doing carving. And those were the three areas—or even some broom making. It was like, gosh, not only did these become the gifts, but these could also be sold. And so the Arrowcraft Shop started, knowing that, particularly, there were all of these weavers in the community that had looms at home.

The problem was that even though people had looms at home, what was the quality like? And so, actually, in those early days, Winojean Redding was the person that was hired to go out on horseback. She went to the individuals' homes to help them with quality control over their products. And then she in different times would bring back the placemats or potholders.

I'm still using Arrowcraft potholders today. They held up so beautifully, [laughs] unlike products that we see today. But anyhow, then all of these products started to be sold at the Arrowcraft Shop, and a percentage of the income then from the sales at the shop coming back to the school.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, came to the school, not to Pi Beta Phi [inaudible].

MS. BLAIN: But what happened was the alum clubs and the actives throughout the country were encouraged to have Arrowcraft sales. And as you kind of informally mentioned, the early Tupperware parties or similar types of parties—this was going on long before that. And these were sales that the clubs, the chapters would request. You know, 25 potholders, 25 tote bags, 50 of this. Or they would request certain traditional patterns that would be woven in cotton fibers primarily or some linen. Then those objects would be sent to any individual in a community. And that individual would have a "house party" with this group of people, and they would be buying this merchandise. What was not sold was sent back, but most of it was sold, and the money was sent back.

MR. HERMAN: Who made the decisions about what would be made then? Because I would think there'd be some designs that wouldn't be very popular—

MS. BLAIN: Correct.

MR. HERMAN: —and others that would.

MS. BLAIN: Right. Pi Phi had a lot to do with that. They hired a person who was the head of the Arrowcraft Shop who would make decisions about what was going to be woven or made.

And then there was one of the ladies who was working at the shop who lived in town who was kind of the head of the weavers. So she would meet them when they would come in and bring their finished products. And then in some cases would give them the yarns to continue to weave with, because Arrowcraft could get the yarns at a discounted price for purchasing such a quantity.

But also then the particular patterns could be woven. The Whig Rose was the pattern that was so popular in traditional Appalachia, for instance. There would be certain colors of Whig Rose that would be woven. And the yarns would be right there at Arrowcraft. Ladies would come in, get their yarns, take them back, weave the products. X number of weeks later would bring the products back.

MR. HERMAN: And would they be paid right away?

MS. BLAIN: And they would be paid pretty much upfront, right.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: For those people, getting paid right away was important, because that was their job; that was their livelihood in most of the cases.

MR. HERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, and I'm guessing that that really had great economic impact on those households—

MS. BLAIN: Oh, it was their income.

MR. HERMAN: —where the men probably couldn't work year-round.

MS. BLAIN: In many cases it was their total economic income.

MR. HERMAN: Did the school get involved with teaching weaving? If there were a hundred looms, I'm sure that must have grown from what the original number was when the Settlement School was first founded.

MS. BLAIN: Well, the school, as such, didn't get involved with it. But the lady who was the head of the program at Arrowcraft, for instance, would be involved with those ladies to make sure that what they were doing was appropriate. These were people who were living in very remote areas of Sevier County, the county where the school and shop are located. And to get to their homes was difficult in many cases. These were people who, in a lot of cases, lacked a formal education. And they did not really want to act—react—with anybody at the school. They were threatened by the school.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: So they could easily work with the shop manager. She had worked with them for years. They were like an extended family to those people.

MR. HERMAN: I wonder what their reaction was if a new design was to be introduced.

MS. BLAIN: Some were very receptive and some weren't. Some could just weave—and using Whig Rose again as a sample—they could weave that over and over, and work 18 hours a day on just weaving the repetitive patterns. Others wanted the challenge of trying new colors or maybe trying a new pattern. But it was usually the younger ones that wanted the challenges. The older ones, the older ladies, really wanted to stick with what their grandmother did or what they had done for years.

MR. HERMAN: Did Arrowcraft help in providing looms to those who didn't have them to increase production?

MS. BLAIN: Initially there were some looms. But basically, the people had the looms.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: Because that was something that family members had had for years and years.

MR. HERMAN: It's just a fascinating story, I think.

MS. BLAIN: Yes. And weaving was popular at the school itself from the '40s on. When the school first started, weaving was a very popular subject. But it was not the community people, not those ladies who were weaving for Arrowcraft that were the students. This was people from outside of the area even, probably very few from Gatlinburg or Sevierville at all. So many of the classes consisted of students who were literally from everywhere, every pocket of the United States and some foreign countries.

MR. HERMAN: Did the weavers know or even care at all about the school? Or was it really just work?

MS. BLAIN: Not really.

MR. HERMAN: It was employment and income.

MS. BLAIN: It was employment for them. They did not come to the school. They were afraid of the school. I know that Marian tried to get some of the weavers to come up to the school at different times. We talked about hosting a little afternoon tea for them, when maybe there would be more of a traditional weaver that was there for a particular week.

MR. HERMAN: Oh. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. BLAIN: And that just did not go over at all.

MR. HERMAN: Yes, yes. I know that Arrowcraft no longer exists as such, and the decline of the cottage industry. How did that come about? I think the store now is still run by Southern Highland Handicraft Guild or something.

MS. BLAIN: The store is owned by the Pi Beta Phi Fraternity. But it is run and has been leased for a number of years. And I don't know what the length of the lease is. But there is a lease that's been going on for a number of

years to the Southern Highland Craft Guild. I think it's a successful shop for the guild.

I think it could have been more of a successful shop for the Pi Phis, but I just think—probably management. There wasn't the appropriate management there. And also I think that Pi Phis had to realize that if these people were dying off, these woven products were not going to be woven again, because how many people are going to be weaving these traditional mats day after day after day, as they had in the past? Economic conditions were such that people were getting jobs in other locations and with industry and with, you know, other jobs.

So even in the '70s, they started to handle a lot of other things. They were all made—pieces, objects of wood, ceramics, metal—were made primarily in the Appalachian area. But they were things that were not necessarily made right there.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. Well, I think it would've been kind of a mixed bag: some people who probably didn't want to or couldn't weave anymore.

MS. BLAIN: Sure.

MR. HERMAN: And others who would like to keep up just as they had been.

MS. BLAIN: Sure. There are still weavers who are weaving for the Southern Highland Guild today that are traditional weavers, who are still supplying the shop with some traditional—maybe not the same patterns—but still some very traditional woven things.

MR. HERMAN: Did Arrowcraft wholesale any of those to other kinds of shops for resale?

MS. BLAIN: Not that I know of, and I think that was an opportunity that was missed. I think that it had been such a successful operation of having these clubs and chapters buying these things and then reselling them to their alums and actives, that they were just going along as is. I don't think there was much foresight as to what was going to happen in the future. The other thing about it is that, when I took over as director of Arrowmont, my initial title was Director of Arrowmont and Arrowcraft.

MR. HERMAN: Oh!

MS. BLAIN: And I was like, what more could I do? I'm also involved in teaching at the university. And it was somewhat unrealistic as to the responsibilities that I could uphold. So they did hire a person who then, halfway through my tenure, well, it was kind of at the start of my tenure, after a couple of years—who took over as manager of Arrowcraft. But she had no weaving background, no craft background. So to put somebody like that in that position, she didn't know what to say.

MR. HERMAN: Was that a Pi Phi choice then?

MS. BLAIN: It was a Pi Phi choice and a Pi Phi.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: It was somebody whose husband was retiring—had retired—from a position in Cleveland, Ohio. He became business manager because he had worked as an executive in a department store. She was now in charge of Arrowcraft, and she'd never even worked before that in her life. So she just went along. They said, we want to do these things; she'd say, okay. She didn't know from anything.

MR. HERMAN: Was she getting any feedback from the Pi Phi chapters about what they wanted to get done?

MS. BLAIN: Well, they were happy at that point, in the early days—and we're talking about the early '80s—they were still happy to have the materials that they did and the objects that they had for sale.

But then there was a board member who was kind of responsible to Arrowcraft, and she was a weaver, and she was trying to get some new products out there. But she lived in Texas, and she was only there twice a year. So again, there wasn't any hands-on, and the person she was working with at Arrowcraft was somebody who had a very limited education and who was on the side of the old weavers. Here we're bringing in new things, and we're trying new materials, and she wasn't particularly for that. So when new woven objects were brought in, they were not that well received.

MR. HERMAN: No.

MS. BLAIN: Which was unfortunate.

MR. HERMAN: Well, getting to your tenure now that we've gone through a bit of history, I'm interested in—

because you were not interested, as I understand it, when Marian retired, in taking over the directorship—why?

MS. BLAIN: That is correct. Initially, I was not interested in it, because I had received an M.F.A. in ceramics, and I really wanted to pursue a career being a ceramic artist as well as a faculty member at the University of Tennessee, where I was quite happy.

And I could see what Marian had gone through. She had the dual position, again, of her own—she never could do her own work, and she was pretty blatant about that. Other people in the department were winning awards and being in shows, but she could never do her own ceramic work, metalwork, because there just wasn't any more time in the day.

She was teaching a lot at the university, and then she was at Arrowmont. She didn't have a staff; she had a secretary, and there were a couple of maintenance men. And when things were going on, if there was a conference during the year, they would bring in people for that. But she was just so involved. She had a full-time job at both places and was trying to do it. I could see that. And so I just kept thinking that I really wanted to just pursue ceramics as well as teach. So I had made that clear to Ray and to Marian initially.

When Ray was hired, he was really good at just calling me at different times and saying, you know, Do you want to pull together the ceramic faculty? Would you help me with names for this area or that? And so we'd meet. But as far as anything beyond that, I was a faculty member at the university. And also my salary depended on the whole "publish or perish" idea at the university. And so by working a little bit—not a little bit—but harder at Arrowmont or whatever was not getting me anywhere at all.

MR. HERMAN: I hadn't thought about that.

MS. BLAIN: I had to be competitive with the other faculty members, or I would be way down on the totem pole. I was hired as an instructor. And I moved up at the appropriate years, when expected, to assistant professor, associate professor. All of those different titles—instructor, then assistant professor, then another whole time period was the tenure, then associate professor, and then professor—and all of those were at the exact times when I should. But I also had to be in a lot of exhibitions in order to be competitive and to get myself to a salary—to a level—where other faculty were to be on the salary schedule. My pay was from the University of Tennessee.

MR. HERMAN: Did you have time in the summer then to produce your own work, or was that—

MS. BLAIN: It was limited. It was always a struggle to try and fit it in.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: But when I was teaching, like a lot of faculty members, there were time periods during the year when I could get some work done and so on. So that's why I was able to go up for these different levels at the appropriate time. And never fell short at all, because I was producing.

MR. HERMAN: Did you become full professor then before you became director of Arrowmont?

MS. BLAIN: So actually, I was an instructor from 1969 to 1973. And then '73 to '79, I was assistant professor. Got tenure in 1976, and I was associate professor 1979 to 1984. And then I was professor in 1984 and went till my retirement.

MR. HERMAN: So you were doing the full directorship at that time when you were still—

MS. BLAIN: Associate professor.

MR. HERMAN: I mean directorship at Arrowmont—

MS. BLAIN: Correct.

MR. HERMAN: —when you were associate professor.

MS. BLAIN: Right, right. So what happened was I was hired as interim director in December of 1979. And it was very clear—I made it very clear; the board of Pi Phi made it very clear—interim director. And that was fine with me.

But as things worked out, and when you take on a position like that—or when I took on a position like that—I wasn't just thinking of one or two years or what was going to happen in the next few months. When you're dealing with a school like that, you're planning conferences three, four, five years in advance. You're planning exhibitions well in advance. You're planning faculty two, three, four years up the road—especially when you're

dealing with nationally and internationally known faculty. So therefore, all of a sudden it was like, my God, here I'm planning for all this stuff for two years from now and three years from now, and looking forward to it in a sense, and I'm not going to be there. So one thing led to the other, and I agreed to become director.

MR. HERMAN: So they did ask you.

MS. BLAIN: Right.

MR. HERMAN: You were the number one on the list, I would assume, as senior—

MS. BLAIN: Yes, they really did—they did not interview anyone.

MR. HERMAN: During that period then, did you see, when you took on the full directorship, changes that you wanted to make or things that you wanted to change that hadn't worked, or just how you could respond to the evolution of the craft field?

MS. BLAIN: The enrollment during Marian Heard's time was very high, and she really had classes that were pretty balanced for beginning to intermediate to advanced level. And was starting to vary the options. When Ray Pierotti came on, he was doing more variation with the options.

I knew that I did not want to follow what he was doing in terms of the performing arts. It was fine to have some music programs during the summer when classes were being held, as kind of a culmination-type program on a Friday night or a partying-type, a celebratory-type program. But as far as teaching that, those areas, I was not interested in that. And I made that very clear when I was hired, and that was made very clear to me that that was not part of my job.

I also said that enrollment had been quite flat for a couple of years. I felt that it could be back to the days when Marian was director—very high. Enrollment was high at other schools. I knew that. And I just really felt that the need was there, and why couldn't we get it back up again? Why couldn't we have other options which would allow it to be that way? So that's where Elderhostel became part of it.

When I took over, I also said I wanted to have a full-time assistant director, and that was part of the agreement. Because I had been a part-time summer; Betty Street before me was strictly summer, under Marian Heard. In fact, her position was like for five weeks in the summers for three or four summers, whatever it was. If you're going to run this school and have a director who's working with the university and working with Arrowmont, you've got to have somebody on the staff at Arrowmont all the time, dealing with the personnel that's there and trying to increase the offerings throughout the year.

So what I wanted to do right from the start was to have spring classes. And that was initiated in 1981. It was a case of where "spring" meant spring break for a lot of students in university programs. A lot of teachers who maybe were high school art teachers who needed some credit classes—or noncredit classes, whatever.

So I figured if we had classes during March—I'm not speaking for now because I don't know if all the spring breaks occur at about the same time—but when I was there, most of the spring breaks occurred during March, and they occurred second, third week in March. So we had huge enrollment for our spring classes in March.

And I had a full-time assistant director. So even while I was back and forth from the university, Clare Verstegen, my assistant then, was totally in charge at Arrowmont, and we could have just other things going on during the year.

MR. HERMAN: How long was Clare assistant director then?

MS. BLAIN: She was there for eight years, and would have stayed longer, but she had always wanted to get an M.F.A., and she wanted to go to Cranbrook [Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI]. And that turned out to be a reality for her.

MR. HERMAN: She had not been at University of Tennessee, Knoxville—

MS. BLAIN: Correct.

MR. HERMAN: —during that time.

MS. BLAIN: How I met her was, she was a studio assistant, and we had an office staff member that left. I asked her if, when her studio assistantship first part of the summer was over, could she come back, or could she stay on? She drove back to Wisconsin, where she was from, and came back in another couple weeks. And one thing led to the other, and she became the full-time assistant director.

MR. HERMAN: So then she was there for eight years.

MS. BLAIN: I was there between 1980 and 1987. And she was the first full-time assistant director, and her title was Program Coordinator.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that was really my question, how your job and hers were defined, whether they balanced each other, whether you did much of the same things, or [inaudible].

MS. BLAIN: Well, both of us were very hands-on people. And we were right there literally—that was kind of our life. It was Marian's life too. Clare lived at the school for most of the time. She finally did get an apartment in town. But she lived in the staff house. There was a small apartment for her. But she was there all the time and was a hands-on person.

MR. HERMAN: During the summer.

MS. BLAIN: All the time; she was full-time.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, full-time.

MS. BLAIN: So she was hands-on, working with maintenance, directing maintenance, directing the cooks—she was the person. If they needed a hand in the kitchen, she'd be in the kitchen. Nothing was ever too big for Clare. She was the photographer on campus. She was doing the graphic design work. So she was there all the time. She knew so many of the major faculty members throughout the country in all these different disciplines. So we would talk together about who we should get in terms of faculty. She'd contact some; I'd contact some. She also dealt with the gallery during her tenure.

MR. HERMAN: What does she do during the winter, though, when the school was closed? How long had the school year stretched by that time?

MS. BLAIN: Well, see, we started Elderhostel then, too. So she was the program coordinator for that. Then she was involved with the children's classes. Then she was involved with the community night classes.

MR. HERMAN: So the school really had already become—how many months of the year would that be now, 10?

MS. BLAIN: Probably nine months or 10 months, yes.

MR. HERMAN: Alright. Wow. Well, that's a considerable growth from a five-week program.

MS. BLAIN: Right. But it was growth. I think the important thing to realize is that it was growth in a direction that had been going on for years. So it was introducing programs not totally new. Maybe the disciplines changed a little. But it was still dealing with the same mission. So you were still dealing with the visual arts and the crafts. In the '80s we were dealing with—the painting and drawing and a little bit more of a sculptural emphasis that Ray Pierotti had put into effect. And the photography, which had been put in at the end of Marian's tenure.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, oh.

MS. BLAIN: Marian was the one who actually got the program started in photography. I don't know if that has been credited to Ray. But Marian got it started, working with a man named Jack Schrader, who was the faculty professor of photography at East Tennessee State University. She got him to design the photo studio, and got that going in the late '70s—mid- to late '70s.

MR. HERMAN: As you and Clare were working on developing who was going to be on the faculty for the coming year, were you in contact with some of the other schools to coordinate, if you're bringing in somebody from another country, that they could teach at [inaudible]?

MS. BLAIN: Yes, to some extent. A good example of that was the man named Ray Key who came and taught the spring classes every spring. His classes, there was a lineup of people waiting every year.

MR. HERMAN: He's a wood turner.

MS. BLAIN: A wood turner from England. In fact, I think he's still teaching there in the spring. I think he is. Anyhow, he would come. And then I would work with him, or Clare would work with him, on trying to set up something for the weekend in between. He did two one-week classes for us in the spring. Our spring classes were one week in length. So that in-between week he would maybe do a workshop for Highland Hardware in Atlanta. Or he would do a workshop for a school in Virginia. Or the Wood Turners Association, which has now started up [a chapter] in Asheville [NC].

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: Or he would stay an additional week in this country and do something before or afterwards. Or a week's workshop for one of the other schools. As far as working directly with other schools, I think we all realized the importance of being independent and getting our own people. We both know that there were faculty that taught at many of the schools and have for years and still do. But I don't think I've called any school, and no one called me, and said, "Sandy, who are you having this year? Are they good? I want to have them at the school." Nothing like that.

MR. HERMAN: How about the Appalachian Craft Center, which developed during your tenure, I think, didn't it?

MS. BLAIN: The Appalachian Center for Crafts—

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: —started in 1980. Marian Heard worked with the Appalachian Regional Commission on that. I went over a couple of times. That's in Smithville, Tennessee. But she was the one who more directly worked with them. And I don't think Ray had any relationship with them, at least not to my knowledge.

MR. HERMAN: Partly that question was because I think the only other one of the schools in the southeast—or anywhere that I know of—that's had an Elderhostel program is the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina.

MS. BLAIN: They have. Correct.

MR. HERMAN: And still do.

MS. BLAIN: Correct.

MR. HERMAN: And I think they're the only one.

MS. BLAIN: Yes, their program is different from Arrowmont's, though, in that they mix—this sounds weird to say—but mixed regular students, younger-aged students, with Elderhostel people. And you could be sitting as an Elderhostel person - you were paying one fee that was set by Elderhostel national out of Boston - and next to you could be somebody that is paying an entirely different fee, set by your institution. It caused some very hard feelings. I had heard this from the inception of the program. And we never did that. We had straight Elderhostel programs.

MR. HERMAN: I think after you left, though, they tried so-called blended programs. And I think that the Elderhostel programs then stopped soon after that.

MS. BLAIN: Then stopped. They're not doing them today. And I think it was very unfortunate, because I think Arrowmont benefited tremendously by the Elderhostel programs.

MR. HERMAN: What other changes then would you identify that either you were responding to within the field or initiating? I'm thinking now about introduction of new processes: looking at wood turning, which has become a very important thing for Arrowmont that distinguishes it from all the other schools, where Arrowmont doesn't have a hot blown-glass program; Penland [School of Crafts, Penland, NC] does.

MS. BLAIN: We really needed to expand our programs because, obviously, as you've indicated, things were changing in the art world. And I just felt that the audience was there for some expanded programs.

Again, I was a hands-on director. I was—along with Clare—we would be the photographers for the school. For me it was carrying a camera as kind of a cover-up so that I could get into the studios easily without looking questioning or being snoopy. I'd walk in with a camera, and all of a sudden I'd start talking to the students. Or talking with the faculty. And it was very revealing because there were things that were said about whatever that would come out, because I was standing right there next to them, that I would hear. And I would leave there, and I'd go out in the hall and write it down right away so I would remember things.

There were so many things that came up that way, because I was part of the student body, part of the faculty. I was just one in the same with everybody. So I'd be in the studios, and people would say different things about, oh, my gosh, I wish my husband could come here, but he's a wood turner, and you don't have a wood turning program, or you don't have a wood program or whatever.

Anyhow, so that's oftentimes [how] a new program would start. It would be at the request or a sharing of interests by a student or a faculty member of whatever. We actually hosted the first wood turning symposium in 1984. And at that time—it was 1985 rather, I'm sorry—and at that time, that's when the Wood Turners

Association was formed. And today I guess they have, I don't know, eight, 10,000 people.

MR. HERMAN: It's huge.

MS. BLAIN: It's just gigantic. But it was formed in the Arrowmont auditorium with well over capacity; I think it had 250 people in attendance. And from that point on, it was like fundraising, heavy-duty fundraising.

Stoney Lamar worked with us. David Ellsworth worked with us. We had top-name wood turners teaching for the school. They were all most enthusiastic about getting something going.

And another incredibly wonderful contact was meeting Robyn Horn. Actually, this is how I operated and how I felt it worked. She actually was a student taking Bob Lockhart's sculpture class back in the mid-'80s. And as I was in the studio one day, she asked if she could talk to me. I don't know who Robyn Horn was. I didn't know who this person was. I certainly didn't know the names of all the students or anything. And we chatted. But it was a conversation that was informal, not an appointment kind of setup or anything. And pretty soon it's like, you need a wood turning program here. I'm really interested.

MR. HERMAN: She said this?

MS. BLAIN: There is the possibility of a grant from—have you ever heard of the Windgate Foundation? And one thing led to the other. But it was through a contact like that, of me being available. Clare was available going back and forth to studios. Bill Griffith is available going back and forth to studios. That kind of thing was how we raised money for the school. And how new programs also got started.

MR. HERMAN: In addition to the Wood Turners Association, I think the National Basketry Association was also founded at the school—

MS. BLAIN: It was.

MR. HERMAN: —as a result of a conference?

MS. BLAIN: Yes. The basket conference was in 1991. We had another one in 1999. I think the organization is still going on today.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: We had a wonderful show.

When I first moved here [Arizona] in December of '04—spring of '05; I can't remember exactly, or '06—Sara and David Lieberman, who were involved in this community, had a very large basket collection. And I served on that committee to get the show going with the ASU [Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ] Art Museum. I knew a lot of the players because they had taught at Arrowmont or had their work at Arrowmont in the gallery or whatever.

MR. HERMAN: What other initiatives, in terms of object types or media, can you think of that happened during your tenure: and was that a deliberate attempt to move things forward, or was it in response to what students seemed to want?

MS. BLAIN: I think it was both.

MR. HERMAN: Okay.

MS. BLAIN: Well, yes. I think what happened was that students and faculty members would comment about what's going on in the art world, because a lot of them had been to other schools, were university products. And [inaudible] so again, I would always want that kind of sharing to take place. And a lot of times there would be evening sessions over a drink with faculty members. So you kind of in an informal way start discussing what's happening around the world in terms of the arts. And so that's how certain things happen.

We did a lot of conferences. Marian Heard did some conferences when she was there. And I certainly followed up on that. To this day I think they're still doing them at Arrowmont. During my tenure the American Craft Council Southeast, we had five of those conferences that took place at Arrowmont. And they were not just media-oriented, but they also involved business, which was something that you didn't necessarily get in spring or summer or fall classes. So there was an emphasis on business aspects.

We did a clay conference in 1980 before Bill [Griffith] ever came. And then when he came, we started the utilitarian clay conferences. I think this fall, this last fall, was the fifth one. And they're just tremendous in terms of bringing students to the school, people who had been there before, as well as new students to the school. We did a leather conference in 1982, something that people thought, leather? That is so Related Art, Craft and

Home Economics. And it wasn't because this was leather in terms of sculptural pieces. Faculty members who were teaching leather— Mark Goldring, who was the head of that, Marsha—you know her last name I'm sure. Lloyd? No, not Lloyd. Marsha—what was her last name?

MR. HERMAN: There is a Marcia Lloyd, but I'm not sure whether—

MS. BLAIN: I don't know.

MR. HERMAN: —she was the leather person. I don't know. I don't remember.

MS. BLAIN: Okay. Anyhow, we had some really "name" people who were teaching there. We picked up on titles. Like a Form and Function Conference, which was a cross media. And that was in 1984. Wood conferences, just while I was there, we had four of them, four majors ones. And then with that organization being formed in 1985. The Tennessee Art Education Association meetings; those were there from when Marian was there, and that continued every year or biannually. The Southern Highland Craft Guild, we tried to get those annual meetings there. And those were, again, wonderful in terms of bringing people from the region. It's like Arrowmont; we know, but what is it? And here they're coming, and they're seeing the facilities and knowing firsthand what we're offering. When Clare was there, she got the Surface Design Association to have a regional conference there in '81 and then national conferences in '83 and '89. And she worked very closely with those.

American Quilts Study Seminar in '87. I mentioned basketry conferences. We actually did a paper conference that was in combination with a group of papermakers from Finland. That was in 1993. A Fiber Forum Conference in 1993 with the Handweavers Guild of America. So sometimes we paired up with already-established organizations. Watercolor USA Honor Society Conference. That one we did, but we also did an exhibition with the Knoxville Museum of Art as a joint effort. Studio Art Quilt Conference in '95. Enameling conferences; I think Arrowmont is still doing those, and that was in 1997 and 2001. Those were international. All of these were also with major exhibitions in the gallery, either juried or invitational or both. Polymer Clay Conference in 1997 where we had internationally named faculty. In fact, at the end of the counter right there is a piece by Pier Volkos.

MR. HERMAN: Pier Volkos, yes, Peter Volkos's daughter.

MS. BLAIN: Daughter, right. That came out of the gallery show at that time. And another watercolorist, the Tennessee Watercolor Society in 1998. So those were just some of the conferences that we did that definitely expanded the program.

MR. HERMAN: This is the end of memory card two, interview with Sandra Blain on May 19, 2009.

[END CD2.]

MR. HERMAN: This is memory card number three. This is Lloyd Herman interviewing Sandy Blain on May 19, 2009, at her home in Tempe, Arizona.

Sandy, we were talking about the conferences and introducing disciplines. And I'm very interested because you mentioned polymer clay. Had there been much attention given to that in the other schools that you're aware of? Or was that kind of a first for Arrowmont?

MS. BLAIN: I think it was a first for Arrowmont because I think when you think about the material, you think of sort of a hobbyist taking over and something that you can do with your little microwave or your oven at home. You don't have to have a lot of equipment, and you can just work in your kitchen and whatever. But when we did that conference, we brought polymer clay to an art form. We had top-notch people in the country; we had a major exhibition in the gallery. And I think from that point on it was no longer thought of as just a hobbyist role. Professionals are, to this day, using polymer clay alone or combining it with other materials for very serious jewelry or sculptural forms.

MR. HERMAN: I'm thinking also about other new materials, like paper clay and precious metal clay. I think precious metal clay, at least, was taught at Arrowmont.

MS. BLAIN: Precious metal clay was taught at Arrowmont. Fred Woell, a well-known person, taught it. And then some other people did as well. It's something that when I was at Arrowmont, we probably had five or six different years of summer sessions, a week in length, in that material. I don't know about today.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. Do you have an idea whether that was really pioneering at that point, to do it?

MS. BLAIN: It was close to pioneering, because one of those summers that we had it, I happened to be up in Maine and was visiting with Carolyn Hecker -

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: - and she was going to be at a party this evening. Actually, I was jurying a show at Colby College [Waterville, ME], and she was going to be at this party that night and invited me to go. It was with the Mitsubishi Corporation, which was sponsoring this polymer clay—or the metal clay.

MR. HERMAN: Precious metal clay.

MS. BLAIN: Precious metal clay. And so I went to that, and it was in the mid-'90s probably.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes.

MS. BLAIN: And it was just kind of just catching on at that point.

MR. HERMAN: Thinking about the basketry and wood turning really growing from hobbyist disciplines, if we can call them that, the same thing I would say was true of traditional blacksmithing, when that really was applied to, kind of, more artistic ends. What was Arrowmont's role in that aspect of metal?

MS. BLAIN: Well, blacksmithing had been done in the Appalachian area, but not in terms of an art form, more of being a farrier. And so when Ray Pierotti was there, he was very instrumental in trying to get blacksmithing to kind of broaden the scope of what had been taught in terms of metal. When Marian Heard was there, there was a lot of work being done with enameling and some forming and casting. But not to the scope of larger smith sculptural forms.

We didn't have a place for it. But there was an old chicken coop that was on the property of Arrowmont. Ray tried to raise some money and got Jim Wallace—I can't remember whether it was after that or if he was then with the Metals Museum in Memphis [TN] - to work with him. So actually a blacksmithing program started in [inaudible] 1978—probably the summer of 1978. And then we continued that for a number of years.

But the problem was, first of all, having converted chicken coops to a blacksmithing studio; so it was an old facility to begin with and not very adequate. We were in the mid-'90s, trying to build a new dormitory, and we needed that property and that space up there.

MR. HERMAN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. BLAIN: And I thought there were enough programs elsewhere that had a dedicated program of smithing. The main one in our area was John C. Campbell Folk School. They had a very, very strong blacksmithing program, name people. And I thought, you know, that can be their program. Wood turning was something that we were doing, more so than other schools. Glass was something that was being done more at Penland. So it's like, let's each kind of push our own and make it more of a statement versus getting involved in everything. So we gave up smithing.

MR. HERMAN: Then thinking about wood turning as certainly something that is nearly unique, if not unique to Arrowmont, are there other programs that came in that were really Arrowmont specialties?

MS. BLAIN: I don't think that there were any specifically. I think that was the one big one. Because, really, the other schools in the area and in the United States are pretty varied in what they were teaching, and we were, too.

MR. HERMAN: Mm-hmm. Yes. What about—

MS. BLAIN: But I think now we're able to do some better than other places because we had great facilities.

MR. HERMAN: You talk about the Surface Design Association and those conferences. Was there much attention to the wearable art movement? Or was that such a different kind of thing that would require sewing machines and equipment that you might not have?

MS. BLAIN: No, sewing machines and other equipment were not a problem for us. We actually had classes in wearable art.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: And surface design was big at Arrowmont because Meda Parker Johnson was very instrumental in working with Marian Heard on the design of the room for surface design. And Clare Verstegen, when she came aboard as my full-time assistant director, her background was surface design. And so therefore she carried it on and worked with surface designers throughout the country.

We didn't really separate wearable art from anything else. It was usually classes in screen printing. And then there would be maybe photographic screen printing, maybe there would be other processes, and students

would carry it in whatever direction they wanted.

MR. HERMAN: So if they wanted to make a garment [inaudible], they could.

MS. BLAIN: Garment. Maybe contemporary quilting. Any of those things were possible. There were, however, some specific classes that related to just doing wearables.

MR. HERMAN: Were there other things that were tried and you decided that that was either a dead end or simply didn't have enough enrollment?

MS. BLAIN: In my tenure there, I didn't particularly want to do glass, because I felt that glass was something I mentioned earlier: Penland had really taken [it] on, been doing it for years. They had great facilities for it and great equipment and space. And I just felt that we didn't. For us, it was makeshift, and it was putting the glass into an already-existing studio with some other interests. I couldn't generate the enthusiasm there to make it really work to the extent that other schools were doing.

MR. HERMAN: And, of course, it's very expensive to have all those programs.

MS. BLAIN: And it's very expensive because—yes. To this day I don't think Arrowmont is involved with hot glass. They're involved, as we were, with some flat glass. I guess more so now than when I was there.

MR. HERMAN: So to backtrack just a little bit to Robyn Horn's initiative with the Windgate Foundation, the Pi Phis would go with the flow whenever any new initiative that you might come up with, like a wood turning program?

MS. BLAIN: I don't think they would go with the flow. But I think they really trusted me. I had some longevity there. The enrollment was strong. They had been part of the Elderhostel programs. We had picked up this program called Pi Phi Arts Weekend, where they themselves could start to experience the visual arts programs firsthand.

MR. HERMAN: When did that start?

MS. BLAIN: That started in 1991.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: Right. It was held every year. And it was one of those things that they could realize now the importance of space, the importance of tools and equipment, the importance of good, communicative faculty, the importance of a gallery space, of having a book and supply store, of having a library: all of that became firsthand knowledge because they were needing that while they were taking classes. So I think there was a lot of trust in the program and in what I was doing and with the assistant directors that I had.

And the Pi Phis related to both Clare very well and to Bill very well. So I don't think there was any question that they could see those were traditional programs that had once been popular and how they've changed through the years. And we're just trying to pick them up and carry them forward.

MR. HERMAN: So Clare was assistant director for eight years. And then was there a gap, or did you—

MS. BLAIN: There was no gap. I hired a person who was an art teacher from near South Bend, Indiana, or one or the other right there. He was a high school art teacher, and he had the interest and the background in the various art materials and media. He was one of many applicants. He crossed over with Clare on her final summer so that he had three weeks or a month of crossover, and took over in the fall of '88.

MR. HERMAN: And who was he?

MS. BLAIN: Bill Griffith.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, Bill Griffith. Oh, so he had been a high school teacher.

MS. BLAIN: That's correct.

MR. HERMAN: I didn't know that.

MS. BLAIN: There was no break at all. We couldn't afford a break.

MR. HERMAN: No, no.

MS. BLAIN: We had so much going on that we needed the personnel.

MR. HERMAN: And how did the division of responsibilities with you change—or not—when Bill came in?

MS. BLAIN: I don't think they changed that much. I think Bill was more interested in clay. That's obviously my expertise. And there were some comments originally about how Clare was representing a different discipline. But I think in both cases, both with Clare and Bill, their background was art education. And so they knew the people and the materials and the processes of what was happening in the other arts. So that was not a problem. And where Clare carried on a couple of surface design conferences, Bill worked with those people, too; but Bill then introduced the Utilitarian Clay Conference and got that going, and it's very strong.

MR. HERMAN: And Bill joined the staff, again, was that 1980, did you say?

MS. BLAIN: Bill joined the staff in 1987.

MR. HERMAN: Eighty-seven.

MS. BLAIN: Assistant director. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: And he is still the assistant director today.

MR. HERMAN: He still is now. And as far as you can see, his role didn't change, versus yours, during the time that you were there?

MS. BLAIN: No, I don't think so. I think he's such a—he's the heart and soul of Arrowmont. He's the person that everybody kind of goes to and relates to, and he's just all around.

MR. HERMAN: But clearly his role has probably changed a lot since you left and a new director came in.

MS. BLAIN: Yes, I think he has much more responsibility now in terms of the hiring of the faculty. He also is totally in charge of the resident program.

MR. HERMAN: Yes, talk about the resident program.

MS. BLAIN: The resident program was an incredibly wonderful program, continues today. It's more popular than ever. And now it is fully endowed through Robyn and John Horn and through the Windgate Foundation. And that happened, I think, about two years ago.

When it started, it was 1991. I was able to convince the board that we really needed to push ourselves a little bit more toward having more advanced students at the school. And also we needed other promotional tactics. It was fine to be putting ads in newspapers—magazines rather, not newspapers—and having students carrying the word. But I was really seeing from other schools how resident students at these various places were going out in the world and listing that they were for a year or two years at another place.

And I also saw the advantage, in our competitive world, teaching world today, of having people who, after their university program, could go somewhere for a year and work on their own things and then maybe have some added responsibilities by the institution. That if you were comparing that student who had just come out of a residency with somebody directly out of a university program, wouldn't you want the person with more experience and more varied experience?

And I was able to convince the board that this was true. They could see that. And how we needed to have a facility for them to work in, because they couldn't be working where other people were. They had to have their own dedicated space. So we were able to raise money for that. That was Pi Phi and non-Pi Phi money that I was able to raise.

And we have a studio for five that is strictly dedicated for the residency program: for five students, five residents. And they are there for—in my time they were there for a nine-month period. Today it's somewhere around nine or 11 months.

It has been—continues to be—an extremely strong program, starting with three residents that first summer, and then moving on to five. And a couple of years ago those programs were endowed. So that now the student is getting a small stipend. They always got their room and board. But now they're getting that and a small stipend.

They also—those students are there to help teach children's classes. Great experience. Teaching some community classes. Great experience at a different level. They help as staff members maybe a couple of days a month, in terms of helping with gallery setup, exhibition setup. Just things around the school that will definitely help the school, but will help their careers in the future.

MR. HERMAN: Is that volunteer then, or are they paid for the additional duties?

MS. BLAIN: They're paid for the additional duties as well.

MR. HERMAN: Because sometimes haven't they also worked in the kitchen or other things—or am I confusing that with Penland or Pilchuck?

MS. BLAIN: Well, they have. But then there's a work-study program that we initiated also during my tenure that helps the kitchen staff.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: And those people were individuals who maybe had limited art background, but wanted to get involved but couldn't afford to come to the school. They could come for a conference; they could come for a five-week period—spring, summer, fall—work in the kitchen, and take classes for half the time.

MR. HERMAN: So they weren't required to have a lot of skills to do that.

MS. BLAIN: Not for the work-study program.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: The residence program is—there are so many people who are applying, it's very—what's the word I'm groping for here—competitive.

MR. HERMAN: And were they chosen by portfolio?

MS. BLAIN: They're chosen by portfolio, letters of recommendation. Definitely.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: And they're top-notch people who, when they leave there, if they're applying for a teaching job, usually get one right away.

MR. HERMAN: That's good. During that period of residency, is it only artistic development, or do they learn any business practices?

MS. BLAIN: They can learn all of those things. It depends maybe on what's going on that year, if there are particular conferences or other activities. But it kind of relates to their particular interests. If somebody really has a strong interest in gallery work, I paired them up with the gallery coordinator so that they would get that experience of working in all aspects of that.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. Well, I was really thinking about setting up his studio. It depends on how far advanced they are, or whether they've already had a studio, or whether they would need that help, too.

MS. BLAIN: Right. They're also able to take a couple of courses during the year with these name faculty members. So then when they're taking those courses, they're at a different level than a normal student. So they sort of "party" with the faculty, eat with the faculty; they find out about what their background is, what their teaching is, what their studio looks like. All of those aspects come into play.

MR. HERMAN: Networking.

MS. BLAIN: Networking is what it's called.

MR. HERMAN: Absolutely. I'm interested in how the school's relationship and your relationship as assistant director and director with Pi Beta Phi might have changed—or how their response to the school has changed. Because, of course, right now in 2009 they have already had an offer and were selling the property underneath the school. That deal didn't go through. But it's now a question of no longer [being] Pi Phi's major charity.

MS. BLAIN: It isn't Pi Beta Phi's major philanthropic project anymore. I'm sad that that is not the case because I think that, in the early days, it was the importance of the three Rs, reading, writing, arithmetic, but it was also the involvement with the vocational interests that put the Settlement School on the map.

Over the years, Marian Heard and I, in particular, really tried to pursue those avenues and work closely with the Pi Phis. I don't think that that has been done as much in the very recent years. We would have officers' workshops at Arrowmont, which meant that all of the officers came to the school once every couple of years. We had some other things going on when there were meetings that would bring the Pi Phis to the school to see

firsthand. As I mentioned, we had them as hostesses of Elderhostel. So that we were trying to include them in everything, to make them see and hear the importance of the school.

I think in the last few years it's more talk, and they haven't been involved. Sure, times are changed. But I think there probably are ways that they could have been more involved and maybe that wouldn't have happened. However, I have not served on the board. I have not been there, so I shouldn't be stating that so emphatically, because for several years the Pi Phis had indicated to me that they wanted more outside funding for the school.

I was doing that. I felt that I did quite a good job in terms of fundraising. When I left, I was very pleased with my abilities of fundraising, in which I had never had any background [laughs]. But again, I sort of had to jump in and do everything. I worked with some Pi Phis, particularly Jean Scott, who was just wonderful in terms of working with me on that. But I think that we were really able to be diversified and get money. And I think I was heading on the right trail.

But I had made the decision to retire from there and just teach a little bit and retire totally. You can't go on forever.

MR. HERMAN: How many years altogether did you live in Knoxville and Gatlinburg while at the school?

MS. BLAIN: Well, I had a house in Knoxville—an apartment first for about 10 years—and a house for 25 years. So basically, with the school for 33 years. Then a couple of extra summers as a student.

MR. HERMAN: How did you decide to leave that area then and move to the desert? That's quite a change, from the mountains to the desert.

MS. BLAIN: Right. I think that, as indicated, I didn't have that many careers: I was a high school art teacher, went on to teaching at Tennessee and Arrowmont, and that was it. And it's like, wait a minute, [laughs] maybe I'm missing out on something here. I've been in Chicago, Wisconsin, and Knoxville. And it's like, hmm, let's see. I just thought that maybe a break was really good and really important.

And when I retired from Arrowmont in 2001, I really didn't know where I was going at that point. I knew I was going to be teaching for a couple of years or whatever before total retirement from the university. But I didn't know I was coming out here.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MS. BLAIN: I decided, though, after hearing about what was going on, the strong programs in ceramics and other areas here at the university—I had hired several people from here; my former assistant director, Clare Verstegen, is a professor of fibers here. We had traveled together and just were friends. And she said, "Why don't you think about this area?" And pretty soon I started finding out about the Ceramic Research Center connected with ASU. And I thought that might be an interesting place just to stay involved, get a studio setup, whatever. Stay involved and let the new person take over at Arrowmont without me being there always rethinking something.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: Let him take over. And that's really what I did.

MR. HERMAN: Now let's talk about your own work, since we've maybe exhausted Arrowmont [laughs]. Because I think of your work as being always, as you have said yourself, about texture; I think of it as muted tones. I don't think of your work as involving brilliant colors, which then forces any viewer to really look at the texture and forms. But I don't know whether your work has always been that way. I think I've seen functional pieces, what I think of as structural pieces.

MS. BLAIN: [Laughs.] I'll show you some pieces before you leave today.

MR. HERMAN: Both hand-built and wheel-thrown.

MS. BLAIN: Right. Yes, my own background has always been more involved with functional things rather than pure sculptural pieces. I was a stoneware potter, having taught at the University of Tennessee and working at Arrowmont. I was using their kilns, primarily the university's kilns, for some high-fire work. I did do some low-fire electric work in my own studio in Knoxville. But the pieces were more functionally oriented, and to this day continue more in that vein.

I am primarily doing hand-built work, but I still throw. I'm teaching a full-day class on Mondays at the Mesa Arts Center, and it's for hand-builders of all levels, but next month I'm doing a substitute stint for a week at Mesa Community College, and that's on the wheel. So I'm still doing both.

As far as my own work is concerned, I mentioned earlier that I've always had to work in the studio and be a practicing artist. It was a struggle for me to find the time, but it was never a struggle to find the interest. It was always there, even though the hours were long at my other positions.

I've always been interested in surfaces that become very personal, either through texture or glaze application, and then the strong relationship to the form. In the last few years I have been using a lot of texture with my work. Most of the textural imprints are from found objects that I personally find on daily walks, and then think about them and think about their relation to the process of clay, to the materials of clay, and utilize them for functional to more sculptural forms.

They kind of reveal—the surfaces—kind of reveal a personal narrative that I have experienced on a daily walk or from some location. There the objects serve as metaphors for the impact one has on their surroundings. They haven't changed that much; the surfaces have maybe gotten a little bit, oh, a little bit more depth, because I'm thinking more about the pieces, now that I have more time to work.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that was one of my questions, without the pressures of teaching on a full-time basis and running a school.

MS. BLAIN: Yes. So that I can spend a full day, maybe eight, even 10 hours on something until I get it to what I want. Whereas before, sometimes things had to be cut and covered and, oh, darn, it dried too fast. Well, we've got to move on to the next day or whatever. And it was a little bit more difficult.

I've had some good success since I've been out here, in terms of being part of many shows. We're fortunate to have had the National Ceramic Conference, NCECA, here just a month ago, in April of '09. And was part of 10 different shows. I'm serving on the board of the Ceramic Research Center. So I'm involved with collectors—not only in purchasing work—but in seeing collections and being involved with them at different levels.

MR. HERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Have you done any mentoring of younger artists, too, or has it been primarily more technical and artistic education?

MS. BLAIN: Well, mentoring in terms of the high school and a junior high situation last couple of years. There's a high school that's in the Tempe area, and I've worked on some different projects with a faculty member and worked directly with the students at several different times. And on the junior high school level, a program entitled LINCS, with the Ceramic Research Center and ASU, where we go out to different junior highs or high schools and work with the teacher and the students.

MR. HERMAN: This is such a vast metropolitan area, I would think it would be very hard to have any kind of a cohesive artistic community. But yet, I can see that there might be in clay, and maybe the Ceramic Research Center would be a catalyst for that. How have you found moving from relatively smaller cities into this vast one?

MS. BLAIN: For me, it has not been difficult. When I moved here, I made contact with Peter Held, who is the director of the Ceramic Research Center. He asked if I would be interested in joining the advisory board, really, my first year here. I am serving as the president of that now. It has gotten me involved not only in many different things that they're doing, but [also it's] a group that ceramic people are involved with. There's a strong studio tour program that is an annual studio sale that involves about 10 to 12 different studios, the third week in February, where we each have three to five people at our studio for an exhibition and sale of work. And people come. I have hosted that for the last two years. One of the sites has been here, and it's been very successful.

MR. HERMAN: This was probably an unusual year because you were in so many exhibitions during the NCECA conference. But about what is your artistic output in terms of number of pieces in a more typical year?

MS. BLAIN: Well, I'm doing both. Exhibitions, and then I'm also part of some sales. And I'm not talking about art fairs, but I'm talking about the Ceramic Research Studio Tour. I do an outdoor kind of home sales, where it's a pond sale, pieces that are unusual for indoor and outdoor use. This is a huge sale in April, involving 20 other people, very well known in the whole valley area. And then before Christmas, something, usually with the Audubon Society. This year it's going to be at their new facility in Phoenix. And usually a home studio sale before Christmas. Maybe one other. Last couple of years I've done one with the Shemer Art Museum [Phoenix, AZ]. But that's really it.

MR. HERMAN: It sounds pretty busy.

MS. BLAIN: Well, I'm doing more saleable things for those kinds of activities, as well as then maybe some larger, more major pieces for exhibition.

MR. HERMAN: And what do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

MS. BLAIN: [Laughs.] It's been great living here. I have to be honest and say, though, that I do try to get away some during the summer, maybe a week kind of length. Vacations. Last three or four years I've gone to San Francisco and visited a friend up in Los Altos and gone there for the ACC show. So it's usually in August. And back to the Midwest for a couple of weeks. Maybe back to Arrowmont or maybe something else.

MR. HERMAN: Yes, yes.

MS. BLAIN: But, you know, when you have continuous 100-degree-plus days, it's kind of nice to get away.

MR. HERMAN: [Laughs.] Sandy, without consulting my notes to see if there are questions I didn't ask you, can you think of things that you would like to add before I pause this and look at that?

MS. BLAIN: Yes, one thing I wanted to say is that, over the years, I don't think we emphasized enough the fact that Arrowmont has had a major input on so many different students, the diverse audience, because of the tremendous faculty that we've had. These are people that are internationally known in many cases. Back in Marian Heard's time, there's no question—this was back in the '60s and in the '70s—she was having people, like in enamels, Dorothy Sturm, Kenneth Bates, Stanley Lechtzin in casting, Michael Croft who was a Young American. Seivers, Joan Austin, Meda Parker Johnson, Glen Kaufman, Peter Collingwood. In clay, Michael Cardew, Hal Riegger.

MR. HERMAN: Wow!

MS. BLAIN: Those are just to name a few. Then Ray continued that with other names that were just so well known in the visual arts. I continued it, and it is being continued today. I think that's so important for programs you have to have everything working for you, and I think a lot of people don't realize that. You have to have facilities; you have to have faculty; you have a food service; you have the housing; you have a strong administration; you have the revenues and the interest in fundraising. But the fundraising is not going to come unless you have a strong program. Programs are critical.

MR. HERMAN: I don't think I asked how you recruited for students. I think that advertising in Craft Horizons was certainly one of them. But did you also work through university programs to encourage students, summer students, from those craft programs to come? Or how did it work?

MS. BLAIN: Craft Horizons in the early days. Marian did. American Craft after that. All the media publications. But those are expensive. And we would do it; all my predecessors did it.

But the other thing that we really did was we wrote letters to faculty members—past faculty, current faculty—and there were scholarships that were offered to different schools. We talked about the programs and how maybe you could come as an assistant, or you could come as a work-study student if maybe you didn't have quite as much background. Maybe you could come as an assistant to a faculty member, and there would be no charges once you got there. You paid your way, but you didn't have any charges then.

So there were a lot of other ways that—this was before the Internet, really—where it seemed to work for us to get students. We had such a great communication link to faculty. And that was Marian's days and through Ray's and through mine; it's so important, I think, to know the faculty and treat them as friends. And then they in turn publicize the school. Because if they had a good experience, they want their students, if they're teachers, or people in their community to go to that school.

MR. HERMAN: Did you have any kind of feedback forms that you would get from students and faculty about what worked and what didn't?

MS. BLAIN: We had evaluation forms, a separate one that went to students their last day there. They could send them in, or they could hand them over to us. Put them in a box so they didn't hand them to us directly.

And faculty I met, or if for whatever reason [I] wasn't there when they signed out, my assistant director - we always met with the faculty to give them their check before they left on Friday night or Saturday morning, and we talked to them about their experience: what changes, what they liked, what they didn't. And also, did they have ideas for faculty? Someone maybe from their school that we were unaware of or someone from their discipline, whatever. And also were there students that we should get in contact with personally, or do you want to do that for us? So there was a lot of personal sharing.

MR. HERMAN: That was mostly, I guess, as the school became more geared to academic programs and people who were really trying to establish themselves as artists, more than the hobbyist thing. Did the hobbyists just sort of keep rolling in without any courtship?

MS. BLAIN: Well, to some extent. But we also knew of the organizations like the wood turners organization. So

we would make sure that we knew when their deadlines were for their publications and whatever. Sometimes it would be a paid little ad.

But sometimes our PR—this is the value of the gallery, too—is that when we had a conference, we had an exhibition or multiple exhibitions that related to that conference, the theme. So therefore all of those people who were part of it got, firsthand, packets of information from us talking about the next programs that related to that particular theme or media. Those exhibits were great recruitment tools for us.

MR. HERMAN: I hadn't even thought about that.

MS. BLAIN: Right.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BLAIN: They sure were.

MR. HERMAN: I had a question here about your involvement with the American Craft Council. And I know that you are an honorary fellow, and you and I served—I think you chaired the Annual College of Fellows Committee one year.

MS. BLAIN: Correct, 40-some years. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: But I didn't know how else you'd been involved with that national organization.

MS. BLAIN: Well, actually, I was involved with ACC at two different times. I was the chair for four years of the awards committee. I served as an education committee member for several years. Awards committee. I was on the CEO search committee in 2001-2002. And I was chairman or co-chairman for so many of those SECACC, South East Conferences of the American Craft Council. Right. And I was also the program consultant for the conferences, as well as exhibitions, that were held in other places in the southeast. I was involved as a Tennessee representative to the Southeast Assembly four or five years, back in the '70s.

MR. HERMAN: I would say quite involved.

MS. BLAIN: Quite involved, let's put it that way.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. And what about NCECA or other medium—

MS. BLAIN: Yes. I never served on the board of NCECA, but I've always promoted NCECA to the students. I always felt it was, again, a valuable experience. That the more varied—particularly the grad students—the more varied your experiences are, the better chance of your survival in your area of interest or a teaching career. So I always pushed for that.

I was involved on the CERF board for—

MR. HERMAN: CERF being the Craft Emergency Relief Fund.

MS. BLAIN: Craft Emergency Relief Fund, which you were also involved in. What else was I involved in?

MR. HERMAN: I was thinking for the good of the transcriber, NCECA is NCECA, and it stands for—

MS. BLAIN: National Council for the Education of Ceramic Arts.

MR. HERMAN: For the Education of Ceramic Arts or in Ceramic Arts?

MS. BLAIN: In Ceramic Arts. They can look that up. [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts.]

Since I have been here, I've served on the advisory committee for the Ceramic Research Center, being chair. I was vice president before that. Craft Emergency Relief Fund board member 1993 to 1998. And I was loan fund committee chair 1996 to '98. Foothills Craft Guild, which was a regional organization outside of Knoxville, I'm an honorary member of that. I was a member of the Gatlinburg Gateway Foundation, trying to raise money there, 1999 to 2001. Honorary member of the Kappa Pi International Art Fraternity, International Ceramics Symposium board member, 1975 to 1978. Knoxville Arts Council, 1979 through '82. Southern Highland Craft Guild—I'm a life member of that, having served in many different capacities before that. Tennessee Artist Craftsmen Association, an honorary member, having served as president and other responsibilities. Tennessee Arts Commission on the craft advisory panel, the grants panels. World Craft Council back in '79.

MR. HERMAN: Can we make that resume an addendum to the transcript?

MS. BLAIN: You can if you'd like. And it has quite a lot on it.

MR. HERMAN: Thank you very much, Sandy. This is Lloyd Herman ending an oral history interview with Sandy Blain for the Archives of American Art at her home in Tempe, Arizona, on May 19, 2009.

[END CD3.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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