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Oral history interview with Jan Thompson,  
1983 September 6-November 16

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Jan Thompson on September 6, November 7 & 16, 1983. The interview took place in Seattle, WA, and was conducted by Sue Ann Kendall for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

DATE: SEPTEMBER 6, 1983

[Tape 1; Side 1]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Jan, you're part of an important group of Northwest artists, and have known people like Morris Graves, Mark Tobey, Richard Gilkey, a lot of people, for years. And it seems like you yourself are one of its best-kept secrets. So I'd like to start out talking a little bit about you and where you came into the scene.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I'm actually not an artist, not an artist myself. But I met them all starting at the WPA art center in Spokane just as the war was first starting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You were a student?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, and all these fabulous people came. The WPA art center was a wonderful place for artists at that time, and Guy Anderson, first of all, was my special love. He was so incredible. I never met people like this in Spokane, my God! Carl and Hilda Morris came. And Margaret [Tomkins--Ed.] and Jim FitzGerald. And then there were two or three people from the east and it was just incredible. And it changed my whole outlook; I decided at that point not to go to college. It did change my whole life, meeting people like that.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What were your plans before you met them? To go to college, and...

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: ...what were your interests?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I was mostly interested in music, but they changed my whole way of looking at life. And Guy, Guy was so beautiful and showed me literally how to see, you know, how to look at things that it had never occurred to me to [see--Ed.], that a dump would be beautiful. I was obviously very receptive.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You were a painter, then?

JAN THOMPSON: Well I was studying painting. And then I later did children's portraits for a living, but I've never been, I'm not an artist; I just did children's portraits.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You did florals, though, I understand. You have done florals?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Are you still painting?

JAN THOMPSON: No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Not at all?

JAN THOMPSON: No, not at all.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Except you went to do a portrait recently, you said.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Where are your works, what you have done?

JAN THOMPSON: Just in private homes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: In this area.

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Because I have to admit I've never seen one. That's why I say you're a well-kept secret.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, you have not missed anything. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well I'm not so sure. I'd like to see them sometime. So you met, actually what sounds like a group of people that later became Seattleites.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: But they were all in Spokane.

JAN THOMPSON: And that's how I happened to meet Morris [Graves--Ed.], because through Guy, later when I came to Seattle... I married in the meantime and then I came to Seattle. And Guy introduced me to Richard Gilkey, who had just gotten out of terrible-- he was in the marines in the war in the South Pacific-- and he'd gone through I think one of the worst experiences I've ever heard. And he'd gone, well, what we used to call shell shock. He was found running on this island, nude, and burned and terribly hurt; the hospital that he'd been in had been bombed. And anyhow, he was shipped home and in very, very, very bad shape.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, both physically and emotionally, mentally and psychologically.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, everything. He was just in terrible pain. Anyhow, he was just coming out of this, he was 21, I think, when I met him at Guy Anderson's out at Granite Falls. My parents had a place out at Granite Falls, too, and Kenneth Callahan had a place up there, too. And Richard was beginning to paint a little bit, which was very good therapy for him and wonderful. And he had just met Morris Graves. Morris had been a great help to him, and helped him look at paintings and think about paintings and all that. And so that's how I met Morris, through Richard Gilkey.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now let's go back to it. Why were you in Spokane to begin with?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, I was born in Spokane.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So you grew up there, and were then going to the center there.

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Then your decision to move to Seattle was after you were married?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Okay. And then you got to know the people in Spokane, but then continued contact once you came over here.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did you have any interest in art as a child?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, my mother [Susan Meyer--Ed.] always painted, and she really was very good. In fact the one time she entered the Northwest Annual [annual exhibition of Northwest Artists, Seattle Art Museum--Ed.] she won an honorable mention.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh!

JAN THOMPSON: And Hector Escobosa, who used to own the-- what was it he used to own or be manager of? Frederick's or the Bon or one of those places [Seattle department stores--Ed.]. Anyhow, he bought it! I thought that was wonderful for this little lady from Spokane who had never entered anything. She was very good, but she stopped.

SUE ANN KENDALL: But you also stopped you say; but it's sounds [as if--Ed.] you do continue some things. It certainly must give you an understanding of other people's work, to have painted yourself.

JAN THOMPSON: You see, I work weekends in the Foster-White Gallery. And I stopped painting since I started working there, because I think I'm so surrounded by paintings-- in, every possible different style-- and I see them so much that every time I try to paint, I see somebody else's painting in front of my eyes, you know, that's done it better or worse. I've lost, I don't have any direction. I don't have any...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Sense of your own...?

JAN THOMPSON: Sense of my own, no.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ah hah. That's one question I wanted to ask you, and we'll talk more later about your association with all these people, if somehow you didn't get lost in that. Because I know you've been very, very close to some of these people and spent a lot of energy with them.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. I think so, and they were all very powerful people. And powerful painters. And I really was more interested in their work, really, and how it progressed-- and I realized there was nothing that I could do that could equal it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you regret not trying, not putting more into it?

JAN THOMPSON: I think I do. Oh yes, of course I do.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think about picking up the brush again, more often.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yeah.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think you will?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm, I think I will.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Good. I hope so.

JAN THOMPSON: But, you know, just very, very privately. (laughs)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think it's because you were a woman, perhaps?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh no.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You don't think that had any...?

JAN THOMPSON: No, no. Nothing.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Most of the other people are men in your group. It was very much a male group.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, true. No, it really had nothing to...no. In fact they were all incredibly supportive and tried...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Tried to encourage you to paint, as well?

JAN THOMPSON: But... They tried to help, oh yes. But I think I got stuck in doing these children's portraits for a living. (chuckles) And actually it worked, you know, because I could work here for a year, doing portraits, to go live in Europe for a year.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Not bad.

JAN THOMPSON: And I'd spend it all, then I'd come back and do the portraits and go back and live in Europe. And now, I look back and I wonder why didn't I paint when I was in Europe? Just paint? But I didn't. I was so busy looking at things and just having a wonderful time that I didn't paint. And so, see, I'm not a dedicated painter, obviously.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It sounds like you've absorbed a lot though, and perhaps if you really put your mind to it, a lot of things would come out.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah. Well, I've absorbed too much (laughs), and nothing's come out.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (chuckles) You need to stop looking and start painting, I guess.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, anyhow, that's enough about me because I'm...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Okay. Let's pick up again here in Seattle when you came over here and met Richard Gilkey and helped him; I think we'll get back to some of that. Right now I'd like to go on and talk about Morris Graves. I think you're a very important link to him, because he is somewhat of a recluse and not very many people talk to him. How did you meet him? Can you describe your first encounter.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, oh, I'll never forget it! He had invited Richard Gilkey to bring me out, and he was just finishing the house out at Woodway Park [in Edmonds, Washington--Ed.].

SUE ANN KENDALL: He had a name for that.

JAN THOMPSON: It was called Careladen. (laughs) It was snowing and it was at night. And we went out and he had just gotten this enormous stone that weighed tons and tons and tons, and he was looking at [it--Ed.]; it was a most beautiful, great, great Japanese-type stone, \_\_\_\_\_. And he had just had it delivered, which was a terrible job. You can imagine what... And we got to the door and out stormed this man, six foot, whatever he is, six foot six [later Jan Thompson corrected to six foot four--Ed.].

SUE ANN KENDALL: He's that tall?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, he's enormously tall. He's very thin. And he had a great candelabra-- it was like a Russian movie, he had a great candelabra in his hand, blazing candles. There were no outdoor lights yet. It was snowing, and we went out and he put the candelabra-- and it must have had ten or twelve candles on it-- on this enormous stone that had the snow in the ledges, all white. And here was this devastatingly beautiful man standing behind it with his eyes flashing. Well, you know... But he affects everyone like this. He's absolutely hypnotic.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So the myth about him being somewhat of a mystic, do you accept that?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, he's very much a mystic. But there's also the other side of the coin. For everything about him, just about the opposite can be said is true, you know. The way he wants, how he wants to be Gandhi, and live like Gandhi with just a pair of sandals and nothing. And the other half wants to live like Frederick the Second.

SUE ANN KENDALL: He has a flamboyant side, then. (laughs)

JAN THOMPSON: Oh! Very much, and everyone thinks he's this...very serious, mystic and he's being-- what's the word, well, the wild side is just as wild and flamboyant is the word, as the other side is retiring and mystic. But I think as he gets older, he's becoming more and more of the mystic and the recluse. But you see when he breaks out of the recluse, he's absolutely wild!

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. The other side has to come forth.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah! But everything about him, he's the most masculine man in the world. He can move mountains. You know, he worked twelve hours a day moving great stones and building a garden, building his house. And the other half is incredibly feminine, just incredibly feminine. He has the most incredible sense of sympathy, and softness. But everything I can think of-- on one side he's so generous that you can't believe it; the next day after meeting him, he knocked on my little apartment door and handed me a painting he painted for me that next morning.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Wonderful.

JAN THOMPSON: I think that possibly why he's such an exciting person is that there are these tensions, you know. And I think it showed up certainly in his earlier work.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Can you describe the works that you're talking about?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, mostly the birds, that were caught between two worlds, and they were always going towards the light, they were always held back by the dark.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JAN THOMPSON: Tortured, tormented in some way.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ah hah. They're usually described in very spiritual terms by the people who write about them.

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Would you agree with that, or not?

JAN THOMPSON: Not completely spiritual, no. They're tormented like the Wounded Gull. I wouldn't call it a spiritual bird; it's a very wounded, hurt gull.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think it's a metaphor for human existence?

JAN THOMPSON: I think so, um hmm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Does he talk to you about his work?

JAN THOMPSON: No. Very, very seldom talks to anybody about his work.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh really. So...

JAN THOMPSON: He doesn't think words-- that's one of the things that's very painful for him. Well there was a period-- again, here we go, there's that split in his personality-- there was a period that he suddenly started talking about his work, and then after that he was embarrassed; he was sorry that he had talked so much.

SUE ANN KENDALL: When was that?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, it was in the fifties, and he was writing his letters to Marian Willard, and he did talk a lot about the work and how much it meant.

SUE ANN KENDALL: How about the Life magazine article that I understand exasperated him terribly.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, all articles exasperated him. There isn't an article possible, no, except Theodore Wolff's. Theodore Wolff is the only person he felt that really ever said anything that was really right about his painting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ah huh! Theodore Wolff does write very eloquently about him. So it's not unusual for him to be exasperated, at any rate, about what people say.

JAN THOMPSON: No. And most often I feel that he shouldn't be exasperated, because most of the things I think are quite well written about him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What is it that bothers him about them? Does he talk about that?

JAN THOMPSON: It's [a] sort of personal violation, I think, to even see his name in print. And you know he has that terrible thing about his photograph. He does not want his photograph [taken--Ed.]. It's almost like the old superstitions that every time your photograph is shown a part of you is taken away. I don't know. He has a real phobia about that.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Almost more than the printed word is the photograph.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think that Martha Kingsbury captures his character pretty well in her book, Northwest Traditions [Seattle Art Museum, 1978--Ed.]? I think she's the one that made the comment about his being a combination of Zen and Dada. I'm not sure that's hers, but somewhere I'd already read that.

JAN THOMPSON: That's pretty good as a matter of fact, yeah.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I think so too. It seems to me that captures him.

JAN THOMPSON: I think that's very good. It's true. When I first met him, that really was true. He was-- of course Dada is very Zen.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That's true. (chuckles) But at the same time it has a flamboyant side.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right, and he loved doing wildly funny things that would turn your world upside down, that would make you think.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. You're saying he does that less and less now, you think, as he gets older?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, it's not so flamboyant now. And he really is becoming more and more of a recluse. It really does kind of worry me because he doesn't want to see almost anybody now.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And does he ever leave where he lives?

JAN THOMPSON: He hasn't for quite a while, but he is going to his opening [the Whitney Museum opening of retrospective exhibition, Morris Graves: Vision of the Inner Eye--Ed.].

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, he is!

JAN THOMPSON: Well, they did a very clever thing-- and I don't know whose idea this was-- they had this private opening for 50 people, and a dinner, and the whole thing is in honor of Marian Willard, who is very ill.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, she is?

JAN THOMPSON: She's very ill. And he said, "I've got to go to that." If they'd made it for him, he wouldn't have gone.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Of course not! (laughs) Very, very clever, wasn't it. Whose idea was that?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I don't know whether it was Tom Armstrong's or what? Here's the invitation; I'll show you later. But it says black tie. He said, "I'm sorry, I have no black tie. Well, they don't care." And he's willing to come any way he wants. But it'll be interesting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And that's the one for the 50 people?

JAN THOMPSON: That's the one for 50 people. He had written to them to ask if he could get a private viewing before the show. He's never seen a retrospective of his own-- and it's going to be very traumatic.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, I'll bet. I'm wondering, after he sees that, if he'll be angry about it?

JAN THOMPSON: No, I don't think he'll be angry. No. But I know he's going to be very, very nervous, upset.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Upset.

JAN THOMPSON: No. I don't know. It's going to be...

SUE ANN KENDALL: So he really objects to-- or is it that he doesn't object to what people say so much as just the fact they say it about him?

JAN THOMPSON: Sure. It's part of it, that he just doesn't want to... You know I called him; there was a beautiful article in this latest Vogue. (Which I don't have; I left it for the gallery to read. I'll get it back.) I said, "It's very faithful. It's beautifully written." And I could see [his irritation. He groaned--Jan Thompson added]. "Oh. Vogue. Oh dear."

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh dear. (chuckles)

JAN THOMPSON: Now last year, John Huston, whom he got to know very well in Ireland, called him and said he'd bought a painting from the show at Marian Willard's. And he said, "Could I stop and see you?" --"Well, oh..." -- "Because I'm going to be in California, I'd like to come and see you." And Morris debated and debated; he would like to see John. So he said yes. Well then John did arrive with his entourage. He never travels anywhere alone. None of those people do, I don't think. Anyhow, he brought Billie Pearson, that jockey that is his art advisor.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah. You know him?

JAN THOMPSON: Have you ever heard of Billie Pearson? He won the \$64,000 question about 20, 30 years ago. Anyhow, he's his art advisor. So Billie Pearson came, with his wife. And John brought his new mistress. And he brought Eve Arnold, the photographer that did that book on China. Well Morris was appalled. They were not staying with Morris, but this...

SUE ANN KENDALL: They arrived at the door, all these people?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. But John was so overwhelmed with the beauty of the place that Morris was touched. John didn't talk; he was practically in tears. He just walked around, and everyone left John alone while he walked around. So that turned out all right, but John still didn't tell Morris what he was there for. And he introduced him to Eve Arnold and Morris said she was a charming woman. And then he brought the book out that she'd done on China, and Morris was intrigued, he thought the book was beautiful and everything. And I suppose Morris was in a good mood, and so John said, "Would you mind if Eve took your photograph?" -- "Oh no, I don't like photographs." Well, he talked Morris into having two photographs taken by Eve Arnold, which is I know what agonies for him \_\_\_\_\_, because he just dies when somebody takes his photograph. Anyhow, she did. And John was the guest editor for the Paris Vogue last year, for one month, so he had a feature on Morris.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And used those?

JAN THOMPSON: And used those photographs, yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh! And so he hadn't gotten permission.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I think he must have, I think he did get permission at the time. He said sort of, "Now look, we'll send you the negatives, and if you don't like them, tear them up. I'm going to be editor of Vogue next month, and I'd kind of like to use one, if you approve." Well, they never sent any negatives. One was ghastly. And one was quite good.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yes, he doesn't seem to fit into the mass media or technological age.

JAN THOMPSON: No. Everything is always so painful for him, you know, like that. And yet he is a sort of a public figure, not a great big public figure, but, you know, he is, and he just can't accept it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Can't handle that.

JAN THOMPSON: No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What is the nature of your relationship with him? He obviously is still very close to you as a friend.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, we're dear, dear friends, you know. And have been ever since that night. We have traveled together, and when he was very ill in Ireland, I was still in Italy, and I came over to take care of him. He really almost died-- it was a terrible illness.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What was that of?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, it started [when--Ed.] he was doing his sculptures in Ireland. He'd gone around getting all these pieces of marble and stones and things cut. And the Irish are so maddening; they didn't do precision work, and they ruined 90percent of it-- he was very, very nervous and upset. And he hurt his back, and that went into spasms, and that's when they didn't know what it was, and he was in the hospital, and so I came from Italy to take care of him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did he call upon you to do that?

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah. Or he called, and then he called back and said, "Please, don't come." But I came anyhow. I had to find his place which was way up in the Dublin mountains, get the car, driving with a right-hand drive, on the left side of the road. And find the hospital. It was crazy! (laughs)

But anyhow, I did manage it, brought him home, and he was in bed for two months. And then he got a lot better and John Huston said, "Now you've got to go to my doctor in Paris."-- I'll never forget the name, Dr. Dobinyi-- "He gives you these exercises and he'll fix your back right up." So Morris went there and he was gone ten days and came back, and he was limping. And I looked at him; there was a big red swollen thing behind his knee, and I thought, God, that looked like phlebitis, so we called the doctor in [Dublin--Jan Thompson]. The doctor came to the house and had a drink, very Irish, and chatted and he goes, "Oh no, that's not phlebitis, nothing wrong with that." We were invited to Scotland for a week, this great house, some people that used to live in Seattle, in Woodway Park, the Brennens. He said, "No, there's no problem with that; you could go." Morris was feeling better, except for this big limp, so we flew to Scotland. That night about four in the morning, I woke up hearing, "Jan, Jan," down the hall, and I ran in there, and I found him. His neck was swollen this big and was all red and [untranscribable sound: a hoarse inhaling]; he was breathing like that. So we got the local doctor-- it was way out in the countryside in Scotland-- and the local doctor took two hours to get there.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh dear.

JAN THOMPSON: And he came in and said, "Well, I better take him to the hospital." And made him walk down the stairs, got him into the hospital and... Am I going on too long about things like this?

SUE ANN KENDALL: No, no.

JAN THOMPSON: Okay, got him to the hospital. There was bed after bed after after bed after bed after bed after bed, you know, big... And the only way Morris could breath was [sitting up--Jan Thompson]. And the nurse every time she came by, she'd push him down-- and he was dying! And [gasping sound], he'd get himself up again and sit up, and she'd push him down. And he was fighting for his life. They hadn't taken any xrays, they hadn't touched him. They had told me to leave; I couldn't stay around. So the next time she came around, Morris hit her. He had to be sitting up; he knew he was dying, and knocked her down. So they called me at this place where [I] was staying and said, "You can come and get your American patient. We don't allow this sort of behavior here." I borrowed their car, and they made him walk out of the hospital, and the doctor said, "I've known pain all my life. I've been through the war and everything, and I know when a man is faking. This man is faking." And got him in the car, and I had to get him up to the second floor over my back like that, you know. "Hhuhh," he was going \_\_\_\_ and the people at the place where we were staying were embarrassed. They said, "Well, Morris is being Morris, you know."

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, so it's another flamboyant act.

JAN THOMPSON: Overacting, melodramatic. Morris [said], "Well, you, it's up to you." Well, I knew he was dying, and I called Victor Waddington in London, who is a great friend who's got a beautiful gallery. And Victor got the



American Embassy, and they found a private doctor in Edinburgh-- see it's socialized medicine, so there wasn't another doctor who would touch it; no other doctor around would touch it if his doctor says he's faking it. They got a private doctor in Edinburgh, and they sent an ambulance, but that took two days.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Meanwhile he's gasping.

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh. And one man came with a cot, and so I had to carry the other end of this six-foot-six man down this great castle, and you know the people were standing right there. Got him to Edinburgh. It took those doctors two minutes to realize he'd had an embolism to the lung. It had been phlebitis, and the blood clot had gone to the lung. And he said very seldom do you live, without medical attention. They said, "He must be just strong as a horse and we think we can save him. But it's most painful thing a man could live through."

SUE ANN KENDALL: Wow.

JAN THOMPSON: He was in the hospital six weeks, in Scotland.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What kind of impact did that have on him? Did you talk about it?

JAN THOMPSON: No, he wouldn't talk about it, no. And he sent me back to Italy then.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And what year was that?

JAN THOMPSON: It was about 25 years ago, because it was the same year Ward Corley died, that beautiful painter, that was our dear, dear friend.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. '58 or so.

JAN THOMPSON: Twenty-five years ago, sixty..., about '58, '59.

SUE ANN KENDALL: With someone as sensitive as Morris it seems like that kind of experience would have had a major, major impact. It would for anybody. But he doesn't talk to you about those kinds of things.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, now he remembers it with a laugh, you know. He seems to remember the ambulance and those awful people.

SUE ANN KENDALL: But he doesn't talk about his work with you. I'm surprised.

JAN THOMPSON: Very seldom.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Have you ever watched him work?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh no. Oh nobody ever did. I mean he guards his studio like, oh my...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Is it true that he sort of goes into a trance-like state? Do you know?

JAN THOMPSON: I think so. Everything has to be just right, and it's just pure inspirational painting. It's not the kind, you know, like Guy Anderson, or Bill Ivey, [who--Ed.] can paint slowly, relaxed, \_\_\_\_\_ eight hours a day, people can drop in... It's just a different kind of painting. And Morris, I think, paints in a flash. It either turns out or it doesn't.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Has he said that, or are you just assuming?

JAN THOMPSON: I don't remember ever talking about it. [His latest work, however, is not done in such a spontaneous way-- it is much more carefully planned and executed.--Jan Thompson added]

[Tape 1; Side 2]

JAN THOMPSON: You know, he never liked to talk much about working. He would never comment, say, at Gilkey's. And Richard Gilkey, because the way Morris is, never lets down. But Bill Ivey would say, "Well, how's the work? How's the painting going?" And it would make Richard very, very nervous, whereas Bill loves to talk about painting. It's great to talk with Bill about painting. He just loves to talk about it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, Morris loves to talk about other people's paintings, you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So, he'll discuss other people's work?

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Whose work does he like?

JAN THOMPSON: You mean in Seattle or generally?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Both. Seattle and in general.

JAN THOMPSON: Who would be his favorites? It's really hard to say.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I mean maybe more than one person, but...

JAN THOMPSON: I know he loved Bonnard.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Paul Klee, maybe.

JAN THOMPSON: Of course.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Which is understandable.

JAN THOMPSON: An amazing array, like he loves pop art, and was really very excited about pop art. All kinds of artists that you would never suspect. And I'm not I probably can't speak right of the moment. I know Rothko [and Gorky and Jasper Johns, etc., but he has many paintings in his house of minor painters no one has ever heard of--Jan Thompson added].

SUE ANN KENDALL: I'd be pretty curious to know. Does he relate their work to his own?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh no, not at all. I can't think of any work that he relates to his own, unless it's part of the Orient, something Asian.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Does he view his work as a spiritual striving or understanding, as it's so often written.

JAN THOMPSON: You know, it's something I've just never [discussed with--Ed.] him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So your friendship really doesn't revolve around his work so much?

JAN THOMPSON: Not really, no.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Are you sort of soulmates, or...?

JAN THOMPSON: He does say things like, "I'm very excited [about what--Ed.] I've just done," and it's either "the very worst thing I've ever done," or "the very best." And then, you know, he'll call the next day and say, "Oh, it was such a disaster. I thought it was so beautiful, and then I look at it today and it's just \_\_\_\_." He will talk that way.

SUE ANN KENDALL: But that's very unspecific.

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh. The latest painting he just did, he did talk about, and it was something so unlikely, the kind of painting, that I can't imagine him doing it. It's a scene with cliffs and the sea, and on the sea is a boat, a container cargo, and on the cliffs is a puffin, a real tough, wild puffin. You know, [a] puffin is not a spiritual bird; it's a tough, wild bird.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JAN THOMPSON: And I said, "Well, Morris, you know, I'm puzzled by this because the cargo ship is certainly not threatening, it's very ethereal, and the puffin is so tough. What I would assume Morris would be saying was that the bird is endangered. And he laughed and he said, "No, I was saying just the opposite; that everything is one really after all, and that the cargo ship is part of the whole scene." So I never know! (laughter) And that's one thing I've learned, never to second guess Morris, never to guess what he's thinking. I'll see a movie and I think, "Oh, I know you'll love this movie, Morris," and he'll hate it. Or I'll see a movie that I think, "I know he'll hate it, I just know it," and he'll love it. Books or things like that. It's not always that way, at least not...

SUE ANN KENDALL: But often, he surprises you?

JAN THOMPSON: Right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Huh! Does he talk about Eastern mysticism at all? Does he talk about the references that Kass speaks of in the book [Ray Kass, Morris Graves: Vision of the Inner Eye, Braziller for the Phillips Collection,

1983--Ed.]?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, he does quite a bit. He reads a lot, all the time, about Eastern thought.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And that's been true over the years?

JAN THOMPSON: And he quotes Coomaraswamy, and Rama Krishna. [In retrospect, Jan Thompson is not sure this is accurate--Ed.] And he does meditate. Somebody said to him, "Do you meditate?" [and he said,] "Well I don't have specific hours, I meditate all the time; I never stop."

SUE ANN KENDALL: So his understanding is intellectual as well as intuitive, you would say?

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, I think so.

SUE ANN KENDALL: He's actually studied it. He knows about it through reading. And his nature seems to lend itself so much to that that it could be sort of an intuitive understanding only, but it sounds like what you're saying is that it's both.

JAN THOMPSON: It's both. It really is. It really works with him. And he is quite Zen in that he sees the madness of everything too.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, yeah.

JAN THOMPSON: And he can laugh, you know. He's got the most wonderful laugh, and he really can laugh at himself and the world.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So even though these things-- these articles and so on-- annoy him, he can ultimately laugh about them?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That's good. That's probably his saving grace. Do you think that perhaps he is the one artist of that group of four [artists in the Northwest commonly associated together: Graves, Tobey, Kenneth Callahan, Guy Anderson--Ed.] that deserves to be called a mystic?

[Break in taping]

JAN THOMPSON: You see I'm not sure what a mystic really is. Part of him is a mystic, yes, and I think maybe more so than any of that group, yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think he's psychic? Would you call him a psychic?

JAN THOMPSON: Well I've known several times he's been quite psychic, yeah.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I would have assumed that.

JAN THOMPSON: Actually it was Doctor Lobb, the head of Swedish Hospital, who was his doctor; he is a good friend of Morris' and he cared for Morris' mother. And Dr. Lobb is a scientist and a doctor and he called me one morning and he said, "I literally am trembling. I got a call this morning from Morris. I hadn't heard from him for a year." (This was so unusual, many years ago.) And Morris said, "I'm terribly worried about you. [I've been] terribly worried about you all night; I just had a dream that something terrible was wrong." Dr. Lobb said, "I had just gone through a divorce, that terrible trauma that happened to this \_\_\_\_."

SUE ANN KENDALL: This was with Lobb's family?

JAN THOMPSON: With Lobb's family. And Morris had picked that up somehow. And Dr. Lobb said, "I don't believe in this stuff, you know, I'm a scientist. This doesn't happen." It doesn't happen that often.

SUE ANN KENDALL: No, but there are people who do attune to that.

JAN THOMPSON: He is so attuned to the people that he likes-- very, very close to people.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Are there other examples of when he's been able to pick up something like that?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, he'd been living in Ireland, and he had no idea that I was going through a trauma, in a very low time in my life, and he wrote and said, "I decided that"-- you know, he just enclosed a deed to two-and-a-half acres of his Woodway Park property, that was in the process of being sold. And here was the deed for me, which was so wonderful because he didn't know that I was going through a bad time. But it came at the right

time.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Almost as if he knew you needed something like that, that it would be appropriate.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right. But it's happened many times, that way, with me. And I think with other people too--I'm sure with Marian Willard.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What has her role been, since you mentioned her now. I know they corresponded because there are excerpts of the letters in Kass's book.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah. She was really very important in his life, his mentor and his...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now is their relationship more specifically regarding the art, since she was his dealer?

JAN THOMPSON: It was both. It was both. They were very close. And very close before I met Morris, you see, because they were friends from '43, I think, '44 on. And she was absolutely wonderful for him. She drove him crazy but then anybody handling Morris' finances would drive him crazy. I mean, I'm sure that he drove her crazier than she drove him. (laughs) Because he never has enough money, you know. He drives an old, old car, and doesn't buy clothes or anything, but he does have beautiful homes and beautiful objects-- which aren't out any more; they're all behind doors, so that the place is absolutely sparse.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Why are they behind doors?

JAN THOMPSON: I think he just got tired of [seeing] all these different things. There are a few beautiful things out, very beautiful.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You mean they're in storage?

JAN THOMPSON: No, they're [in] cabinets in his house that all close. So when he wants to see one of the beautiful objects he can bring it out.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So you do visit him where he lives now?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And who else does he still maintain contact with, as a close friend?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, Richard Gilkey. They're very close. And Janet Huston [serves as Gilkey's agent--Ed.], he invites her down. The Hatches [Marshall and Helen; collectors of Graves' work--Ed.].

SUE ANN KENDALL: But he doesn't come up here to visit?

JAN THOMPSON: No. No, it's too hard because he feels kind of obligations to see so many people if he comes; he can't just come casually. Oh, he likes Phil McCracken very much. And he just said he'd like to come up and see Guy again.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, but he doesn't; it's just hard for him to do that, even though he'd like to.

JAN THOMPSON: Very hard.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh. Back to the whole question of mysticism, since it's one that continually gets bounced around in regard to this group of people. I guess I wonder if it isn't partly because of Morris that that word was coined. I'm not sure it was used in relationship to him to begin with, and yet it seems like he perhaps represents what the people who say that are talking about.

JAN THOMPSON: You see, Mark Tobey was a Bahai, and I think that is mystic. Kenneth Callahan painted sort of mystic [paintings--Ed.].

SUE ANN KENDALL: I don't [think] it applies to him very much, myself.

JAN THOMPSON: No. Kenneth Callahan's not a mystic, but he painted sort of mystic paintings, you know, what they call mystic painting. And Guy Anderson's not, but certainly Guy is very spiritual.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. They all had some aspect of themselves that perhaps could qualify as a mystic. So you don't think it's a misnomer particularly?

JAN THOMPSON: No, I think it's just that it's been so overdone. It is a part of it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yes, and then how people interpret that term. It gets sort of popularized.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And becomes distorted I think. As a writer myself I don't even like to use it, because it's so overworked.

JAN THOMPSON: He used to sign his letters to me, laughingly, "Northwest Mystic." [sic]

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs) This is Morris?

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, that's wonderful. Oh goodness. Okay. You actually were involved in some of the pranks and so on. I know that Ray Kass talks about a couple of them in the book. What about your trip to Mexico with Morris; there's some Dada-type activities that were a part of that?

JAN THOMPSON: Not really in Mexico I don't think. I just remember one vivid image. Let's see, Richard Gilkey drove his old Model-A down to Mexico; (laughter) and Morris drove his old truck. So they followed each other down, and they played games all the way down, and they finally got there. Ward Corley and I followed by plane; we were not about to drive down. And Morris went to a little place on Lake Patzquaro, where Gordon Onslo Ford, a painter, had a villa. And Gordon Onslo Ford had told Morris to use the villa. Well he got there and it was absolutely filthy. And so he spent two weeks cleaning [the whole place]. There was a maid that went with it, and they worked and they fixed a room... And in the meantime Richard Gilkey and Ward Corley and I'd found a place in Morelia, and we fixed that up and were living in that. And just as [Morris--Jan Thompson] stopped cleaning up, the people that had leased it showed up, and they said, "Well, we've leased this for a year." "But, but, but, but, Gordon Onsley Ford told me I could have it." "Sorry." And so Morris got it all cleaned up for them and had to leave.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Had to leave! Sounds like it was very important to Morris that his environment be right.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, it has to be... Oh! Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Because all these different houses that he had, he spent lots of time getting ready.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, very.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think that that has to do with his ability to paint? To go into the kind of trancelike state that he needs to...?

JAN THOMPSON: I think so, I think so. Everything has to be right-- the silence, the size of the room, or...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now when he's traveling-- and I'll get back to this trip, I sort of interrupted there-- does he look at a lot of art? Or [was] it just a fun trip?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. No, he looked at, he looked at all the Riveras and Orozcoc and everything. Oh yes he looks at everything.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So he's a very visual person, as well as having this spiritual side.

[Break in taping]

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, it was a marvelous image. Morris had bought a whole bolt of magenta Mexican material, violent magenta color. And he was in this open truck. We were driving back to Morelia. He wrapped part of the bolt around his shoulders, a' la Isadora Duncan, and then he was driving down the highway, with this whole bolt of material streaming, this magenta just rippling down, you know, for about three or four blocks, and he was driving about 50 miles an hour. It was a beautiful sight. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Almost like a Christo Running Fence, only running behind the car.

JAN THOMPSON: Exactly, exactly. Very much so.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So. Let me see, we're on the Mexican trip here. You went down for how long?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, we thought we'd be there for quite a while. Then we all...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Until he got ousted from his house!

JAN THOMPSON: But then we all got sick, and we just hated Mexico. (chuckles) Well, it just didn't work... Umm, here I was a lone woman with these men, and we all looked wierd and the Mexicans just couldn't-- I mean we couldn't get into hotels, they wouldn't... (laughter) I mean they'd look at us and say, "No way." An old ModelA and an old truck and we weren't rich, and we weren't-- Well, and rats came up the toilet and...we came home.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh dear. (laughter) Too bohemian for...

JAN THOMPSON: Right. Oh gosh. The truck broke down the minute we got across the border. Luckily we crossed the border, and we had to stay there three days. We called Carolyn Kizer, who was married to Stu [Stimson--Ed.] Bullitt at the time, and she sent us \$250 to get home. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, sounds like you had a lot of fun with all that though.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yes. Oh, it was wonderful.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And you're right, you're the only woman with all these men, and...

JAN THOMPSON: I know. But by this time we'd bought all this-- this is not important but I have to tell you-- furniture and stuff for the house, like toilet seats and a refrigerator and stove, and there wasn't anybody around to buy it. Now you can sell easily if you can find a tourist, but there weren't any tourists. So we went out into the desert and set up a housekeeping set, with a toilet, the refrigerator, the stove, a table, two tables, and all these chairs and stools and this set and then just drove away.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs) Oh, how wonderful.

JAN THOMPSON: I wanted to stay and watch whoever found it. It was set up like a little living room and kitchen setup.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, I think you people created some real happenings.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes.

[Break in taping]

SUE ANN KENDALL: I guess I'm asking questions about some of these fun things just to set the record straight. Morris was more than, or is more than, just a mystic. He lives out in the middle of nowhere. So some of these things are important just for that reason. You had another experience you wanted to relate.

JAN THOMPSON: Well it was just such a beautiful experience. We were in-- Morris and Richard Svare, who was his secretary for several years, and was a dear friend and lives in Greece now, and Dorothy Schumacher, who I don't know if you've read about her...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yes.

JAN THOMPSON: ...but she was a very important person in Morris' life, very.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I'd like to ask you some more about that.

JAN THOMPSON: They were in Ireland. This was very early on; Morris was trying to find a place [to live]. I was in Sicily. And we decided to meet, only they were going to travel into France, and we thought well let's try to meet on the Riviera. But we had no way to [write--Ed.]; we traveled for six months, you know, and I was traveling on my motor scooter from Sicily and wandering. We tried to keep track, you know, notes at American Express, all this \_\_\_\_.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs) Right.

JAN THOMPSON: So we had it vaguely down for one [place--Ed.], we centered it on a certain week, and in the Riviera, kind of this general district. I was to leave them a message in Cannes. And this morning that I came across the border on my scooter-- and I had three bags on this scooter, and I looked like a [gypsy--Jan Thompson], oh I was jet black. Anyhow, I had just these feelings [this was the day--Jan Thompson] and first thing I saw when I crossed the border was one of those beautiful flower stands that they have in France.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh yes.

JAN THOMPSON: I bought all these flowers and made a wreath for my head. And I was driving along and we met! Right on the Riviera overlooking the ocean in this brilliant [sun--Jan Thompson], and they saw me coming with the flowers in my hair. And we passed like in a dream. We went just slowly waving, and then we turned around

and came back. And we were all sobbing. We hadn't seen each other for almost a year.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, my gosh.

JAN THOMPSON: And it was the most beautiful experience, because we had no idea that we really would be on that road at that particular time.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Of course not!

JAN THOMPSON: But we planned to try to be.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, that's wonderful, though. So you've met in all kinds of places and sort of touched bases with each other.

JAN THOMPSON: And we stayed at a little place along the Riviera in this hotel. And Dorothy Schumacher and I had a room. I couldn't speak French. That morning-- the walls were quite thin-- in the morning this man came in with that marvelous coffee and they were pouring the coffee in with the milk. And I said, "Oh no, no. Just coffee, no lait." (laughter) (I knew the word for milk.) And Morris [banged on the wall--Jan Thompson] and said, "Atta girl." (laughter) And then in about five minutes the door burst open, and here was this six-foot-six character in a maid's uniform he found in a closet, with the stripes the way they do it, with a little apron and a little duster's hat. And he had a mop and \_\_\_\_\_, and he pulled us out of bed, and said, "Gotta change the beds." And then the maids came in and went, "Ahh." And we were kicked out. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh goodness. Through all of this, how did all of these artists survive, financially?

JAN THOMPSON: I'm not quite sure. Well, you know, one thing, Betty Bowen, who died, was everyone's fairy godmother. And she helped Richard Gilkey and... Of course Morris was selling then.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. By that time Marian Willard was selling for him.

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh. And how did the rest of us survive? Well I was doing these portraits [and working at the University Bookstore--Jan Thompson added]. Betty helped us a lot with that. It was tricky, but it worked.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. Because it doesn't seem like Seattle was very much of a place to support artists in the forties.

JAN THOMPSON: No. No it was wasn't.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And fifties for that matter.

JAN THOMPSON: And fifties, no. In fact, Tobey was, you know, living very, very sketchily too, although he was very well known by that time.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So even being well known didn't mean that they were getting much money.

JAN THOMPSON: No, no.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I always wondered about that.

JAN THOMPSON: He was selling his paintings for \$250. And very few people had that!

SUE ANN KENDALL: That's right, at that time. So it was hard but you did somehow... Seems like you made the best of it, and had a good time nonetheless. It's still difficult of course for artists, but things are different now.

JAN THOMPSON: They may be different but, golly, this last year has been a bad year for artists.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yes, very. Very bad period. And I guess you know that, selling at the Foster/White.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh. Very, very. It's just heartbreaking. They can't afford even to frame their paintings. It's kind of going the way the 1950s had been.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Is it getting better, do you think?

JAN THOMPSON: I guess so. I'm sort of encouraged, just the last two weeks, slightly encouraged.

[Break in taping]

SUE ANN KENDALL: I wanted to ask you too about Morris' work, in a little more detail. And how you interpret his

work, and how it's changed over the years. I guess we could go back to the earlier work first, the earlier birds.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, the main change that I can see is that it's become very calm and glowing. It's like everything is very still and vibrating at the same time. Where before it was all very emotional, and very moving, and kind of wild, now it's the last big flower studies. And some people that think they're just sweet pretty little paintings. Someone like Matthew Kangas [Seattle critic--Ed.] has just dismissed him completely because he doesn't see what they're doing. I mean they're just being so quiet and so full of-- I don't know the word. They're just vibrating, I think, by themselves, and they're sort of this quiet.

SUE ANN KENDALL: But the sense of life; there's a whole...

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, they're not just pretty paintings. They're much more than that. He's always painted flowers, you know; it isn't just a new thing. But his earlier things I think were much more a statement of turmoil and...

SUE ANN KENDALL: His own searching?

JAN THOMPSON: ...anguish and search. He's always searching, searching, searching. And he knows there's no answer \_\_\_\_\_. Whereas the later things have this quiet incandescent quality.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Would you call it a spiritual quality?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh very much so. I think the last things are more spiritual than the early; I think the last flower paintings are more spiritual than those spirit birds.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ah hah. But you think in a way some people's interpretation of those is too much based on pure aesthetics? As you say, "just pretty pictures," and they're looking at them from that point of view.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, yes. I don't know. Maybe some people would never see; I mean, maybe I see more than there's really there.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And he hasn't talked to you about those either?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, a little bit. He said about those, "I don't want to say anything, absolutely nothing. I just want them to be what they are. They're there. That's it." And whereas the earlier things were always some kind of protest, some sort of statement. The noise paintings were obviously, as you know, a protest.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm.

JAN THOMPSON: But a lot of the paintings, the birds, were not protest-- like Gulls in a Sea of Light, and things like that. That's a very spiritual thing. But the Wounded Birds [sic] and the Birds Maddened By the Winter of War [sic] were anguished paintings. I think one of the most-- I don't know whether the spiritual or what-- the painting called Bird Searching for the Cliffs. The one the Chicago Art Museum office. I had never seen it in real life until the opening at Washington [retrospective exhibition, The Phillips Collection, April 9, 1983--Ed.]. And I tell you, I think that's his greatest painting. It's so powerful.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. I've just seen it in reproduction.

JAN THOMPSON: It's coming from the dark, heading toward the light. And it is incredible! In fact, one man was standing beside it and he said, "I thought I've seen most of the Graves paintings, but I've never seen this one." And he said, "My life will never be the same."

SUE ANN KENDALL: Wow, very powerful impact on him.

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh. In fact the woman that bought that originally, bought it for her daughter who was dying.

[Tape 2; Side 1]

JAN THOMPSON: I think it was about six months that she was in bed before she died, and she had this painting right at the [foot--Jan Thompson] of her bed. And the mother wrote to us, and she said that painting brought such peace to her daughter that she just looked at the painting for the last six months of her life. The mother donated it to the Chicago Art Institute in memory of her daughter.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, his paintings have that kind of power, for sure. Do you think that often he has been interpreted too much just on aesthetic terms?



JAN THOMPSON: I wouldn't say so.

SUE ANN KENDALL: With formalism as prevalent as it was through all those years...

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, yes. Well, he was such an oddball that he just didn't fit anywhere. And I don't think anybody knew what to say, you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. And yet it seems to me they recognized that what he was doing was very good. But [they] didn't have the tools to deal with it.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. But they couldn't quite, because he doesn't fit anywhere.

SUE ANN KENDALL: No, and that's a little bit like Paul Klee; even though he was associated with the Bauhaus and you can find things to say about him, his work as a whole doesn't quite fit in. And then he wasn't intellectual in the way that, say, Picasso's cubist period was. So it's hard to pinpoint, and it does stand apart, for sure.

One more question before I go on and ask you about some of the other people: if you were writing about Morris, what kinds of things would [you] say that perhaps weren't said in Ray Kass' book or in some of the other books? Since you...

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, I never would write a book about Morris. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Why is that?

JAN THOMPSON: I think I have inherited some of Morris' reticence to talk much about private things, you know. I think maybe naturally I'm not that way; but I think over the years I've become more and more reticent because of his feelings, and I'm so sympathetic to them.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. Especially as it relates to Morris, more than in general?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm, yes. I don't think I ever could write anything about Morris.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Almost too close. But I guess I'm saying are there things that you think are important about him that haven't been said? Not necessarily personal things that would betray that trust that he has in you as a friend.

JAN THOMPSON: No, I think the main thing, like [we covered], is that there is no one Morris Graves. You know, there could be 20 books written about him by different friends, and everyone would have a different point of view and a different Morris.

Some people, for instance, have gotten very, very disillusioned and disappointed in Morris because he wasn't the Buddha that they wanted him to be, their god. Barbara and Clayton James were very close, and he met them in the conscientious objectors camp, in the war. They were very close. And they're lovely, lovely, beautiful people, and they came and moved right next to Morris in Woodway Park, built a house. And they got very upset because Morris was becoming worldly and he wasn't just this perfect mystic.

SUE ANN KENDALL: He wasn't sitting out underneath a tree.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right; he wasn't being a mystic, and he wasn't being a recluse--I mean as much as they wanted him to be. And like, he got the Duke and Duchess of Windsor Award and went to Paris to receive it, and met them and delighted in it, you see. That's what, I think, upset them more than anything. Or the Rothschilds invited him and he went. Well that was very upsetting; he should have stayed... I mean that was selling out, I think, is the way they would put it. And then they hated, they didn't like his pranks, you see, and then the real blow was [with--Ed.] the "you're not invited party." And he, without consulting them, just assuming that they'd think it was a great lark, put their name on the list of artists.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And so they came?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, they, no! He said, "These Northwest artists are-- you are invited to a-- you are not invited to it." And he put down Clayton's name as some of the non-invitees, you see, without consulting them. And they were so angry that they even took the paintings back, brought the paintings back that he'd given them, and left them in the field, between their houses.

SUE ANN KENDALL: [Oh my word.]

JAN THOMPSON: They were hurt. But I don't think they've spoken, oh they've spoken, but just barely. And they were really close.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And that was way back in what, early fifties, must have been.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. And they still speak of him with real regret, the god that failed, you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Couldn't accept the fact he was human like the rest of us, almost, and did funny things, and...

JAN THOMPSON: That's right. And they didn't like his concern with worldly things like wanting beautiful furniture and beautiful objects, although they lived beautifully, they really do, but it was a different thing. They felt that...

SUE ANN KENDALL: He wasn't living up to their image of him?

JAN THOMPSON: ...they felt he was becoming seduced by the world.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And yet of all the artists that I can think of, Morris is probably one of the least seduced by the world.

JAN THOMPSON: The least seduced, I know, I know, exactly. (laughter) But they still, you know, [live] in a very strict code, Barbara and Clayton James, a wonderful code. Their purity is almost hard to follow, real hard to follow.

SUE ANN KENDALL: The rest of us can't quite keep it up. (laughter) Oh, but that is amazing, especially in relationship to Morris, who's...

JAN THOMPSON: And I know Guy Anderson, too, thought Morris had sold out, because he's running around the world meeting all these important people.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Huh! So even among the artists there was that feeling?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And who else? Tobey was-- well, Tobey's very worldly though.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, he was, but I think the whole... Now let's see. I'm sure Carl and Hilda Morris-- they were never close friends-- but it was mainly Barbara and Clayton and Guy and Tobey that just thought that was about the end of his being an artist.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And was this like the early fifties that this happened?

JAN THOMPSON: Late, more like late fifties.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It seems that you've sort of been able to maintain contact with a lot of these people who themselves don't always get along.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. yeah. Well, I love them; they're all such wonderful people. But, it's very hard for wonderful people to get along.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs) But you seem to have managed yourself to be able to stay friends with all of them.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, I really love them all. I never was very close to Tobey. He put me off. I just couldn't quite get that close to him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Just as personalities go, you mean?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. Oh, I was a little frightened of him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Are you willing to talk a little bit about the big split between Tobey and Graves?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, the big split had happened apparently before I met him, and I never could see that it was a big split because after I met Morris-- and Morris was always inviting Tobey out-- everyone was talking about their terrible feud. Well, I never really saw it! I do know that Morris was always being terribly hurt, I mean he did revere Tobey quite a bit, and Mark was always hurting him dreadfully by saying... People would tell Morris things that Mark had said about Morris. And I know he would be dreadfully hurt. But he always tried, and he'd invite Tobey [out]... In fact Tobey kept saying he wanted to live in the country, and so Morris arranged that Mark could buy some property out at Woodway Park, which he did. And then he hated it; he just hated it. He never built anything.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, he was a city person.

JAN THOMPSON: He was a city [person]. But about '55 or '6, we were in Paris and Tobey was there. [At--Ed.] the meeting between Mark and Morris-- I mean, there was no feud-- they obviously cared a lot for each other.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And he was friendly-- you were going to say-- at that meeting.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, oh yes. And it was really quite beautiful. I was walking behind with Richard Svare and seeing those two arm in arm, they were beautiful, and they had so much to talk about and so much in common. It was just a shame that-- and of course I may be prejudiced because I saw it-- I was close to Morris-- I saw from my point of view how Morris did try, and how he was rebuffed. I think I just really feel that it was more on Tobey's part, you see, than it was on Morris'.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think it had to do with their work, and jealousy?

JAN THOMPSON: Apparently; Mark was a very jealous man.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That's fairly well known.

JAN THOMPSON: He never forgave Morris for becoming famous before he did. And, you know, it was just so silly. And it wasn't Morris' doing; he just happened to send these paintings and they got picked up by Dorothy Miller. But I don't think Mark ever forgave.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What about the white writing that has been so written about and who did it first and so on? Isn't there some dispute of who took from whom?

JAN THOMPSON: Not really. I think it's obvious that Mark started the white writing, and Morris did a few white writing things, but that's not, I mean that's such a...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, that happens all the time with artists.

JAN THOMPSON: Of course.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I just wondered if it wasn't that Morris did some and then sent them on and they were sold and maybe that was what disturbed Tobey?

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, it probably was. But it was so completely different from anything Tobey was doing.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. Their paintings are like night and day.

JAN THOMPSON: I know, completely different! It was hard to believe that he could have claimed that he had copied.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Who was first anyway isn't all that important, but it's interesting because you hear different stories. I certainly wasn't there and don't know, but it's only important as it relates to the development of their work; I'm not interested in all the gossip that surrounds it, but if in some way it influenced the course of their work.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I think they both influenced each other's work. And I think that the white writing did influence Morris' work, in a way. He took and he changed it; he took it in a different way. I just don't think it's [been] important in Morris' painting; I can't see that it is. I can see that Mark went on with it, and refined it and it became something very, very special.

SUE ANN KENDALL: In his work, sure. What about cross influences, not only between Tobey and Graves, but any of them-- Gilkey and Graves...

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I know Leo Kenney... Graves has just been his idol forever. And although he doesn't really paint like him, you can see a definite influence in his work. And Gilkey has always, in a way, almost fought against [it--Ed.]. He just wished he hadn't been so influenced; and he couldn't paint anything [for years-Jan Thompson] without thinking, "What would Morris think of this?"

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, so it was that powerful an influence?

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, it was. And Morris didn't want it to be, you know, he certainly wasn't trying to be a guru or anything like that.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. So you're saying, in the case of Kenney and Gilkey, that Morris Graves really was held up very high rather than Tobey. Because so often you hear about Tobey's being sort of the spiritual father of the group.

JAN THOMPSON: Right. Tobey wasn't, for Leo Kenney, no. It was Morris for Leo Kenney. Richard revered Tobey, too, though. He used to clean out his [Tobey's--Ed.] basement and do all that stuff. Loved listening to him and talking to him, and they had a pretty good relationship. Tobey did three beautiful portraits of Gilkey. Unfortunately I think he-- it would have been nice to have given him one. He told him he could have one for \$250; well, it was like \$250,000 in those days. But they are beautiful portraits.

And then I think Ward Corley would have been one of the important painters, but he died very young. Oh, and we've forgotten Sherrill Van Cott, who was a very important painter, who died when he was 25. He and Morris were close, very close. He did sculpture up until his heart got so bad that he [then] took up painting but he \_\_\_\_\_. Have you seen any of his?

SUE ANN KENDALL: No.

JAN THOMPSON: I don't have any here. He was in Fortune magazine; they did a whole spread on him when he was 22 years old.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Hmm, I'll look that up.

JAN THOMPSON: And he \_\_\_\_\_ was beautiful. He was very influenced by Morris. And then Ward Corley was very influenced by Morris.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You say they were influenced. In what way, can you be more specific? It was different for each of them, perhaps?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. Sherrill adopted Morris' technique completely, with the tempera gouache paintings. He painted little lizards and little animals, and they were really quite spiritual. He was probably closer than anyone. Gilkey [was influenced--Ed.] mainly in the way Morris saw things.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Saw things, literally, or thought about things?

JAN THOMPSON: The way he saw, visually. And Kenney also adopted the gouache and technique. Kenney knows more about Morris' work than anyone I know. He could talk about Morris' painting so articulately. I can't. I'm not articulate talking about painting. But he is incredible. Really. I've never heard anyone talk so well about paintings. They just come alive, and they just get very exciting. He knows every single painting by heart that Morris has ever done.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That's amazing. Now, did any of them take classes from Morris when he taught at the museum?

JAN THOMPSON: Morris never taught.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I thought he did! A little bit at SAM [Seattle Art Museum--Ed.]. I've wondered, because it doesn't sound like something he would do.

JAN THOMPSON: No, he never did [as far as I know--Jan Thompson].

SUE ANN KENDALL: He worked there for a while. But he didn't ever teach?

JAN THOMPSON: No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Okay, maybe next time we'll go on more with these other people.

JAN THOMPSON: There are some marvelous stories about Morris and John Cage.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh yes, I'd like to get into that, as well. Before we sign off this time, I'll go back to my other question, which was if you were to write something on Morris-- and I realize you maybe wouldn't write, but to talk about-- are there things that you would want to include that haven't been?

JAN THOMPSON: I'd have to think about that because it's got me stumped; I really can't think right now.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Okay, we'll give it some time.

[Tape 2; Side 2]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Jan, last time we spoke a lot about Morris Graves, and your friendship with him. I have just a couple more questions about that and then we can move on to other things. I wanted to ask you about John Cage's influence on Morris, and if you knew John Cage when he was here?

JAN THOMPSON: I didn't know him when he was here; he left before I came. But I've known him since. I think they both discovered Zen at the same time, which is so influential in John's work. And I think they influenced each other in a way.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was that through his [Cage's--Ed.] being here at Cornish?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm. John and his wife, Xenia, lived in the same apartment building and did wonderful crazy things, which I heard about in New York [just last month--Jan Thompson], by the way, because we took Xenia to lunch. He hadn't seen Xenia for 30years, and I had never met her, and so she was recalling some of the wild, wild things they used to do.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What apartment building was this?

JAN THOMPSON: That I don't know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: But in Seattle somewhere. It was before you were here.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. So I think they influenced each other that way.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Does Morris still keep in touch with John Cage?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You don't know any more specifically how they interacted?

JAN THOMPSON: No. I don't think he influenced Morris' painting any way, but I think he influenced his thought, which of course eventually influenced his painting. John's whole premise [encompasses--Ed.] any kind of sound or anything that happens; there's no end to it. That influenced Morris' thought, I think, too.

[Break in taping]

SUE ANN KENDALL: One more question, about Morris' antics, theatrical antics, I guess I would say. Do you think that any of them were done for mere shock effect?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh I think so.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think that makes him seem more inauthentic?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh no! No I don't think so. I mean I think all crazy antics and stunts are done for the shock. I mean, they're not done for one-self alone, you know, they're done to shock. That's part of the fun I think.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, right. (chuckles) But you still feel that they're very genuine on his part?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh very. Oh yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Because some people have questioned that and don't really buy those things as being real.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh what's real? I don't know what we mean is real. If something is funny and comes off as an antic and a joke, I mean what's an unreal antic?

SUE ANN KENDALL: He seems to get that side of himself out in those theatrical performance-type things, more than in his work perhaps. Do you view his work sort of as the opposite side of him?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh there's so many opposite sides of Morris, but the serious side of him is so incredibly serious and the crazy side is so crazy that it's...

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's like a release.

JAN THOMPSON: It is, wild release.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, right. In relationship to his personality, too, another thing that I've heard from some people is that he was very generous with friends, but that it was very much on his own terms, that he's sort of a prima donna and that you don't ask Morris to do something. But on his terms he does a lot of things for other people. Do you think that's fairly true?

JAN THOMPSON: Certainly never in my own personal experience. People are asking him all the time. I just asked him to write something for someone for a Guggenheim, and he was more than delighted to do it. That wasn't his own terms and it's a lot of work! It takes a lot of effort on his part to do this. When I think of the countless other

times he does something for other people when they've asked him, they were certainly not on his terms.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So you would not necessarily agree with that?

JAN THOMPSON: Well no! A lot of his kindnesses are on his own terms, but don't we all?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Don't we all, indeed! (laughter)

JAN THOMPSON: He usually would think of it first; that's why it sounds like his own terms, but he thinks of something wonderful to do for someone before they ask. That sounds better than asking and then doing it. Because you feel guilty for not.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You just mentioned how loyal he has been, too, to his friends. Did you want to elaborate on that a little?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, for instance, with Dorothy Schumacher who is an old, old friend. She was very [important in his life--Jan Thompson]. I don't know whether I went through this, but the first time he met her, he had his first show at the museum here in Seattle. And it was a show of landscapes-- I think it was at the Henry Gallery [actually Seattle Art Museum, 1936--Ed.]-- [that] had some with gloves in them. And these gloves were symbols. And the show-- he told me-- was a personal message to someone, and he found out later that someone never came to see the show. (chuckles) So he was pretty disappointed.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did he say who?

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, it was for Guy Anderson. And I don't know whether Guy ever saw the show or \_\_\_\_\_, but at this point when Morris... I guess it was the last day of the show-- and he was up there, and no one had liked the paintings...

SUE ANN KENDALL: When was this show?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh golly! It must have been in the early thirties.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Real early!

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, real early. And there was a young woman there looking at paintings whom he'd never met, and she started talking to him about them and he was just floored because she knew exactly what they meant. I mean she knew more than what he meant; she was so articulate and so wonderful. And they got to be friends. That was Dorothy Schumacher. And she had been sort of reading a lot of Buddhism. She would bring books over and they would read Buddhism and listen to music. She's had a rather sad life and he still loves her, and so does Guy.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Where is she now?

JAN THOMPSON: She's been living in LaConner for the last few years, and now I think she's moved to Mount Vernon.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And she was a friend of both Morris and Guy? And other painters also?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. She was a real catalyst.

SUE ANN KENDALL: In what way?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, just her excitement about things. Every time you went over you'd see some[thing] new; she was very original. But she herself, her whole life kind of went down the drain. That's a terrible way to put it, but it did. And yet she's had these wonderful ideas that never came to anything. She did the most beautiful bouquets, incredible, before people did these great bouquets that went to the ceiling. She grew flowers and she had shows...

SUE ANN KENDALL: You don't mean paintings; you mean real bouquets.

JAN THOMPSON: She did the actual bouquets. And they were always just so imaginative. In fact she had a show once with cascading chrysanthemums in a gallery here. They were absolutely fantastic. And Morris took her to Ireland with him. But she ruined that trip by taking a cat along, and the cat had to be in quarantine for six months, and so she had to go up every day to Cork to see the cat. You know the whole trip was ruined; the cat was traumatized forever. But she did things like this and just kind of ruined her own life-- somehow I don't know, it was very, very sad. But, in fact, she started Ward Corley on painting those [haunted] bouquets, because once she took a brownie camera and took a photograph of a bouquet, with the light coming through it. She

deliberately did it out of focus, and he just went to pieces. That's how she was a catalyst. She got everyone excited about things.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And intellectually was stimulating?

JAN THOMPSON: Very, very, yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So she read a lot and then talked with them, I suppose?

JAN THOMPSON: Wonderful person. Wonderful woman.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was she a patron at all?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh no. She had no money. She lived in a tiny house. She was a gardener too, loved plants, and they'd take trips to the mountains to get alpine plants.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And who else did she talk to or influence? Besides Guy and Morris?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, Ward and Richard Gilkey, and [Barbara & Clayton James--Jan Thompson]. I think just mainly those people.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Had she been educated in the arts?

JAN THOMPSON: No! Not really. It's amazing. She'd been to the university, but she just had it; she is a really very special woman.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ah hah. So you've known her also I take it. Interesting. What about Betty Willis' role with these people?

JAN THOMPSON: Well Betty I met-- as I say, I came kind of late; '48 doesn't sound very late, but it was late for a lot of these things. And she had been important before I came. She was still good friends with Morris and Mark. And she'd worked at Marian Willard, the Willard Gallery in New York. I think she was important in getting Morris' things back east, I don't know how important.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And Tobey also?

JAN THOMPSON: And Tobey's things, yes. I know she claims that Tobey wanted to marry her desperately and had a nervous breakdown when she wouldn't. But I hear from other people that that's not true, also. She has lots of stories of those days and I'm never sure-- I shouldn't say that, but I just don't know, you know. We all color the things...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Sure, sure. Well, you mentioned that Jack and Lenor Larson has commissioned her to do a book. Is that on Tobey or on the Northwest?

JAN THOMPSON: It's on the Northwest School.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ah hah. So she'll get a chance to put her perceptions down, whatever they are. (chuckles)

JAN THOMPSON: That's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Wes Wehr claims that she won't allow him to say that [about Tobey's proposal--Ed.]; and he claims that it was to Pehr that Tobey proposed, rather than Betty Willis.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh. (laughs uproariously)

SUE ANN KENDALL: I thought you'd enjoy that.

JAN THOMPSON: That's funny.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now she had her own gallery here, also, for a period of time. I just read that in a piece on Zoe Dusanne.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, I didn't know that.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Just for a couple of summers or a couple of years, evidently; or at least [she--Ed.] exhibited things through somebody's gallery.

JAN THOMPSON: I didn't know that. That's interesting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I think it was called the Fifth Avenue Little Gallery. Very short-lived and therefore nobody remembers very much about it. I have it written down here that it was in 1947 and '48, so that was before you came.

JAN THOMPSON: There was a rather bitter fight a couple years ago between her and Morris. You see, when Morris moved away he left a lot of paintings with her, some of which he gave her, which he said if she ever sold-- as she said she [never--Jan Thompson] was going to do-- but if she did, they would split, \_\_\_\_\_ dollars, which she agreed to. And she sold quite a few but never did let him know, and I didn't want to tell him, because [it wasn't my business--Jan Thompson]. Finally this big one came up, The Pine-- let's see what was it called? something Pine \_\_\_\_\_ [Concentrated Pine Top; series--Ed.]. But it wasn't signed; so she was stuck because they wouldn't buy it unless it was signed, and they would pay \$25,000. It was through the gallery [Foster/White Gallery--Ed.]. So Don Foster went down and had Morris sign it, and Morris said, "Well I'll sign it if you'll honor our agreement." And so by phone she said she would; and then she didn't. Well actually it ended up she gave him \$3,000. It wasn't the money. I know Morris well enough; it wasn't the money, it was the betrayal. It was very bitter, and she spread all sorts of terrible rumors about town. It made me very angry. [She made people believe--Jan Thompson] this poor old lady was just struggling to survive and he was trying to cheat her out of everything. And it was very bitter and a lot of people believed her. They didn't know the story.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now does she still have paintings?

JAN THOMPSON: I don't think she has much left. I think she has a few. But it was an unhappy thing.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, for sure. What was her relationship with not only Morris, but other people earlier on? Was it mainly as a dealer or as a go-between?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I'm not quite sure, really. I think it was a go-between. She knew them all; she knew their painting. She worked hard, I think, to help Morris in New York, and help Morris here, and help Mark. I'm sure she did. I'm sure she took it very seriously, and she had great taste.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's interesting that there seem to have been a lot of women in this town-- for instance there's Zoe Dusanne, Betty Willis...

JAN THOMPSON: Wonderful! She [Dusanne--Ed.] was...

SUE ANN KENDALL: ...Dorothy Schumacher. And they all seem to have known these painters; it would an interesting story.

JAN THOMPSON: And Nancy Wilson Ross.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. But I don't really get a handle on Betty Willis and exactly what she was to these people.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I'm not sure myself.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you know her personally, yourself?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now you do.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, and she's a fascinating woman.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What about Nancy Wilson Ross?

JAN THOMPSON: Well she, she moved away so early. She was married here to someone-- Ross [Charles Ross, an architect--Ed.].

And she married Stanley Young [playwright--Ed.], who was the head of ANTA [American National Theater and Academy--Ed.]. And they lived in [the east--Jan Thompson], and she's written a lot. She wrote about Morris; Morris is featured, I think [in] *The Left Hand Is the Dreamer*. And she's written a lot about them. She claims that she was the one that introduced Morris to Zen. And, although they were very interested in Buddhism through Dorothy Schumacher before that, I think probably it is true that she did introduce him, and probably John Cage, too. I don't know about her in John's case; it would be interesting to find out. She just has published a big book, a big complete book on Zen, and she was very disappointed not to get to Morris' show [1983 retrospective--Ed.]. She was very ill; she was in the hospital \_\_\_\_\_.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So her thinking also influenced their thinking?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm.



SUE ANN KENDALL: What about Zoe Dusanne and her gallery? It seems like Morris was never connected as closely as Callahan and Tobey.

JAN THOMPSON: No, I don't know why, but I've only heard him say good things about her and about her gallery. She had a really fascinating gallery. It was the first good gallery in Seattle. In fact it's probably better than probably almost anything here today, too, you know. She had some Graves. But-- I must say I've never asked-- I've never found out why, I don't think he ever had shows there.

SUE ANN KENDALL: No, he didn't evidently, and these other people did.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah. I don't think he had any shows in Seattle in those years at all! Maybe he was showing at Marian Willard and maybe there wasn't enough left over for... I'm not sure about that.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was she also intellectual in terms of her ideas on art?

JAN THOMPSON: Well yes! She was in a way. She was the first one to bring some European work to Seattle.

SUE ANN KENDALL: She seemed to be oriented towards Europe, almost more than the Orient. You get so many of these other people thinking on Zen or Buddhism or whatever, but she seemed to be bring the other.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. She did a lot for Tobey and he broke her heart when he moved to [Otto--Ed.] Seligman's gallery and...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well he was also instrumental somewhat in getting that gallery [Seligman--Ed.] going, wasn't he?

JAN THOMPSON: She felt very betrayed, because she had worked so hard. She had just come back from a trip to introduce his work to Europe, and...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was that a definitive break then between the two of them?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm, yeah, it was.

SUE ANN KENDALL: [Women's critical role--Ed.] seems to happen over the years as you trace things back.

[Break in taping]

JAN THOMPSON: Well, there were so many women influential: Marian Willard, Dorothy Miller from the Museum of Modern Art, Dorothy Norman, who is an author and collector, from New York. Nancy Wilson Ross, Betty Willis, Dorothy Schumacher. I mean all these women were very, very influential in Morris' life.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It would make a great story, in a way.

JAN THOMPSON: It would.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And you just mentioned that you think he was really more influenced by women than men, as a rule. Or was it that his friends were women rather than men? Which do you think?

JAN THOMPSON: I think he seemed to have more powerful women friends than men. They seemed to. When I count it up it seems to me that there were more interesting women in those days.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, and yet they're the ones whose names seem to be forgotten, but the male artists' names are the ones...

JAN THOMPSON: That's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: ...that carry the ball, so to speak, and that's...

JAN THOMPSON: Now whether they were-- you know, maybe that that particular kind of woman was fascinated by Morris, too.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And yet I'm sure you're speaking of many different kinds of women who were doing different things. Some were dealers, some were more intellectual; they were kinds of relationships, but still mostly women. And then there's also Betty Bowen.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now, what was her relationship with those \_\_\_\_\_?

JAN THOMPSON: Well they knew each other for years. Betty lived in Mount Vernon; she was raised in the Skagit

[River Valley--Ed.]. And she heard about these crazy artists that live in LaConner, that lived in a burned-out house. And she was walking through one day and-- she was like 16 or 17-- and some young kid, some fellow came along and said, "Hey! You want to see the house of a crazy man for a quarter?" And she said, "Sure!" Well he had found a way into Morris' house (Morris wasn't there), and he was doing tours through it. [Graves lived here ca. 1937-1938--Ed.]

SUE ANN KENDALL: For a quarter! (laughter)

JAN THOMPSON: For a quarter. So that's how Betty first saw Morris' place and she was so fascinated with this surreal house that had all black charred walls and sand on the floor-- deep sand you walked through... Well anyhow, she was just fascinated. Then she later met Morris. She was always so charming, so darling. But then not too long after that, [Curt--Ed.] Valentiner...

[Break in taping]

JAN THOMPSON: Valentiner was making a trip out to meet Morris, when Morris lived up at The Rock, Deception Pass [Fidalgo Island, Washington--Ed.]. So he came out, and they spent about three very quiet beautiful, mystical days together, so quiet and serious. And Morris took him down in his old Model-T car, down to the train station at Mount Vernon. And (chuckles), they'd been on a very high, spiritual plane, see, and Betty Bowen was getting on the train too, and she saw Morris and she came running up. "Morris, darling," and kissed him and got bright red lipstick all over his face, and then grabbed Valentino and kissed him all over too, and said, "Oh, is this your darling friend?" (laughter) The spell was broken.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Indeed. And with that he got in the train and left! What was he out here for?

JAN THOMPSON: Just to see Morris' work. And he was very impressed. That was again before I knew Morris. I think that was all in that same year that Dorothy Miller saw the show, and he bought some things for his own private collection.

SUE ANN KENDALL: He was also at the Detroit Institute of Arts, for a long time.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh I didn't know that.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, if it's the same one. I'm sure we're talking about the same person \_\_\_\_\_. Okay. The book that Bill Cumming is writing. [Sketchbook: A Memoir of the 1930s and the Northwest School, to be published by the University of Washington Press, October 1984.--Ed.] You wanted to mention that. You have to clue me in a little bit first, as to his perceptions.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I think it's fascinating. It's very nostalgic and [contains--Ed.] lots of things that I didn't know about Bill and how he came here, and his first meeting with Morris (he [Cumming--Ed.] read the chapter [to a group of friends--Jan Thompson]) and how kind Morris was to him. He said, "I was just this country bumpkin who knew nothing," and puts that on a little too thick because I think Bill's always been probably very sophisticated. He wasn't all that much younger than Morris. He said that the Callahans-- Margaret Callahan, Kenneth's first wife, was a beautiful loving woman, and she was very kind to him. And so it's really kind of lovely.

SUE ANN KENDALL: About when did he arrive here?

JAN THOMPSON: Well I think he came from some small town like Kent or something. This was about '39.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So the book goes way back and focuses mostly on that period?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. He read two or three chapters. One chapter on Lubin Petric, who he says is Morris' brother-in-law, which is not true. He lived with Morris' sister for a while, but they never married. And I think they better get it straightened out in the book before the book is published. Lubin himself said they weren't married, and Morris said they weren't married.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well as a matter of historical record, actually I'm sure that that can be looked up.

JAN THOMPSON: Anyhow, Lubin was a very interesting man, very interesting painter. Overshadowed by Mark and Morris and became an alcoholic and a sad person. But oh, he was a beautiful painter.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I take it he's not living?

JAN THOMPSON: No, he died a few years ago. He was Lithuanian or something like that, a big, heavy man with a big black mustache and charming, just charming. But somehow never felt-- I suppose because he must have felt overshadowed. But I remember once [Morris told me--Jan Thompson] when the Northwest Annual was on, and Morris was going to come by in his old Model-A-- or Model-T, whatever it was, his truck-- and pick up a big

painting. Lubin had done a great big, full-size oil portrait of Morris, that Morris said was incredible. So Morris got his own painting in the truck and he came by to pick up Lubin's and Lubin wasn't there. The door was open, and he went in and noticed the fire burning in the pot-bellied stove, and here was the end of the painting burning up.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Hm! Why?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, he was self-destructive and he thought it didn't measure up, probably; that was the way he was with his whole life.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It would be interesting to know who might have emerged had there not been Tobey, Graves, Callahan, Anderson.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right, that's right. Because Lubin would have been [one], I think; he was a powerful painter. There's one of his paintings hanging in Meany Hall [auditorium complex on University of Washington campus--Ed.], not a typical one, but you might get a chance to look at. He did mainly big still lifes; the ones I've seen were quite new.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And the museum has others?

JAN THOMPSON: I think the museum has. I know Dorothy Bowie has a beauty. She's at the university. There are not many, really; too few.

SUE ANN KENDALL: There are probably other people who might have emerged, as I say, had there not been such a monopoly of the four main ones.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, that's right. Because that was pretty hard to...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well in that regard, it makes you think of Helmi [Juvonen--Ed.]. Another woman! Now in that case a painter. But what do you know about Helmi, or do you know her well?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, Helmi. I haven't seen her for years, but I knew her when she was following Tobey around and putting a pillow in her stomach and saying it was Tobey's baby.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh... Tell me about that!

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, yes. She was in love with Tobey. And most all of her paintings had Tobey in them, and herself pregnant, or babies [who] were Tobey's.

[Tape 3; Side 1 -- 45-minute tape]

JAN THOMPSON: Charming childlike, child-woman, who has been locked up most of her life. Let's see if I get the story straight. Somebody rescued her; I think she was about...

SUE ANN KENDALL: From the time she was young?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. I don't quite know how. I know Dr. Fuller [Richard Fuller, founder of the Seattle Art Museum--Ed.] bought [or rented-Jan Thompson] her a little house and somehow she got by; she'd sell her paintings down at the [Seattle Public--Ed.] market and she'd sit on the street corner in the University Way, in big dirndl skirts, with a pillow in it (she was always "pregnant" by Mark)... But it got too much for Mark, because she finally was sleeping in bushes outside his house and ...I don't remember-- but it just got to be a little too much for Mark. And he didn't want to have her locked up or anything, but it just got [so] he couldn't go anywhere; she was just following him everywhere. And then he did go to Europe; he sort of fled in a way, but he did go. And she sent him, every day, a package to "Mark Tobey, care of Pablo Picasso"-- she got Picasso's address somewhere in southern France-- and every day Picasso got these packages for Mark Tobey from Helmi. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: What did he do with them?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I guess somehow he \_\_\_\_\_ to Mark somehow and said, "Look, I've got this stuff," and I don't remember the end of the story. (laughs)  
And they were just full of stuff, you know, like, oh, rocks, or some feathers or something.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So she attached herself to Tobey; or was it through her art first of all that \_\_\_\_\_.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, I don't know how that happened. But it was-- she was so darling. She was very sweet. She had a little blond Dutch bob, you know, and big blue eyes; she was Finnish. Then she finally has ended up in some sanitarium. [Jan Thompson later uncertain this was correct. Since ca. 1960 Helmi has been at a convalescent and care center in Elna, Washington--Ed.]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JAN THOMPSON: And Morris went to see her a few years ago [in Elna--Jan Thompson]. She was told that he was coming. She writes to Morris every day, or she did up to a year or so ago; I haven't heard lately. Little cards she'll write [him], you know, like "Eat your cornflakes. They're good for you." But he went to see her, and she was sitting waiting for him. She had ribbons in her hair. And he hadn't seen her for like 25, 30 years, and she just said, "Oh Morris. Look what I just found." And just went on talking like they parted 10minutes ago, and she was a darling. Wesley Wehr keeps track of her; he goes to see her all the time.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. They're putting together a show of her work in, at Evergreen [State College, and the State Capitol Museu, Olympia--Ed.].

JAN THOMPSON: Oh there are? Oh good!

SUE ANN KENDALL: Wes is, and I don't know whom he's working with. Martha Kingsbury I think is one person who is writing on her work. And what is her work like?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, it's fascinating. It ranges from, you know, very silly little drawings of pickaninnies to really fantastic, incredibly beautiful paintings, usually with Mark's features, face in it, of totem poles, Indian symbols, Indian things, all worked together, intricately done, \_\_\_\_.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So you think she's a good artist?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. Strange, but very good, in a special way it's... I like it very much.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And you think it's necessary that she's locked up?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, she can't support herself; there's no way at all she could get by \_\_\_\_\_. She's old now; she's in her eighties. And she's not well. So--Elna's a nice place.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, right. But she's obviously been in and out all of her life. And yet her name comes up, and her work comes up. Was she influential in any way?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, I wouldn't say influential, no. But she was a charming spirit, you know, always sweet and good-natured and happy, and it was always kind of nice to see her sitting on a curb with all her drawings around her. She was always drawing. Everybody'd go by-- "Hello, dear," you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now where are all these things that she does? A lot of them I'm sure are lost, but the museum has some.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, the museum has some. The Hatches have some beauties. They've got many of the best I think. I think Bill Staadeker has some beauties.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So Tobey tolerated her as he could, and then when he left did that fall off?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, and I think it was very upsetting to her. And I think soon after she was put up at Sedro Woolley [State Psychiatric Hospital--Ed.]. I'm just not sure. Wes knows about that, but I think it was Sedro Woolley for a while.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What about Wes? How objective a viewer of all of this is Wes?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh boy, that's hard to say! (chuckles) I don't know; maybe none of us are very objective. I'm sure I'm not all that objective. But I'm sure I disagree with Wes on many, many things. And, you know, he's been in all these-- he certainly knew Mark a lot better than I did. He knew Morris very, very well. I had a falling out with him a few years ago, because I think he betrayed Richard Gilkey very badly.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Can you elaborate on that.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, Richard had left the gallery, and this was the first nongallery show he'd had. It wasn't his best show, but there like three very good things in it. And that's pretty good for him [i.e., for anyone--Jan Thompson]; there were three really great paintings, but the rest okay. So it was presented. Well, R.M. Campbell was a good friend of Wesley's, and Campbell wrote the most vicious, I mean really vicious-- it wasn't just a bad review; that's something else-- this was vicious, saying what a dirty trick it had been for Richard to leave the gallery after the galleries had done so much for him. And it's not true: Richard had never belonged to a gallery until about two years [or so], and it [being a gallery artist--Ed.] just wasn't for him. But it was really a vicious review. Almost libelous, it was so slanderous. And it was full of untruth. I know you can't do anything about a bad review, but this was nasty. And Wesley Wehr fed it, I mean the two of them were very close. Well it was so bad

that several of us wrote letters, saying, "Why so vicious? Why such a really terrible review?" I know I wrote a letter saying that Richard Gilkey had brought beauty to the Northwest for 25 years and that R. M. Campbell had brought ugliness for a year (chuckles), and hopefully not much longer.

But the role that Wesley played was, I felt, a real betrayal because he and Richard Gilkey \_\_\_\_\_. Richard Gilkey had given Wesley a letter that Picasso had written to Richard. I mean, that's a real treasure. But those things mean so much to Wesley, those keepsakes, and they don't mean that much to Richard Gilkey. And Richard's a very generous man, and he gave him this wonderful letter from Picasso which was worth a great deal. (I think it would be worth a great deal \_\_\_\_\_.) And then to have him turn; [he] did everything he could to see that everybody wrote in support for R.M. Campbell, and apparently, according to Joe Goldberg, Wesley Wehr practically forced him to write a letter saying, "I agree with R.M. Campbell." I mean it was just one of those dumb things. Oh, we probably shouldn't have even written letters, but it was just such a shock that he would do this. Anyhow, so my feelings have sort of cooled. And then, see the next month Wesley Wehr had a show, and R.M. Campbell called him the Monet of [Seattle--Jan Thompson]-- Oh, I don't know what he called him, \_\_\_\_\_, I've forgotten what he said. But the whole thing was unpleasant, unsavory, and my feelings changed completely.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What kind of an influence has Wes had, maybe good or bad, but how much influence do you think has he had?

JAN THOMPSON: Well I think his influence has been mainly in gossip. He keeps up with all the gossip; he knows what everyone is doing every second of the time. And he keeps everyone informed of it, and it's an important role.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Although he has his own biases; I mean he's not an objective transmitter of this information.

JAN THOMPSON: No. (laughs)

SUE ANN KENDALL: And of his own work, which I don't know very well, very frankly, how do you view him artistically?

JAN THOMPSON: Well I thought they were quite lovely, you know, really quite beautiful. Very minor, but lovely--major, minor, who cares, but because it's something beautiful. I haven't seen any for three years.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think that he had influence?

JAN THOMPSON: No, I don't think so.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Except in terms of friendship or whatever, say with Tobey he seems to have been very close to Tobey.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. Very.

SUE ANN KENDALL: More so than Morris, perhaps. Or, is that not true?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yes. Much closer to Tobey.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And he knows Guy Anderson, too.

JAN THOMPSON: Very close to Guy.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Quite well. So, you don't view his role as being a key one in any way particularly?

JAN THOMPSON: No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: In this area, but he does know a lot of things.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh to be certain, he does. I think he knows probably more about the things that have gone on since the forties than anybody I know, because he likes collecting all the small things and remembering.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And loves talking about them.

JAN THOMPSON: And loves talking about them. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: All right, let's go on to some other people. You know Richard Gilkey quite well since we just were mentioning him. And you said that your relationship with him began after the war, when he was in such bad shape, and you've known him ever since then.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I assume... Can you talk in more detail about his relationship with Morris?

JAN THOMPSON: Well they're very good friends, still are very good friends.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Does Morris still keep in touch with him?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yes. And I think Richard's always fought against being so influenced by Morris, because he said he has never painted a painting in his life that he didn't think, "What would Morris think?" And that's a terrible burden to be under. I don't think Richard's ever really been free.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That still is the case, you're saying?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: In his work, are the landscape elements used symbolically.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, sometimes they are. Just the plain landscapes I like the best. When he tries to use symbols, I don't feel it works.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You mean like those surrealistic things.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah. And they're important to him and I know what he wants. I think they just haven't come off yet, for what he wants to see them do, I never felt they worked. Whereas if he just paints what he loves and what he knows, I think they really work.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And you view the landscapes basically as landscapes without any particular symbolism?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm, I do.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Because I think Tom Robbins has written, or someone, that streams can symbolize passage of time, and so on, in his work, and I don't see that. I don't feel that coming from the work, but I wonder if you know him better, and...

JAN THOMPSON: I don't think so, hm mm, no. I've always felt there's a problem with Richard-- part of it is that always being under the burden of Morris-- he's never done what he ever wanted to do, in painting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Which is what?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I don't know. And I don't think he knows, either. I know that he thinks that it's there, and he never has quite grasped it. And I think if he'd just relax it would evolve.

SUE ANN KENDALL: He could get free from [the influence of Graves--Ed.]. He's very powerful, almost like a father image that you can't get away from. Does Richard talk to you about his work very much?

JAN THOMPSON: Mainly about the frustrations of it, that he just hasn't done what he's wanted, what he felt he could have done. I think he's getting over the Morris burden now, but mainly he's talked about the frustration, never really being quite happy with what he's done.

SUE ANN KENDALL: When he was involved with the group in the late forties, they did have all these discussions [about] Zen and various things, and yet I don't see that in his work. And that's why I'm sort of confused, because he...

JAN THOMPSON: No, it's not in his work at all.

SUE ANN KENDALL: ...becomes associated with that, and, myself, I see him in a very different way.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yeah. He's more earthy and literal ... When he does those landscapes I feel that they're truly Richard Gilkey paintings.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. Have you seen Bruce Guenther's book yet [50 Northwest Artists, Chronicle Books, 1983--Ed.], that just came out?

JAN THOMPSON: No, I haven't.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Gilkey was not included along with some other people.

JAN THOMPSON: And Leo Kenney wasn't included, and that seemed weird because I think Leo's a very important painter in the Northwest.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I was going to ask you if you agreed with Bruce's choices.

JAN THOMPSON: I haven't seen the book yet.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Phil McCracken was left out, as well, and Leo and Richard. Those three were the ones that come to mind right away.

JAN THOMPSON: Well certainly I would have put them in, if I were doing the book, because I think they've been important painters, and whether you like them or not isn't the point.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. What about Leo Kenney? I guess your relationship with him began also in the late forties?

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm. He and Richard Gilkey were dear friends also, and then Leo Kenney left. So I didn't see him for years and then when he moved back, he moved into my basement! And did some of his most beautiful work down there in that little hovel down there.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now when was that, that he moved in?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh God! Well it must have been 20 years ago.

SUE ANN KENDALL: When he came back from California, which was around '60. What about the change in his work?

JAN THOMPSON: That change had actually happened before he came back. He was doing the [display--Ed.] windows for Gumps in San Francisco, and he was also painting, but not so much. So the change had already occurred. But then he started painting downstairs and I couldn't believe these things he was coming out with; they were just excellent.

SUE ANN KENDALL: These are the geometric ones?

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, wonderful things.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ah hah. I understood he didn't paint a lot when he was in California.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, he didn't paint a lot, but he did change a lot; and when he did paint-- he again is a self-destructive person.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's been said that the big change came about after a Mescaline experience, or some kind of a drug-related experience.

JAN THOMPSON: Really? I don't know about that.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It was also termed sometimes as a personal mystical experience; I've heard it both ways. If he was here living in your basement, you would have been...

JAN THOMPSON: No, he was already painting this way before he moved here. So no big change here. Maybe, well, I just don't know about that. It's possible.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Visually his work changes so drastically from the early surrealist derived images to the later work, and yet I see a connection there, in terms of still dealing with the same type of thing, inner world. But visually they're very different. I wondered if you knew more about his thinking and evolution.

JAN THOMPSON: What [caused] the change? Well, I really don't know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: How long did he stay here, then?

JAN THOMPSON: Well he was here about a year, and it was during that time that Richard had broken his back. He was married to Ann, and living next door. He had just bought her a new puppy and was sitting in his car at a red light in Lake City, and a car smashed in the back of him; it didn't break his back, but it did something terrible, so he had to have this terrible operation. Not a laminectomy-- a fusion, and they had to do it in two spots. Well they didn't know how to do it, and he should never have had it done. It was awful. He was in a cast from the knees to the neck for six months, and they put it on wrong so that they sprained his hips. There was a walkie-talkie from his house to my house, so that when he needed something Leo and I would run over and take care of him. It was a bad year.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I didn't realize that they moved next door. huh. For a long time?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, when he got well, they got divorced.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, how about Phil McCracken?

JAN THOMPSON: I never knew him well. But a lovely guy, lovely, wonderful, gentle, poetic...

SUE ANN KENDALL: But you were never close to him, in the way that you were with other people?

JAN THOMPSON: No. No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, it's interesting that Bruce left all of those people out. Of course he was limited to 50 people and I guess maybe he had to pick and choose, and include a large area and so on.

What about this Kennedy [formerly Lisbon--Ed.] apartment building in the U[University--Ed.] district? That's where Wes lived, and evidently Morris lived for a while, and that's where a lot of these relationships started. Do you know anything about that group, or who all was there?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yes, we all lived there! (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Tell me about that place!

JAN THOMPSON: Well, it was funny. It had pull-out trundle beds, you know, those kind that tip out. And it was very cheap. And it had little kitchenettes. Leo Kenney was there, and he painted his place black. All black. (laughter) And then I lived upstairs and I painted mine all white. Gilkey lived there, and Jack Lenor Larson. Wesley Wehr lived there. Ward Corley lived there. Oh, it was crazy. I don't think Morris ever lived there, not that I know of.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Wes says he came looking for [company--Ed.]?

JAN THOMPSON: He visited a lot, yes. (laughter) Yes, it was a wild place. And Bill Ivey used to come and visit.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And that was when?

JAN THOMPSON: That would be the early fifties?

SUE ANN KENDALL: So it was a common sort of thing to get together and discuss things, or discuss work, or was it more for fun?

JAN THOMPSON: It was mainly just so (laughs)-- It was not very serious.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So you were all doing your work or whatever you were doing, but it wasn't like a....

JAN THOMPSON: I was working at the University Bookstore. I was trimming windows at the University Bookstore. I was the only one that had a steady job, so I was the only one that ever had any money. (laughs)

SUE ANN KENDALL: And what about Tom Robbins [Seattle critic and author--Ed.]. Do you know him?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, not very well, but I find him charming. I really like Tom. I find his books hard going. I [have a lot of problems] getting through his books. I like them still, but really, I'm puzzled. I think maybe I'm too old to read them. I don't know what it is. I'm amused by them.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, you can't quite put yourself in those roles; nor can I.

JAN THOMPSON: I can't put-- yeah! (laughter) But I think he's a darling.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What kind of impact do you think he had?

JAN THOMPSON: Actually... We used to scream with laughter with some of the things he'd say. I think he was really pretty good now that I've seen other reviewers. (laughs)

SUE ANN KENDALL: You mean in terms of his writing?

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh. I don't know why we were all laughing. But we were all laughing all the time anyhow. I don't know why. Everything was so much fun in those years. They're not fun anymore.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs) Oh dear. But he's also done a lot of serious writing about a lot [of] these people, a lot of catalog writing.



JAN THOMPSON: That's right. This was when he was first beginning. He's gotten a lot better. I think he's really pretty good.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You think he tunes into their work, then?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yeah, I really do.

SUE ANN KENDALL: His interest in art seems to have sort of stopped with that crowd. (I'm not sure I'm right in that.) Because he really is not an art critic in the sense that one deals with all kinds of things, but he seems to have taken these people on as a special crowd. He supports them and he likes that work very much. Did he talk to them about their work a lot? Was he part of the gang, so to speak?

JAN THOMPSON: No. He came sort of later, I think, late fifties, wasn't he?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. He was reviewing into the sixties. So he was sort of an outsider in terms of that group.

JAN THOMPSON: He and Richard Gilkey kind of organized that-- There was a bomb went off in Alabama church, and a lot of children were killed-- and Tom and Richard put on a benefit and the [Seattle Art--Ed.] museum let us use the museum in the center [Pavilion, Seattle Center--Ed.] and we asked all the artists for work and we all worked like crazy. And almost everything sold. It was a fantastic success. I think there were about five or six of us selling, and we couldn't take the money fast enough. Everybody bought. The only thing that didn't sell was a beautiful, beautiful Tobey still life that Zoe Dusanne donated; it was only \$5,000, but it was a beauty. Tom worked real hard, and Richard.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And then he sort of disappeared from the art critic scene?

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah. And then he started writing his books.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, right. But he still is a good friend of Guy's, I know.

JAN THOMPSON: They live right next door to each other.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So they still are in contact with [each other].

JAN THOMPSON: I have to tell you one funny thing about Bill Ivey. He worked hard too for the benefit. Richard Gilkey and Ward Corley and I were cleaning up afterwards; we were running mops around the floor and trying to clean up-- and Bill Ivey was to bring his car around to pick up something. And, you know, in front of the pavilion, there are steps going up. Bill must have been tired, [because] he pulled his car in and suddenly we looked out the window and Bill's car came sailing down these steps. He was dreaming; I guess he thought it was a ramp, but this big station wagon was going [untranslatable sound] in this great cloud of dust. I thought we were going to die! A picture of Bill's face just flying through the air.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, what's happened? (laughter)

JAN THOMPSON: He is such a darling.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, have you known him well over the years?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And he again sort of stays apart from that four, the big four, [and] has sort of gone his own way.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, his own way, absolutely.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So you've really known a lot; I mean you've known them all!

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah. I still see a lot of Bill.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Any feelings about where he stands in relationship to the group or his connection with that group?

JAN THOMPSON: Well he was not influenced in any way. He had studied with Clyfford Still [in San Francisco-Jan Thompson]. But he's so sensitive and so aware of what they were all doing. And they were all such good friends, that... He's just been a real important part.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's interesting though how he's less well known, certainly nationally, in a way. And one

wonders why. I think his painting is good.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, you know he's not a bit ambitious. He just couldn't care less, and someone could take over and just really show him. I think he's a very good painter.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Exactly, and yet he didn't come to the fore.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, he doesn't want to. And in a way Guy had never wanted to particularly either.

SUE ANN KENDALL: They just sort of stayed apart from that.

[Tape 3; Side 2]

SUE ANN KENDALL: ...Denise Farwell was another woman who was influential in Morris' life.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. I got to thinking that when everybody talks about the Northwest School, it's always the male artists that they're talking about. But suddenly I realized there are all these powerful, important women that were very influential. I know in Morris' life, and I'm, and in Guy's life, but one I hadn't mentioned was Denise Farwell. And she was a fantastic lady. She had great, great taste. And it was-- again, I hate that word-- but it was Northwest taste. I mean she, her gardens of mosses and rocks and her eye for the Northwest plants and the way she did her house, her whole, her ideas, and she helped artists, and she... She helped Leo Kenney a lot.

SUE ANN KENDALL: How?

JAN THOMPSON: And, you know, she'd lend them money, or do anything like that. And she was a Jungian and the, and loved to talk with them about, you know, everything, and help them and \_\_\_\_\_. She was a very important lady, in the Northwest School.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm! You mean, in terms of her ideas, or...

JAN THOMPSON: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And you're saying based in Jung?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. And I didn't know her well. But I just all, so this is all hearsay, but I know that she is important-- in Richard Gilkey's life, in Leo Kenney's life, in Morris Graves' life, and Guy Anderson's.

SUE ANN KENDALL: As, so she was a friend, again...

JAN THOMPSON: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: ...more than a patron?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yes. She wasn't a patron. In fact, she was the only person that ever did this. Morris had given her two very beautiful paintings before he, the Museum of Modern Art and all that stuff, before, you know, before they were valuable.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, um hmm.

JAN THOMPSON: And after all this happened and [he, they] became famous, so well known, and they became very valuable, she gave them back to him because she said, "It's not fair; I shouldn't have these, you know, they were a gift and..." You know, that, it was very thoughtful. And nobody else thought to do that. I wouldn't have, I would have hung on to them, kept right up. (laughs) But then he painted a very beautiful bouquet for her and donated it to the museum after she died.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. Which was when?

JAN THOMPSON: About three years ago.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, that recently!

JAN THOMPSON: Um hmm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I see. And they, she was in this area the whole time?

JAN THOMPSON: No, she was in, she left here soon after I got here, so that's why I didn't know her well, but I just heard of her, and then she lived in San Francisco for years. And then she moved back, she went to Bainbridge [Island in Puget Sound close to Seattle--Ed.]. And by that time everyone sort of had dispersed so they didn't see

her very much.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you know how Morris came to know her?

JAN THOMPSON: No, I don't, as a matter of fact. I don't know how they met.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Or how she got involved?

JAN THOMPSON: I don't, I really don't.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Because I've heard the name but I don't know myself through what connection, you know, that all happened.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah. But it is fascinating that there was Denise, and there was Betty Willis, and Dorothy Schumacher, and Nancy Wilson Ross, and Dorothy Norman, and Marian Willard, and Dorothy Miller, and these are all, you know, incredible women, and they were all very supportive and influential, powerful-- in their ways-- and I think had a lot to do, the whole growth of...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Of that group.

JAN THOMPSON: ...growth of that group.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You're not speaking just of Morris?

JAN THOMPSON: I thinking that, I think that-- Well, Morris particularly because Morris, the, Marian Willard and Dorothy Miller and those women there. And of course Dorothy Schumacher was Morris' good friend too.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JAN THOMPSON: I think more for Morris that's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And then there was also Margaret Callahan...

JAN THOMPSON: And Margaret Callahan, oh yes, exactly, yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: ...for the other people in the group at least who, certainly many of them have spoken of her as being sort of the ringleader of the...

JAN THOMPSON: She was very much loved, and again I only met her, and then she died very soon after, but she was, everyone liked her.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Were some of these in any way sort of a mother figure to Morris, do you think?

JAN THOMPSON: No, I don't think so, no. They were, because they were all about the same age and... No, I don't think any of them were. I probably should, he is still very close to his sister, [he had, to] one sister.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What about Morris' family? His relationship with his parents and so on. I know very little about that.

JAN THOMPSON: It was a...complicated.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, as is often the case. (chuckles)

JAN THOMPSON: His father, you know, committed suicide.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh!

JAN THOMPSON: Morris was in Puerto Rico. I think Morris was 19 or something. But it was hardest on Wallace, the youngest son; he was living at home at the time. He was about ten.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh dear.

JAN THOMPSON: The mother was a powerful lady-- and I loved her-- but I could see she'd be very, you know, she was a strict mother.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Strict in terms of discipline?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, well, she, of what she wanted for her children.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh.

JAN THOMPSON: You know, she was, she was a very strong lady.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And did she not want Morris to be an artist?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, she, I'm, the whole family of course... Two of the older brothers were married by, you know, by, when Morris was trying to be an artist, they were older, and they were all very embarrassed. They thought Morris was the failure in the family, the black sheep, you know, somebody to pretend didn't exist, you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm.

JAN THOMPSON: I think now they're very proud, but they weren't at the time. (chuckles)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was there, so there was pressure on him perhaps to conform to a more normal lifestyle.

JAN THOMPSON: I'm sure there was. I never saw it and he never talked about it, but I'm sure there was. But, she was closest to Morris, the mother was closest to Morris, of any of them. She, and, she was 90, I think she died at 96. And she was clear as a bell. But once he came back and she was in a nursing home and, but she-- she had osteoporosis, so she couldn't walk and she was in a wheelchair. But I went to see her regularly and, once a week at least, and he came once and I drove him out, and I left them together and then I came back. And it was the most beautiful sight. He, he was a giant of a man, you know, and he was holding her, she was by this time so tiny, he had \_\_\_\_.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Sure.

JAN THOMPSON: He was holding her in his arms and she was smiling up at him and he was saying, "Let it go, Mother, just let it all go. Let it fall. It doesn't matter what Laila last week. It doesn't matter what [Laura] wrote. It doesn't matter. Just let it fall." [Jan Thompson spoke this passage softly, calmly--TR] He was trying to help her ease, because she was fighting! You know, hard, just, you know, she was not going gently into [that at the time]. He wanted her to go gently.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, he wanted her to go gently.

JAN THOMPSON: Right, he wanted her to, yeah. But it was so-o-o beautiful [to see] this man wonderful man holding her. She was like a, like a baby.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, um hmm, yeah. Now what about his father's suicide? Does he ever talk about that?

JAN THOMPSON: No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: ...or the causes, or...

JAN THOMPSON: No, he doesn't like it known at all. But the father was-- and I can see maybe where Morris gets his well-known rages-- you know, the father was, apparently had a temperament \_\_\_\_.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Volatile?

JAN THOMPSON: Volatile temperament. And nobody knows for sure what happened.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, well, so often you don't. And those that do don't talk about it, and that's understandable. But... Yeah, people refer to Morris as having temper tantrums and so and it might be something that he saw his father doing, certainly.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, that's right. He does have \_\_\_\_, and they're pretty violent.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Last week you also mentioned that when you were in New York that John Cage's first wife was reminiscing and talking about...

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yeah, she was...

SUE ANN KENDALL: \_\_\_\_ stories of Seattle. Could you tell me some of those things that she...?

JAN THOMPSON: If you could ever interview her, you would just die, because she's just, you know, she's-- In fact this book I'm reading of that biography of Jane [Bull, Bolt], she's mentioned in there. They mention her, some things that she has to say about Jane Bolt. Let's see, what, well the things that they talked about were just silly things that they did.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I suppose some more antics?

JAN THOMPSON: Just antics, just jokes among each other, you know, just crazy.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, but can you remember any of those? You weren't here, of course?

JAN THOMPSON: And I wasn't here. But, oh dear, I can't, I can't... If I think of any I'll come back to it, but I can't think of those silly things right now.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Okay. And what about Cage's and Morris' falling out? Didn't they have a fairly bitter falling out a while back?

JAN THOMPSON: Well (chuckles), yes they did. And it was so silly, you know. John Cage is on a macrobiotic diet.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh! I didn't know he was into that!

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, I mean, it's just, it's just religious, you know, with him, and he won't... In fact after the, they had the, you know, they danced here, and Morris did one of the sets. Afterwards they came here and there wasn't one single thing I had that they could eat; not one single thing. But John brings his own bread that's as [Jan Thompson knocks on table--TR], you know, and he has to...

SUE ANN KENDALL: A rock?

JAN THOMPSON: He has to bring his saw to saw it because it's hard like a brick. (laughter) But this, this falling out was over something so silly. He and Morris had come down to visit. And Morris likes people to visit but not for very long anymore. He's getting crotchety about, he wants his own space and he doesn't like people around very much, really. And so they were planning to stay for a while, so he decided, he took a trip somewhere and I can't remember where he went. But he went away for a week.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now, which place was this?

JAN THOMPSON: This was down in California where he is now. And he went away, I think for a week, somewhere; I've forgotten where he went. And they had planned to be gone when he got back. And that was all arranged. But when he got back they were still there, which annoyed him. That upset the thing a little bit. And it turns out that John had, was teaching Robert-- the, Robert [Yarbrough], the wonderful young man that lives there and takes care of the garden and does the cooking-- had told him that he was cooking all wrong. Well, Morris had taught him the kind of cooking that he liked.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Of course!

JAN THOMPSON: You know, fresh vegetables from the garden and it's, it's mostly wok cooking and it's, it's just the kind of cooking he likes, and John had taught him another kind and was saying, "You mustn't do this, you mustn't do that," and being, I mean, being really, you know, rigid about it, and it got... And he, they cooked this dinner and it isn't what, wasn't what Morris liked. Well, it just sounds so silly, doesn't it?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, except that it wasn't Cage's house, I mean, in a way.

JAN THOMPSON: No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It wasn't for him to do. (chuckles)

JAN THOMPSON: Well, Cage did it out of love, too, you know; Cage wanted them to eat right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, of course.

JAN THOMPSON: Of course they were eating right! But not what he thought they were eating-- Anyhow, it ended up and Morris said, "This is my house! And I eat the way I want to eat, and I don't want this, I want to eat," you know. And so John stood up and said, "Well, I have, I know when I'm not welcome," and got up. And it was big hoohah, and they packed and they left that night.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And they have not reconnected since?

JAN THOMPSON: Well that, well they did. You saw the picture; they were hugging at the opening.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah.

JAN THOMPSON: But...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Things maybe haven't been quite the same.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right. (laughs) And over something so silly you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: All over our diet. (laughs) I didn't know John Cage was on that. I don't know that much about him.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, the problem is he's got Merce Cunningham on it, and Merce, you see, dances all day long. He's 65.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JAN THOMPSON: And looks 165. I mean he just looks like he's at death's door. He must weight 80 pounds now. And you know he needs more energy; he needs a great big banquet or something.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Or something.

JAN THOMPSON: He comes to my friend's, the doctor, [Alban Cree McKeen's] in New York, and Alban doesn't cook anything special. He comes, Merce comes quite often by himself. And he cooks, and he eats everything there just like, you know, like he can hardly get enough. But then gets home and he gets only the other things, very, very special diet. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh dear. One more question I wanted to ask you about was Morris' homosexuality, if that was a problem early on, because at that time it was something that...

JAN THOMPSON: A problem for him, you mean?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, for him but public...

JAN THOMPSON: It never was a problem for him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I wondered about public acceptance, because now, now it's okay.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah.

SUE ANN KENDALL: One can say I'm gay and expect to be accepted at least among certain circles, and I'm curious about in the thirties and forties if that could have been a problem.

JAN THOMPSON: I don't think it ever, I don't think it ever was a problem for Morris.

SUE ANN KENDALL: With his family perhaps?

JAN THOMPSON: I don't think that, I don't think it ever came to a showdown, even with the family. And I don't think it was a problem for Guy. I don't think it ever was a big issue.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was it secretive? I mean...

JAN THOMPSON: Because they were, they were all artists together, and somehow that never, you know... If he'd been in the business world, he might have had some problems, but I don't think ever, he never associated with anyone but artists, poets...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JAN THOMPSON: ...and it just, I don't think it ever occurred to him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Even though I, I would imagine that Seattle is fairly conservative at that, in that time.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh my, it was. But artists are exceptions; they can be, you know, anything, and they're accepted.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JAN THOMPSON: The straight community will accept, if you're an artist they expect you to be crazy...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Then well that's okay.

JAN THOMPSON: ...pervert, [dirty].

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh. And then of course his antics I suppose...

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh, oh, that [edge, adds]. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Just, just anything was okay, I mean, because that's, that's the kind of thing that he was known for.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right. That's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So, and so, did they feel it necessary to keep that under cover?

JAN THOMPSON: Huh uh. Not that I know of. I don't think ever, ever.

SUE ANN KENDALL: No, in fact I've heard that he was very obvious, I mean.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh sure.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I mean Morris sort of didn't try to hide it.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh sure.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It was a very obvious kind of thing, so... And the same way with... Now Tobey-- this is an interesting question-- but I always assumed he was homosexual or at least bisexual. Is that true?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well some people deny that, so...

JAN THOMPSON: Oh really?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah! And what surprises me was that, and I thought that came up about his will and everyone assumed that he and Mark Ritter were involved, and he Pehr.

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh, of course. He and Pehr were...

SUE ANN KENDALL: ...were lovers?

JAN THOMPSON: Of course!

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs) Well, I wanted to confirm that with you because...

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, [and then, I admit] it's strange. He did marry once, but that didn't last long either. I think it lasted one night. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, and that did it! I suppose that might have been through pressure? Social pressure to be normal?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I don't know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So-called normal.

JAN THOMPSON: No, I don't really know about that marriage and so forth. But it was, of course, and [\_\_\_\_\_, Tobey] Betty Willis claimed that he begged her to marry him. But...

SUE ANN KENDALL: And poor Helmi, who wished he would have. (laughter)

JAN THOMPSON: And poor Helmi, yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So, huh. Well, I guess it's important only in how it may have affected their work, or the acceptance of their work. Do you have any perceptions on that?

JAN THOMPSON: I don't think it had any bearing at all.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Just didn't seem to matter.

JAN THOMPSON: I don't think so. I can't see, I can't see why it had any bearing at all.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So how about some of the breakups among these people? Was that due to any kind of lover relationships rather than artistic matters? Because normally people shy away from talking about the one, and

talk about the other, and I think well these, these people were human beings. How did that impact them?

JAN THOMPSON: Well I don't, let's see, I don't know. I don't know of any breakups that caused any, no I don't, I can't think of anything. Let's see. No, because Morris' \_\_\_\_\_ really kept, no, I don't, I don't think... They all had their own friends and...

SUE ANN KENDALL: So you don't think that it, it's a problem?

JAN THOMPSON: No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: One other question about the, well let's say the thirties, forties, maybe into the fifties, I guess that's \_\_\_\_\_ latter time. Did they keep any connection with the figurative tradition? Of course Guy Anderson always has. But as this move into abstraction occurred, did they do any life drawing?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, let's see, I think probably Guy would one who did, that I can think of. Oh, probably Bill Cumming; yes, he always did.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Because most artists do maintain some kind of a link.

JAN THOMPSON: Some kind of, yes, right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: But not in the case of Graves?

JAN THOMPSON: But, no. No. He wasn't interested in human figures, really.

SUE ANN KENDALL: He never has been?

JAN THOMPSON: No. He did that one figure, which was in the retrospective, is his own, it's a self-portrait lying down.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JAN THOMPSON: And it's quite a, it's a beauty; it's a beautiful painting. But that's the only figure I think he's ever done.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Interesting. Did he ever do it as, like drawing early on when he was learning? Of course he didn't go through a regular art school...

JAN THOMPSON: No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: ...so he didn't have to.

JAN THOMPSON: So that I won't know. I don't know; I don't think so. I don't think he ever wanted to represent human figures.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's quite unusual, in a way.

JAN THOMPSON: It is, isn't it?

SUE ANN KENDALL: I mean Tobey of course did, in Market [Seattle's Public Market--Ed.] scenes, and always had done some.

JAN THOMPSON: Right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And Guy Anderson.

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And Kenneth Callahan.

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So that's curious in a way.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, it's interesting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did the influences from New York in that time, do you think, overwhelm with the abstract expressionism and all of that? Did that just overwhelm this area, do you think?



JAN THOMPSON: Well, it didn't seem to. But I know they all loved it. They were all very pleased about it, I mean they all loved abstract expressionism. I think Morris was the only one that loved pop art, when it came in.

SUE ANN KENDALL: When it came in. Ah hah!

JAN THOMPSON: He really loved it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That figures though, in a way.

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh, it does. That kind of, again, the zany kind of part of him just responded completely to it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, right.

JAN THOMPSON: He's the only one I know that likes Andy Warhol too. I mean, he, he talked to him, and he, he liked him a lot, you know, personally, \_\_\_\_\_.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well the public kind of antic, antics that Warhol does may relate to that.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's quite unusual, in a way. Tobey of course did, in market [Seattle's Public Market--Ed.] scenes, and always had done some. And Guy Anderson, and Kenneth Callahan. So that's curious in a way.

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SUE ANN KENDALL: Did the influences from New York in that time, the abstract expressionism and all of that, overwhelm this area, do you think?

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SUE ANN KENDALL: The public kind of antics that Warhol does may relate to that.

[Break in taping]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Jan, I'd like to have you talk a little bit about what you called one of the earliest happenings, the uninvited party that Morris had; maybe describe that a little bit for us.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, we talk about it quite a bit, but I don't think anybody ever described the beauty of it. Visually it was really just ravishingly beautiful. It was kind of a joint idea; I don't think it was all Morris' idea. Ward Corley was just as zany as anybody, and Richard Gilkey, and I think they all kind of worked on the idea together. I remember they were thinking about it. I wasn't participating at that point-- You can't be "serious" that you'd really do this sort of thing, you know. (laughter) But the beauty of this: it was the table that filled the whole entrance way-- it was a courtyard-- and the table filled the whole entrance way so you couldn't get through. And the table was covered with white damask cloth.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now the entrance way to what, a patio, or...?

JAN THOMPSON: To Morris' house out at Woodway. It was the gate house. It had a court, and the road went through it to the main house. This table filled up this entrance way. And the table had been sitting out in the rain for seven days with the leftovers of the meal, with a turkey carcass, and wine spilled, and silver, and crystal, and all this, and flowers that were rotting, and it had turned incredibly beautiful. It was all kind of lavender and pale blue and dusty pink and rotting colors and... (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did it smell yet?

JAN THOMPSON: No, it didn't smell. It was basically very [beautiful]. And then the water [came from--Ed.] a sprinkler, that would hold like a screen of water that came down in front of it. And then the music was playing...

SUE ANN KENDALL: What kind of music?

JAN THOMPSON: Well first there was just kind of blues music playing. And then, the people that came were very offended, decided to steal some of the silver. And the minute they'd reach in, Dorothy Schumacher was at the controls of the records and she put on a pig-squealing record. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: The minute their hand would reach for something.

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah. But I don't think anybody described how visually, really incredible it was. It really was like the happenings, you know, twenty years later.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, this image of decay obviously, and rotting, and...

JAN THOMPSON: Kind of like an old Albright painting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh. (laughter) These people arrived and could get right up to the table, and there was nothing blocking them except the sprinkler, the water?

JAN THOMPSON: That's right, yes; they could just get up to the entrance way, and the sprinkler was [on], but you could see the table through there, because there were sort of spotlights on the table too. (laughs)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did anybody come on around then to the house?

JAN THOMPSON: It was impossible. They had to go all the way around another way, and they didn't know how to do that.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And where were you? You were inside?

JAN THOMPSON: We were hiding. We'd built little things like they had in the war. You could see; it was just little blinds. We were right behind the wall.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Little slits, that you could see through? And who was "we"? Who all was there?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, Morris, and Dorothy Schumacher, and Richard Svare, and Richard Gilkey, and Ward Corley, and I.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now who had arranged this table ahead of time?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh we all had. We'd all worked hard on that. (laughs)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did you have a feast, I hope, first?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. We had the feast first and then we left it out in the rain... But Helmi was the charming one. Helmi came in her dirndl skirt and her sketchpads and everything, and she loved the whole thing. She caught the whole point immediately, and she sat down smiling and she sketched-- I'd love to have the sketches-- she sketched people's faces as they looked at it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, she did!

JAN THOMPSON: And she sat there for hours sketching.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And just watching people as they came. What's happened to those?

JAN THOMPSON: I don't know. I'd love to have them sometime.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Is that the only visual record?

JAN THOMPSON: Uh huh. It wasn't possible to take a photograph, just wouldn't turn out.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So whatever she might have would be somewhat of a record or an artifact.

JAN THOMPSON: But I think, literally, over 150 people came. It was wild! They were just wild. They were all dressed up, because they just assumed it was a misprint in the [invitation].

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, and they'd all dressed up, I suppose, and spent all that time getting there. I think it's wonderful. (laughs)

JAN THOMPSON: And over half were absolutely furious. You know, just infuriated. We could hear everything they said.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You don't happen to still have the invitation?

JAN THOMPSON: I do somewhere. I'll dig it out someday.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That's great. Save it. But I guess your point is that it was not without its own beauty, visually.

JAN THOMPSON: That's right. That's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: As well as of course the joke, and the meaning, and everything else that we can derive from it. (chuckles) Yeah, I think at this point in time people would be more used to something like that happening, or having artists do such things. But at that time, it was fairly scandalous.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did the press pick up on it?

JAN THOMPSON: I don't remember them. I don't think they did. They may have but I've certainly forgotten.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Gee, they missed one. (laughter)

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I sometimes wonder, when the press did start picking up on Morris' antics, if that ever made him feel as though he almost had to keep up with his image?

JAN THOMPSON: Well I don't think he was aware, I don't think he ever knew. He never read...

SUE ANN KENDALL: He never paid any attention.

JAN THOMPSON: No, I don't think he ever noticed, unless somebody told him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Because that sometimes happens where artists become known very fast and they are expected to be certain ways.

JAN THOMPSON: And they have to keep up, right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And it's a real pressure.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, yeah, the whole art world is such pressure. Once you... The pressure Morris was under, after having a successful show in New York; then you have to have one every year, and it's got to be better and it's got to be better. That's terrible pressure. It's awful to be an artist, to have had to keep up, every year.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It sure is. And do you think he's successfully disengaged himself from that?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes. Oh yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And that really within himself he felt disengaged?

JAN THOMPSON: Yeah, but for years I'm sure he must have felt under pressure; but he couldn't have had a better dealer than Marian Willard. She understood it, you see, but most dealers wouldn't.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, often the pressure's coming right from the dealers directly.

JAN THOMPSON: She was wonderful that way.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And of course she's still active, so these people have been able to stay with her.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, she isn't anymore. Her daughter [Miani Johnson--Ed.] owns it. And it's a whole 'nother cup of tea.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh really. So her daughter runs it very differently?

JAN THOMPSON: Completely. And she's very successful. Marian said, "I don't understand a thing she's showing, but it's her things, and it's her turn, and I'm proud of her."

SUE ANN KENDALL: Good for her, in a way, that she can at least step back and stay out of it. Is [Miani] likely to put more pressure on artists? Is that how you mean she's different?

JAN THOMPSON: No, it's completely different kind of work, completely.

SUE ANN KENDALL: More contemporary kind of stuff?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yeah, very contemporary.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What does Morris say about contemporary stuff?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, he sure doesn't see much he likes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did he go to shows when he was back this last time at all?

JAN THOMPSON: No, I don't think he did. He goes to San Francisco quite often, and he is just sick about the level of the work.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So he isn't being stimulated by things that he sees at all?

JAN THOMPSON: No. No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Any particular things that he does like, or doesn't...?

JAN THOMPSON: I'm trying to think. I can't think of anything-- I think of the Morandi show, he liked that! [Giorgio Morandi; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1981--Ed.]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh yeah, that figures! (laughter)

JAN THOMPSON: I went down for that too, a couple years ago.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I would love to have seen that. One other thing I wanted to ask you. What about the use of drugs, which of course was so prevalent in the sixties?

JAN THOMPSON: I know Morris dabbled in them out of curiosity. I know he took LSD once and was very excited about it. But he said, "You know, you'd never have to take it again, because it opened the door, and the door's open; I don't need it. I don't need to do anything."

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, no need to keep doing it.

JAN THOMPSON: No, and I know he took peyote. He went down to Santa Fe; there's a religious group down there that asked him, and it was the kind where you come in at sunset and you can't leave until dawn, a real Indian ritual, I mean. And they chew the peyote, and then they were supposed to vomit. Morris was so rigorously trained never to vomit in public-- and apparently with the peyote, the way you chew the-- what is it? nuggets? or whatever it is with peyote-- you chew, then you have to vomit in order to get the full effect. And he said everyone was just quietly vomiting. He couldn't do it. He just couldn't do it! So he just sat there all night, just being violently ill but not vomiting, and having no religious experience whatsoever. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: So that one bombed out! A lot of, I guess I'd say hippies, sort of dropped in on Morris in the sixties, didn't they?

JAN THOMPSON: Oh yeah. It was practically open house for them. He just loved those kids and thought that they were wonderful free spirits, and so anybody could come in. I was so worried because, God, anyone could have come in and done anything. I mean, he's way in the woods there. But apparently no bad experiences.

SUE ANN KENDALL: His place became known evidently because it was sort of a haven.

JAN THOMPSON: Right, he'd always have a pad there and...

SUE ANN KENDALL: He seems to have tuned into that period.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh very much so. Really, it's the way he was, you know, in the thirties.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh. And anti-war, anti-technology, that whole attitude of the sixties, anti-big business establishment.

JAN THOMPSON: Oh, he loved the flower children and he had a wild story about Pat Keller, who has one of the greatest collections of jewels-- in the world, I guess. She's very beautiful. And she and Dale [Keller--Ed.] came and spent a couple days, and she and Dale just for fun had dressed for dinner. He dressed in black tie and she dressed in an evening dress-- one doesn't do that at Morris', but they did just for fun. (laughter) And she wore all her jewels that she brought with her. Emeralds and diamonds... And while they were having dinner, this little flower child came. She literally, he said, had this wonderful mop of curly hair and she had tiny little wildflowers all through her hair and she was barefooted and dirty and just darling, you know. And so he invited her in for

dinner. I mean, anybody could get in. So she was sitting at the dinner and she looked at Pat blazing with these jewels and she said, "Are they real?" And Pat said, "Yes. Would you like to try them on?" So Pat took off all her jewels and put them on this little flower child. I loved it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs) Oh, of course in that day a lot of people, including flower children, scorned that kind of wealth. So it must have been an interesting dichotomy to have the two together. So, I assume there was a lot of experimentation with drugs, as well as people sort of coming through.

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I don't know. I don't think Morris ever took LSD more than that one time. At least he said it was. Probably pot. But I don't think there was anything else. I wasn't there, but I kind of doubt it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, it was so much a part of that culture, though, that undoubtedly there were some things people were bringing through, not necessarily that Morris even had to use...

JAN THOMPSON: But Morris has always been for anything that would open the door a crack, you know. It's just to be able to see a little further than we see. I'm sure he'd be open to try new things. But he also is very protective of his body. He's very careful about his body. Although he still smokes, that's true.

SUE ANN KENDALL: He just doesn't abandon himself to something that might destroy his health.

JAN THOMPSON: No, no.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think he got burned out, perhaps, at that time, with all these people coming through? Because you say he's changed so much now.

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, he's changed a lot. I think he just got tired of it, and then, for instance, he built a big deer fence to keep the garden intact, because the deer would come in and kids would always leave it open or something. But unless he didn't tell me, I don't think they ever stole anything or did any real harm. But they did lie around a lot, and not do anything. And Morris is a puritan in ways, in his work ethic and all. He works.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I was raised that way, so I know very well.

JAN THOMPSON: That upset him, that they would lie around and just take handouts and eat dinner but wouldn't help in the garden or do the dishes. That really upset him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I'll bet. That wears on anybody, I think.

JAN THOMPSON: And I know he idealized them, you know, he just thought they were beautiful kids. And I'm sure they were, but they were also quite lazy. Spoiled.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now they've had to grow up, most of them, and somehow make their own way. Those are the days, though; I think we all look back with a certain fondness on that period and everything that it stood for. But times change.

JAN THOMPSON: There was also a story about Charles Kraft. Do you know his work, the painter?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Vaguely, and I certainly have heard about him.

JAN THOMPSON: Well Charles used to go down quite a bit to see Morris. A lot of these young men went down for inspiration, you know, they really did. He inspired more of these young people. I'm sure I can't think of how many young people that have gone down.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did he invite them down? Or how did they know to go down there?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, he could have invited them down. But once Charles Kraft was there and after he left, Morris discovered one of his own paintings was missing. So Morris called me and said-- because he knew that Charles was staying with his mother here-- "Is there any chance I could get ahold of his mother and find out what was going on." I called his mother and I said, "Is there any chance that we could get ahold of Charles?" And, "Why? What's he done now?" you know. It was all a big mixup, and I finally got ahold of Charles two or three days later. He had taken the painting as a Zen joke. He wanted to see if Morris really was as Zen as he talked. And he had gone back and rolled it up and put it in Morris' mailbox, which is a post box three miles from the house, in the boonies, you know. I guess it's kind of Zen, but not terribly. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Not terribly, right.

JAN THOMPSON: And it was one of Morris' favorite paintings. And I don't think Morris was very Zen about it. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: One of those contradictions!

JAN THOMPSON: Right. But he wasn't stealing it, you know. Morris knew he wouldn't steal it, but he was puzzled. And I think Charles really thought it was a Zen joke.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That kind of backfired on him.

JAN THOMPSON: That kind of backfired.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, do you think that Morris still uses any drugs at all? Or has that sort of died out with the times?

JAN THOMPSON: I don't think so. I think it's died out.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Probably had to take a stick to get everybody out of there, after a certain time.

JAN THOMPSON: I'm sure, I'm sure. It must have been bedlam there for a while. It got to be known as being a, the stop on the way up.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. The hippies going north!

JAN THOMPSON: And it seemed so weird because here's this secluded man who wants to be intensely isolated, and yet that was the stop for...

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well that's just it: another contradiction about Morris. And yet of course it was an offbeat kind of stop.

JAN THOMPSON: If they had been businessmen they would have been given the shaft. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. Has Cage visited him a lot there over the years?

JAN THOMPSON: Yes, he has.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you think they actually talked a lot about aesthetics? About what they were doing? Or were they just good pals?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, I think they did. I wish I'd been around when they did.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah! A little mouse in the corner.

JAN THOMPSON: Right. But, you know, I was around Morris and Mark Tobey at times, and I never heard them talk about anything. Mark was always saying, "Oh my stomach hurts"-- I mean it always something very mundane, except one time. It was out at Morris'. Mark had found something, some found object, and he said, "My that's beautiful. IGif I could just paint it like that, beautiful." And Morris said, "Well that's not enough for me." And they did get into an interesting discussion-- Morris wanted it to mean more than that, and Tobey was saying, "But that's it, that's exactly it." And that was the only time I ever heard them really get into something... And of course I've forgotten. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Who said what? Even what you said about Morris saying, "I want it to be more than that," sort of checks with the spirituality of his birds and so on, where Tobey's concerns did often seem to be more aesthetic. In a sort of plastic way, I think he looked at things visually and maybe thought about the aesthetics of them more than Morris.

JAN THOMPSON: I think so too.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Not that Morris doesn't have to think about aesthetics concerns when he's working; he does, but a little different emphasis probably there.

[Break in taping]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Would you say Morris is an intellectual?

JAN THOMPSON: Well, he would certainly deny it. In fact, he distrusts intellectuals, supposedly. But I think he's so incredibly intellectual. (laughter)

SUE ANN KENDALL: He absorbs a lot of things too.

JAN THOMPSON: But he absorbs everything. I've never known anyone to read so much. I mean he has stacks and

stacks of books. He always in some ways puts on a slight act when he meets very bright people. And he will pretend like he's a complete naive and doesn't know anything, and then draw them out, and then answer or ask them a question that will just be so right on that they're absolutely overwhelmed, because they realize he really does know exactly what they're talking about. And that goes for the science too, like in that NASA thing; he was really talking among the top physicists in the world, and I could see by their letters that they were pretty well amazed that he did understand what they were talking about. But Guy, for instance, is much more well-rounded, the renaissance man, well read, and I think much more able to talk, \_\_\_\_\_ to be articulate about it. I think Tobey was intellectual.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Both of them are, [and] their personalities are so different than Morris', it seems to me.

JAN THOMPSON: Well all three were completely different.

END OF INTERVIEW

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