



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Cynthia Bringle,
1992 January 22**

**Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the
Smithsonian Institution's Women's Committee.**

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Cynthia Bringle on January 22, 1992. The interview took place at her home in Penland, North Carolina, and was conducted by Liza Kirwin for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Women's Committee.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

LIZA KIRWIN: First I have to say this is Liza Kirwin for the Archives of American Art interviewing Cynthia Bringle at her home in Penland, North Carolina. It's January 22, 1992. And I wanted to just begin at the beginning and ask you about where you were born, and - you grew up in Memphis?

CYNTHIA BRINGLE: I grew up in Memphis. I was born in 1939, March 14th, and grew up in Memphis and went to high school there. Went off to high school, the last three years of high school, came back to Memphis and went the first year of college to Southwestern at Memphis, which is now Rhodes College.

MS. KIRWIN: Did you first get interested in art before you went to college, while still in high school?

MS. BRINGLE: No, I was interested in art from a - being - from a youngster, you know, from going to Saturday art school. I liked to - always liked paint/drawing art classes.

MS. KIRWIN: Was this something that your family encouraged? Because your sister is also an artist, Edwina.

MS. BRINGLE: Edwina is now, but it was something that was always encouraged, and if we wanted to do it, fine. But having found out in the - you know, years ago we were sitting around talking with my mother. Edwina, who is now in art now and is a weaver, she said to mother, she said, "Well, when we were young," said, "the only paintings, you know, the art - you every - the art teacher would put everybody's paintings up, and she would say the best ones were always Cynthia's and Maury Bethea's, so I decided not to do it so much anymore," which is just what happens sometimes to youngsters.

MS. KIRWIN: Because you were singled out?

MS. BRINGLE: I always loved it. Yeah, because we were singled out, Maury Bethea - Maury and I were singled out, and so - and I'm sure it made the others feel like they probably weren't as good. It's not necessarily true, though, but that is what happens to youngsters. And then I went to Saturday classes, and - you know, like sixth, seventh, eighth grade, and I loved it.

MS. KIRWIN: Was this just kind of a community thing, or was this something under the Memphis County?

MS. BRINGLE: No, this was a private class. I went to the Memphis Academy as a youngster, you know, like fourth, fifth grade, to Saturday classes, and then I went to private classes on Saturdays,

which I loved. I have a painting in my studio that I - when we cleared out my mother's house about a year ago, I took - and it's an oil painting I did at 14, so, you know, it goes - it goes back to then, and even when I went off to - when we went off to high school, there were no painting classes, and I would go off in the afternoons and on weekends and paint on my own, and I just enjoyed doing it and being out there by myself, and, you know, doing that. So then I went to - I went to college, first year, which, you know, just a regular liberal arts college - which, it was a very good school, but there wasn't much art back then. And then, after my first year in college, during that, I - there was someone else I knew, and she said to me, she said, "Cynthia," she said, "I'm going to painting classes this summer." She said, "Well, why don't you come?" And I said, "Okay." So I talked to my parents, and I had saved some money from odd jobs and they said, "Well, you can go." So we came to a place called "Painting in the Mountains" - which was in Burnsville, North Carolina - for a month, and did oil painting and water colors. And when my mother came and picked the two of us up at the end, the director told my mother, said, "Send her to art school." And at that point I decided I wanted to go to art school, but you think that you're not good enough to go, you know, so I think you hesitate. But it just - it took the - you know, when the director said to my mother, "Send her to art school." So then we went back to Memphis and I enrolled at the Memphis Academy of Art and was scared to death, but I enrolled and said, "Oh, I want to be a painter," and they let me in. I mean, they're looking for students. They'd probably let in almost anybody, but then you didn't even have to have a portfolio to get into art school. I mean, now you have to have all of this background - or portfolio to get in, in a lot of places, but then you didn't.

MS. KIRWIN: And your parents were supportive then of this?

MS. BRINGLE: Yes, it was fine with them.

MS. KIRWIN: How big was Memphis Art Academy then?

MS. BRINGLE: At that point they were probably graduating - the graduating class was probably like a dozen people and when I - I think when I graduated there - I can't remember. There were 15 to 20 people in the graduating class in four years.

[Interruption]

MS. KIRWIN: I wanted to go back, having a moment to turn off the machine to think, who was the director at Burnsville? Do you remember the gentleman who told your mother to -

MS. BRINGLE: Francis Hall Haring.

MS. KIRWIN: Francis Hall Haring. Okay.

MS. BRINGLE: Or Francis Haring.

MS. KIRWIN: Francis Haring, all right.

MS. BRINGLE: And it was called, "Painting in the Mountains."

MS. KIRWIN: "Painting in the Mountains." They have a lot of places like that around the South, I'm learning.

MS. BRINGLE: Well, you know what? A "Painting in the Mountains" still exists in Burnsville on a little different level, but, I mean, then it was a residential facility: little cabins and a dining hall.

MS. KIRWIN: Sounds a lot like Penland [Laughs].

MS. BRINGLE: I had a great time.

MS. KIRWIN: When you went to the Memphis Academy, who were the teachers there? Was Dorothy Sturm there?

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, Dorothy Sturm was there.

MS. KIRWIN: Did you have any classes with her? I was just very -

MS. BRINGLE: She was a good friend of mine.

MS. KIRWIN: -- curious, because we got her papers -

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, you did?

MS. KIRWIN: -- at the Archives this year, and so - in fact, I just went - going through her papers and, you know, trying to think what the Memphis art scene was like. She seemed to be a pretty influential woman.

MS. BRINGLE: She was, but sort of in a quiet way, but I always really - I mean, I had her for my first jewelry class, actually, and I liked her a lot. I just liked her, you know, and I think - and I know that she liked me, which was really nice, and I would just go up and sit and talk to her lots of times. I have - if you look - you know the book -

MS. KIRWIN: Morphology in the -

MS. BRINGLE: -- that was done on her?

MS. KIRWIN: I know. No, oh, yeah.

MS. BRINGLE: The enamel book. You all probably have that. Do you have that book?

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: If you look through that - I can't remember. They used two or three of the enamels I own in that book, and one that my mother owned, which I have now. See, this one. Here's one -

MS. KIRWIN: You took jewelry with her?

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: And you could just go and talk to her?

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah. Well, you asked about Dorothy Sturm, and she was there as a teacher when I was at the Art Academy. When I started at the Art Academy in the undergraduate school, they were not in the building that they are in now. They were in the old homes, the Fontaine and Lee homes in downtown Memphis, which are now two historical buildings on the historical register, and that's where the art school classes were. And I had jewelry with Dorothy on the third floor in one of these buildings, and it was a beginning jewelry class where you would learn to just do really basic things. But I just liked her a lot as a teacher, because she was real basic, too, and I would often, in the late afternoons before I'd go home, I mean, I'd go up and see if she was working and see what

she was doing and just sit around and talk to her and watch, because I just thought she was a wonderful person. And I got to know her in those years there and I don't think I ever took another class from her. Maybe one other class. But I really didn't - I continued a little bit with the jewelry. I took an enameling class, and probably one other jewelry class, but during the end of my first year I got into doing clay and liked that so much that the next year I took additional - an additional clay class as my elective.

MS. KIRWIN: Who was teaching clay?

MS. BRINGLE: Thorn Edwards was teaching clay when I was there, and he later moved to the State of Washington where he lives now. But so I would just -

MS. KIRWIN: When you got there did you take painting, or what was this switch from entering the Memphis Academy of Art and thinking you would become a painter?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, in your first year in art school you take everything that they tell you to take.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You don't really have any choices. You take this - there's a two-dimensional design, three-dimensional design, art history - I mean, everything is required classes that you took. The first semester I took jewelry. The second semester I took a pottery class - a basic pottery class, you know, one pinch pot, one coil pot, one slab piece, a little bit on the wheel, and I liked it a lot and I liked the jewelry a lot, but I went and took pottery again the next year, and at the end of the second year I figured out that where I really was spending all of my time was in the clay studio. And I was still spending some time in the jewelry studio but -

MS. KIRWIN: Did students there know that Dorothy wrote poetry and short stories and things like that about her -

MS. BRINGLE: No.

MS. KIRWIN: or that she was - were you aware that she was showing at Betty Parsons in New York, and that she had a reputation beyond the City of Memphis?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I found out probably in my - end of the second, third year, when I got to know her better that she had shown at Betty Parsons in New York, but, you know, the arts and art school students, I think, were really naïve about a lot of things at that point, and we weren't - we weren't exposed to very much there. They didn't have outside people come in very much to the Art Academy when I was there, you know, that would have given the students more exposure than the City of Memphis offered. So from that point of view, I think we weren't really aware of you know, how far afield that she went. I mean, I knew she did - I also knew she did medical illustrations and was very, very good at those.

MS. KIRWIN: She's very - yeah, she -

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, extremely renowned in that field of doing that, but I used to go to her house and she had these huge collages that she'd done. I mean, I think she was way before her time in lots of stuff that she did. Certainly in Memphis she was.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative] I was wondering about that, because a lot of the articles that I read about her made a big point that she dressed like a man and that this was really not taken too

well in Memphis. I mean, did she have a persona of what an art student might consider an artist or something like that, that set her apart?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I never thought she dressed like a man, but, I mean, she dressed in comfortable clothes.

MS. KIRWIN: Right, well, that's what I would think, too, but maybe Memphis in the - in the late-'40s, is she's -

MS. BRINGLE: She wore comfortable clothes. She chain-smoked cigarettes, you know. She didn't - what she cared about was doing her work.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, it's really apparent from her - just her papers her complete devotion.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], but I would go down to her house and she had these racks of collages, and stuff and she'd pull them all out for me to see. And I think now about how stupid I was, but, you know - she said to me at one point, she said, "Well, Cynthia, do you want one of these?" I didn't take it. You know, I was in - probably embarrassed to take it, you know, so I didn't. I mean later on we traded. I mean, what I have of hers now is - are things that she has given me, you know, and I gave her pots. Well, what in the world are my pots worth compared to these things of hers at that point? But she'd say, "Cynthia, I want you to have this," and so I have four of her enamels, you know, and I'm sorry now I didn't get any of her -

MS. KIRWIN: Collages.

MS. BRINGLE: -- Collages or drawings are what -

MS. KIRWIN: Her drawings are wonderful.

MS. BRINGLE: The drawings are wonderful, you know, but when she started doing more of the drawings, she wasn't really doing that many of them. And also, she spent a lot of her time designing for the -- for stained - for stained glass pieces for the churches. I mean, she did a lot of designing for stained glass and churches in Memphis that have her work, and she worked for Laukhuff Stained Glass and did an incredible amount of work for them. And so - and see, she was also taking care of her mother and her aunt, and that was a lot of her time, was doing that - aside from her own work - and they took a lot of care, because in their later years when I would go and visit Dorothy, she would talk about having to take them here and take them there, go do this, and go do that. And finally she moved them into a little house and she lived in the house behind them, you know, so she could take care of them. So - and then, after - you know, after I moved from Memphis, I didn't see a lot of her, but I would usually try to visit her when I went back and she would - I would go - after I moved away from Memphis, I would go back and do a show of my work once a year at least in Memphis, and often she would come and see what I was doing - was - I - I consider it a great compliment to me that she would come and see what I was up to.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], yeah. Who else was teaching there at that time?

MS. BRINGLE: Ted Russ was the director, Burton Callicott -

MS. KIRWIN: I've met him.

MS. BRINGLE: Ted Fairs, Vita Reed.

MS. KIRWIN: What was that third name?

MS. BRINGLE: Vita Reed.

MS. KIRWIN: Vita Reed?

MS. BRINGLE: He was a painter, a very good painter. Henry Easterwood was teaching weaving. John MacEntyre was teaching sculpture. My mind has gone blank. A man named Sandy Kincannon taught the printmaking class. Martha Turner, who is now deceased, taught design, silk screening. They were good - I think it was a very good faculty, and the thing is that you'd think that where you're going - because it's in your own hometown, it's like an artist in their own hometown can't be any good. So therefore, if you're going to art school in your own hometown, how can it possibly be any good? And so the first year I was in art school, Fran Merritt, who was then the director at Haystack, came through and showed slides of Haystack.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh.

MS. BRINGLE: And I said, "Well, this looks like a really good place, and I'd like to go there," and I decided after my - that during my first year, I thought, "Well, I don't know enough to go there after my first year, so I'll apply during my second year." So during my second year in art school, I applied to go to Haystack and I got a scholarship and I went to Haystack that summer.

MS. KIRWIN: What year was that?

MS. BRINGLE: I think it was 1960. I'll have to go back in the '60s. I think it was '60. They were still - Haystack then was in Liberty, Maine, and it was not on Deer Isle. It was before they moved to Deer Isle. And when I went there, I went, of course, to take clay, and it just so happened that three days before I was supposed to go, I had an accident and I dislocated my shoulder and went there with my arm in a sling.

MS. KIRWIN: Were you throwing then, and -

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, yeah, I was throwing then, and doing that whole thing, but that -

MS. KIRWIN: -- but you went anyway with your arm dislocated?

MS. BRINGLE: I went anyway. I was determined I was going.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs].

MS. BRINGLE: I went anyway. I think Fran Merritt did not quite know what to do with me, when this person arrives with their arm in a sling, and Bill Brown was Fran's - was up there -

MS. KIRWIN: His assistant.

MS. BRINGLE: His assistant, and I don't think he was really known as his assistant, but he was teaching woodworking up there in the summer, and they told me later that Bill Brown said to Fran Merritt, said, "Well, sure got a good one now," or something like that [laughs]. Oh, I know what he said, "Oh, you sure know how to pick them."

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs].

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, little did he know that 20 years later he'd still have me around, but anyways,

so that's where I met Bill Brown was at Haystack when I was a scholarship student. Anyways, so I stayed there. I was there that summer for - I don't know, I was there a month. Maybe I was there six weeks. I'll have to think about it. But anyway, I was there and then went back home, and before I left there - it was the next summer that they were going to move to Deer Isle, Maine, that Haystack was going to move, so I asked Fran Merit if I could come back the next summer, and he said, "Fine." And I said, "I'll come early if you need help." And so I came back to Haystack the next summer. I came two weeks early, before the school was to open up for the first time for the summer. Ben was there.

MS. KIRWIN: Did you come to help them move or -

MS. BRINGLE: I came to help them do whatever was necessary and -

MS. KIRWIN: What was the first facility like?

MS. BRINGLE: The first facility was old cabins that had probably been a camp, little cabins sitting in the middle of the woods and -

MS. KIRWIN: I've never been to Haystack, either one.

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, and the new facility - I mean, they have a beautiful facility built on the ledge rocks and designed by Edward Larrabee Barnes. But I got there two weeks before the place was to open. I drove up there and one of my brothers actually went with me, and he was just going to go and stay a couple weeks and help out, too. Two weeks before the place was to open, the walkways weren't all built. The cabins weren't all finished. There wasn't but one bathroom on the whole place working. You know, none of the beds were where they were supposed to be. The wheels weren't set up in the pot shop or anything. But I got up there, and there were also several other people that had come early to help like Ron Burke and Charlie Galis -- and you probably know him.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: Anyway, the - and we just pitched in and did everything that was necessary. We moved beds. We painted floors. We did everything that we could to get the place ready to open and it opened, you know - by the time it opened it, everything was done. A lot of people just pitching in and doing it, and it was wonderful, and we had a great time doing it.

MS. KIRWIN: So you're really one of the founders of the [Laughs] -

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I was certainly one of the furniture movers of that. But, so you know -- and then Bill Brown was also of course there, that summer. And then I came back to Haystack the next summer and was a studio assistant. I asked for him and I said, "Well, can I be the studio assistant next summer?" And he said, "Well, I've never given it to a girl before." I said, "Well, I can do the job and I think that you should give it to me." And so, finally - he hemmed and hawed around, but he finally said I could have the job. So I came back the next summer and was the studio assistant in the clay studio.

MS. KIRWIN: And who were you - who was teaching that when you went those early years?

MS. BRINGLE: I had - I had a lot of different teachers, and I can't remember from which year to which year, but in the - actually, at the old Haystack, I'd had Bill Weinman and Olen Russell were two of the teachers. And then on Deer Isle, I had people like - well, Ron Burke did teach one summer, but I had Ed and Mary Shire, and M.C. Richards, and Toshiko [Takaezu], and Daniel Rhodes.

MS. KIRWIN: Were women teaching - when he said he didn't want to give you the studio assistant to a girl -

MS. BRINGLE: He didn't want me to - no, he- yeah, because he said it was too much hard work - physical labor, because then you were also seeing about mixing clay and reprocessing clay. You were loading all the kilns. You were doing all those kinds of things, but, I mean, the students were also helping with it. That's why he didn't want to give it to -

MS. KIRWIN: But they did have women teaching? They just didn't have -

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, they did have women teaching.

MS. KIRWIN: They wanted to have - they wanted the -

MS. BRINGLE: Assistants to be men.

MS. KIRWIN: -- assistants to do the tough work -

MS. BRINGLE: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: -- of remixing clay and things like that. Oh, okay. Hmm.

MS. BRINGLE: So then I would - you know, I would be at - I was in Memphis, of course, in school - in the undergraduate school, and then the year - the year I was the studio monitor or assistant at Haystack was the year before I went to graduate school. I had done that. So then I finished in Memphis and graduated -

[Interruption]

MS. BRINGLE: Where was I?

MS. KIRWIN: You were about to go to graduate school.

MS. BRINGLE: Well, when I was getting ready to finish in Memphis I had - I had already decided at that point that what I wanted to do was I wanted to go out and set up a studio and make pots. At that point I had probably met two people who were really doing that, as far as I was concerned. Through M.C. Richards, I had gone to her place in Stoney Point, and I had met Karen Cairns, and she was making pots full time. And then Michael Cohen was a friend of mine. He had been to Haystack. And he had started making pots in his mother's basement and selling them. And so I talked about going to graduate school, and he'd been a year to graduate school, and he kept saying to me, he said, "Cynthia, you know how to make pots. Why are you going to graduate school?" Because he had been a year with Maija Grotell at Cranbrook, and didn't like it and quit. And I said, "Because I just don't know enough." You know I didn't know enough technically to do this, so - so I started applying to graduate school. Oh, at that point, the Memphis Academy of Art was not accredited. It was very difficult to get into graduate school, because I came from a non-accredited college - and I applied to several different places. I was actually offered another - a scholarship at one place, and got a really nice "no" letter someplace else that said, we - that we would take you and give you and assistantship, but you're - you come from a non-accredited school. So I had also applied to Alfred, and I had had Daniel Rhodes in - at Haystack one summer -- before my senior year at Memphis I had had him in between, and he had tried to get me to come to Alfred then. He wanted me to switch schools and come to Alfred, and I had told him that I wasn't going to switch schools; that I liked what I was doing. I knew what I was going to be doing next year. If I switched to Alfred, they'd

probably make me go an extra year, you know, when you transfer. And I said, "I've got it made my senior year," I said, "because they already put me on this special program where I can do whatever I want to. I can go to any class I want. No enrollment will be taken from me in any class." You know, which was very nice, you know, to be in that position. I said, "I'm not switching schools." So when I applied to Alfred, they let me in, partially because of that, and because Ted Russ and Ted Randall, who was the head at Alfred, they knew each other, and he knew what kind of school it was. And so

MS. KIRWIN: Was Alfred the best place for ceramics in the country then?

MS. BRINGLE: It was considered the best place then. It probably still is considered -

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MS. BRINGLE: -- one of the best places now. So anyway, I went up there, unknowing what I was going to get into. And they thought my southern accent in New York was very strange but [laughs], so that's where I ended up in graduate school.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh [Affirmative]. So was some of - what was your work like then when you were at Alfred? Like what sort of things were you doing?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I've always basically made a lot of functional work, which I did also then, but what graduate school did is give - it gave me - gave me time to experiment with other things, like making porcelain pots, and getting a little bit into Raku, and doing some Majolica, and at the end of graduate school I also did some crystalline-glazed pieces, which I always say I'm going to go back to one day, but I'm probably going to wait for about 20 years at this point to do that, because I'm already involved in so much.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: But we had -- it just gave you a lot of time to work, graduate school did.

MS. KIRWIN: And you felt like you got a lot of the technical background that you needed to do different processes?

MS. BRINGLE: I got some. I probably could have gotten more, but actually, the first year in graduate school I almost quit.

MS. KIRWIN: And why was that?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, because I thought the program was lousy. They took - when I - at that point, they took all the first-year graduate students, who were a mixed bag of people who came from a variety of backgrounds, put them in classes with the juniors so that they could have - do other things, like painting and sculpture and woodworking class -- you know, real basic classes, because some of the people came from non-art backgrounds.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And I went to them and I said, "You know, this is ridiculous. I've already -"

MS. KIRWIN: You already knew what you were doing.

MS. BRINGLE: "I've already been through four years of art school and you're asking me to do this over again." And I told them I wanted to quit and I didn't want their degree. I just wanted to quit.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs].

MS. BRINGLE: And I would just be a special student and then I could just take pottery classes, because that's what I had come there for.

MS. KIRWIN: That's what you wanted to do, yeah.

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, Bob Turner talked to me quite a bit, and through him talking to me, I said, "Okay, I will continue and finish the degree." But the next year they changed the whole program.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, it seems kind of ridiculous to make graduate students go through that again.

[Interruption]

MS. BRINGLE: What's in my mind just goes by the time I had another conversation.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, we were talking about graduate school -

MS. BRINGLE: Well, anyways -

MS. KIRWIN: -- how they wanted you to do other things.

MS. BRINGLE: They wanted me to do other things, so anyway, I said, "Okay," and I ended up just finishing there, you know, the two years.

MS. KIRWIN: Were you still going to Haystack in the summers?

MS. BRINGLE: I didn't go to Haystack that summer in between. I actually - that summer in between, my sister and I and another person had decided to take a camping trip across the country. Well, at one point during my first year, I was in Cleveland visiting Toshiko and some other people that I knew there, and this other person told me, she said - she said, "You know there's going to be a Hamada workshop in Seattle, Washington in the summer," which was the summer of '63.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And I just - I went, "Tell me about it. Give me the information." So I got the information, and they said they would only take a certain number of people and you had to send them all this preliminary stuff to see if you would get in or anything like that. Well, anyway, I sent in everything and I got in the workshop. So we made this - in '63 we camped all the way across the country - the three of us - in a tent, you know, had a great time. And so - actually, what I should say first, before that, is that when I finished that first year of graduate school, I was going to drive back to Memphis. So my mother decided that it would be a good idea to send my sister up there to help me drive back, and we'd already planned this camping trip. So Edwina came up and it took us about two or three weeks to drive back to Memphis, because I took her everywhere around there first. And one of the places we stopped on the way back to Memphis was here at Penland, because Bill Brown had come here in the fall of '62, so the summer of '63 was his first summer here. You're agreeing, right?

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative] [They laugh].

MS. BRINGLE: The summer of '63 was his first summer here, and I got out the map and we found Penland on the map, and we're driving up the hill.

MS. KIRWIN: You hadn't heard of it before this?

MS. BRINGLE: No, I had never heard of it before. I mean, I had spent a summer in Burnsville painting, 15 miles down the road. I never heard of Penland at that point. So we're driving up here and everyone keeps saying, "And where are we going?" So we arrive here at Penland, and we get to the porch of the craft house about 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening, and Bill Brown has gone out. Well, finally, you know, the woman keeps questioning me about what we're doing there. I keep saying, "Bill Brown is a friend of mine, you know, and I told him I would come and help for a couple of weeks." Well, that's what I ended up doing was I spent two weeks here helping. You know, classes hadn't really started yet for the summer. They were just -

MS. KIRWIN: I wanted to ask you -

MS. BRINGLE: They were just running some - I think they were running some classes for teachers or something because it was early in the summer.

MS. KIRWIN: I found this photograph. I made a Xerox of it. This was supposed to be from 1963. It says, "Bill Brown, Cynthia Bringle and Ed Brinkman building the first kiln."

MS. BRINGLE: Well, that's right.

MS. KIRWIN: It's a bad Xerox.

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, that's Ed.

MS. KIRWIN: But I wonder if you could talk about - that - was this the summer that -

MS. BRINGLE: This was the summer.

MS. KIRWIN: The first summer.

MS. BRINGLE: This was the first summer. Penland did not have a gas kiln at that point. They only had electric, and before Bill Brown came, the most clay they used in the summer was 500 pounds, and the clay studio was what is now the glaze room. That was all there was to the clay room. And so Bill Brown, you know, started hunting around and located some bricks that came out of a boiler in a mica factory that they would sell the school for a nickel a piece, and we would have to go get them. So Bill went on the first trip. We took Bill's station wagon and a trailer, and we'd load up bricks from back behind the boiler -

[Interruption]

MS. BRINGLE: Okay, so we went behind this boiler and got these bricks. They're totally black and covered with soot, but they were brick, so that's what we did; we went and got the bricks. We must have made four loads to get all these bricks for the first gas kiln - to build the first gas kiln for the school. And Ed Brinkman was one of the first residents of the school, and he still lives in the area, so that's somebody else we could talk to at this point. But anyway, that's - I stayed two weeks that summer, just doing odd jobs with Bill - whatever he wanted me to do to help.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You know. He put a pond in at one place, and we were out - we were down there digging the dam - digging the mud out to make the dam. He'd already gotten the bulldozer guy stuck in this pond, but you know, I mean, whatever he wanted - and, you know, Penland then was - when Bill came in, a lot of the people who had been there for years were a little bit wary of him, but he never told any of them to leave, or they couldn't come back or anything. He just let them stay, and let them stay in their jobs, and, you know, if they wanted to leave, fine. If they wanted to stay, fine. And many of them supported him and stayed for years, and there were a few that left after a year, decided they didn't want to come back. But a lot of them were sort of volunteers anyway. They didn't get paid for doing these jobs at Penland. They just came. Penland housed them and fed them in the summers, and they did odd jobs for the school, you know, took care of the weaving department or worked at the school. There was one wonderful woman named Helen Henderson, who was - came in the early years. She wasn't there that first summer, but she was probably there the next summer, and she told Bill in the beginning, she said, "Now, if I don't like what you're doing, I'm going to leave or tell you," and he said, "Fine." And she stayed off and on a number of years. But, so -

MS. KIRWIN: You didn't teach this first - 1963?

MS. BRINGLE: I didn't teach '63. No, I just came in and helped for a couple of weeks, and then I left to go on the camping trip.

MS. KIRWIN: What did Edwina do while you were -

MS. BRINGLE: Well, she helped around.

MS. KIRWIN: She helped, too?

MS. BRINGLE: She helped around, and, you know, went up in the weaving studio and helped them do stuff and, you know, that's probably -

MS. KIRWIN: Was she weaving then?

MS. BRINGLE: That was her introduction, probably, to weaving was then.

MS. KIRWIN: Really?

MS. BRINGLE: No, she was an x-ray technician.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: She wasn't in art from the beginning like I was. When I went into art school, she went to go study to be an x-ray technician.

MS. KIRWIN: So you think that may have been - we'll have to ask Edwina herself, but that may have been her first exposure to weaving?

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, it was. It was her first exposure to weaving was at Penland -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- you know, coming here with me, was doing it then. So then we went back to Memphis and we packed up the car and went on this camping -rip across the country, and then I

took off for two weeks during the camping trip and went to the University of Washington at Seattle for a two week workshop for Hamada.

MS. KIRWIN: And what was that like? That - that was when he was going around the country with Leach and -

MS. BRINGLE: No.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, no?

MS. BRINGLE: He was doing workshops himself. He'd done one, I think, at San Jose before that. He was doing a couple of different workshops in the country, and I think he'd been down there for longer. But he did the one at the University of Washington for two weeks. He had it set up for morning and afternoon, and you were either supposed to be there one or the other, because there were so many people that wanted to come to it. So I think I was scheduled for the afternoon class or something, and a friend of mine, Fred Bower, who was one of the early ceramic people, if you look back in ceramic history, too, in terms of somebody who made jumps in terms of style of work. He was one of those.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And we had been at Memphis together in undergraduate school, because he was from Memphis also. Anyway, he was there, and after about a day there, I found out that - from him and talking to other people, that even if I came in when I wasn't supposed to be there, if I was really quiet, nobody would care, so I would spend the whole day there, and just quietly stand in the back of the room and watch Hamada work and listen. So - and his - one of his sons was there helping him also. So it was a wonderful workshop for me, just to watch this man work, and - just in his own quiet, slow manner, just make these wonderful pots. I have a really nice collection of photographs that I took of him.

MS. KIRWIN: I'd like to see those. I have some photographs. I know at one point he went around the country with -

MS. BRINGLE: With [Bernard] Leach.

MS. KIRWIN: -- Leach and Yanagi [Soetsu], and we have photographs of that when he went to New Mexico and visited -

MS. BRINGLE: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: -- the Martinez, and saw the black pottery, and just some wonderful photographs, but I'd - you know, from the photographs you don't get any sense of how he made pots. What - how did that affect your own work, seeing him?

MS. BRINGLE: I know it affected my work, but the thing - the thing is, also, is that I've always been influenced by oriental work, anyway, and also having been a painter to begin with. I mean, even before I met him, I was already doing brushwork on pots, and I know that just influenced me more in terms of doing it. But for watching him, it was just the simplicity of what he did and how he did it. It was like he always knew when to stop, you know, when he would be working. And he had a great sense of humor in his own quiet way, but he - every place else he'd been, he had an interpreter. But they didn't - for some reason, they didn't have an interpreter for him in Seattle, so he spoke English.

[They laugh.]

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, you know, if he had an interpreter he didn't - you know, he was just like - he didn't have to bother with listening to anybody if he didn't want to. But there were some ladies in the class that asked - I couldn't believe sometimes the questions they would ask, and he would answer them in such a way that he'd put them down, and they didn't even know it, you know.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: They didn't even realize it. But his son - another one of his sons, when I was in undergraduate school in Memphis, had come to Memphis to visit and had made pots at the Art Academy, so I'd already met his son and seen him work, and he was a really nice young man who loved being in Memphis, stayed with Henry Easterwood in his house, and at that point, played the Beatles music all night, or rock and roll. And he - and the Memphis Academy of Art is in the middle of a park, and he was also very much into botany, and so he loved being there. You know, so he was around - his son was around the Art Academy for several weeks at a couple of different times, visiting and making pots.

MS. KIRWIN: So when did you decide to set up a studio in Tennessee? Was it just about this time?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I had already decided that I wanted to set up a studio when I was in undergraduate school, and then after finishing in graduate school - right out of graduate school I came and I taught a class at Penland that summer in '64. I might have taught at Haystack that summer, too. I can't remember. Maybe I taught at Haystack that next summer. I'll have to go back and look. But anyway, I taught a class up here, and Bill Brown had started the residency program here, having people here in the winter, where you would, you know, live somewhere around the school and work in the school studios, and then in the summer you'd have to figure out some other place to work, because there would be classes. I mean, it was way before the barns and other kinds of studios. And Bill tried to get me to stay at Penland and be a resident at that point, and that was in '64, and I told him that I didn't want to do that. I needed to go out on my own and set up a studio to see if I could make it by myself. I didn't want to be in a school and do - I wanted to be in my own place. So left and went back down to Memphis, which is where I had family and knew people, and started looking around for places to set up a studio. And I found an old house that belonged to - some friends of mine said they had an old house, and if I wanted it, the rent would be cheap, and it was old and it needed a lot of work, and the rent was very cheap. And I spent six months putting it into a livable space and a studio and so I really - I had my studio set up and started making pots there in the spring of '65.

MS. KIRWIN: And that was in Eads?

MS. BRINGLE: In Eads, Tennessee -

MS. KIRWIN: Is that -

MS. BRINGLE: -- which is 20 miles outside -

MS. KIRWIN: Near Memphis?

MS. BRINGLE: -- 20 miles out - then it was 20 miles outside the Memphis City lines, out in the country, out in the middle of nowhere. It's not in the middle of nowhere now, but it was then. So, you know, I started a studio and started making pots, and I'd send off slides to shops and go visit them and try to sell my work. And I did open house at the studio, and I talked to ladies, garden clubs and

book clubs about what I was doing.

MS. KIRWIN: Did you do fairs, too?

MS. BRINGLE: They thought I was nuts.

MS. KIRWIN: Did you do crafts fairs?

MS. BRINGLE: I started after I had been there a couple of years. I applied and got into Florida fairs, Winter Park and St. Augustine. See, the American Crafts Council shows then were in the Northeast. There weren't any anywhere else, and if you didn't live in the northeast -

MS. KIRWIN: You couldn't get in?

MS. BRINGLE: -- you couldn't get in. They were only for those states. They weren't open to everybody.

MS. KIRWIN: I didn't know that.

MS. BRINGLE: No. So I, you know, I did the Florida shows and was on the street.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh [Affirmative] [laughs].

MS. BRINGLE: And sent pots to shops.

MS. KIRWIN: And you sold things from your studio and you had -

MS. BRINGLE: I sold from my studio, and I did orders for people, and I wholesaled a lot. I mean, when I was at Alfred I had made connections to, you know, shops in Buffalo and Rochester, and I would ship pots up there, too. But that was also way before UPS, and everybody - in order to ship things, you had to go to the truck terminals and take your pots and ship them off.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative] Were you making a living?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, let's see. I managed to pay my bills, so I considered I was making a living.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: My parents certainly would have given me money if I would have asked them, but I had told them I didn't want it. So my father would give me sacks of groceries every once in a while [they laugh], you know, or materials and that kind of thing to help out since I never would take money.

MS. KIRWIN: And when was the - then you come -

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A]

MS. KIRWIN: -- one has this photograph, and we microfilmed it, and I went through the papers to try to find it again because I wanted to ask you about the circumstances of the photograph. Did you learn how to build a kiln in Haystack and then -

MS. BRINGLE: No, in - well, we took kiln-building classes at Alfred, you know - it's that kind of thing. Actually, you know, I helped with the beginning of this kiln, but I think Ron Burke ended up - and Ed

Brinkman ended up finishing the kiln, because I left. We sort of started it.

MS. KIRWIN: How did - at this point, how did Bill Brown's management style compare to Fran Merritt's? Did you get the sense he was trying to change -

MS. BRINGLE: They were -

MS. KIRWIN: -- Penland into what Haystack was?

MS. BRINGLE: I didn't think he was trying to change Penland into what Haystack was. I just - I thought he was trying to bring new people into Penland, which is what it needed, and what he was hired to do. He was trying to bring new people in, and just making it an exciting place for artists to be with no restrictions, like Haystack was, with no faculty meetings, and, you know, no visible management for the place, to hire the faculty. I mean, Bill Brown, I'm sure you've heard this before, said, "You hire the best horses and you let them do it," and that's exactly what he believed, and he never interfered -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], so you had -

MS. BRINGLE: -- with what the faculty was doing. You know? He just let them - the studios were there to run any way they wanted to, and he just did it. And we would often get frustrated at Bill for not answering a certain question or something, but he wasn't like that. He wanted you to figure it out yourself. I mean, that was his style to do it that way, and at that point, Bonnie Ford was in the office and the truth is, she was, I think, managing that part of it - the office part of it. She was the registrar and took care of the money and -

MS. KIRWIN: You must have met Lucy Morgan?

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, yeah, I did.

MS. KIRWIN: Can you talk about her a little bit?

MS. BRINGLE: I'm sorry I, like, never taped her or something, but she would come to visit and she would go in the enameling studio and make a few things, well, mostly if Mel Someroski was here, because he would sort of lead her through everything. But she'd come and she'd do that, or she'd sit and knit booties to be sold in the Penland gift shop there. And in the evenings she'd stand around and talk about the school and - the early beginnings of the school, what went on. She was a wonderful woman, and she always supported Bill Brown in anything that he did. I mean, she stayed away from the school the first year he was here, because she knew that people would come to her about how to do things and she didn't want that, so she totally stayed away. And then after that, when she was here and people would say something to her, and she'd say, "Well, go to Bill." And she never tried to interfere. She was a wonderful person, talked about how she got people to give money to the school, probably gentle nudging.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, I've come across some of that in the papers when she - when the Pines burned and she got it rebuilt, the money that she got from Lilly to build the Luna House -

MS. BRINGLE: Build the Luna House.

MS. KIRWIN: -- and must have been - she was a very good fundraiser. She was very persistent.

MS. BRINGLE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: And Bonnie, who worked with Lucy Morgan, was the thread of continuity in the office with Bill.

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: She was able to keep things together.

MS. BRINGLE: Right. She kept things - you know, she's the one that tended to the letters and the students and the housing and the checks and the - all of that.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You know, she'd tell Bill how much money there was to spend. And frankly, in all honesty, I think that the money-management part of Penland went a little awry after her death. It's not that Bill did anything - he didn't do anything wrong, as far as - I mean, he wouldn't have taken any - I mean, he wouldn't have taken a cent and spent it on himself or his family. I mean, nothing like that. He wouldn't have done that. But he wasn't really a money manager, you know, and neither was Jane, as far as that goes. So, I mean, if the money was there, I mean, he wouldn't see any reason why he didn't need to spend it. You know, if somebody gave money for an endowment, "endowment" didn't mean a thing to him. It was money that was there and therefore, "spend it" -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- even if it was earmarked "endowment." It was just the way he thought about money totally differently. He didn't - he didn't think like a money manager thinks. He thought like an artist about that, "Well" -

MS. KIRWIN: "It's there."

MS. BRINGLE: -- "it's there. Just" -

MS. KIRWIN: "You need it, use it."

MS. BRINGLE: -- "You need it, you use it."

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] When did Bonnie die?

MS. BRINGLE: You know, I don't remember what year she passed away. I should look that up, because I think that's an important point in the history of the school, is that. I don't think a lot of people realize how much she really did.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, I've heard from many, many people that she was running the school and keeping it together -

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: -- that she was in charge of the office.

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, she really was. See, Bill didn't believe in having an office.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: I mean he didn't. I mean, he was back in the back room, and, of course, he was never

there. He didn't like to write letters.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], I know that.

MS. BRINGLE: You know, he was - and he was very poor at it, you know. I mean, he's dyslexic, which a lot of artists, it seems like, are. He couldn't spell, couldn't do anything like that. I mean, he'd give it to the secretary and she'd correct the whole thing and write the letters. So - but he was good in so many other ways and had, you know, foresight in terms of who to bring into here and the programs and that kind of thing.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: That was Bill's expertise in all of that.

MS. KIRWIN: What were the best aspects of the program, say, in the '60s, changes that Bill made from -

MS. BRINGLE: Well, the -

MS. KIRWIN: -- the way the school was run under Lucy Morgan?

MS. BRINGLE: There was nothing - you know, the thing is, is that the school under Lucy Morgan had reached its pinnacle in terms of, I think, who she knew, in terms of people to get in to teach classes, how to get new students, that kind of thing. Because when Bill Brown came, probably most of the students were over 50. There weren't any young people here. Okay, Bill came because of Haystack, and his background in the arts. Anyway, he knew people from all over, and so he got people that he knew from other places, and who had been faculty or students at Haystack when he had been there, and said, "Hey, I'm at this place in North Carolina. I need help. Would you come here for a couple of weeks and help? We won't give you anything to do this, but we'll feed you," you know, "and we'll give you beer money."

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I want you to know that beer money at that point was \$30 a week, was what - and most people gave it back to the school. They'd go, "\$30? I don't need this." So you either wouldn't take it, and half the time he'd forget to pay you anyway, or you would just give it back to the school, or buy something that the school needed and give it to them. I mean, lots and lots of faculty members did that. They still do, but, you know, now they get a little more money, which isn't still much, but -- so through that and through people - some of these people were in universities, so they would know students, and more people started coming, and they started a scholarship - they had a scholarship program where students would come and pay a little bit and do dishes and pots and pans for the school in order to be here. That would bring in young people, too, is that part of it. So it gradually started to change, you know, and -

MS. KIRWIN: Did anyone react badly to having come down here and, you know, many of them were very important in their field, and not getting the kind of accommodations they expected and this sort of thing? Because it seems like -

MS. BRINGLE: Most people didn't care.

MS. KIRWIN: -- it couldn't - it couldn't be that everybody was happy about the situation, or maybe they just didn't come to Penland.

MS. BRINGLE: But those kinds of people didn't come. But most people didn't care. I mean, they had - they would come and they'd meet other artists from other areas of country that they'd heard about or they knew, or they'd get to know other people in other fields, and have a good time being together in between not teaching the classes, and you know slide shows at night, and dances on the weekend, and the faculty was housed in places which you wouldn't believe. You know, now, you know, I mean, they were just - some of the places where faculty was housed were sort of these fallen-down shacks. I mean, one of them especially was, which has now been turned into something else, but you know, they - it's not that they get the Ritz anymore, but I mean the housing is a little better than it used to be.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah. When did you decide to move here?

MS. BRINGLE: In 1970, Bill Brown - oh, I had already decided that I wanted eventually to move here, and actually, in '69 I started this house. My house sits on Penland School land through an agreement with the board. I have -

MS. KIRWIN: I wanted to ask you about that, because it -

MS. BRINGLE: Through an agreement with the board, I have a lifetime lease on the land, and when I'm gone my building goes to the school. The school assumes no cost in it. I also cannot put the school at any risk as far as the building goes, like I can't mortgage it. So anyway, I started building this house in '69 as a summer place. I spent the summer of '69 here, and I had a shed out in the back - an open shed and a wheel and I made pots out there, and I had an electric kiln hooked up here.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: Then in 1970, Bill had decided to start the Concentration building, which is the eight-week class in the fall, and an eight-week class in the spring, because what was happening was that at the end of every summer, or during the summer, there would be all these students that said, "Well, why can't we stay here? We don't really want to go home. You know you have all these buildings here. Why can't we just stay? Why can't we just have classes? Why can't we just do something? We don't want to leave." Well, it was really hard to get the students out of here, so Bill decided to start the winter program. So after a number of telephone calls - and I kept trying to get him to get somebody else - he talked me to coming up here and teaching a class, the first class they had in Concentration. And at that point, see, Edwina had already been living here several years. Edwina had started - Edwina had come up here one other time, gotten involved in weaving, still an x-ray technician, and she -

[Interruption]

MS. BRINGLE: Anyway, Edwina had already lived up here for several years and was like a scholarship student, but she was like what a course student is today, only didn't have a title. She worked for the school in exchange for her - a place to live, and she helped out in the summer and did all kinds of odd jobs, and she'd already been through two summer programs at the school as far as learning how to weave, and - so Bill asked me to teach the clay program and Edwina to teach the weaving program. And anyway, I finally said, "Well, I'm going to move anyway at some point. I'll just move now." So I moved up here in the - in '70 -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- in the - during that summer - at the end of that summer, and when I moved up here I had to finish my house, which was just a shell, and so I taught the first Concentration program, which was the fall of '70 and the spring of '71. I taught the clay, and Edwina taught the weaving, and that was all the students there were.

MS. KIRWIN: Just those two?

MS. BRINGLE: Just those two, and they were small groups. But we all had a great time. And I'm still in contact with some of those people who were in those early classes.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, yeah?

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, and some of them are still making pots. But anyway, so I taught it for that year and that's when I moved up here. And then after that, they already - they had - the residency program was at the barns and they had that going. And after that, in '71, I started renting studio space from the school in the barn.

MS. KIRWIN: Before you built your studio here?

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, that was before I built my studio here, because then I built my studio here in '75, so I was in the barn in between -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- renting space from the school. And I kept talking to Bill Brown about I needed to get out of the barn, and he kept telling me I didn't need to get out of the barn, that I could stay there. And I kept telling him, I said, "No, it's not right for me to stay here in the barn. You know I need to get out in my own place and let somebody else have this space."

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: Because I was beginning to feel like I had - you know - some other, younger person should be in there, because that's what I felt like the residency program was for.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, you're no longer a resident. You're a teacher.

MS. BRINGLE: No, but I didn't - you know, I didn't need to be in there.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: So he would have - I mean, he would have let me stay there some more.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: So in '75, I built this building down here.

MS. KIRWIN: Then did Edwina - does she have a house up here, too?

MS. BRINGLE: Edwina - Edwina applied for and got a job in Charlotte and moved down there, and she's been down there now about 17 years I think. It's funny I can't remember exactly when she moved down there.

MS. KIRWIN: When you moved here were there - other - there are a lot of potters who now live in

the vicinity of Penland. Were all of those other people living here at that time -

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, no.

MS. KIRWIN: -- or were you among the first wave of people to set up shop here?

MS. BRINGLE: I was among the first wave.

MS. KIRWIN: Who were the others around that time who came?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, Judy and Ed Brinkman had been residents - had been among the first residents at Penland.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: I think he might have been the first resident at Penland, and they had met here and married and he'd moved into the area, and he was making pots. When I moved up here, the only other person who was - Ron Probst had been a resident, and when I came up here, he moved out and set up his own studio in the area. One of the reasons early on I had decided to move up here was because my feeling was that it would become a community of craftspeople due to the school and the interest, and I wanted to live in a community where there were other craftsmen. I didn't want to be the only person, which is the way it was in Memphis. There wasn't anybody to communicate with. There wasn't anybody doing the same thing. Besides, it was hot [they laugh] in the summer. I didn't like the weather. I like the mountains. I've always liked, ever since the first time I came here to come into these mountains, it feels right, you know. These mountains just feel good to me and the place to be. So, I mean, every time I would leave here, I hated it and I'd come back and I'd start seeing the mountains as I'm driving down the road, I'd go, "Ha, I'm in the right place." And I still feel like that.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh [Affirmative], that's good.

MS. BRINGLE: I can go off to Winston-Salem and come back and I start seeing these mountains and I go, "Oh, good. I'm home. I'm in the right place."

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: So I -

MS. KIRWIN: Well, I'm sure you moving here was part of the reason why a number of other potters moved into the area, too, thinking there's strength in community.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I mean, probably - probably so, and most of the people who live in this area, in many ways it's an outgrowth of having either been students at the school, faculty at the school, or just coming to the area and knowing that there's a community around here now. That's the way that it is.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You know, I mean this is a great source, you know, which is good.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: I'm sure sometimes it feels like a burden up at the office, but, you know, I don't know whether it does or not. When they start doing these big community dinners now, I mean, you cannot believe how many people -

MS. KIRWIN: Really?

MS. BRINGLE: -- come.

MS. KIRWIN: I didn't know they did that. They have -

MS. BRINGLE: They do it on the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving. They invite people to come. Everybody brings a covered dish, and the Fourth of July, I mean the hill was covered with people the last time.

MS. KIRWIN: Really? Hmm. Yeah, this -

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, the line from The Pines all the way, almost - way, way up the walk.

MS. KIRWIN: Were these all craftspeople, or -

MS. BRINGLE: No, not necessarily.

MS. KIRWIN: -- people from - whomever wanted to come from the community?

MS. BRINGLE: Craftspeople, a lot of craftspeople.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: But some of them are just people who have come up to the school. I mean, some of them are people that have become interested in the school, and because they retired to the area and now they volunteer, you know -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- to help the school out.

MS. KIRWIN: During this time in the '60s and '70s, were you still going back to Haystack and teaching and going other places?

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], I was. I was still going - I - you know, through going to Haystack and other places, you just start, as I said, networking, and you get to know people, and you get invited to do workshops in different parts of the country -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- and, you know, every place I'd go and do a workshop, I'd talk about Penland and show slides of Penland, you know, which -

MS. KIRWIN: So you were sort of a missionary?

MS. BRINGLE: [Laughs.] Well, I think everybody should know about good places.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] Yeah.

MS. BRINGLE: So now I go and I do workshops and I talk about Penland and Haystack and Arrowmount and Anderson Ranch and all the places I've ever taught, and tell them that they should just look around, because the - you know, broaden their horizons.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: Because the truth is, when I was in undergraduate school, nobody ever said, "Go someplace else," you know. I mean, I figured that out. I needed to go someplace else. You know, now maybe they do, but then they - they didn't say a whole lot. But, you know, get to meet other people and see what else was going on.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: So -

MS. KIRWIN: How many workshops do you do, like a year? I know you go all over the country.

MS. BRINGLE: I always say I do - I always say I do from one to six.

MS. KIRWIN: One to six a year?

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, anywhere from two days to two or three weeks and in between, and I have been all - all over the country. I've been from Florida to California to, you know, Washington to Alaska to Maine to - the farthest I've been is Brazil, you know. And I gave a talk in Australia once. But -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- the thing is, it's very - I like to do it; to get out and to see what else is going on, get exposure. Otherwise, the thing is I always tell people now, I say, "Well, you know, after you've been doing this for 25 years, they think you're about ready to be dead and buried." [Laughs] You know, a lot of people retire after 25 years of doing something. Well, potters aren't going to retire. People in the arts don't ever retire. You have to keep your - part of it is to just keep your name out there -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- to do it. And I enjoy doing it, too. It's exhausting. But -

MS. KIRWIN: Arrowmount's pretty close to Penland geographically. How does it compare to the Penland program?

MS. BRINGLE: Hmm, they have good faculty over there. They have a very nice facility. The feeling over there is tighter, tied into the university system at UT. There seem to be a few more sort of regulations that they have to go through. They've loosened up some. But it also sits right in the middle of Gatlinburg, Tennessee, which is a big tourist town. But the truth is, when you're at Arrowmount, you don't realize you're in Gatlinburg, because it's separate. But they have a nice facility. They run good classes over there. They have good faculty.

MS. KIRWIN: But Penland's - has been a little looser?

MS. BRINGLE: Penland has more of a community feeling to it. You know, it's more spread out, and

more classes going on. It's probably also because of the architecture at Arrowmount. It's all newer buildings. It feels more - it feels a little more sterile in the buildings because of that.

MS. KIRWIN: I was going through the minutes of the school and trying to find out when you had - when you became a member of the board, and the first mention is around '83. Was that - is that right?

MS. BRINGLE: That's it.

MS. KIRWIN: eighty-three?

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: It was right at this pivotal moment when Bill Brown was out -

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: -- and you came onto the board just before then.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: Could you talk a little bit about that time?

MS. BRINGLE: Turn that off for a sec.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MS. BRINGLE: Okay, in - see, when Bill Brown came here, the school had a "board," but Bill didn't believe in consulting the board about anything.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You've probably heard this from other people.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, yeah, from Bill and Jane.

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, I mean he really didn't - he didn't want a board. He just wanted to run the school his way, and board meetings early on were - he would have the board up to the school once, maybe twice a year, and you'd give them lunch, and you'd say hello to them, and then you'd send them home. And most of them were local people. Well, as the school started growing some and had more money needs and such, too, the board, you know, became people from outside of the area in Winston-Salem and such who had - many of them had helped the school out with some fundraising and that kind of thing. And - but there was - there weren't any craftspeople on the board, and people would always ask Bill about that. He said he didn't want them on there. I don't know why. He just - he didn't want any craftspeople on the board. Well, there was a push from the - on the board's part to, you know, get craftspeople on the board, because the craftspeople who taught here thought that it would be good if a couple of them were on the board. Well, finally, I guess what happened was, is they went to Bill with a couple of names, mine being among them, and said they wanted to put a craftsperson on the board, and he finally said, "All right." I think under duress probably he said, "All right," and that they would put me on the board. So one of the board members came to me and they said, "Cynthia, you know that this is probably not going to be easy," and I said, "Well, that's probably true, but I believe in this school, and I've always helped out anyway," and I said,

"I'll do it." Well, the school had been having a number of problems before that, and certainly, Bill's drinking and Jane and all of that were all a part of - of it. But even with all of that, the school continued to run, and I certainly give Bill Brown all the credit in the world for going off and drying up and quitting drinking and that part of it - which is difficult.

MS. KIRWIN: And this is the late '70s?

MS. BRINGLE: Uh, yeah, I should be able to remember exactly when that was, but I don't. Jane could probably tell - have told you. She - did she tell you?

MS. KIRWIN: She never talked about it.

MS. BRINGLE: She never talked about it? Well, anyway -

MS. KIRWIN: I mean, I knew, but she never - she never discussed it with me.

MS. BRINGLE: Right, well, that's certainly a part of the history of the school's - is all of that. It's just like the house that you're staying in now was called - you know, somebody said, "Well, couldn't it just be called Bill's Bar, because isn't that it?" [Laughs]

MS. KIRWIN: When you say "problems with Jane," I know she was heavily involved in -

MS. BRINGLE: She was heavily involved in -

MS. KIRWIN: -- running the school.

MS. BRINGLE: -- the school, and running and doing things, and was in the beginning not salary. Later on, she was salaried -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- by the school, never a whole lot. She ran the kitchen and the scholarship students and that, was in many senses, just, you know, picking up what Bill either wasn't doing, or what she thought ought to be done. I mean, she was saying what ought to be done.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: Which - there was resentment over her doing stuff, too, you know. It wasn't a good situation, I don't think, for the school at that - at that point. And Bill and Jane were becoming more and more resentful of the board, and the board trying to do things with the school in terms of raising money. We weren't telling Bill what to do, but it was raising money and endowment - starting an endowment for the school, and what - they just didn't want anybody interfering - what they considered to be interfering. I mean, the school was needing more funds, needing tighter control of the money -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- and Bill didn't want to do that. I was -

MS. KIRWIN: Was Bonnie still alive at this time?

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-mm. [Negative] I was, from a distance, you know, watching all of this, not really knowing everything that was going on.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: In '83, when they asked me to come on the board, I said, "Okay." I started seeing a little more about what was going on, because I had more - you know, going to a board meeting, you had more insight into it, and there were certain board members who were trying to go out and raise money for the school, and Bill and Jane didn't even like them doing that. You know, I went to a meeting with two other board members to a local company asking them about certain things about giving money to the school. Bill was just belligerent at that meeting, and I don't know why that other person at the meeting - the other board member - just didn't throw their hands up and quit.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, I watched a number of things like this happen, where Bill and Jane were either belligerent, or just downright ugly to board members and saying to them stuff like -

MS. KIRWIN: Do you - do you think it was because they thought they were losing control of the school because the -

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, I think that was part of it. They wanted to -

MS. KIRWIN: They were coming in and fundraising and -

MS. BRINGLE: They didn't want anybody else doing anything, or telling them how to do anything.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And Bill and Jane were at the point of - Jane would - I mean, she'd say to me - and, you know, she'd just be irate. I said, "Listen, you have to work with the board. They are only here to help. They're not getting paid for this," you know, "They are volunteering to help the school." I mean, John Ely went out and raised money for endowment. Bill Brown spent it - part of it. John Ely went out and re-raised it. Bill Brown started going back into it again. That's when the board said, "Okay, financially, we take all of this out of your hands," and he was furious. They would not let him write a check because he was just spending the money.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, again, I say not dishonestly spending the money.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], just not managing it -

MS. BRINGLE: Just not managing the money -

MS. KIRWIN: -- very well.

MS. BRINGLE: -- that kind of thing. And I can say -

MS. KIRWIN: Is this when they hired -

MS. BRINGLE: John Gray.

MS. KIRWIN: John - oh, yeah, I remember. But there was another person before that who was - I believe it was before that. I'm not so clear on this history. Oscar Tinney, that was '79, who had also had some conflicts with -

MS. BRINGLE: Right, it wasn't Oscar Tinney.

MS. KIRWIN: -- with - Jane and Bill.

MS. BRINGLE: Tinney was his last name, but -

MS. KIRWIN: But then there was -

MS. BRINGLE: I think it was John.

MS. KIRWIN: -- John Gray. Because in '79, Oscar wrote that he was replaced - he was to replace Bonnie Ford as registrar -

MS. BRINGLE: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: -- but then his job assignments were much more curtailed than what he originally -

MS. BRINGLE: Was hired for.

MS. KIRWIN: -- was hired for, yeah, and - until he just completely backed off and eventually resigned because of what seemed to be pressure placed on him by Jane -

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: -- to not -

MS. BRINGLE: Jane didn't want -

MS. KIRWIN: -- to control anything.

MS. BRINGLE: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: And then, Bob - or Gray -

MS. BRINGLE: John Gray.

MS. KIRWIN: -- John Gray came in after him?

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative] So all of the, you know, financial part of it was handed over to somebody else, which they didn't like either. But then - you know, I kept sort of watching all this happen, and the board would talk about well, what could they do? Well, I had already watched the board go through, you know, Bill Brown going off to control his alcoholism, and him being able to do that. Well, anybody that's an alcoholic usually spends the next year trying to work through a good part of that, and, I mean, before they can I think even start - it takes at least three months before they can even start thinking clearly, anyway.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And then, you know, they let Bill get through all of that, to see if things wouldn't

change, and they really - some things changed, but in terms of his being able to manage things well, they didn't. And Bill and Jane - I mean, I heard them openly more than once say stuff like, "We just won't hire any faculty. We'll let the board do it."

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: You know, "We'll just let them see how they can run this school. We won't do this or that. We won't put out a catalog." To me it wasn't even clear thinking, but that's exactly what was going on, and I'd keep saying - I'd say to Jane, "You can't do this." And other people - it wasn't just me. Other people would say to Bill, "Bill, you can't keep doing this," you know -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- so in the board meeting, when they asked Bill Brown to resign, when that happened at that board meeting, I didn't know it was going to happen. I mean, I had been on the board, I guess, for a year at that point - or less than a year at that point, less than a year.

MS. KIRWIN: There was a time about six months before that - I think this was before you were on the board - Bill Brown gave a letter of - letter of resignation to the board, which wasn't accepted. He was trying - he - I have never seen a copy of the letter, but I did read about it in the minutes, and I read subsequent letters back to him about the board refusing his resignation.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: And the-the letter of resignation was for health problems when he was resigning, and it wasn't accepted. And then - then you entered on the board -

MS. BRINGLE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: -- and they had decided at that point that maybe they should have accepted the letter of resignation.

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I think just more problems kept coming up.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: But at that meeting where they asked Bill Brown to resign, I, as one of the board members, did not know that was going to happen at that meeting and it was a surprise to me. It's not that I didn't think it was time to change. It's just that it was a surprise. But there were - executive committee and maybe a few other members of the board had already set things up in terms of finding an interim director, everything.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: They had already planned all that.

MS. KIRWIN: It must have been a shock to you.

MS. BRINGLE: It was a shock to me. It was a shock to me and, you know, I saw it as necessary. I didn't totally disagree with it. I did think it was a difficult way to do it, but in knowing Jane Brown, and just the way that she was, just irrational, truthfully, I don't think there was any other way for them to have done it. And you will find a lot of people tell you that. Other people will say it could have been

done differently. I'm not sure how, at that point, knowing the circumstances, it could have been done any differently.

MS. KIRWIN: Hmm, mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You know, so they asked him to resign, and he said, "Yes," you know, with no qualms he said, "Yes," and then that was when Jane started raising all this ruckus about stuff. I mean, given Bill by himself, he wouldn't, I don't think, have raised any ruckus. But then, on the other hand, he allowed Jane to do it. He never said, "Don't do it."

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: Well, at that point, I was certainly - I was on the board, a part of what was going on, even though - I mean, that - part of that is a blur to me. I mean, it was just such a thing happening that, you know - I mean, I'm sure I said, "I wish there was another way to do this," which other people said they wished there were, too. Fran Merritt was on the board then, too.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that.

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, he was on the board, too, at that point.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: He didn't have any idea it was going to happen, either. You know, it was a total shock to him.

MS. KIRWIN: There was a faction of the board, though, that had made plans to -

MS. BRINGLE: They had made plans, yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: -- for this change.

MS. BRINGLE: For the change, mm-hmm. [Affirmative] For somebody to come in and take care of things so the school would be taken care of. I mean, they had gotten somebody else on the board, Richardson Rice, who came in as an interim director, and he had done this in several other places, been an interim director, you know, not at crafts schools.

MS. KIRWIN: So had people known - they might have seen this coming more clearly, that Richardson Rice was on the board, maybe something was going to happen. I don't know.

MS. BRINGLE: Well, that - but - no, most people didn't know that.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: You know, I mean, most people don't know who the board members are, you know, in places, and don't pay any attention to them unless you're closely aligned with the school in some way, or any place in some way, you don't know who board members are unless you have contact with them. So anyway, I was certainly a part of - it was myself and Mike Page and a couple of other board members. I mean, we gathered all of the faculty who were around and people who were in the area at that point, and got them all together for a meeting and said, "This is what's going on." Well, people were in total shock. Other people - there were some people that said, "I've seen it coming. I knew it was coming," but they still didn't want to believe it, and some of them were irate about it.

Some of them continued to be irate for years, and there are some of them that still are. I became, for a lot of those people, the person to dump on, and the bad guy. I mean, they considered it my fault, and I got ugly letters, phone calls you wouldn't believe. I mean, I spent so much time on the telephone explaining to people what was going on, and finally, it got to the point where, you know, I talked to people on the board and stuff, and I said, "You know, there's a lot of stuff that shouldn't be aired. You shouldn't air dirty laundry. You should let it go and let it be." But people wanted dirty laundry aired, and that isn't what happened. And John Ely finally wrote a letter explaining part of it, which he didn't even want to do. You know, he didn't want to say some of the stuff that had gone on, but he did, finally, to try to calm things down. And it's taken years for some things to calm down, you know?

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And it took years for some people to realize what was going on, and other people - and people from way away from here, lots of faculty members wrote all of these letters, but the thing is, they were writing these letters not knowing any circumstances. They were only writing letters because they had had this wonderful time at Penland, and they believed in the place. Well, it's not that any of the rest of us hadn't had a wonderful time at Penland and believed in the place, too. It was just time for something else to happen, and for the school to continue on. So if it was - It was a mess. You know? It was a mess for me for a year, because I was on the search committee to find a new director. When Richardson Rice was here at interim director, I was around, Marvin Jenson was around, you know, and people like us that were around, you know, we would get together, and Richardson Rice, who was a wonderful man, he hadn't run a craft school before.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You know? I'd go to him and I'd say, "Okay, it's time to hire the faculty for the summer," you know. I mean, there were several of us around who would do that. We'd go in and say, "Okay, this is what needs to be done next." You know, "This is what we have to do next to have summer. This is what we have to do next to have the fall program. We have to hire the faculty. The brochure has to go out."

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] I'll bet it was a mess.

MS. BRINGLE: You know, well, it wasn't. It just went on, but it was very - it consumed my life during that time.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, I could have just left, but I was already involved in it. And there were people that resented the fact that I was doing that. And in all honesty, I was trying - I didn't want people to know I was doing that. I didn't tell anybody else, you know. I didn't want to be running the school, you know, but the school had to continue, as far as I was concerned. So I would just go and I would say, "This is what's next," and I would just quietly walk out. And I had already been a part of this - some of the others had been a part of - other people around here had been a part of it. We were already hiring part of the faculty. Like I was hiring all of the clay faculty. I did that for years. I would get on the phone and I would hire them all, you know.

MS. KIRWIN: When did that start?

MS. BRINGLE: I started helping hiring faculty here before I ever moved up here, because I'd been

around and met people and I knew clay people and other people on the staff. And I'd go to Bill Brown - and I'd go off and I'd judge shows or something, and I'd come back and I'd say, "Bill, I met somebody I think would be a really good faculty member." And other faculty members that - did the same thing. They'd say, "Bill, I met somebody who would be a good faculty member." And you'd talk to somebody about Penland and say, "Hey, this is a great place. You don't get any money, but," you know, and they'd come, and you'd call them up. So even when I lived in Eads, you know, Bill would call me up and he'd say, "Hey, would you call so-and-so or such-and-such," or I would call him up and I would say, "Hey, Bill, I think you ought to get such-and-such a person here to teach," and he'd say, "I don't know them." I said, "Well, I know them. I think if you'd just call them up," so I would call him back and say, "Bill, did you call up so-and-so?" "I didn't call them. Why don't you call them for me?" So I'd get on the phone, and I'd call them.

[END TAPE 2 SIDE A]

MS. BRINGLE: So then I was on the search committee.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, I was going to ask you about - I mean, I'm sure that kind of compounded some antagonism towards you, because you were on the search committee. I mean -

MS. BRINGLE: I was on the search committee along with - you know, there were like a lot of people on the search committee, and they tried to get local people on the search - you know. People that lived in the area -- on the search committee to - Harvey Littleton was on it. John Ely was on it, and Dan Bailey, who was a resident at the time, was on the search committee - so it was a big group.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And actually, Harvey Littleton and I were supposed to be co-chairmen of the search committee, but in all honesty, I was doing it, because it just - Harvey's wonderful, but being the chairman of a search committee - I finally just got so I'd call Harvey up and I'd say, "Okay, you have to be here at such and such a time. Just come over here."

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You know. Because I couldn't - I tried to get him to make the decisions about stuff. He just - he's so busy with his own work and doing other things. He doesn't like messing with that kind of thing. So, I mean - I mean, we looked for a long time for somebody.

MS. KIRWIN: What sort of person were you looking for? What were the qualities in the -

MS. BRINGLE: We didn't - oh, the problem is when you're looking for somebody for a place like this, you're looking for somebody who can do everything.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: No. It's a really extremely difficult job to fill, and we interviewed the first group of people and didn't find anybody in the first group, you know, and then we got on the phone. Everybody got on the phone and started calling all over the country, "Do you know somebody who would be good for this job?"

MS. KIRWIN: Do you think Jane was really campaigning to get Bill his job back, or did you consider that a possibility?

MS. BRINGLE: It was never considered.

MS. KIRWIN: Never a possibility, so her efforts were really -

MS. BRINGLE: I didn't think that she was campaigning. She might have been.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, she did have that letter-writing -

MS. BRINGLE: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: -- which I've read a lot of them, very heartfelt letters in support of Bill, and I think it was her gesture to try to get him his job back, but it seemed completely in vain because, you know, the way that it had been done - I couldn't - I mean, as a total outsider from many years in the future, [laughs] I couldn't see any way that it would be possible for him to come back into the situation, and I think was more she was acting out of trying to save his reputation or something at this point.

MS. BRINGLE: It wasn't just to save his reputation. It was to save our butt. Excuse me.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, it was - this - Penland was her life -

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- you know, and she was in control.

MS. KIRWIN: He was happy to - I mean, he had made the decision and was willing to resign.

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: It was Jane that wouldn't let it go.

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah. In my estimation, she wouldn't let it go, but on the other hand, he didn't say, "Stop," but he'd never been able to say "stop" to her, you know, "Don't do this," I think.

MS. KIRWIN: Just - before we get into the search committee there was something else that came up that seems to clarify a lot of things for me when I was talking to Tru Kelly. Last time I was down here, she had mentioned - and I knew that the grounds were Catholic, and I'm Catholic myself, and Tru had mentioned that there was this element of kind of a Catholicism at Penland, an idea of some sort of religious retreat or community that entered into this. Did you ever get the sense that their - that they had a - you know, this strong religious belief entered into their ideas of forming a crafts community?

MS. BRINGLE: No.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MS. BRINGLE: I never got that.

MS. KIRWIN: There was something that Tru mentioned to me, and having been to other religious communities, I was wondering whether this ever came in to play in the management of Penland, to think of it in terms of their religion. You don't think so?

MS. BRINGLE: I don't think so. I mean, the only thing I ever heard in terms of their religion was other people had said - a couple other people had said in the past that if Bill hadn't have been Catholic, he'd probably divorced Jane. [They laugh.] I never said that, but I heard other people say that.

MS. KIRWIN: I'm sorry I never met Bill Brown before.

MS. BRINGLE: Before, yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: Because I've really only heard of Bill through other people and a lot through Jane, so I haven't -

MS. BRINGLE: Well, see, Jane - I mean, Jane always - and she was running things I think for a long time, but Bill - Bill also had - I mean, Bill was running things, too, in the sense of the people that came here and that kind of thing, and Jane often resented many of the people that came here. Edwina will tell you that when Edwina came early on - and Bill asked her to come - that Jane really resented Edwina being here and her coming here. And -

MS. KIRWIN: Why?

MS. BRINGLE: -- was - was treated - Jane treated her terrible, and Jane did that to - Edwina wasn't the only one that Jane treated terribly. I mean, there were many younger people that were students here that - what would happen in my estimation was students come and they're young and sort of needy, and Jane would sort of mother them and, you know, they'd go to her as - you know, and talk to her about things, so in that sense maybe she considered herself the mother confessor. That might have been a part of it that Tru was talking about. And then, as the younger people grew up emotionally, needed Jane less, and became more of their own person, then she would begin to resent them and get rid of them. They wouldn't be around anymore, or they wouldn't be scholarship students anymore.

MS. KIRWIN: And she had that kind of influence?

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah. I mean - I mean, that's what -- that's what happened to some of them, with some, no, but, you know, I would pick - I was helping pick the scholarship students, too. I mean, there were a couple of scholarship students that, you know, she wasn't supposed to be picking the scholarship students, but she helped run the scholarship program, too, so, I mean, she did certainly pick some of them. But I would pick some of them to be part of the clay program, and she'd come to me and she'd say, "You can't have them back," and I'd say, "Why not? Why can't I have them back?" Well, then she'd - for some whatever reason - well, it was personality conflict. It didn't have to do with their work or who they were.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You know. It would be a personality conflict between them, because they were a good student, and because I was picking them for the clay program, I'd say, "I'm going to pick them anyway. They're coming back."

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And she resented me. Part of why she resented me was, as far as Bill was concerned, I was fine. I wasn't - you know, Bill always supported me in whatever I did, or she would have had me out of here. You know, as far as she was concerned, she would have had me moved out, but that was never true of Bill. It was - you know, it was just the way it was.

MS. KIRWIN: So you did an exhaustive search and couldn't find anyone?

MS. BRINGLE: So then we did another search.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And that's when we came up with Vern, who was highly recommended by the person who was the director at Anderson Ranch, too, and, you know, we got letters and such, and when Vern was hired it was known that he probably would not be here longer than five years because that was his pattern -

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, uh-huh [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- was to be at places about four or five years. And frankly, you know -

MS. KIRWIN: And that doesn't seem like such a bad idea after having -

MS. BRINGLE: No, having had somebody for 20.

MS. KIRWIN: -- long-term directors.

MS. BRINGLE: And truthfully, in all honesty, as far as I'm concerned, since you're always going to get my honest opinion anyway, if Vern had just have been here two or three years, it would have been fine, but he was here too long.

MS. KIRWIN: He - how long was he here?

MS. BRINGLE: Over five years.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] He liked it better than other places.

MS. BRINGLE: He couldn't find another job.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh.

MS. BRINGLE: He started looking for another job after he had been here about four years.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, he would leave here and go off from here and not tell anybody where he was going. You know, he was just traveling and probably looking for another job.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] Well, it must have been - it was a very difficult - it's a very difficult spot for anybody to begin to take over and in a community so divided over this issue of the director. How do you think those years were with Vern? What - what do you recall of his leadership that you'd like to comment on, good and bad?

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, actually, in the beginning I think it was all right, and in the - then, you know, after I got to learn more about Vern and his way of doing things, I - I felt like I couldn't trust him. He'd say one thing to me and other people, you know, and I'd hear what he'd say to people, and I knew it wasn't true as far as, you know, just following through with things and saying he was going to do something and he didn't do it.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You know, or he'd say he had done something and he really hadn't done it. I think he was a good idea person, and I think he brought some good things to the school, but in the end it was certainly time for him to be gone. I think, frankly, he took advantage of the school and he would go travel and he would do stuff. I think he did stuff personally that wasn't anything to do with school business, and the school paid for it. I don't have any proof of that, and I don't think that you should even - I don't know if you should even write this down. I've already said it on tape, but -

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: -- you know.

MS. KIRWIN: Did he noticeably change the program?

MS. BRINGLE: No, you know, he would have dramatically changed the program if he could have, but he found out that the school runs very well with the kind of program that it had. I think there were - Vern has a lot of ideas and he did bring -

MS. KIRWIN: He seems much more oriented toward criticism of crafts.

MS. BRINGLE: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: And one of the things that I noticed of - I'm sure there are lots of new things that he brought to the school, but one was the critic in residents, and also, the session catalogs changed dramatically.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], they did because he wanted them to be booklets -

MS. KIRWIN: There was a lot of -

MS. BRINGLE: -- with writing in them.

MS. KIRWIN: There were some heavy-duty essays -

MS. BRINGLE: Yes, yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: -- there. Matthew Kangas wrote one.

MS. BRINGLE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] He wanted it to be a Penland journal with critical writing.

MS. KIRWIN: What did you think about that direction? You just -

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, I think it's all right to do that, but it was a huge expense for the school. I'm not sure if that's the place to do it.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: I think doing a little bit is fine. I mean, I don't disagree with that, but he also liked to write, too. He - he likes to - he likes to get involved in anything that gets him and his name out there, so he was serving on every board possible that he could be on and get on -

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: -- you know, to be a part of other things. He doesn't - he has a hard time sort of sitting in one place, I think. You know, he wants to be off in every direction.

MS. KIRWIN: It seems like he'd be a very good person, knowing his background and his involvement with so many - hands-on involvement with so many different crafts, that you'd think that - I mean, I could see why you've made - why you made that decision.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: It was a tough job for anyone to take on, though.

MS. BRINGLE: No, well, I mean, the search committee, looking through everybody that applied, he came out on top of anything else.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And Richardson Rice, who was the interim director just, I mean, he really fought for Vern to be in that job. You know?

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative] When Vern came, were you still involved very much with suggesting the faculty for ceramics -

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: -- and continued in that role?

MS. BRINGLE: I continued in that role, and actually, at that point, too, and all along before then, I had been helping out in the clay studio with ordering and supplies and helping with the monitors and that whole thing. And one summer there was this big blow-up in the clay studio between one of the monitors and one of the faculty members, and Vern said something to me about it, and I said, "Well, I'll go talk to them," and so I did. And anyway, he said, well, he would talk to them, and then something else went on. But see, Vern wanted to run - he wanted to have his hand in everything at the beginning, but then he didn't follow through with it, like run the clay program, but not really run the clay program, that kind of thing. So he got mad at me about something ridiculous, truthfully, and he wrote me a letter saying that because I was a board member it was a conflict of interest for me to be helping in the clay studio, or something like that.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: So I wrote him a letter back and I said, "That's fine. I quit. Find somebody else to do it. I don't need to be doing this," I told him. I went to him and I said, "I don't need to be doing this. This is volunteer work for me. I only do this to help. It's very time consuming," you know. I just quit. Well, I mean, he couldn't believe that I so easily said, "I quit." You know, but before that, at one point he had said, "Well, I want to see about hiring all the faculty," because there were all of us - different people all over, hiring different faculty members.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative] and that had worked pretty well in the past.

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: That was the way that things worked.

MS. BRINGLE: So then he said that he wanted to do it, and I would call all over the country and I would say - and besides that, I never even went up and used the school telephone. I paid for it all myself on my own phone. I never even asked the school to reimburse me, as well as most people who did it, didn't either. They just did it for the school. So I said, "Fine." He said he wanted to do it all himself. I said, "Fine," so I gathered all my papers together, all the phone numbers and everything, and I said - you know, I'd say, "Okay, these are the people I've - have said they would come the next year or the next year," and I did all that, put all that information together, and I went in and put it on my desk - on his desk, and I said, "Here's all the information," and I turned around and left. You know, well, at some point later, he realized how much time it takes to do this. It's a tremendous amount of time and organization, and finally, at one point he said, "Cynthia, would you call some of these people," so then I started doing some of it again. And then Joy started doing it, and then I would still -

MS. KIRWIN: His wife?

MS. BRINGLE: His wife. And then I would still do some of it.

MS. KIRWIN: What role did his wife play in the administration of the school?

MS. BRINGLE: His wife was hired by the school. And she -

MS. KIRWIN: Well, that's very odd after the -

MS. BRINGLE: It is. They said they weren't going to do it, and they did it. You know, they hired her, and at that point it seemed to be fine, but in all honesty, I mean, what she was doing was covering for Vern in many cases. He'd be off doing other things or he'd do something else. She'd cover for him and make up excuses for him, too.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And do stuff.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: In all honesty, if he had been around - he - if he had been totally out of the picture, she could-probably could have run the school, and she probably could have run it very well.

MS. KIRWIN: Hmm [laughs].

MS. BRINGLE: But it got so you couldn't trust what she said, either, as far as what was going on.

MS. KIRWIN: How did the -

MS. BRINGLE: And it got to - at the end, they really - they - they both really resented me, because, I mean, in the beginning Vern had asked me a lot of -

MS. KIRWIN: Did Vern even know any of these clay people that he was -

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, he knew some of them.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, he did?

MS. BRINGLE: But no, he didn't know all of them. But the thing is, is in the beginning Vern would ask

me, you know, about the school and how things ran and what went on and I answered a lot of questions and spent a lot of time doing that. But then also, as a board member, when I saw things going on at the school, I would go and question him. I'd say, "What is going on here?" because I wasn't just going to let it ride because I was - I felt in a different position, and he really resented - and she resented me asking about things. And - because I was on the board and knew what was going on in some cases, you know.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], because of your experience here they resented that?

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah. Well, no, they resented anybody questioning them about anything.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] So then he - then he was actively looking for another job -

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: -- realizing that this wasn't his ideal situation?

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: And Joy was very much involved -

MS. BRINGLE: In the school.

MS. KIRWIN: -- in the school at this point.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: So where did -

MS. BRINGLE: Hunter was the assistant director at that point.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, and Hunter had taught here before.

MS. BRINGLE: Hunter had taught here for seven or eight years.

MS. KIRWIN: That's right.

MS. BRINGLE: And then he'd been hired as the assistant director.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, when did that - when did that position open?

MS. BRINGLE: And Vern had - and Vern, at one point, was ready to let him go.

MS. KIRWIN: Hunter?

MS. BRINGLE: Hunter. Hunter was here sort of as a - I don't remember the exact time span. Hunter was here sort of, you know, to try it out for a year, or something like that, and then Vern had talked - had said something to me and other people on the board about, "Well, maybe Hunter's not going to stay." Well, to me that meant maybe Vern doesn't want Hunter to stay, because he didn't want Hunter to have any authority here. I mean, he'd give Hunter authority, and then he'd take it away to do certain things, so when I heard that that was maybe going on, I went to - I went to Vern and I said, "You shouldn't - you should encourage Hunter to stay. It's very good," and a couple other board members did the same thing and anyway, Hunter stayed.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative] When was that position created, assistant director?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, Bill had before sort of had people that were "assistant directors," in the past.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh.

MS. BRINGLE: It wasn't something new.

MS. KIRWIN: I didn't know that. Who filled those roles before?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, a guy named Charlie Dysert [phonetic] was here sort of in that position with Bill Brown.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And Jerry Horning was here in that position.

MS. KIRWIN: And what did they do for Bill, as -

MS. BRINGLE: Tried to fill in the gaps to - with Bill, it was loose.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah [laughs].

MS. BRINGLE: But there's always plenty to do in this place, you know.

MS. KIRWIN: So then, when Vern did find another job, Hunter was there.

MS. BRINGLE: Well, Hunter was there, and they had the search committee.

MS. KIRWIN: Were you on that search committee?

MS. BRINGLE: No, I wasn't on that search committee. I think I would have told them, "no." I didn't need to be on that one. [They laugh.] I wasn't on that one. But anyway, then they had another - then they had a search committee to look for somebody else for the job, and even though Hunter was certainly thought of at that point in terms of who - someone who would maybe take the job, it wasn't fair to him, probably, or fair to the school not to have a search committee and do a regular search, and so they did. They did a search. They interviewed a couple people for the job, and Hunter was chosen. And I actually sat in - I was asked to sit in on the interviews, which I did. So - and then when Vern - when Vern got his other job, he immediately left. Joy stayed on a little while longer, but Vern immediately left. About a week later he packed up and left. [They laugh.]

MS. KIRWIN: So it seems as if, at least as an outside observer, that Hunter has done an awful lot to get the community back together again -

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: Because he was a teacher when Bill was there, and he sort of bridged the years.

MS. BRINGLE: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: And he was more of -

MS. BRINGLE: It was also just the kind of person that Hunter is, too.

MS. KIRWIN: -- the insider. Yeah, well, could you talk a little bit about him?

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, the thing is - I mean, I mean Hunter is - first of all, he's good at managing. I mean, he has the school on a good track financially. He's, you know, got all of that in line, which puts the school on a financial basis to be able to continue. He's been in the crafts all his life, so he knows - not all his life, but for many years. And so he's taught here in the past and he knows a lot of people. But also, everybody knows that you can go to Hunter and you can talk to him about things, and he's going to be honest with you about it. And he's the same with everybody. You know, he doesn't - he doesn't say something to somebody and not follow through with it, whereas you never could be sure sometimes before. You couldn't be sure with Vern. I mean, lots of students would say, "Well, Vern said," or faculty would say, "Well, Vern said we could do so-and-so and such-and-such, and why didn't I come back and do this or that?" I said, "Listen, get it in writing."

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: You know? I said, "It's not necessarily - I'm going to tell you. I've watched this. It's not necessarily true that this is going to happen. It's just not the way it is. It's not that it's not a good idea and it shouldn't happen." I said, "It just won't, because that isn't the way he operates."

MS. KIRWIN: What do you think of the school's new move toward trying to establish a two-year program and to be accredited?

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, they don't want it accredited.

MS. KIRWIN: Well -

MS. BRINGLE: They want a certificate.

MS. KIRWIN: Yesterday, Connie Sedberry was talking to me about accreditation, the school seeking accreditation. Maybe she meant a certificate.

MS. BRINGLE: Well, see, I don't - if they're doing that, then I don't know about it.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] Okay. Well -

MS. BRINGLE: If they're doing that, I don't know about it, but I think that would be -

MS. KIRWIN: I had talked to her about two -

MS. BRINGLE: I think it would be the biggest mess in the world to try to get this place accredited.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MS. BRINGLE: They go, "And you do what," you know.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, I was talking to her about the two-year program, which led to a discussion about perhaps eventually seeking accreditation so that they -

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, well, years down the line they may decide that they want to do that. But I think in terms of trying to have a program and a certificate, I think it's going to be fine. I think it's going to be a mixed bag in the beginning. It's going to take a number of years to get it off the ground. It's going to be hard to find, in the beginning, students who want to come and be here for that length of time. There'll be a few, but I think it'll be - and it says so in the - some of the information I've seen printed

in - that some people will just come for one session. There'll be a lot of people like that, still, that'll come -

MS. KIRWIN: So it will be a two-year program that people will participate in to a certain degree?

MS. BRINGLE: Certain degree, I think. I could be totally wrong, but I - you know, having known the students that come and watched them and done all that, I think that's what'll happen.

MS. KIRWIN: You're no longer on the board now?

MS. BRINGLE: No, I served two terms, and then you go off.

MS. KIRWIN: What's the length of a term?

MS. BRINGLE: Four years.

MS. KIRWIN: Four years?

MS. BRINGLE: So I was on there for eight years. And then you go off and then - you know, they can ask you at another point to come back on if they want to, but it's fine. I mean, you know, I served two terms, and that's fine. I mean, I don't feel the need to go back on, you know. Years down the road, it would be all right, but in all honesty, when I was serving on the Penland board, part of the time I was on other boards, too. And frankly, as a producing craftsperson, serving on one board at a time is enough.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. I wanted to ask you -

MS. BRINGLE: And I just started my third term of the North Carolina Arts Council.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about your participation with them. What exactly led you to do serving on the North Carolina board, Arts Council?

MS. BRINGLE: This is the state arts council board, and so it's 24 people, and the arts council in Raleigh has a staff of - I think probably about 20 people, which covers all of the arts, music, dance. It also covers community arts, everything to do with schools. You know, that's all -

MS. KIRWIN: Museum programs?

MS. BRINGLE: Everything. You know, well, it's visual, folklife, literature, music, dance, theater, community arts. I probably left something out. But anyway, those are all the programs, and all the board members serve on one or two of those. Usually, most of them serve on at least two of those panels, so what we do is we have to deal with policy, emphasis on certain programs. We go over grant applications for funding. It has certainly made me a lot more knowledgeable about the state and what goes on, which for me - I mean, I've learned so much about what happens, and the opportunities that the Arts Council have - gives to people for programs and small towns and organizations - and they're very good in terms of encouraging groups to apply for funds and making suggestions to them, and trying to up the quality of the programs that go on.

MS. KIRWIN: Do they just - do they dole out the individual artist grants?

MS. BRINGLE: They do individual artist grants, too, which -

MS. KIRWIN: Do you applied to them? I mean, I'm not - while you're on the - you - I'm sure you can't -

MS. BRINGLE: When you're on the board - you can't apply when you're on the board.

MS. KIRWIN: But you had - had you gone through -

MS. BRINGLE: No, I've never applied before.

MS. KIRWIN: -- that process before?

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-mm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: So this gives you a great deal of insight to -

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, but actually, the individual grants are not done by Arts Council coordinators. Those are always outside panelists that do those, which I think is a better way to do it, because that means when somebody calls me up and tells me that they didn't get a grant, "Well, I didn't know," or "I wasn't chosen," and "Why not?"

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: But it's also nice because, as I go around other places and I see certain stuff going on, I can say, "Hey, you should call up the Arts Council and talk to them. They can help you."

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative] Have you been involved with Jan Brooks at all in her efforts to try to launch a journal of craft criticism? She's in Asheville. Are you familiar with her? I've just talked to her a little bit on the phone and I've run into her at different conferences.

MS. BRINGLE: Jan Brooks-Lloyd?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MS. BRINGLE: She's in Charlotte?

MS. KIRWIN: Well, oh, maybe she is. I guess I had tried to meet her once in Asheville.

MS. BRINGLE: Right, she's in Charlotte. I know her, but no, I'm not - I haven't been any part of that.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, Lord forbid that anybody would ask me to write something. [They laugh.]

MS. KIRWIN: Well, you say that you have been involved with some journals and you are -

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: -- contributing editor -

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: -- of one.

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, but I just try to do it as little as possible. [They laugh.]

MS. KIRWIN: Do you have - do you want to talk at all about venues for writing about clay and reproducing work and articles, say, about your own work? What is your opinion of some of the level

of writing about clay in this country? Do you think that there's a need for a journal devoted to serious criticism of clay and do you think that -

MS. BRINGLE: Well, see, that's what American Ceramics thinks they're doing.

MS. KIRWIN: Do you think that American Ceramics or Ceramics Monthly is doing enough in this area?

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I think Studio Potter is doing some. I certainly think American Ceramics is doing some, but a lot of times - I mean, for me -

MS. KIRWIN: Studio Potter is the - is the magazine that you're -

MS. BRINGLE: Studio Potter is the magazine out of New Hampshire. It comes out twice a year.

MS. KIRWIN: -- and you are connected with in a way?

MS. BRINGLE: Yes, yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: In a sense, in a manner of speaking, you are -

MS. BRINGLE: Yes, in a manner of speaking.

MS. KIRWIN: -- contributing editor.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], and American Ceramics, which I read a little of sometimes, but part of it just gets too esoteric for me. I am too basic to listen to all of that and to read it. I know - I mean, for some reason, somebody is making something because their mother did something, you know, I don't -

MS. KIRWIN: So you're not part of the audience for these magazines -

MS. BRINGLE: I'm not as -

MS. KIRWIN: -- for that kind of writing?

MS. BRINGLE: No, I'm not a part of the audience. I don't think people - on the whole, the people who are the audience for those aren't the people out producing crafts full time.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: They are the university college people who are more the audience and the collectors. I may be wrong about that, but that's what it seems like. And Ceramics Monthly doesn't have much critical writing. Every once in a while it does, but more basic, you know, what's going on. It's a good magazine to sort of see where everybody is and what's happening.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And of course -

MS. KIRWIN: Do you keep up - it seems as if you - doing those workshops and being at Penland, that you really don't need the magazines to keep you current with who is doing what? You see a lot and you meet a lot of people.

MS. BRINGLE: You see a lot, but you - the magazines do keep you more up with it. I mean, there are so many people out there today, and so many new people out there. I mean it used to be - you know, 15 years ago, you knew half of them. Well, you don't anymore.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MS. BRINGLE: I mean, the thing is, is that people like myself, who have been doing it for 25 years, are now considered the old guard, you know. I mean - or maybe we're the middle ground, you know, where the people who have been doing it 35 and 40 years, and those guys who are out there, they're retiring now. You know, that is the old guard. I mean, people like Don Wright and Bob Turner, who are retired and - but wonderful people.

MS. KIRWIN: Do you go to a lot of clay conferences?

MS. BRINGLE: I go to some of them. I don't go to all of them. I missed the one last year which I really wanted to go to, but found it necessary to do something else, and I'm going to Philadelphia, you know. I'm not sure if I would be going or not. They asked me to do - I'm a - I'm doing a program there one afternoon, so when you say yes, you'll do something, that means you're going to go. [Laughs]

MS. KIRWIN: You're going to go. And what's the conference again, for the -

MS. BRINGLE: On March, like, 3rd.

MS. KIRWIN: -- the organization?

MS. BRINGLE: The National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, NCECA.

MS. KIRWIN: NCECA? Okay.

MS. BRINGLE: So I'm in the program. I've been on the program a number of times before.

MS. KIRWIN: I was interested to - to see, even in the '60s, I've seen, you show your work with your sister.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: She shows her weavings and you show your pottery. Do you think that there's - I mean, they really look good together. I'm just looking at the Bringle & Bringle poster you have on the side of your refrigerator.

MS. BRINGLE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: Do you and your sister share a sense of a certain aesthetic about - she in fibers and you in clay - that you can put your finger on?

MS. BRINGLE: No, but I - the thing is that I think that the - I mean, fiber is very touchable, the things that she does, the wall blankets, and the pillows and the hangings and stuff like that, and I think fiber is warm to look at, and I think clay is, too.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And the colors in fiber and clay often go well together, so they - I think they show well together, to have the two different media together. But when Edwina first - when she started

weaving, and actually, she hadn't been weaving for a very long time, probably a couple years, but she was still doing stuff, you know, two or three years she'd been doing it, I was asked to do a show somewhere, and I said to the woman running the show, I said, "Well, you know," I said, "is anybody else going to be in the show, too?" They said, "No, we just want your pots." I said, "Well, I don't have that much stuff for the wall." I said, "My sister's a weaver." I said, "Well, what if I bring some of her things to have things on the wall?" And she said, "Well, that's fine." So I went to Edwina and I said, "You better get busy, because you're going to be in a show with me." And the first time I did that, she went, "What?" [Laughs.] I said, "You'd better get busy. If you're going to weave, this is it."

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: So that's how we started having shows together. And it looks nice together.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, they really do. They really do. A lot of time - I just wanted to ask you, if someone were to see your pots - and we did this last night going around, I don't know so much about ceramics, but you can look at something, if you know it - look at it and say, "This is a pot by so-and-so," or you recognize it right away.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: When somebody sees a Bringle pot, what are those characteristics that you think of that you could determine would be a Bringle pot? Do you see it in your -

MS. BRINGLE: I don't know. I guess it - well, it just goes back to - it's probably the same with everybody. It's the form and the decoration that's recognized as mine in many cases. In other cases, in all honesty, it's not recognized, because people who go in my showroom often say to me, "How many people work here?"

MS. KIRWIN: Really?

MS. BRINGLE: I say, "One." It has to do with the diversity of firing, and in some cases of form, too, but diversity of firing. I mean, there's stoneware and wood-fired pieces, and wood-fired soft pieces, and Raku pieces, and everything from coffee mugs to architectural wall paintings, and some pieces are really sculpture. There are a few of them that are just totally sculpture down there. Most of them are really functional.

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: So they can't imagine that one person works this many different ways. Well, it's always - I've always worked in diverse ways, and it just gets more diverse. It's just like Jean coming in here last night and said, "Who did this platter on the wall?"

MS. KIRWIN: Right. Right.

MS. BRINGLE: I said, "Well, I did that." Well, it's totally different than she thinks of my work.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And she's been in my showroom quite a bit, and knows my work. But people who know decoration from the way I do it, might - would see - maybe would see it.

MS. KIRWIN: In that piece?

MS. BRINGLE: In that piece. So it is pretty diverse, and that isn't going to change.

MS. KIRWIN: Do you think that's because - in some ways because of being at Penland, and being exposed to so many different people coming and going that you try to experiment in lots of different ways, or have you always done that?

MS. BRINGLE: No, it's just always the way I have worked in clay. I mean, lots of people, when they went out and set up a studio, they make a line of ware where they decide to make a mug a certain way, and a pitcher or certain form, and from the very beginning, I never worked like that. I mean, I can make you a dinnerware set, you know. I've done 12-to-18 piece place settings of dinnerware for people, and they all match. They aren't all decorated the same way, because I won't - I just won't do that. I won't put the same line one quarter of an inch in on the dinner plate. You know, if I'm going to decorate dinner plates, they may all be the same glaze and the same colors, but they will all be different. But I like to sit down and throw 12 pitchers and no two are alike. It's more exciting to me to do it that way, and that's the part of being an artist for me.

MS. KIRWIN: It does seem that you have a preference for stoneware. Is that true? Do you just like working all different kinds of clay?

MS. BRINGLE: I do. Yeah, I'm doing a lot of wood-fired pieces now. But you - I think at that - you know, those of us who do functional ware have always done more stoneware, because it's more durable and usable, you know, and you're selling pots to be used every day, and, you know, last year - a year ago, we had to clean out our mother's house. Well, I mean, there were pots in my mother's house that I had made for my parents - in the '60s - still being used.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: And you look in history, what has remained? Pottery.

MS. KIRWIN: It's the most durable -

MS. BRINGLE: It's the most durable.

MS. KIRWIN: -- thing, artifacts, yeah.

MS. BRINGLE: That's why I always tell the students to be careful about what they buy.

MS. KIRWIN: It will be dug up [laughs] a million years from now.

MS. BRINGLE: It's going to be dug up, and do you want this dug up?

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: I said, "Look in museums," you know, there's a lot of stuff that potters threw out that's in museums now. They dug it up. "This is a kiln disaster," it says on it. I mean, ancient pots in the museum in Heraklion in Greece, you know. "This was a kiln disaster found and all these pots melted together." The potter didn't want that dug up.

MS. KIRWIN: You do have a lot of beautiful surface decoration on your work, and I - at one point, you did say this goes back to your initial impulse to paint.

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I'm still doing it. It's just on three-dimensional forms now.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. BRINGLE: But it's still painting. I mean, that's the way I feel about it.

MS. KIRWIN: Do you do a lot of incising on your pots still?

MS. BRINGLE: Carving? Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], carving.

MS. BRINGLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

MS. KIRWIN: What's your principal outlet for your work? Is it your own studio?

MS. BRINGLE: Me. And for larger pieces, galleries.

MS. KIRWIN: Do you have a gallery that represents you when -

MS. BRINGLE: Well, I have galleries where I have work, but I don't have one that primarily represents me. In all honesty, I don't do as much PR as I should, or get out there and take stuff. I just - I'd probably rather do the work thing than go out there and do that. You still have to do - I still have to do it. I've got to write letters and send out slides and take slides like everybody else has to do. You just tear your hair out. Some -

MS. KIRWIN: This does seem to be a good spot to get people to come to your studio and you have at least a changing audience through the summer.

MS. BRINGLE: Well, yeah, and actually, the changing audience is a lot of summer people around here.

MS. KIRWIN: But it brings a steady stream of customers by, so that's good.

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, and - and there are so many craftspeople in the area now that people come and go around to different studios. And granted, I mean, Penland students do come down sometimes, too. Mostly they come to look. But I try to do open house during the summer for the students, to give them an opportunity to see the studio and me to answer questions, see the kilns, that kind of thing.

MS. KIRWIN: I've pretty much asked all my questions.

MS. BRINGLE: Good.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.] Having kept you for an hour and a half. I want to thank you. Do you want to add anything?

MS. BRINGLE: No, but did you - and I'm sure you got from the school the Mountain Milestonebooklets.

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MS. BRINGLE: Did you get a bunch of those? Yeah?

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative] I tried to find a complete - we did compile a pretty good set

between the school and Bill Ford. He had some that filled in - yeah; those were really interesting for the early history of the school.

MS. BRINGLE: Yeah, I have a few of them. I thought sure you had them. The only reason I have a few of them is because they were getting ready to throw them out up at the school.

MS. KIRWIN: That's what I hear from many people.

MS. BRINGLE: A lot of stuff got thrown out up at the school, and I took - I got some things that were getting ready to be thrown out.

MS. KIRWIN: That's what I attribute to large gaps in the records of the school that so much was thrown out, at least from what people tell me that's what happened.

MS. BRINGLE: Oh, no, it was all story and name and places and -

[END TAPE 3 SIDE A]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...March 24, 2008