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Oral history interview with Marilyn Levine,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Marilyn Levine on May 15, 2002. The interview took place in Oakland, California, and was conducted by Glenn Adamson for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Marilyn Levine and an outside editor have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

name is Glenn Adamson. I'm the interviewer and I'm going to be talking with Marilyn for the next couple of hours about her life and work. It is May 15, 2002, and we're sitting in Marilyn's home, which adjoins her studio here in Oakland.

And I guess, maybe, the first thing I'll ask you, Marilyn, is how long have you been in this space?

MARILYN LEVINE: Well, about 26 years.

MR. ADAMSON: Mm-hmm.

MS. LEVINE: It was an old warehouse when I moved here.

MR. ADAMSON: The whole thing?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, everything you see was not here.

MR. ADAMSON: And you built it all?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, I built it. Well, I built my space.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. LEVINE: And then I became a partner that -- you know, in the ownership of the building, along with Peter Voukos.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So, where were you before you came to Oakland?

MS. LEVINE: I was in Salt Lake City for three years. Before that, I was in Regina, Saskatchewan.

MR. ADAMSON: But you weren't born there?

MS. LEVINE: I was born in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

MR. ADAMSON: Alberta, right? And what year was that?

MS. LEVINE: 1935.

MR. ADAMSON: 1935. Okay. And how long did you stay there after you were born?

MS. LEVINE: In Alberta?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. LEVINE: Well, I grew up in Alberta. I grew up near Calgary mainly, and I went to school -- all my school was in Calgary, public school. University -- I went to the University of Alberta in Edmonton for six years and became a chemist, and married a chemist and ran into nepotism rules. I couldn't get a job as a chemist anymore, and that's why I got into ceramics.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Well, let's back up this stuff.

Can you tell me a little bit about your parents and family?

MS. LEVINE: My mother was a -- was my mother. She had been a schoolteacher, briefly, before she was married.

My father was an engineer. They got married in the Depression, when there was only allowed to be one wage earner in the family, so she had to give up her job.

MR. ADAMSON: You mean there was an actual law about it?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, right.

MR. ADAMSON: So that everyone would have work?

MS. LEVINE: Right. I guess so. I wasn't really aware of the rules in those days -- [laughs] -- having not been born yet. But that's what I was told; she had to give up her job. And she notified the person who was waiting for her job, so he could get in line there, and then I was born the following year. And the following year after that my father changed jobs -- was offered a new job in Edmonton; moved to Edmonton. So I lived in Edmonton till I was three.

MR. ADAMSON: So what was he doing for a living in Edmonton?

MS. LEVINE: He worked for a meat-packing firm as an executive. He'd been with CPR before that, Canadian Pacific Railway. And --

MR. ADAMSON: As an engineer, or --

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, as an engineer. He -- well, it was in the Depression, and he was afraid, evidently, that his job would be done away with. You know, the writing looked to be on the wall, and he got offered another job as an executive in this meat-packing firm, and so he took that job. It turns out his job at the CPR wasn't eliminated, but he didn't know that at the time. And it was many years later that he got back into sort of an engineering thing.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, were your parents Canadian?

MS. LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Born and raised?

MS. LEVINE: Well, it was interesting. My father was born in Canada of American parents, and my mother was born in the States of Canadian parents.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] So, sort of half-and-half?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, but they were Canadian citizens. My mother gave up her U.S. citizenship when she voted.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And what kind of a name is Levine?

MS. LEVINE: That's my married name.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, that's your married name.

MS. LEVINE: It's Jewish.

MR. ADAMSON: Jewish. But your maiden name was --

MS. LEVINE: Hayes.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, which is English?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, English or Scottish or something.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So you were one year old when you went to Edmonton?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, something like that.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, so you don't, obviously, remember.

MS. LEVINE: I remember a little bit before I left Edmonton when I was three. I remember the houses I lived in. There was a white house and a -- and a yellow house. I vaguely remember them. I remember a little sand pile in the backyard.

MR. ADAMSON: Your first encounter with -- with earth, right? [Laughs.] So, you left Edmonton when you three,

after only two years?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, I was almost four. It was in the fall of 1939, I believe, that we moved to Calgary. So I was, you know, three and three-quarters, I think. I'm not sure what date it was, but there wasn't snow on the ground, I remember.

MR. ADAMSON: That narrows it down up there. And was it another job change that you made you --

MS. LEVINE: No, my father was promoted to head of the division for the country, for that division he was in.

MR. ADAMSON: And your mother wasn't working at all at that point?

MS. LEVINE: No, no. Nobody's mom worked in those days, you know? I mean, times are so different now. None of my friends had mothers that worked.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Well, we'll get to that later. So you grew up in Calgary, really?

MS. LEVINE: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: And what kind of an experience did you have growing up there? Did you -- were you a kid that enjoyed school?

MS. LEVINE: You know, I didn't really think of it one way or another. I didn't think I enjoyed it or didn't enjoy it. I mean, it was just what kids did; they went to school. And I was -- I was always the youngest kid in the class. I was a little shy, and I always figured I would grow out of my shyness when I got as old as the other kids. And of course, they always got older. [Laughter.]

MR. ADAMSON: They stayed ahead of you the whole time.

MS. LEVINE: They always stayed ahead.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you have any interest in art when you were that age?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, kind of, I did. My mother and father both had dabbled in art a bit. We had paintings on the wall. I had some drawings that my mother had done. And my -- we had a painting on the wall that my father had painted -- an oil painting, and a painting that my grandmother had done, an oil painting, you know?

So, I mean, they all had dabbled a little bit, and my father's painting apparently -- it was a pretty nice painting, but it turns out, you know, he'd copied it from a calendar or something or other. But he met a painter who lived across the street when he was a kid, and so he got into painting. So I kind of -- it just was around all the time. My parents -- my mother always told me I was artistic, so I thought, well, I guess I am or something.

MR. ADAMSON: So you had that planted in your head from an early age?

MS. LEVINE: Sort of, yeah. I mean, I had always figured I -- yeah, sort of.

MR. ADAMSON: That's interesting. But you decided to become a chemist.

MS. LEVINE: Well, Alberta schools didn't teach art much, you know. Our Grade 6 teacher gave us a little bit of art. We had one half of a half-day or something where we could bring in an apple and paint it with some watercolors. Grade 7 was -- art was coloring in the mimeographed title page of your social studies notes with "short, broad strokes."

MR. ADAMSON: Weird.

MS. LEVINE: Oh, yes. They had to be short, broad strokes. You start at the top left of the apple, then you made quarter-inch long strokes vertically, only going from top to bottom, never going back up again, all the way across the apple. Then you started on the left side of the apple again and you went to the next line and you colored it. That was Grade 7.

MR. ADAMSON: Systematic.

MS. LEVINE: [Laughs.] In Grade 11, there was art at the high school I went to. I went to an academic high school. There was an art class that was an option, and I took that. And it was a 35-minute period, and it was taught by the health teacher and the phys ed -- health and phys ed teacher. And we copied a magazine ad, and we learned to letter with serifs, one of them. That was art.

MR. ADAMSON: But you enjoyed it.

MS. LEVINE: No, I mean, it didn't seem right for me, really, but that's the way it was. And so what I really liked in high school was the sciences, chemistry and math. Math was really my best subject by far. It was very easy for me. It was the only subject I never studied -- I never studied or anything. I mean, how would you study math, anyways? I wouldn't know how one studies math. I had no idea what you could do with math. I mean, girls weren't given career counseling those days, but I had an idea of what a person could do with chemistry, so I went into chemistry.

MR. ADAMSON: It seemed more applied, yeah.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, you could do some research, you know. I wanted to be a research chemist.

MR. ADAMSON: And was it a foregone conclusion that you would go to college?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, to me it was, because both my parents had.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. LEVINE: But my mother tried to talk me out of it.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. I think they probably had some financial difficulties maybe; I'm not sure. But she said, "You know, not everybody has to go to college. You can go to be a nurse." She wanted me to do something that was more human, like be a nurse or a pharmacist or something like that. She wasn't really in favor of chemistry.

MR. ADAMSON: But you did it anyway?

MS. LEVINE: Well, they were more in favor of art, but they thought of art as sort of more like a finishing school, like you go off to a finishing school. It was a nice thing for a girl. So I probably stayed away from it for that reason. I didn't want to be finished.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Did you, at an early age, already object to being typecast, or people telling you what to do because you were a girl instead of a boy?

MS. LEVINE: Well, I was sort of a tomboy, and I always suspected my father wanted a boy, because I was given a mechanical train and I was given a Mechano Set [similar to the Erector Set popular in the U.S.], you know, as a kid.

MR. ADAMSON: And you were an only child?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, I was for a long time. So they finally adopted a boy --

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: -- when I was eight-and-a-half years old. So I think they'd been trying before that and it hadn't happened.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. LEVINSON: So anyways, putting all that together, I always thought I was supposed to have been a boy. I always thought I'd be more appreciated if I was more of a tomboy, by my parents, somehow. I felt if I did away with the girlish things, my dad would like me better.

MR. ADAMSON: Really? That's interesting.

So, when you got to college, you started doing chemistry; and did you do art classes at the same time as a --

MS. LEVINE: Hmmm?

MR. ADAMSON: Did you do art classes at the same time?

MS. LEVINE: I took an art class in -- yeah, I did. There were very few options allowed. I mean, you had one option a year. You know, Canadian universities operated differently than U.S. universities, so we didn't have the semester system or quarter system or anything. It was a yearlong class, and you took five classes each year. And so there really wasn't much option or chance of taking other classes that weren't in your major.

But you had one option a year, and I took art. And I took a drawing class, and I remember going up to the instructor -- this was kind of funny -- I went up to the instructor, and he said -- he told me it was life drawing, and

I didn't know what life drawing was. And then I got to the first class and there was this woman was sitting on this stage, you know, with all these people in the class, older people, younger people, miscellaneous people in the class. And she was in a bathrobe, and I thought -- and there was a screen behind her -- and I thought if she went in behind the screen and she comes out nude, I'm going to just die. [They laugh.] And of course she came out nude and I didn't die. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Yet here you are.

MS. LEVINE: But it was -- you know, those were the days. That was in the '50s, long before the sexual revolution and all that stuff.

Anyways, I enjoyed that class. It was presented in a very academic way. You know, you draw the knee -- this way is how you draw a knee -- and the instructor would come up, and he'd show me how to draw a knee. I mean, how you place the thing on the paper was never addressed, how you place this figure on the paper.

MR. ADAMSON: It was just rendering.

MS. LEVINE: It was just rendering, yeah. But he would show me how my knee wasn't drawn quite right and he'd draw a knee for me, and of course his drawing -- his drawing was beautiful and mine was -- [laughs] -- you know, it was -- and then I went and took another class the next year. I took a painting class, and I enjoyed that. It turned out halfway through the year we had some half classes, they were called, in chemistry, and the class I took conflicted directly with the art class. And all classes had three hours of lecture and three hours of lab, regardless of what they were, unless they had six hours of lab. So we had -- our art classes had three hours of lecture.

MR. ADAMSON: So was that art history?

MS. LEVINE: No, no. It was just three hours of lecture. I mean, the first class -- I can hardly -- I can't really remember the second class -- well, basically because I never went. I mean, I hardly went because it conflicted with my chemistry class. But the first class -- the drawing class -- he would get up there and draw on the chalkboard, you know, how Matisse drew or how Picasso drew.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: That's interesting.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, and all this time, you know, at the time, I'd never heard of Matisse or Picasso until that --

MR. ADAMSON: So that was really your first experience --

MS. LEVINE: I'd heard of Renaissance artists, but I had not heard of modern artists. When I grew up, I had a set of the *Books of Knowledge*, and they had pictures of Rembrandt, and they had pictures of Michelangelo, and they had pictures of, you know -- so I was aware of that, but I was not aware of Picasso, Matisse when I entered that class.

MR. ADAMSON: Was there any spark when you found out about them? Did you immediately want to know more?

MS. LEVINE: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Not really.

MS. LEVINE: I mean, what we saw were these weird drawings on the blackboard.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, I guess presented that way doesn't mean much, right?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, just names. They were just names, and it wasn't till later, when I got into looking at some of this stuff more.

MR. ADAMSON: And this whole time there was no exposure to ceramics at all, correct?

MS. LEVINE: No, no, no, that came much later -- I mean, after we moved to Saskatchewan.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, okay. So at what point did you meet your husband?

MS. LEVINE: I was a graduate student in chemistry.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, so where did you go to graduate school?

MS. LEVINE: The University of Alberta. I stayed on at the same school.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And did you go right through? You didn't take time off between?

MS. LEVINE: No, no, as soon as I finished my bachelor's degree, I started with my master's. And what happened was I had a lab, my research lab, and suddenly it started raining under the ceiling. There was water dripping over my -- and it turned out it was Sid [Sidney Levine]'s lab upstairs. He had the condenser hose that had a little leak that went straight into a crack in the table and must have filled up between the floors or something. And anyways, I went up to tell -- this was at night, this happened -- I went up and I fixed his condenser -- I got a key to his lab and I fixed his condenser hose. And then the next day I went up to tell him what had happened, and that's how I met him. He was the guy that flooded out my lab. He was a post-doctoral fellow at that time.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you have a specialty in chemistry?

MS. LEVINE: I was an analytical inorganic chemist.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, inorganic.

MS. LEVINE: Inorganic, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, like crystals and metals and that sort of thing?

MS. LEVINE: Well, yeah, metals. Anything that was non-organic, not carbon based.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So at that point you started seeing each other while you were still in school?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, while I was still in graduate school, and he had just graduated with his Ph.D. from UCLA, and he got caught in a visa problem. He had gone down on what's called an exchange visitor's visa for his graduate work instead of a student visa, because the consul had advised him to do that because you could get a job then; you could earn money. But they changed the law while he was down there, and there was added a two-year foreign residency requirement. And he had a job at UCLA, but they couldn't get a waiver for him. So he came back to Canada and started working at the university up there where he'd got his master's degree and flooded up my lab. And that was -- you know, that's how we met. And we got married the day after my orals --

MR. ADAMSON: That must have been an interesting experience.

MS. LEVINE: -- and left that same day for Ottawa, where he'd lined up another postdoctoral fellowship.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you continue working in chemistry?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, my mindset then was -- what I'd been brought up for was to marry somebody and live his ego. So I married him and we went to Ottawa, and then once we got to Ottawa then I started looking around for a job. And I ended up with a job with the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys in the Geological Survey.

MR. ADAMSON: Doing what?

MS. LEVINE: I was given a job of finding a new method of analyzing for aluminum in rocks. And up till that point -- this chemistry department serviced all the geologists, and they bring in rocks, and they'd have to bring them to the chemistry department, and the chemists would analyze them and tell them how much of this and how much of that and all that was in the rock. The trouble was, aluminum is one of the highest ingredients in rocks, one of the most prevalent -- next to silicon it's the next highest percentage. And what they did was they tested for everything, subtracted it from a hundred, and what was left over was aluminum. So all the errors for every other method ended up in aluminum. So I was given the job to develop a better method of analyzing for aluminum. And I was given a lab, and I developed a method. You know, I actually wrote up a paper and everything. But then all these high-tech methods came in shortly after that, so as far as I know my method was never put into use.

MR. ADAMSON: So yours were displaced?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, or displaced by some fancy machines that came in later. Mine was chemistry, you know. We mixed solutions, and -- [laughs].

MR. ADAMSON: Did it the hard way, right?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you enjoy doing that, I mean, actually doing applied research?

MS. LEVINE: Oh yeah. I really liked chemistry, and I liked doing research, and I was just -- the one thing that was hard for me was keeping up with the literature, reading the literature that came up. There's just so much.

MR. ADAMSON: And it's technical, so it's hard to -- yeah.

So you didn't stay in Ottawa for very long, I take it?

MS. LEVINE: Stayed until -- well, for a year and a half. And then Sid got a job at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan. And so I followed him there, of course, and once we got there, I started looking for a job. Well, Regina didn't have any industry. It had the government and the university and farming.

MR. ADAMSON: You weren't going to do that.

MS. LEVINE: And the RCMP.

MR. ADAMSON: Which is the --

MS. LEVINE: The Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They're -- but they didn't need anybody. They had a forensic lab, but they didn't need anybody. So I applied to the university when I first got there, and they said, "Oh, we don't hire husbands and wives in the same department."

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. LEVINE: So that was that. And finally, at the last day of registration I thought, you know, I don't have a job, why don't I go take some classes? It was the last day of registration and I thought, yeah, I better -- you know? And I went over to the math department, and everything they offered I already took. It was a two-year college at the time. It was a -- it had been a one-year. They added the second year that year, and then the following year they added a third year and a fourth year, and graduate work, you know, on. I mean, this was in 1961 when all those instant universities happened all over the place.

So I went to the math department, but everything they offered I had already taken. I went to the physics department, but everything they offered I had already taken. And same with the chemistry department, so I went over to the art department.

MR. ADAMSON: Because that was the only thing left you were interested in doing?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, I thought, well, they had art. And so I went over to see if I could audit some classes; that was cheaper.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. LEVINE: I had no intention of being involved, really. And --

MR. ADAMSON: You were just hoping to fill the days until a job came up, basically.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, or something, I don't know. I didn't have a plan for my life, you know, because girls didn't -- weren't programmed to have plans for their life. You just live from one day to the next, or one year to the next, and all that, until the babies arrived or whatever. I didn't think of it, you know.

But anyways, I went over and auditing was half the price of registering, so I audited, whatever that is in art, you know.

MR. ADAMSON: Auditing art, yeah.

MS. LEVINE: So, I did everything everybody else did. There were six students and two instructors. The year before I was there, there were two instructors and one student. And it was actually was very nice because -- well, both instructors were painters -- and it was a School of Art. There was not a degree program. In Canada, the art schools grew up in technical schools, not in the universities. There were art departments in universities, but they -- like, you know, take four classes in art. That was your major. You take four classes. So this was an art school and you ended up with a certificate if you'd registered for credit. And we started in Art 101, all day long everyday; Art 101. In November we moved to Art 102. [Laughs.]

So it was really kind of nice in that you didn't have to turn your mind on and off as you were going from class to class in different -- you know, English class and all this kind of stuff. We just did art.

MR. ADAMSON: All day.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. I mean we had one instructor in the morning and another instructor in the afternoon, all for the same project.

MR. ADAMSON: Geez, and you were painting mostly?

MS. LEVINE: Well, it was -- Art 101 was drawing.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see, so you went back to drawing again. [Laughs.]

MS. LEVINE: And then we -- Art 102 was painting.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. LEVINE: So, yeah. So it was actually quite nice. I mean, it had its advantages and disadvantages, but that was the first time where I -- somebody pointed out how you place this drawing on this piece of paper. It wasn't just how you do a knee or how you draw an ear, you know? It was the relationship to the paper, and all this negative space was -- it had never occurred to me to think of negative space before. It was a totally different approach, as far away from an academic approach as possible. They give an assignment, say, "Follow a line around a piece of paper."

MR. ADAMSON: Wow. So it sounds like they were kind of influenced by modernism in some way.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember the names of the instructors there?

MS. LEVINE: Art McKay and Ken Lochhead were the two people. Art just died last year. Art did the painting I have in the bedroom. We've got a couple of paintings here by Art. I've got a drawing by him too. But the Regina art scene was quite an active art scene at that time. The painters were quite active. They were given some national exposure and all that stuff.

But, yeah, it was as different from the other class I'd taken in drawing -- it was night and day. But then the following year -- in one place I'd looked in for a job that year when I arrived was -- there was a Jesuit junior -- Jesuit college. They don't have junior colleges in Canada, or they didn't. It was high school, Grade 9, 10, 11, and 12, and first year in university. Well, I wasn't qualified to teach the high school, but I was qualified to teach the university, you know. They didn't need me the first year I was there. But then the next year I got a phone call from the -- I think he was a dean of the college, Father Nash. And they needed somebody to teach chemistry because their regular chemistry teacher had to go away and get ordained. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Hazards of having a Jesuit school, huh?

MS. LEVINE: So I taught there for a couple years, at a Jesuit school. It was actually very lonely because I was the only female faculty member.

MR. ADAMSON: In the whole school?

MS. LEVINE: In the whole school, I was one of about two or three that were lay, not priests. And so females weren't allowed in the cloister. Lay -- you know, male lay teachers could go into the cloister. But everything happened in the cloister, all the social activity, everything. You know, all the chitchat and all that stuff. I just went there and taught. So, after two years of that I -- the first year was very heavy, preparing all the lectures. The second year, you know, you can ride a little bit on all the work you'd done. It used to take me eight hours to prepare a one-hour lecture.

MR. ADAMSON: Because it's chemistry, so you have to get things --

MS. LEVINE: You have to get everything in order. I mean, if you don't describe point C clearly enough, you've lost them when you get to point D, and so on. So it had to be all very carefully presented.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you like teaching, by the way?

MS. LEVINE: Yes and no. I think I did. I got -- the reason I'm hesitant is because years later I started getting tired of it, when I was teaching the same class over and over and over and over again. But at that time I think I did enjoy it. But let me go back; back to the art school -- auditing the art classes. The instructor, Ken Lochhead, came in one day -- one of the instructors came in and said, "Well, we have a half-class, half-credit in pottery that you can take if you want," he told the whole class.

MR. ADAMSON: This is before you went to the Jesuit school to teach?

MS. LEVINE: This is before. This is the year that I just went over to audit the classes, you know, where you took Art 101. And Ken said there was going to be a pottery class Monday and Wednesday evenings. And I thought, I have no idea what pottery is but -- well, I knew a little bit by that time. Actually, I did because I'd read a book. Before I read the book, I knew the stuff you walked on on the ground was clay, and I knew the stuff we ate off of, the dishes, were clay. I had no idea it was the same stuff. No, I didn't know before I read this book. And I started reading this book --

MR. ADAMSON: What -- what book was it?

MS. LEVINE: Oh, it was some book one of the other chemistry professors had when we first arrived in Regina -- I'm starting to jump all over here; now we're back to we're just arriving in Regina -- they were going away on vacation and they let us use their house while we were house-hunting when we first arrived. And she'd taken a pottery class. There was this book there, so I read this book. I don't know who it was by. It was just a book, and you know, I found out that there were things called potters' wheels and stuff like that. So I did know that at the time. When Ken Lochhead came in and said there was a pottery class we could take Monday and Wednesday evenings, I didn't think I'd be particularly interested in pottery, but I thought, Sid, my husband, had very heavy lecture schedule Tuesday and Thursday mornings; I better get out of his hair Monday and Wednesday evenings. So I registered for the pottery class in the evening, Monday, Wednesday evenings, and it was mostly government deputy ministers' wives.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. And --

MR. ADAMSON: And who taught it?

MS. LEVINE: Her name was Beth Hone.

MR. ADAMSON: Beth Hone?

MS. LEVINE: H-O-N-E.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. LEVINE: And --

MR. ADAMSON: And was she a professional potter, or just kind of a hobby as such?

MS. LEVINE: Well, a little bit of both, sort of. Her husband was a professional -- a high school art teacher -- and that was really strange. When I moved to Saskatchewan from Alberta -- when I told you that Alberta didn't have much art in the schools, Saskatchewan had practicing artists teaching art in the schools. It just blew me away, having an artist in the school. Wow, you know. Her husband taught art in one of the high schools, and she'd taken up pottery, and I think she'd taken the class from somebody else the year before or something. I'm not quite sure of the history, really, but she was not a full-fledged official potter at the time or anything, by any means. We had two potters' wheels for 18 people and a little kiln that was like this, you know, 14 inches by 14 inches by maybe 15 inches.

MR. ADAMSON: A kiln?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: That size?

MS. LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: You could only fire a couple of pots in it.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, and we made --

MR. ADAMSON: It was a little electric --

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. And we had -- the clay was full of stones and grog and everything in a gunnysack, and she'd dump it into a bucket of water. And then we'd each take out a little bit of clay and put it through a screen and put it on a little bat that we'd made out of a pie plate. That little bat -- and that would be our clay, this little piece of clay.

MR. ADAMSON: So it was really precious stuff?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, it was very precious. And I remember, all these women would sit around this table and they'd be making a coil pot, and they'd add a coil each week, and then put the -- wrap it up and put it away. The next week they'd add another coil and stuff. And I really wanted to get on the wheel, but you never get on the wheel during class. But there was a student in the class; another one of the six art students had taken pottery in high school, and so she -- we got in there outside of class, and she sat in one wheel and told me how to throw a pot. She said, first you center it and then put your thumb down the middle, then you fill it with water. [They laugh.] It was a bad habit that I had for years after that.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: Too much water. And I started going through clay much faster than these little bats, and I start making larger lumps of clay, like the size of a loaf of bread, and storing it up in the rafters because there was no place to keep it otherwise. And then I remember at the end of that class, when the class was all over, I went to Ken Lochhead, who's the director of the school, and the pottery shop was going to be just empty all summer. And I said, "Well, could I use it?" And he said, "Well, you know, we can't really just let one student use the pottery shop, but if you gave a class" --

MR. ADAMSON: So suddenly you were a teacher.

MS. LEVINE: So an ad went out in the paper and students arrived, and I gave a class that summer after having taken one class myself, and reading a couple of books. But I started rearranging the space. I started making these big bats on wheels that went under the tables, and -- so we could make more clay at a time, and stuff like that. And then I got -- after that summer I got offered this class -- this teaching job at the Jesuit college.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So that ended the pottery for the moment.

MS. LEVINE: That ended the pottery for that year, pretty much, because I just didn't have time. And --

MR. ADAMSON: But it sounds like you really took to it, that first experience.

MS. LEVINE: Oh, yeah, it was magic. It was like magic, this little lump of clay could just, you know, suddenly do these things with it. And I had a certain amount of manual dexterity, so I had beginner's luck, kind of.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were good at throwing and --

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah, I could -- and -- so anyways, I've spent one year then just concentrating on teaching chemistry, but then the next summer I came back and we did the same thing. Ads went out in the paper and students arrived, and I'd give a class. And then I stayed on. After two years of teaching chemistry, I decided -- I told you it was kind of lonely and stuff, you know, and I decided to resign and just go back into art. And at that point I was -- the point at which I'd made a commitment, like that's what I wanted to do. I didn't think very far ahead, really, still. I mean, I wasn't thinking my lifetime career. I just thought, this is what I want to do; I want to make pots. And so I did. And then people started coming around, buying a pot or two, and --

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of pots were you making?

MS. LEVINE: Just regular pots -- I mean, they were pottery. They were centered and had nice throwing rings and --

MR. ADAMSON: And mugs and bowls and stuff like that? Just utility-ware.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Pitchers, teapots, cups.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you have glazes that you could use there?

MS. LEVINE: Mm-hmm. No -- well, we mixed all our own glazes.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, you did?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So you had to learn how to do that.

MS. LEVINE: Oh, yeah, but that's no big trouble.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you have access to books that told you how to do it?

MS. LEVINE: There was a copy of Daniel Rhodes's book on the shelf. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Just that? [Daniel Rhodes. *Clay and Glazes for the Potter*. Philadelphia: Chilton Book Co., 1957; rev. 1974.]

MS. LEVINE: I took it home and stuck it in the bathroom, and I read all through it. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: And of course, you could do the -- the glaze chemistry without a problem because you had a chemistry background.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. So, let's see, where am I?

MR. ADAMSON: So you started teaching. Did they let you teach full time at Regina?

MS. LEVINE: No, I wasn't teaching. I mean, this was all unofficial. This was just a little class that had no credit or anything. In fact, what they did was that everybody had to pay \$10, and the \$10 went to me. I had four students, so I made \$40 that summer.

MR. ADAMSON: For the whole summer?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: But you had access to --

MS. LEVINE: It somehow justified them letting me use the studio.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. But what happened when the next academic year came around?

MS. LEVINE: Well, I just fit into the classes again.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. LEVINE: And then, let's see, after two years there, I quit the job at the Campion College, the Jesuit college, went back to art school, took -- there was a new painter that year -- they hired a third painter and a sculptor for sculpture. And so I took classes from them. By this time, there were four students and four instructors. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: And you.

MS. LEVINE: Well, yeah -- three others besides me.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see. I see. You were one of the four.

MS. LEVINE: There were more students in some of the classes, but, like, in the painting class there were four of us, I think. But there were a couple of other classes. They were more around-town people taking classes. In the pottery studio, there was a group of us kind of interested in pottery, and we decided to have a guest come in the summer and teach us -- you know, give us a workshop.

MR. ADAMSON: A real potter.

MS. LEVINE: We got some money. Yeah, a real potter from the East. And so we were all around there in the summer taking this class, all day long everyday, this workshop. And he was doing his thing, and we were watching.

MR. ADAMSON: Who was the potter?

MS. LEVINE: His name was Jack Sures. And he was a good potter. I think the people that chose him, chose him probably because he did everything in electric kiln, and that's all we had was electric kiln.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. LEVINE: Meanwhile, they'd formed a -- there's always been a separation in Canada: East and the West. All the potters in the West felt that the East was ignoring them, so some of the people got together and formed what they thought was another group to deal with this, Western Potters Association. I went to the meeting and met this guy, Jack Sures, at the meeting.

I was taking this painting -- let's see, the painting class and the sculpture class, I had taken that. But the next year they were going to add a potter. The university spent the entire year trying to get the painter's friend to come, and he finally said no. So they were kind of desperate -- it was the middle of the summer, and they

needed a potter for the fall. A full faculty position, this was, you know; it was going to be a degree program and all this. And they didn't know who to hire, and I said, "Well, you know, I met this guy in -- in this meeting in [Weyburn, in Southern Saskatchewan]. I think he'd be really good."

Not only had I met him, I'd then gone to see him in Winnipeg. He lived in Winnipeg. And he had a pottery studio in Winnipeg, and I was really impressed with his head as well as his art, which I didn't know too much about, his pots. I had recommended him, they got on the phone to him, phoned him, and he said, "Well, I'm going to Japan," and he had a Canada Council Grant, but they convinced him somehow -- anyway he shortened his trip to Japan and took the job. I mean, there were none of these national searches then, but actually, you know, the reason I brought that up was because Jack was very, very influential in my career.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, he came and --

MR. ADAMSON: What was his last name?

MS. LEVINE: Jack Sures.

MR. ADAMSON: How do you spell that?

MS. LEVINE: S-U-R-E-S.

MR. ADAMSON: S-U-R-E-S. Okay.

MS. LEVINE: He essentially built a new pottery department there. And the first thing we did was build a gas kiln. He had two classes. One class built one kiln, and the other class built the other kiln. We had the first gas kiln in Saskatchewan. And it was his way of dealing with clay. If I hadn't met Jack, if I hadn't known Jack, I probably would have thought artists sat around waiting for inspiration, you know, because I never saw the painters paint. I never saw them work. They always came to class, and they didn't have paint on their clothes or anything. But Jack would; I'd see him work. And this work would go back and forth from his studio to the kiln and stuff. And he'd get to work at 8:30 in the morning, and he'd work all through the day.

MR. ADAMSON: And he was also making pots.

MS. LEVINE: Pottery, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: But, pretty good ones.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, he was a good -- he had a real sensitivity to the plasticity of clay.

MR. ADAMSON: And do you feel like you learned a lot from him technically as well as --

MS. LEVINE: No, not technically. I mean, technically, you get it out of books. I didn't have trouble with manipulative skills, and my chemistry background -- it was more -- everything else I was missing, everything else other than that.

MR. ADAMSON: Why you were doing it, and what you could do with it?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, well, just attitudes about things, and the work, you know, just the work -- luscious stuff that he made. It was both really good and it was very difficult for me, because I couldn't for a long time -- his -- he made such beautiful stuff, I thought, and there was no way I could make stuff that wasn't just like his. You know, anything that wasn't like his had to be not as good, because he was my only point of reference. And so that was kind of painful, in a way, but that problem just -- later when I came down to Berkeley to graduate school -- just ceased to exist. It just ceased to be a problem. It just vanished. I didn't have to work at making it vanish because there were so many influences, so many points of reference, that it -- I wasn't stuck in this one line away from this one point.

MR. ADAMSON: So how long did you work with him up in Saskatchewan?

MS. LEVINE: Oh, it would be 1966 to '69; three years. And I kept on teaching. By that time, they hired me to teach the non-credit programs. There was a new Department of Extension program, and I was hired in an extension program. So we actually taught side by side. And we loaded the kiln side by side, and we had teams that would load the kiln. Whoever was an experienced student would be the team leader. And whether it was my student or his student, we just would sit down and we'd choose whoever has a little bit experience, and then they'd come in and they'd load the kiln every Monday night, or every Saturday and every Wednesday, they'd load the kiln. Or something like that. Twice a week we would load the kiln, and we would load it jammed full. And

then the next person, whoever was the instructor the next day, would turn it on the first thing in the morning.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. LEVINE: Because we weren't allowed to run it overnight. The Saskatchewan Power Corporation, when they'd come in and see orange flames, they'd freak. They said, flames are supposed to be blue. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: So they got right here?

MS. LEVINE: So there were a lot -- it was an interesting time. I learned a lot, just, you know --

MR. ADAMSON: Just being around him?

MS. LEVINE: Just being around, yeah. Just doing everything.

MR. ADAMSON: What did your husband think of all this?

MS. LEVINE: He was very supportive. I was very, very fortunate. He was very supportive of everything. And he had a very good eye. There were certain things I was making that he would not like, and I wouldn't believe him for a long time, and then I look back at those things; he was right, you know. And he had a very good eye.

MR. ADAMSON: So, how did you make the leap to decide when you wanted to go to graduate school?

MS. LEVINE: Well, I realized what my weaknesses were, which were, you know, everything that wasn't technical. I realized I was so strongly influenced by Jack Sures. I needed to get out of there and --

MR. ADAMSON: You obviously decided this was your vocation and this was what you were going to do, that's all.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. I decided that's what I wanted to do. So I looked around. I didn't think anybody would accept me for graduate school. So I wrote up a letter, sent it to 88 places, because I didn't have any undergraduate -- I had no undergraduate program, because I didn't take anything for credit.

MR. ADAMSON: You must have sent it to every pottery program in America.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, right, I got a list. [Laughs.] And of course everybody sent back, "Well, we have to look at your portfolio." And that's the first time I heard this word "portfolio." That was actually the year before, you know, that I actually went. I actually went to graduate school the following year, and it turned out to be the year that my husband had a sabbatical leave, and he had chosen -- where he wanted to go in chemistry was Austin, Texas, the University of Texas-Austin or University of California-Berkeley. And by that time I had learned a little bit, and I had found out that where I wanted to go was Berkeley or Davis [University of California-Davis].

MR. ADAMSON: Because?

MS. LEVINE: Because in Berkeley was Peter Voukos and Ron Nagle and Jim Melchert, and in Davis was Bob Arneson.

MR. ADAMSON: And you -- you had been able to figure out who those people were and they were important?

MS. LEVINE: Oh, yeah. By that time, I'd figured it out.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you already subscribing to *Craft Horizons* at that point?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah, just barely. Going back a notch now, and Jack Sures was my only influence, and I decided I needed to see something else. And I was thinking of going to graduate school, and so I'd heard by a sort of grapevine or something that something was going on on the West Coast in ceramics. And I couldn't imagine what it could be. And I'd heard the name Peter Voukos before, but I had no idea what he did. And that was the only name I'd heard, so I -- by that time I'd heard of the American Craft Council. And I wrote them and I got a list of names. There were all these names: Jim Melchert and Ron Nagle, Stephen DeStaebler, and all these. They gave me names and address of all these people and, you know, Peter was the only one I'd heard of.

Then I wrote to the Canada Council and asked for a travel grant. And they gave me \$250, which was great. I mean, it wasn't the \$250, it was the excuse. I could get on the phone and say, "I have a grant to come and see you." [Laughs.] So that made it a lot easier --

MR. ADAMSON: Made it legitimate, yeah.

MS. LEVINE: You know, I'm this nobody -- from nowhere -- [laughs] -- and I want to come and see you. So I looked all these people up and it was a real eye-opener for me. Peter had actually -- it turns out it was his first

show at Ruth Braunstein's gallery [June, 1968]. I didn't realize it was his first show there. He'd had lots of other shows, but this was the first show at this particular gallery of these stacks, black stacks. I'd heard this name before, and I was always expecting that there would be maybe more luscious pots than Jack Sures's, you know. These weren't luscious at all. These were big, heavy -- you know. And all of these things that Jim Melchert was making, and then the beautiful little cups that Ron Nagle was making -- all these different directions that ceramics could go.

MR. ADAMSON: And you met the people as well as seeing the work?

MS. LEVINE: I met them -- I met just about everybody, yeah. Peter invited me over to his studio, and we looked all around and -- I was with my husband, he came with me, and we went -- I think I saw Ron Nagle up at the university. Stephen DeStaebler, I saw down at his studio. It was really very interesting meeting him. I remember I had an appointment with Jim Melchert at such-and-such a time, and I looked at the map and it was this far from this far, and the freeway going from here to there; we figured out how long it would take from there to there. And I got on this freeway and it was clogged. I had no idea that highways could get clogged. I had never, ever seen that before. I mean, we had a highway that just went by -- [laughs].

MR. ADAMSON: So you were late?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, I was late. I got there and there was a note for me.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, he had to go some other place, but he would be back. So I did see him later, but all the eye-openers --

MR. ADAMSON: Can you remember who you were most impressed with at first?

MS. LEVINE: I was impressed with every -- them all. I had different feelings, but I was mostly baffled -- this was stuff that I just couldn't imagine. I'd just never seen anything like it, you know? And it just mostly just baffled me. But it was after that -- after seeing it all -- I went back to Saskatchewan and I started making my -- the first time I started making sculptural objects. And they were rectangular, sort of geometric kind of forms.

MR. ADAMSON: Glazed?

MS. LEVINE: No, they weren't glazed; some of them were stained. But they were boxes with oozes essentially. And that was the first time that I started making something that was not a pot. And then the following year I applied to graduate school at Berkeley because that's where we'd chose, right? So that was where we crossed. Sid wanted to go to Berkeley or Austin, and I wanted to go to Berkeley or Davis, so I applied to Berkeley and they wrote back in some nice feminine handwriting that said, "Sorry, you don't qualify, Peter Voukos." [Laughs.] No, it wasn't really Peter's signature.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] It was his secretary signing for him or something.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: By the way, had you met Arneson at Davis as well on your trip?

MS. LEVINE: Yes, I did.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, so you went up there too.

MS. LEVINE: I'm trying to remember. I'm trying to remember the meeting. I can't remember the actual meeting now. But I taught there later, so I'm trying to separate the meeting at that particular time with all the others. You know, it's possible I didn't.

MR. ADAMSON: That's okay, I was just curious.

MS. LEVINE: I can't remember.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were -- you were not accepted.

MS. LEVINE: I was not accepted, but then we had another workshop up there in Regina. There was these two ladies, Beth Hone, who was my first teacher, and another lady decided to buy a church and turn it into a pottery studio. And for their opening celebration, they were going to have this big-name international potter come up and give us a workshop. And so they invited Jim Melchert. It turned out it was his first workshop, he said. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: Well, that's what he said. Maybe I misunderstood him.

MR. ADAMSON: This is like 1969 we're talking about?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, '60 -- yeah, I guess '68 or '69, something like that [February, 1969]. It would have been '69 because it was after I met him down here. Anyways, he came up and he gave us -- we all came up to this workshop thinking we're going to watch him work. I mean, nobody brought any tools or anything, and we arrived, and there was this big pile of clay in the middle of the floor, and Jim gave us an assignment. He wanted us each to make a pair of shoes. And we'd all put our shoes in the middle of the floor as if it was a cocktail party -- just imagine this is a cocktail party with all these different shoes.

Well, everybody started making -- all you had is your fingers and clay -- and I started making mine. I was making this oxford with holes for the laces; other people were putting together some sandals, and he called -- suddenly, like 20 minutes later, he was calling for our shoes, wherever it was. At the time I only had one shoe made. Everybody had two shoes; I only had one. I felt really badly here, like I'm so slow. So I quickly made two little things that went on the bottom of crutches and put it beside my shoe.

And later on, after all that, I was talking to Jim and I was saying, you know, I was thinking of going to graduate school, and what would you recommend, blah, blah, blah? And he said, "Come -- come to Berkeley." And I said, "I already tried and I was rejected." And he said, "Use me for a recommendation."

MR. ADAMSON: So you did?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, so I did. By that time, I found out I was supposed to have a portfolio other than pottery, and I said, "All I've got is pottery." He said, "Well send it in."

Well, to jump forward a bit, years later after I graduated, I remember at the end, Peter had never seen -- he'd never remembered seeing any of my pots. I sent all these nice pictures of my pots that I had professionally taken. I'd met this photographer who offered to trade pictures for pots. So I sent all those pictures in and all that, and I asked Peter -- he didn't remember ever seeing them. And I thought, that's strange because he has a very good visual memory. So I asked Jim, I said, "Did you ever show my portfolio to anybody?" He said, "No, you'd never have got in." [Laughs.] Because I had all these luscious pots, you know? And I was applying to the sculpture department. The reason I was applying to the sculpture department was because I knew that's what I needed, you know. I needed everything that was not the technical -- I needed the art side of it.

I came down to graduate school and, one thing led to another. I stayed on for the MFA -- they'd just introduced the MFA program, I think while I was there, actually.

MR. ADAMSON: So you just tacked on the extra year?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So that was three years in all?

MS. LEVINE: It was two years. I just ran straight through. I arrived in the summer -- it was a summer quarter in those days -- so I managed to get it all done in two years, going straight through --

MR. ADAMSON: Gotcha.

MS. LEVINE: -- and taking a little more units than you were supposed to.

MR. ADAMSON: But wasn't Sid only supposed to teach for one year in Berkeley?

MS. LEVINE: Sid?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. LEVINE: He was -- that's another visa problem. He was a research associate, but when he got here, it turned out they couldn't pay him because he was on the wrong visa. He'd avoided that exchange visitor's visa that had got him into trouble before and came down as a student F-2 visa -- a student spouse; student spouse couldn't work in those days. And so he worked for two years without getting paid, but he -- they always change the law when you're -- they make it retroactive -- that's the way he got caught in Los Angeles. They changed the law after he was already down there. He didn't know anything about the law being changed. And again, while we were in Berkeley, when I was in graduate school, they changed the law, and they took away that two-year foreign residency requirement. So when he found out about that, he went and applied for a visa, and he got paid

for the last three months he was here, out of two years. And the visa finally came through after we got back to Canada.

MR. ADAMSON: Great.

MS. LEVINE: So I was --

MR. ADAMSON: But you were able to complete your MFA before returning?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And again, did you have a plan when you came back?

MS. LEVINE: No. [Laughs.]

MS. LEVINE: I taught at the University of Calgary for that summer after I graduated, then I went back to Regina and I picked up my old job again teaching in ceramics --

MR. ADAMSON: But with a degree.

MS. LEVINE: -- the extension programs, along with --

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of work were you making by this time?

MS. LEVINE: Oh, I was starting to -- I was making the realist stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really, already.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, right. I started that in graduate school.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And can you tell me a little bit about the origin of that body of work --

MS. LEVINE: Well, when I got to --

MR. ADAMSON: -- apart from the shoe story?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, well, a lot of it is the shoe story.

But also, when I arrived here, funk was very big. You know, Bob Arneson and all his students -- I mean, they were all over the place, people -- you know, doing this funk art everywhere.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you feel like -- did you feel like there was a choice to be made between Voulkos's stuff and the funk stuff? Was it not that clear?

MS. LEVINE: No, I kind of thought Voulkos's stuff didn't fit me, but I thought, maybe I'm supposed to be a funk artist, so I tried that out. I tried to -- and it was in the process of trying out being a funk artist, trying to be funky, that I found out what you could do with a pair of shoes or what you could do with a jacket or whatever.

MR. ADAMSON: But that realist stuff isn't funky at all. It's like --

MS. LEVINE: Hmm?

MR. ADAMSON: That -- that realist work --

MS. LEVINE: No, no, but to begin with, I was trying to make it funky. I made some shoes. I mean, I broke them all later -- I made a whole pair of shoes in one day. Now it takes me months -- weeks, months -- to make a pair of shoes, because I do such detail, but then I'd just throw together a pair of shoes in a day and glaze them and stuff. And they were supposed to be kind of funky, but they weren't anything. They weren't funky, they weren't real -- they just didn't say anything.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. LEVINE: They said that, yeah, we kind of look like shoes, but that's about it, you know. So later on, the following year, I threw them all out -- except for one pair, I kept. One pair, and they had something going --

MR. ADAMSON: And you still have those?

MS. LEVINE: No, a friend has them, but they were -- they had something going just form-wise, that one pair. It

was a pair of tennis shoes -- ankle-highs. And I made some Coke bottles; you know, a carton of Coke bottles where the Coke bottles fell over, slumped over. I fired the carton, and then put the actual real bottles in and put them in kiln and opened the kiln and bent the bottles over just as they start to soften.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, wow.

MS. LEVINE: So, they were soft empties.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. I think I've seen that piece.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, and that was supposed to be kind of funky, but again, they weren't really -- I mean, the idea was sort of funky, but my approach wasn't really.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. LEVINE: But it was a phase I went through, searching around --

MR. ADAMSON: It seems like Melchert must have been a very strong influence on you, to be doing that kind of stuff.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, it was probably Arneson.

MR. ADAMSON: Even though you were at Berkeley and he was at Davis?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah, right. I mean, you didn't work with anybody in particular at Berkeley. You just were more or less on your own. In fact, to begin with, I wondered why I was even there --

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: -- because I was paying all this non-resident tuition fee and never saw a faculty member. I mean, I came down and you had to take two classes from two regular members of the faculty before you were eligible to apply for the graduate seminars. Well, there was only one regular member of the faculty present the summer I arrived. So I had to wait two quarters before I could apply for seminar admission -- and so I didn't know who the other grad students were. You know, I was just sitting at my bench working away, and nobody ever came to see anything. And I wondered why I was here.

And it was really after you got -- I mean, first of all, I didn't know how to be an art student. I didn't realize you had to go and grab somebody by the arm and say, come and look at my work. I was expecting somebody to come and make meaningful comments, you know. It didn't happen that way. I learned, but it -- having not been a grad -- I mean, I'd been an art auditor, but you know, we had more faculty than we had students, so they were coming around. But -- anyways, it was mainly seeing what I saw in the galleries, and all that. I mean we didn't have galleries up there in Regina in those days. I mean, there's a gallery or two up there now, but there was nothing. There was no place to see other people's work.

MR. ADAMSON: So it was really seeing the pottery itself, the ceramics themselves, that did it more than the personal connections?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Well, it was everything. You don't really know where all your influences come from, I don't think.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MS. LEVINE: When it was only one person, you know a lot, but after coming down here, everything I saw in the galleries was new to me. Everything -- you know, all the people were new; everything was new. I knew I was consciously influenced by the funk movement, and that's what I was trying consciously to do until I -- you know, I realized --

Actually, the way it happened was, I was making all these shoes and the Coke bottles. I made the Coke bottles; I made a bunch of hats. And one of the grad students, her boyfriend at the time, now her husband, saw these shoes I was making and said, "Would you like to see my shoes, you know, the shoes I wear in the foundry -- the boots?" And I say, "Sure, bring them around." And he brought these boots around, and they were all crusty. They were steel-toed boots, and the toes were torn open, and you could see the steel, and they were all crusty with stuff spilled on them and everything. It was at that point I realized what you could say with a pair of boots, you know; that the whole story, that whole sense of elapsed time, that they've been through something and that -- and this person, you know, whoever had belonged to them, was not there now. This is the evidence of that person's existence.

And so that was a major turning point at that point, and I stopped floundering around. Even when I was making all those funky things, I was still making my boxes with oozes. I mean, I was trying everything, all sorts of things, and just trying out somebody else's thing. And then it was when I saw that pair of boots, and I used them as a model and I made these boots, and I really went to town to try to capture the sense of them having lived through a lot of things, you know.

MR. ADAMSON: And that was the first time you made something that really looked real instead of looking funky?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. Well, I mean, the others, as I said, weren't really funky either. I mean, they were nothing. But it was where I really had a purpose for what I was trying to say in those boots.

MR. ADAMSON: I see, I see.

MS. LEVINE: You know, the others, I guess I didn't know what I was trying to say. I was seeing real objects being made by other people into funky objects, and so I was trying to use real objects, but I didn't have anything to say with them until I got to this one pair of boots, and then I knew what I wanted to say at that point with them.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you know that famous essay by Meyer Schapiro about the van Gogh painting of the shoes, where he talks about that?

MS. LEVINE: Mm-mm.

MR. ADAMSON: I'll have to send that to you.

MS. LEVINE: Oh, okay.

MR. ADAMSON: But he basically talks about how the -- when -- it's just a little painting of some shoes -- van Gogh did the painting.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, I know the painting.

MR. ADAMSON: And he says that it's a portrait of the whole -- peasants' whole lives, you know, to see their shoes.

MS. LEVINE: Well, and the thing also with shoes -- I mean, like the hats -- I was making a hat. People choose a hat for the image it creates a lot, whereas a shoe will tell you about the real person, and the hat tells you the image that that person wants to be. So I stopped making hats at that point.

And I never make anything -- I never made anything that spoke of a particular fashion. You have to stay away from fashion because I don't want that to dilute the individual, the story of the individual. I want to speak more of the -- of that elapsed time of the specific person, even though that person was not there and it's still -- it's anonymous. But I don't want to speak of a fashion. I don't want to speak of pointy toes or spike heels or all that kind of stuff, you know. I want it to be more timeless.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So you got back to Canada, and you were doing work that was really in that vein already.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, and I'd lined up a show -- a gallery in New York had come to actually see my graduate show and tried to talk me into sending it all to New York.

MR. ADAMSON: What gallery?

MS. LEVINE: I don't want to mention it --

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, okay.

MS. LEVINE: -- because he ripped me off.

But anyways, I'd already committed my work to a gallery in San Francisco, which -- that was another thing that still floored me. You know, I got my slides together and I thought -- you know, I went through graduate school so naïve in so many ways, and I was older; I should have known better in a lot of ways, but somehow I just was out of it in a lot of ways. For my MFA I had to have a one-person show, so I thought I had to go find a place to have my one-person show. So I got all my slides together and I went over to Ruth Braunstein's gallery, who showed Peter Voulkos, and I went into the gallery and I asked, "Is Ruth around?" And they said, "No, she's not." And I -- this great sigh of relief, and I left and went home. [Laughs.]

And then when I got home, I thought, well, that's crazy. So I got on the phone to the Hansen Fuller Gallery, at the time, and I talked to Wanda Hansen and I said, "I have to find a place for my one-person show," and she said,

"Well, how about July?" And I just about fell off my chair, you know, because apparently she had been paying attention to my work and all that. But then it turned out we had to have the show, then I found out that the faculty doesn't want to go all the way to San Francisco to see my show. I had to have a show over here. So I had two shows; I had a show at the University Art Museum and then one at the --

MR. ADAMSON: With the same pieces?

MS. LEVINE: Same stuff, yeah, same stuff. But it wasn't for sale at the university, obviously. Well, it could have been, but nobody ever buys from the student shows.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, right. But it was at Hansen Fuller?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you sell anything?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, they sold some pieces.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you -- did you know what kind of prices to put on them?

MS. LEVINE: No, I let them price it. I always let the galleries price them.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: Because they're in the market. I don't know anything about the marketing stuff. But this gallery dealer from New York wanted me to -- he saw my show at the University Art Museum, and he wanted me to send it all to his gallery, and I kept saying, "No, I've already committed it to the Hansen Fuller Gallery in San Francisco." And he said, "Well, what do you want a San Francisco gallery for if you can have a New York gallery?" I said, "I'm sorry." But I finally agreed to have my next show with him, which I did, and it was -- he didn't pay me. It was a long story. I had kept the prices low for customs. So I put them real low because I'd heard the brokerage fee is dependent upon the price of the commodity, so I put it real low and then expected him to re-price everything.

MR. ADAMSON: -- to put real prices on them.

MS. LEVINE: -- put real prices on them, and he did, but he didn't tell me. I kept saying, well, what about the prices, you know, as we were setting up the show. What about the price? He said, "Well, they're certainly not too high." He was just being evasive all the way along. And, meanwhile, before I had the exhibition, I got a letter from OK Harris, who wanted to show my work.

MR. ADAMSON: Because he had seen your work.

MS. LEVINE: They'd seen my work and they wanted to show me. And I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I've already committed to another gallery." Well, then, I found out at the opening that he was ripping me off. Ivan Karp had tried to buy pieces from him. He would only sell four pieces to Ivan. He wouldn't sell more. The show sold out, but it turns out Ivan sent up all his collectors to buy the pieces for him. So Ivan bought most of my show -- a good part of my show -- and it got shipped all over the country and then shipped back to Ivan. But I didn't know that at the time, but I had become suspicious at the opening. I started hearing him quote inflated prices to people. He paid me for one of the shipments -- there had been three shipments. He paid me for only one shipment and on the basis of the prices that I had listed for customs purposes.

MR. ADAMSON: And that's it?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. And so, I didn't feel guilty about leaving that gallery --

MR. ADAMSON: I wouldn't think so.

MS. LEVINE: -- at that point. So I went down that following day and saw Ivan and --

MR. ADAMSON: And Ivan was the head of OK Harris, is that right?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, Ivan Karp who ran OK Harris. So I've been with him ever since.

MR. ADAMSON: And OK Harris, just for listeners, is -- was the gallery for so-called super-realist work.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, he showed a lot of super-realist work. He had Bob Bechtle and Richard McLean and Ralph Goings and --

MR. ADAMSON: So painting as well as sculpture.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, and John DeAndrea, and Duane Hanson.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. So there were only three of us who were sculptors. The rest were all painters.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, DeAndrea, Hanson, and yourself.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you become aware of their work through your association with the gallery?

MS. LEVINE: No, I knew their work beforehand. While I was in graduate school, I started to become aware of some things. So actually, I think there was a write-up of -- in probably the Whitney Show or something -- of Duane Hanson's -- there's a big picture of one of his pieces, I think *Hawaiian Tourists*, or something. I can't remember which one.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you feel a connection with it immediately?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. I mean, I could see that and -- yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So did you get to know those artists through the gallery pretty well?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Some of them I knew. I don't see them so much anymore. Duane Hanson died a few years ago [1996]. He died, 10 years ago, maybe. Yeah, I liked him. He was -- they're all neat people, but --

MR. ADAMSON: And so OK Harris was your main gallery from then on?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And still is?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. Well, I still was with Hansen Fuller Gallery, which changed names, so it became the Fuller Goldeen and Fuller Goldeen Gross and then Fuller Gross until she closed the gallery.

MR. ADAMSON: It didn't close that long ago, right?

MS. LEVINE: 1989, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: '89, yeah. And you had been with them consistently until that time?

MS. LEVINE: Right, from '71 to '89.

MR. ADAMSON: So you had your West Coast gallery and your East Coast gallery.

MS. LEVINE: Right, and it was more galleries than I could deal with, really, because my work is so slow. But I've never had a complaint with Ivan's gallery. Ivan's paperwork is a lot easier. I know exactly what I'm getting paid for and who bought it, what the address is, you know. I get total documentation without having to ask for it. I always had to ask for it at Hansen Fuller, but there was no problem and they always -- it just wasn't the routine.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it seen as unusual for you to have these galleries in the States when you came back to Canada?

MS. LEVINE: No, no, I don't think so. Actually, you know, my work wasn't accepted all that well in Canada.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: No. I came back to Canada and it was out of the mainstream or something there. I don't know, it was just -- I couldn't get a job in Canada.

MR. ADAMSON: You mean as a ceramics teacher.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. I mean, not that -- there's not many schools. I mean, for one thing, when I went to graduate school here in the States -- the reason I came to the States was because it was the only place I could get a master's degree in art. There were no schools in Canada that gave an MFA in art at the time. It was MFA in art history or art education. You know, I think there was -- there's a BFA in Winnipeg, and there's a master's of art

education, I think, in UBC [University of British Columbia], but there was no place I could get a master's degree in art in 1969. Those art schools have all developed since that in universities. I mean, they developed degree-granting programs since that.

MR. ADAMSON: So, how did you come to move down here permanently?

MS. LEVINE: Well, my husband and I separated in 1973 --

MR. ADAMSON: Shortly after you got back?

MS. LEVINE: A couple of years. And I got an offer from the University of Utah [Salt Lake City, Utah], so I went there.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you the only potter there?

MS. LEVINE: No, Dorothy Bearnson and Steve Connell taught some pottery classes. He was a sculpture teacher. So I taught there for three years.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you in the ceramics department or the sculpture department?

MS. LEVINE: I think I was technically in the sculpture department, but I was hired to teach ceramics to non-art majors, and I didn't -- this is where I got tired of teaching, actually, because I didn't realize that it was teaching the same class over and over and over again, three times a day. Three quarters a year, over and over, teaching the same class, and you didn't see the kids grow because they only take that one class and then they go away, the non-art majors. That started to wear me down a little bit.

MR. ADAMSON: What about living in Utah, how was that?

MS. LEVINE: I decided it's not where I wanted to grow old, I guess. That's why I quit -- one reason I resigned. It was not quite what I expected. I didn't expect it to be as different as it was, because I have family in Utah. My father's side of the family had come from that neck of the woods, but if you're not married, if you're not a family, if you're not a Mormon, and if you're not a skier, you don't fit very well.

MR. ADAMSON: It's like Jesuit school all over again.

MS. LEVINE: It's a beautiful area. I had a beautiful studio at the university with big windows looking out over the mountains and everything, you know. It's lovely. But, I just decided, you know -- what I did was I took a leave of absence, and I asked for a leave of absence for two years, which they gave me. But then after a year they phoned me up and said, "Are you coming back or not?" [Laughs.] And Peter Voukos was just buying this building at that time, and I thought, well, I'd like to be an artist and not have -- not teach. And so I came out, and we developed this building together, actually. I mean, it was Peter's dream, but it was kind of an exciting time developing the building into art studios.

MR. ADAMSON: Was there any particular reason you were the one he called to go in with him on the building?

MS. LEVINE: Well, he didn't call me; I called him, I guess. I mean, it was sort of both. I had been invited to teach at Cal when Jim Melchert asked me to come out and replace Peter when he was on sabbatical, so I actually was here the year before for one quarter. Peter was taking me out in his truck, doing his rounds, and he had just bought the Macaroni Factory, the West Coast Macaroni Factory. I asked him, "Why did you buy this building?" And he said, "I just had a bunch of money coming in, and I might as well put it to use to help some artists."

MR. ADAMSON: Can you talk about the Macaroni Factory a little bit? What it was and --

MS. LEVINE: Not too much. It's just a building that used to be -- I guess made macaroni.

MR. ADAMSON: Hence the name.

MS. LEVINE: And he bought it and turned it into artist studios. He had a guy that worked with him to do that -- and so, he was starting to look for another building that this time would include his own studio. He wanted to move his own studio and build his dream studio. I don't know exactly how it came up. I mean, I was interested in doing it with him, like building -- coming out and building a studio in the same building. He was going to have studios for other people. I guess I must have mentioned I'd like -- I can't really remember exactly how it all started.

But then I'd come out on various trips from Utah, and at one point he took me to a building he was thinking of buying and showed me. It was a two-story building. And then -- that was at Christmas time, I think -- and then around Easter, or something, I came out again, and by this time he'd settled on this building, found this building,

which made more sense to him because it's all one floor; everybody can have skylights. And it's amazing, the building. This is really 10 different buildings where alleyways have been roofed over and courtyards roofed over. And my studio is in a different original building, actually, than the living quarters here.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. I'm at the intersection of four buildings.

But, anyways, it was very exciting time, you know, building these dream studios. And it just seemed like a great opportunity to get in on something like that. But I didn't want to give up my job, which would burn my bridges, so I had asked for a leave of absence, and I figured I'd have the studio all built and ready and going, and I'd know in a year. Well, of course, it takes longer than that, and in a year of course it wasn't done, and the University of Utah wanted an answer because they wanted to fill that position. So I resigned at that point.

MR. ADAMSON: So you really committed yourself to just being a full-time artist at that point?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: But then you went -- you did teach subsequently.

MS. LEVINE: Well, they had kept hiring me as a visitor up at Berkeley. I was there for five years, actually, as a visitor.

MR. ADAMSON: And how was that? Did you --

MS. LEVINE: It was fine. I mean --

MR. ADAMSON: Did you like the teaching better than Utah?

MS. LEVINE: Well, yes and no. It's different, you know. Like in Utah, they gave me a studio, so I was there all the time, and here they don't give you -- the faculty don't get studios, so you go there just for your class, and then you split. So there's not that same kind of group spirit kind of thing that develops when everybody's working together all the time. You're not -- you're not working with the students, which I think was too bad because -- you know, I used to think -- years ago when Jack Sures was teaching, they gave him a studio. I thought, that's pretty nifty. He gets a studio, he doesn't have to pay for it; maybe he could sell his work still and keep the money. [Laughs.] You know, that's pretty nifty.

But I looking back on that, the students got so much more out of it. If he was only there to teach his class, it wouldn't have been the same, because most of what you learn is not from the actual formal class, it's just from the ongoing stuff that goes on all the time. And in my way of thinking, universities ought to provide their faculty with studios, I mean, even if they charge them, make it a little less than the going rate or something to keep them there, because that's what the exciting time was when Peter first came here. It was before my time, but when he first came here and they -- where the new University Art Museum is -- new, it's not so new anymore -- but they had a pottery shop up there, and I guess all the students and Peter were there all the time, you know, working together. And that's when really exciting times happen, and that's what happened when Jack was in Regina; it was the same kind of thing. He was there all the time and we were there all the time working.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you feel about the development of your work during that period, the period in Utah and then when you were here for the first five years or so?

MS. LEVINE: The development of my work during that time? Oh, I don't know. When I was in Utah, some of the techniques changed. There's a gradual evolution of the process of how I do it. I've always tried something; you always are pushing the edge a little bit, trying something bigger than you had done before, so it was a little more technically difficult. And I never mixed the same clay body twice.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. I always moved it a little bit. But I don't know, that's not really what you were asking, but --

MR. ADAMSON: Well, maybe we should sort of do a parenthesis and -- can you explain the process, because it seems like magic to most people.

MS. LEVINE: Oh.

MR. ADAMSON: You know.

MS. LEVINE: The process actually started when I was in graduate -- it's evolved over the years a lot, but a major

thing that started was -- actually, Jack Sures started mixing fiberglass with clay. Daniel Rhodes started before that, but Daniel Rhodes took fiberglass fabric and dipped it in clay. Jack Sures took chopped strands of fiberglass and tumbled it -- mixed it with the clay. And so I started using that. The first pieces I made were made with this fiberglass in the clay, and it was fine when I was making clay sections half-an-inch thick, but when I started making the realist things, where the clay was the thickness of a piece of leather, this stuff was really fragile. With the fiberglass, it was extremely fragile. It was like bisqueware.

MR. ADAMSON: What was the advantage of having fiberglass?

[Audio break, tape change.]

MS. LEVINE: The fiberglass gave it tensile strength when it was wet. So I discovered that it was really fragile, and I decided to do some tests, so I made some 10-centimeter bars, and I after I dried them, they were 9.95 centimeters, and after fired to cone 10, they would be 9.94 centimeters. They hardly shrunk at all. And I decided that probably what was happening was probably a lot of little micro cracks all the way through there. The clay molecules were not moving along that fiberglass strand. It was setting up some weak bonding with the fiberglass that just -- developing in micro cracks.

So I decided maybe I should stay away from silicate fibers, something that wouldn't set up that kind of bonding. So I wrote to DuPont and said, "Please send me some fibers. I got this problem and I want to try your fibers, please." And I thought, I had stretchy nylon, and I thought, well, stretchy nylon, maybe it shrinks -- [laughs] -- send me stretchy nylon, and I had them send me other types of nylon and Dacron, and they sent all these samples. Stretchy nylon, you get this bat. It's this mass and there's no way you could use it; the Dacron actually worked fairly -- quite well, but what really worked well was the nylon. With nylon -- the clay went through all its normal shrinkage, so it was just as strong after it was fired as it would have been without the nylon, and it's a whole lot stronger in the wet state before.

So I started using this nylon. And so that's the main thing, you know. And then I roll it out. I used to put powder on the -- stain on the table and roll it on that, you know, trying to stain it. And then I started coloring it, much like a printmaker inks a plate, with a rolling pin or roll it right onto the thing. So it's just evolved over the years. I sandwich the clay slab in the plastic, to keep it wet, and I only expose the areas that need to be joined, and then I use all the normal techniques like scoring and slipping and stuff like that.

MR. ADAMSON: There's very little casting involved, correct?

MS. LEVINE: No casting.

MR. ADAMSON: None at all.

MS. LEVINE: Well --

MR. ADAMSON: Even for metal --

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, sometimes the clasps on a suitcase might be cast -- press-molded actually. But often I'll just carve them --

MR. ADAMSON: Out of a hard clay?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, just get some -- you know, carve them out. It might take me a whole day to carve one little clasp. It's interesting, I hired a guy to work for me in Utah who was -- I remember him saying -- I mean, people will say I have so much patience, "You have so much patience." And I found out that I have patience only if it goes one direction, if it goes forward. Casting, you have to go backwards first. You have to go backwards; you have to make this mold first. I don't have patience for that -- [laughs]. I just don't have patience for that. Only if we're going forwards. I can go at a snail's pace forwards. So I carve and I carve this piece of -- you know, I only want one piece. What's the point of making a whole mold? I only want one or two pieces of that --

MR. ADAMSON: How about the textures on the surface of the clay?

MS. LEVINE: That's partly a result the way I roll it, and then I scratch into the surface after and mark it up -- you have to -- first of all, the important thing is just to try to keep it perfect to begin with, because all the accidental marks that happen on clay are not like the accidental marks that happen on leather, so you have to keep it perfect, and then all my accidental marks are purposefully put there.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. All right.

Why is it so important to you to have it look exactly like leather?

MS. LEVINE: I want your visual sense to tell you something different than your tactile sense, and then experience the dilemma that that presents you with. Your visual sense is telling you one thing, and your tactile sense is telling you something entirely different, then you have to look -- then you can't take it for granted anymore. You can't be indifferent anymore. Familiarity sort of leads to indifference, and if you think you're familiar with this object, you pick up a couple clues, you say, "Ah, leather."

People will ask me, "How'd you get the stitches in there?" And I'll tell them, "I use this little pounce wheel." And then they say, "But how'd you get the threads in?" And they'll swear they've seen threads, because people -- what we do is we pick up a few clues and we fill in all the rest with what we think we know. And I think once you realize it's not what you think you know, and you touch it and it's something different, then you have to examine a little bit more and it has a presence --

MR. ADAMSON: So there's a gap between the perception and the reality there?

MS. LEVINE: Hmm?

MR. ADAMSON: There's a gap between the perception and the reality that you're interested in.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Well, there's a gap between your two senses.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel like the work has been broad enough in its range that you can always stay interested in it, as an expressive?

MS. LEVINE: You know, the last things I've made have been different, and even those little cups. I wanted to do something that was -- the challenges were getting to be just technical, and I wanted to do something else. So I haven't had much time to work in the last 10 years; been a lot of stuff going on in my life. You know, deaths -- deaths of various family members, and I was the executor of an estate, and I'm the treasurer of this building and there's the construction going on, so all sorts of things interrupted my career in the last 10 years since 1991.

But what I have made since 1991 -- I haven't made any of the realist things since then; done a lot of little cups that were based on a source -- athletic shoe kind of things.

MR. ADAMSON: How have you done with them? What do people think about them now?

MS. LEVINE: Don't know. I've never showed them. I'm hoarding them.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh really?

MS. LEVINE: [Laughs.] I mean showed them in my retrospective, but I haven't had them out in a gallery. I want to have more -- you know, a few more.

MR. ADAMSON: Are you looking forward at this point to working a lot?

MS. LEVINE: Oh yeah. I mean, I'm just --

MR. ADAMSON: Itching to get to it?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, just --

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe we should back up again and go back into the history part of it. I think we were probably in the mid-'-70s by the time you got out here to this space?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, 1976.

MR. ADAMSON: 1976.

MS. LEVINE: And all the time since then is just mushed together. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, well it kind of gets hard after that.

MS. LEVINE: It's strange because I've been here longer than any place in my life. I've lived this one place and I still feel like a newcomer.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you didn't grow up here probably.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. Time compresses as you get older.

MR. ADAMSON: You know, from the outside you seem like you're so different from a lot of the other Bay-area

pottery of your generation and of the generation before you. And I remember once talking to Garth Clark, the New York ceramics dealer, and he said that he saw your work as fitting much more into the super-realist movement in painting and sculpture than into the clay movement at all. And it seems like, in some ways, you've been very different from the people around you since maybe the early '70s, when your mature body of work really came into being. And I wonder if you'd share your thoughts about that.

MS. LEVINE: I think Garth misses the point in my work, actually. I guess ever since I stopped trying to be a funk artist, I don't think of myself belonging to any group. I think what I do is probably related to the kind of isolated kind of childhood I had. It goes back to those kinds of things rather than all the things I see around me. It's too busy around here; you know, it's so busy. I'm living here in a major metropolitan area, and I don't even use the facilities that are available in this area, really, anymore. I used to almost see more of it when I was in Utah, because I would come out here and go around and see everything. And now I think, you know, "next week."

MR. ADAMSON: You don't do a lot of gallery hopping and --

MS. LEVINE: No, no. I just have so much I want to do, and I might as well be doing it anywhere.

MR. ADAMSON: But surely being in the same building as Peter Voukos must have been quite an experience.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah -- I mean, it's been a good community here. That's definitely been good, but I'm just saying, when I was a kid I was an opera fan. I mean, I'd skip classes to get home to listen to the Metropolitan Opera on the radio, you know. But here I am sitting right next to the San Francisco Opera, and I never go -- I never have gone, you know. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: And all of your facilities are --

MS. LEVINE: I have other things I want to do now.

MR. ADAMSON: All of your -- everything you need to make your work is right here, including the kiln?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, well, that's one advantage of living in a major metropolitan area, because when you run out of something, you can go down and buy it. You don't have to think of it months in advance and order it. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of kiln do you have here?

MS. LEVINE: I have two electric -- three electric kilns, actually -- kind of a little test kiln -- and Peter had some big kilns. I used to use Peter's big kiln for the large pieces.

MR. ADAMSON: Was that a gas kiln?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, I used that. So it doesn't really matter whether they're fired, electric or gas now, because I fire it in an oxidation atmosphere. But, you know, the jackets don't fit in my kilns, so I fire them in his kiln.

No, it's been a really good community. I was really sad that he just -- that he's dead now. It was just a real shock.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, I can imagine. Can you talk a little bit about some other people that have been around over the last -- it's almost 30 years now -- 25 years that you've been here that we haven't mentioned already? I mean, we've talked about DeStaebler and Melchert and Arneson and Nagle, I guess, and obviously Peter Voukos. What about other people, like John Mason?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, well, I've met John. I met him on that trip, actually. But, you know, I don't think I saw him again until the memorial for Peter.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. Well, who else -- I guess what I'm getting at was who was an intimate of this -- of the group that was sort of built around this building? And it doesn't have to be only potters, you know. Who were the others that were around?

MS. LEVINE: Oh, well, there's Jody Gillerman next door who's -- you know, she's the computer video artist. Stan Welsh used to be up at the end. He's moved on. It's not a great place for bringing up kids, so his kid was getting older and he moved. Bella Feldman is here, and Clay Jensen, who was a former student of mine; he is in the studio across the hall. He was the one I started to say was -- you know, when people would say I had so much patience, and then I was remarking to him once when he was doing all these molds and all this stuff, and I asked him, I said, "Gee, you have a lot of patience," and he said, "What I found is there's different kinds of patience." [Laughs.] And that's what I had been finding out, that my patience only goes forwards. Tom Holland was here. He just moved out. Basically, except for Tom and Stan Welsh and Matt Glavin down there, we've had the same

people in this building for 25 years.

MR. ADAMSON: And you got to know some other Bay-area artists pretty well, it sounds like too. Like you had mentioned Joan Brown earlier.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, well, I mean there's people up at Cal you know. I mean, I know several.

MR. ADAMSON: It seems like your work is kind of self-motivated. You know, it doesn't -- I feel like, from what you're saying, you had this experience where you really saw a lot and it kind of opened your mind up, and then you went in the direction that you wanted to go, and then after that you were kind of on your own.

MS. LEVINE: Well, kind of; different people evolve different ways. Like Jim Melchert -- every show is different, or every other show; Peter Voulkos more, you know, [gestures] it just got bigger and better. And mine, I feel like I'm trying to focus in on something. It's almost narrowing down, in a way, I think. Instead of experimenting out like this [gestures], I'm just trying to get to that point, which I never get to.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, maybe you do.

MS. LEVINE: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: One thing the Smithsonian really wants us to talk about with everybody that we're doing this project with is the overall shape of the craft world. And, you know, there's a few obvious institutions that have really been at the center, and in ceramics it's NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts]. We were talking a little bit about that before we started recording. So, can you talk a little bit about what your own relationship has been to NCECA and what you think of it in general?

MS. LEVINE: Well, it's much too big. You know, those great big meetings. I mean, I just flounder around in those things. The only time I've gone is when I've been invited to give a talk or do a demo or be on a panel or something. And I don't really enjoy those kinds of big conferences. So I don't really have much to say about it.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. What about the American Craft Council [ACC]?

MS. LEVINE: Don't know much about it really.

MR. ADAMSON: Have you ever gone to the ACC fairs, those huge fairs that they have at the --

MS. LEVINE: No. In fact, I had never even heard of fairs before, because where I came from, there weren't fairs. Sometime in the mid- -- early -- '70s or something I heard of fairs, you know, pottery -- where people would sell their work and all that, but I've never seen one; never seen one.

MR. ADAMSON: Even today?

MS. LEVINE: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: No.

MR. ADAMSON: It was always galleries?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: What about -- you've mentioned a couple of galleries already. Are there other galleries, around here for instance, that you think have been really important that you would want to mention, aside from Hansen Fuller?

MS. LEVINE: In my career? No, not really. I think there's been some important galleries around here. Lots have changed over the years. I mean, they've just --

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think it's different working with a gallery now than it was when you started, for you?

MS. LEVINE: Well, fashion has changed and all that. Artists are hot at a certain time, and then they're less hot at other times. All those things change.

MR. ADAMSON: When do you feel like you were hottest?

MS. LEVINE: Probably in the mid-'70s.

MR. ADAMSON: The mid-'70s?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, probably mid-'70s to mid-'80s, probably.

MR. ADAMSON: For like a decade-plus maybe?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, maybe, something like that.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you have specific collectors that really kind of fostered your development and bought a lot of your work?

MS. LEVINE: I never sold things directly myself -- I mean, maybe one or two little things, just little things. But everything went through the galleries, and I just let them deal with that. I don't want to deal with that stuff. I don't want to deal with it. Every so often you'd meet somebody who had bought a piece of mine, and that's fun. [Laughs.] And you'd hear the story of how the cleaning lady put it out on the back porch or something. [Laughter.]

MR. ADAMSON: But there aren't collectors out there that you think of as having a very important body of your work, necessarily?

MS. LEVINE: I don't think so. I don't think I have a bunch of stuff at one place.

MR. ADAMSON: It's scattered in private collections?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, private and public collections.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, that brings up museums, which is going to be my next question. Your first museum retrospective was in the '80s, right?

MS. LEVINE: Well, I had a -- they called it a retrospective -- in '74.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, in '74.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. It was at the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery [Regina, SK, Canada. It was known as the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery for years, until someone discovered a spelling error in the name. Now it is called the MacKenzie Art Gallery], but it was really a survey. There was a little catalogue and it was -- I don't think it even said retrospective in the catalogue, but that's what she'd invited me to show, and they'd dug up all the old work -- [laughs] -- you know, from collectors and stuff.

Then in 1981 there was a 10-year survey in Boston at the Institute of Contemporary Art. And in this last one it was what they call -- they call it the MacKenzie Art Gallery now; they dropped the Norman from it -- and it was a retrospective with a catalogue [1998]. It was supposed to travel, but a couple of pieces broke on the way to the gallery from collectors, so one thing lead to another. Essentially because of that they cancelled the tour.

One place really wanted the tour. I mean, they'd programmed their whole fall program around it, and their classes and everything, so the MacKenzie finally released it to Waterloo to the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, in conjunction with the University of Waterloo. They had the workshop at the same time as the show was on, and stuff like that.

It was too bad it didn't travel because it was nice to see all that work together again. I mean, it traveled to those two places, but they'd originally said it was going to go to Australia, Japan, the United States, and Canada, so that would be really nice, I thought. [Laughs.] But, you know, it's just all fizzled.

They shipped all the pieces without putting them in crates, you know, had truckers come out and pick up the work from collectors --

MR. ADAMSON: Just soft-packed.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, and I tried to talk them out of it, and they said, "No we want to make the crates here for the tour." So a jacket got broken -- a major piece got broken. The restorer worked on it for two or three months. She put it all back together. I couldn't believe it. She did a beautiful job. You couldn't see the problem. It was broken in smithereens and she had it all back together. It was amazing, but it must have cost them a fortune.

But anyways, they did a very nice catalogue.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, that's the one I've seen.

MS. LEVINE: I'll give you a copy if you want.

MR. ADAMSON: Great, thank you.

MS. LEVINE: So, at least there is one place where my life history is correct in the chronology back there, because there's been a lot of little errors in this literature over the years.

MR. ADAMSON: Hopefully this interview will correct that. [Laughs.]

There are other shows that you've been in, though, that weren't monographic; that weren't just your work.

MS. LEVINE: Oh, yeah, lots of shows.

MR. ADAMSON: Do any stand out as being particularly important in your mind, not necessarily for you but just, you know, an event that you were very happy to be part of?

MS. LEVINE: Any particular show?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. LEVINE: Oh, yeah, there were several, I guess, that were important. I guess one of the really significant ones that was -- what was it called -- "Sharp Focus Realism," at the Sidney Janis Gallery [January, 1972]. I was in that show, so that was sort of a turning point. That was a pivotal show. And there were -- yeah --

MR. ADAMSON: Was that -- was showing your work at Sidney Janis in that show suddenly strange because you were mostly associated with OK Harris? How did that work?

MS. LEVINE: It was before -- it was when I was with that other gallery.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MS. LEVINE: And it was before I got the letter from OK Harris, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: So this would have been back in '73-'74?

MS. LEVINE: '72.

MR. ADAMSON: So that wasn't a problem?

MS. LEVINE: No, it wasn't a problem. It was the one show. I mean, it wasn't his stable, particularly, it was just a show he was -- I can't think of other ones right off hand, you know, but --

MR. ADAMSON: Did you ever have any involvement in the shows at the American Craft Museum [now called the Museum of Arts & Design]?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, there was one. That's how, actually, I got off the ground kind of, was a show that was there, where I think Ivan Karp had seen my work --

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MR. LEVINE: -- and maybe Sidney Janis too; I'm not sure. It was "Clayworks: 20 Americans [1971]." I was the only non-American. I was in the "Clayworks: 20 Americans." [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: They figured you were close enough.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, I think Paul Smith was out here, and I think Peter Voulkos recommended me or something. I was a graduate student at the time.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh really? So you must have been pretty charged to get into that show.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it was --

MR. ADAMSON: Did you go to the opening in New York?

MS. LEVINE: No.

MR. ADAMSON: No? [Laughs.]

MS. LEVINE: Oh, I never went to the vice president's house either.

MR. ADAMSON: The vice president's house? You mean Walter Mondale?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: When they were collecting crafts?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, well, Joan Mondale came around here.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. And it was kind of funny because there were cars parked all -- right down the middle of the street they parked; they didn't park on the edge of the street. You know, and the Secret Service and all -- and all these strings of cars down the street and all that. She came in here; she came to Peter's studio and my studio. And I remember her coming in here, and she said, "Oh, you live here?"

Peter entertained her. I mean, he was going to make a plate for her, and he wanted her to put her fingers through the plate. He'd get this plate and he'd say, "Here." And we were all down there watching and stuff, and she was a little nervous about it, and he'd say -- he had this glass of scotch and he said, you know, "Dip it in -- dip your finger." [Laughs.]

And then somehow there was this collection that was going to be shown at -- I guess she chose a piece that the Oakland Museum owned -- or maybe they didn't own it yet. It was in a show there. I'm not quite sure whether they bought the piece after or before. It's a piece they have now anyways, so it was going to be shown at her place, so everybody was invited. All the artists were invited, but I got the flu and didn't go.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, that's too bad. It would have been fancy.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: What about the Oakland Museum? Have you had close relationships with any curators there?

MS. LEVINE: No, not really.

MR. ADAMSON: Or the -- what was the other?

MS. LEVINE: San Francisco Museum.

MR. ADAMSON: Museum of Craft & Folk Art.

MS. LEVINE: No.

MR. ADAMSON: But you've shown your things there, presumably.

MS. LEVINE: Well, they have a piece of mine, each museum. Each of the museums around here has a piece of mine, at least one piece.

MR. ADAMSON: How does that happen?

MS. LEVINE: Well, the University Art Museum bought a piece out of my graduate show. Oakland Museum --

MR. ADAMSON: -- got it early.

MS. LEVINE: Pardon?

MR. ADAMSON: They got it early.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, right. And Oakland Museum -- maybe it was being collected for showing in the vice president's house, I'm not sure; it was a show anyway. And one of the curators at the Oakland Museum decided to buy a piece that was there. I think that's how it happened; I've forgotten. No, I couldn't say that for sure. And then somehow I think they got a couple of donations or something.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So they have more than one of your pieces?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. And San Francisco Museum, when Henry Hopkins was the director, he bought a piece for the museum from one of my shows at Hansen Fuller, or Fuller Goldeen, or whatever it was at the time.

MR. ADAMSON: Have you -- does it make any difference to you if your work is in a museum or not?

MS. LEVINE: Oh, yeah, I like to have it in museums. That's nice. I mean, wouldn't artists like to have their work in museums?

MR. ADAMSON: Well, I guess it's obvious. But, I mean, in terms of making your work seem -- I don't know, does it help you to sell your work more easily, or is it something you point to in a conscious way? I guess you're not really doing the selling, so you don't have to worry about that.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, I'm really glad I don't have to do the selling because it's just -- I would be no good at it at all. I'd hate it. I'd hate doing it and I'd hate --

MR. ADAMSON: You'd hate spending the time on it I'm sure.

MS. LEVINE: Well, I'd hate spending the time, but I'd always -- I'd hate doing it. Even back when I was making pots, people would come over and they'd ask me to make a piece that -- I remember one couple wanted a blue punch bowl to match the curtains -- [laughs] -- so I made three blue punch bowls or something, and I didn't want them to be pressured into buying anything, you know. And they came and I guess none of the punch bowls they liked, but they left and they bought something else. [Laughs.] They probably felt guilty and I felt guilty. I mean, I just don't like dealing with that kind of stuff, you know? I generally don't take commissions, very seldom. I've taken one major commission.

MR. ADAMSON: Which one was that?

MS. LEVINE: It was Pacific Enterprises -- they've commissioned artists all over the place to do a wall.

MR. ADAMSON: That's a company?

MS. LEVINE: It was a company. They sold off their entire collection after -- they have a catalogue this big of their pieces. Then they sold off the entire collection. It turns out mine, luckily, was all bought because it was three pieces hanging on a board, and for a while there they were going to split it up.

MR. ADAMSON: Were they jackets?

MS. LEVINE: There was a golf bag and a backpack and a baseball glove. They wanted sports -- sporty kind of equipment. Anyways, it was bought by the Rothmans [their Claridge Collection] at auction -- I guess.

MR. ADAMSON: It's funny to see what happens to the prices of things in the secondary market too. I often talk to artists who are amazed by the cost of things that they sold for almost nothing, you know, a long time ago. It's interesting.

MS. LEVINE: So I generally don't take commissions. I'll say, "Well, if I happen to make something like that I'll let you know." I just don't want to have to -- it's such a dilemma trying to figure out what I want to do and what they might want; you know, try to satisfy both me and them. And chances are you don't satisfy either, so -- [laughs].

MR. ADAMSON: Do you find your new ideas come easily?

MS. LEVINE: Oh, I don't know. Let me --

MR. ADAMSON: Because it takes you a long time to make a piece, right?

MS. LEVINE: It takes a long of time. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So it must be a big decision to start?

MS. LEVINE: Well, it kind of rolls when it starts, you know. You make a piece and as you're making that piece you think, I can do this and this and this, or I could do that; this is what I'd like to do next.

MR. ADAMSON: So do you tend to make pieces that relate to each other in some kind of sequential fashion?

MS. LEVINE: Yes, sort of.

MR. ADAMSON: Like you do one jacket, and then you think, I want to do a jacket differently, kind of thing?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, kind of.

MR. ADAMSON: So you have little groups that develop.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, but only one piece at a time.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So you bring it all the way to completion before you start again?

MS. LEVINE: I bring it all the way to where it's drying, to when one is drying, I'll start another piece.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. LEVINE: And then I might fire two or three pieces together, depending on the size of the kiln.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you have pretty good success with your work staying intact in the kiln?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. I've never had any problem. In fact, I'd loaded the -- you know, the piece that went to Pacific Enterprises, the backpack part, it hung on the wall, a backpack, so there was no flat side. So what I had done was I'd loaded it in my kiln when it was still wet, on wet clay posts that I put a little piece of plastic on, and just set it in the kiln on all these little posts to dry in the kiln on a slab of clay, so that whole thing is shrinking together. There's a slab of clay, then the posts, and then this backpack on that, and I let it dry in the kiln.

And on this one day, October whatever it was, 17, 1989 -- I can't remember exact dates -- I turn on the kiln. It's 3:00. At 5:00 the Loma Prieta Earthquake happened. [Laughs.] And after I'd loaded that piece, I'd had another shelf and another piece on top. The kiln is on wheels, and I had blocked the wheels when I loaded it in case I bumped into the kiln. It's a big freezer-type kiln, big freezer shape. Of course the power went out when the earthquake hit. And I came down there, and the wheels had jumped right over the blocks, and the kiln rammed into the wall. And I left it there. The next day I opened it up to look, and I couldn't see what had happened underneath the top shelf; I had all these other things on top. And I thought, well, even if something dreadful had happened in there, there is nothing I can do about it at this point. So eventually a week later I turned the kiln on and just fired it up, and it was fine.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: I mean, all these posts and everything -- I had so many posts in there that it had all hung together. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: That says a lot about your approach to kiln firing.

MS. LEVINE: Oh, yeah, kiln firing is a major thing. To load a jacket in the kiln would be like a three- or four-day episode just loading. First of all, you got to clean the kiln out from everybody else. So you clean all the grog out of the burners and all sorts of things. And then I'd have to build a structure out in front of the kiln -- this was a front-loading kiln, a big gas kiln -- build a big structure that would be at exactly the level of the kiln shelf. And so I'd have to build a very solid structure inside the kiln to hold up the shelves -- and I would have my jacket on a slab of clay --

MR. ADAMSON: Flat?

MS. LEVINE: The layers from the bottom up would be like a board, you know, and then there'd be sand, and then there'd be a slab of clay, and then there'd be sand, and then there'd be lots and lots of little posts with alumina on top of them, and then the jacket on top of all those little posts, and toothpicks holding everything together that will burn up -- wooden toothpicks.

MR. ADAMSON: Why the toothpicks?

MS. LEVINE: Just to hold everything firm so they wouldn't fall over.

MR. ADAMSON: While they're firing.

MS. LEVINE: Well, they're all moving around when I'm putting it in the kiln and everything. So you've got all this weight of this jacket and this slab of clay --

MR. ADAMSON: The posts are for circulation of the heat around the bottom?

MS. LEVINE: No, the posts are to hold it up because there is no flat side --

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MS. LEVINE: -- for the hanging jacket. And -- or for anything, for a golf bag, and firing it on its side so it's rounded -- and so, loading the kiln I have to build this very sturdy structure inside the kiln, and the kiln shelves have to be exactly level, and I have to build a sturdy structure outside the kiln, lay the board on -- and then slide the slab, with the jacket on top of it, into the kiln on top of some more sand, and without knocking over all the shelves that are in the kiln. So that's why it has to be so sturdy. I slide this whole thing in there, and there's barely room

on either side for you to get your fingers around. And, you know, to get all that done perfectly, it takes two people a few days to do it all right -- at least three days.

MR. ADAMSON: And do you have assistants that you regularly have help you?

MS. LEVINE: I did. I had assistants. I had a number of assistants for a number of years. But, you know, I live here, and pretty soon I was just getting -- much as I liked everybody -- you know, I never had an assistant I didn't like, but I just was really feeling a lack of privacy, and you can't be sick one day, you know. I mean, they're here. [Laughs.] You can't not feel like working one day. So I haven't had any assistants in the last 10, 15 -- well, 10 years -- 11 years. So that's one reason the work goes so much slower now. When I have had the chance to work, I do it all myself, whereas I'd have the assistants roll the clay, I'd have them mix the clay, I'd have them do everything except the actual piece. They'd help with the load, they'd clean the kilns and do all the other little errands that need doing around the studio.

MR. ADAMSON: So now you have to go back and do all those mundane tasks yourself?

MS. LEVINE: I do them all myself, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you like that, or is it tedious?

MS. LEVINE: Well, it's a trade-off. I mean, I might get an assistant again. What I need now is an assistant doing the paperwork. There is too much paperwork now. And so that's actually where I need somebody more than in the studio -- well, I need somebody in the studio too, really, to get going a little faster. I haven't had any assistants really since 1991, but what I started doing was piling them all up on three days of the week so I'd have two days just to myself. I had somebody in the office, I had three people in the studio, and I was going nuts.

MR. ADAMSON: Even with that it was too much?

MS. LEVINE: Well, it's just lack of privacy, you know? And there was no place for me to be. I had people in the studio, people in my office. I had people, you know -- [laughs].

MR. ADAMSON: Be a good day to go out and take a walk. [Laughs.]

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, right.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, I had no idea that the kiln-loading process was so involved, I guess.

MS. LEVINE: Well, when you think it's the clay shrinking -- you've got a jacket that is over a yard long to start with. So it moves in three or four inches, so you got to have everything -- you can't have little posts that will tip over as the jacket shrinks, so you've got to have something underneath it that shrinks, and then you've got to have something underneath that so it will roll, so the sand -- usually the slab on the bottom does crack.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, it does crack usually because it just can't roll in that easily, but the jacket never cracks. The problems with the jacket are usually -- if I can get it in the kiln, the problems with making the jacket occur before, when it's wet, and it starts falling apart on me. It's just so --

MR. ADAMSON: How many jackets do you think you've made?

MS. LEVINE: Probably -- there were six in that show, and I probably made four before that; probably 10 altogether.

MR. ADAMSON: And they're big undertakings?

MS. LEVINE: Oh, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you put a real jacket in front of you to work from?

MS. LEVINE: I had a series of jackets. I had a bunch of jackets hanging on the wall, and I'd use little bits -- I'd see how they drape, the stiffer ones and the less-stiff ones, and I just had them all -- I haven't used an actual model for anything for years. I used a model on a wedding present for my brother. I made him his cowboy boots, and because they were his, and so I wanted them to have all the scratches in the same places and the tears and all that in the right places. But basically ever since that, there's very seldom that I have a model --

MR. ADAMSON: That you're specifically following.

MS. LEVINE: -- that I specifically follow. You know, I'll get a scratch from here and a tear from there and a type of buckle from here and a type of drapery from there and, you know. So when I was doing the jackets, I had a lot of jackets hanging on the wall just to see how they draped.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. And you take the parts you'd like from each.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, or try to.

MR. ADAMSON: Some of your titles have people's names in them.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. That's doesn't mean anything. Mostly it doesn't mean anything. It's just a name -- it's much easier to remember something that was called *Elmer's Jacket* than "jacket number six." Which is "jacket number six"?

MR. ADAMSON: But there isn't an Elmer.

MS. LEVINE: Well, there was. I mean -- that was just named in honor of Elmer Bischoff, you know, but it wasn't his jacket. But I named it in honor of him after he died.

MR. ADAMSON: Do most of the names have specific references for you?

MS. LEVINE: Often they'll have some specific reference to me; somebody who gave me a piece, but they're only really there for identification.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. It's not like you're giving the piece to the person.

MS. LEVINE: But with the cups I started trying to dream up some names for them. I dreamed up some names that would be appropriate, somehow have some sort of a mystery to the name; there's some meaning -- something beyond just identity.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you give me an example?

MS. LEVINE: I call one *Whyte Eice*, but it's spelled W-H-Y-T-E E-I-C-E, but it's white, W-H-I-T-E. It was like ice, you know. I called one *Nitro* because it had some black in it. *Bondi* because it was the same color as the iMac that came out -- [laughs]. You know, a little different than names like *Sally's Jacket* or something. I mean, *Sally's Jacket* might have just been because Sally happened to be there the day I named it or something. Alice -- there was an *Alice's Bag*. Alice happened to look at it as it was coming out of the kiln -- Alice Westphal. Remember Alice Westphal? You can see her big Exhibit A Gallery in Chicago.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, okay.

MS. LEVINE: So, you know, the names were actually nothing else -- they just were identity. It was easier than "bag number 42."

MR. ADAMSON: Well, it's interesting because they are suggestive in the sense that we were talking about a while back with the personal history that seems to be loaded into these objects. You sort of think about who Alice might be.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, right. Well, I want that to happen. But I want it to be anonymous; you don't know who she is.

MR. ADAMSON: So, do you like to think about who might have owned or used the piece?

MS. LEVINE: Well, I want people to think of that, see what that association is, and think of that time period that that piece existed in. You know, serve as a measure, not a measure but denotes some elapsed time and denotes absence of somebody who had been there. The life is no longer as it was, be it somebody who is maybe dead now, but maybe just grown up now. We all were little children, and those little children -- I often think of my little brother, whom I adored, my little adopted brother. You know, he was such a sweet little kid. And I still love my brother, but that sweet little kid is no longer here. I mean, that was a time that -- he's a different person now. So there's that kind of thing that I'm kind of speaking of, a life that is no longer as it was, for whatever reason; grown up is one reason.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, but there's a loss there, too.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, your work is actually very melancholy in a way, which I'd never really thought about it before, but it's actually -- there's a real sense of human absence.

MS. LEVINE: Right. I think that's a very, very important part of my work, that sense of human absence. It's hard to put it into words. Whenever people ask me to write a statement -- I hate writing statements because I think of my work as my statement. That's my statement. But the more I talk around the work -- you know, here's this work, and it says all this stuff, and I can talk around it and around it and around it and around it, and talk all these points, and I'm just hoping that somehow the person that's reading this or listening to this somehow can take all that stuff that's going around and around and around and somehow find the focus of what it really is trying to say, because the work is saying a certain thing, but the words -- I can never come to the words that will describe the work. Everything I say is -- it's not right -- I mean, it's only a bit of it; it's only a tiny bit of it, this --

MR. ADAMSON: Do you tend to feel the same when other people write about your work?

MS. LEVINE: Everybody sees different things, or they don't see some things. I don't read a lot of what other people write about my work, actually. No, I don't.

MR. ADAMSON: You're not dying of curiosity? I guess not. [Laughs.]

MS. LEVINE: Sometimes I am and I put it aside intending to read it, if get it, but often I just don't get around to reading it. I mean, if they say I'm the greatest artist in the world, I say, "Oh, yeah, that's nice." I notice that, but sometimes it's very hard for me to understand what they're saying. But sometimes I think they're missing the point entirely when I do read -- I mean, I don't go out of my way to read a lot of stuff and search out everything. First of all I don't get it; I'm not subscribing to all the magazines anymore. I used to subscribe to them, but I don't subscribe to them anymore.

MR. ADAMSON: Like *American Craft* and *Ceramics in America*, those kinds of things?

MS. LEVINE: Oh, yeah, or *Art in America*, or, you know I used to subscribe to *Artforum*, but I never get around to reading them. They just sit here. I always have something I want to do. I'm not a great reader. In fact, I'm dyslexic. I have a hard time reading.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah. That's why math was so easy; you didn't have to read anything. It was just a breeze going through math, but anything I had to do a lot of reading I never -- I mean, I never read a textbook in school.

MR. ADAMSON: Someone was just saying to me that a lot of crafts people are dyslexic. A lot of studio crafts people --

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, that might be, because you learn to express yourself other ways.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you sketch at all?

MS. LEVINE: I used to -- when I was taking those drawing classes, I thought my drawings were okay, but I look back on them now and they weren't -- they were tight or something. But at the time I was reasonably happy with what I was doing; not completely happy but reasonably happy. Now if I try to sketch, I'm so out of practice, everything I do is just so awful and I'm so frustrated, you know. It's just awful because my sense, my aesthetic sense, has got so far beyond my technical ability to draw, and before it wasn't. They kind of went along together. Same with my photography. My initial photographs of my own work, I thought, well, these are, you know, that's okay. [Laughs.] I look back on those now and I say, you know, they weren't okay. Maybe you can tell it's a pair of shoes or whatever, but the lighting is not good.

MR. ADAMSON: Good photography is very, very difficult though.

MS. LEVINE: It's very difficult, and it's really worth getting somebody that knows how to do it.

MR. ADAMSON: Who did the row of jackets up there?

MS. LEVINE: Who did the photographs or the jackets?

MR. ADAMSON: Are those photos?

MS. LEVINE: Well, that's the jacket that I have in -- [unintelligible]. It was on a poster and I cut them all out. I cut out one poster, and it was one poster just linked together.

MR. ADAMSON: It looks like it was drawn with pencil from here.

MS. LEVINE: No, no, the roof leaked and it ran over. [Laughs.] See all those scratches? Those are leaks. So it's been a little water damaged. But, no, it's --

MR. ADAMSON: That's what you get for living in a studio building. [Laughs.]

I noticed you have a lot of other artists' work here too, as well as a couple pieces of your own.

MS. LEVINE: I don't have any pieces of my own.

MR. ADAMSON: Isn't that yours over there?

MS. LEVINE: Nope.

MR. ADAMSON: What is that?

MS. LEVINE: The shoes?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. LEVINE: That's Clay Jensen. That's bronze, and he made them for my 50th birthday.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really? Really, really? So you don't --

MS. LEVINE: The only piece I have -- this isn't really mine; this is John's. I made this for John's birthday.

MR. ADAMSON: It's a belt.

MS. LEVINE: Nineteen -- it would have been for his 60th birthday. I made that for him. I made one for --

MR. ADAMSON: It is really uncanny to touch them.

But you don't like to live with your own pieces, necessarily?

MS. LEVINE: Oh, I never have had enough.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. LEVINE: I was always scrambling to get the last piece made for the show. Everybody's always said the artist should save back some of their pieces for their future, for their retirement and all that. I've never been able to do that. My work is just too slow to make, you know? I have the cups.

MR. ADAMSON: We should go take a look at those.

MS. LEVINE: They're in a crate; they're stacked up, actually.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MS. LEVINE: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, is there anything else you want to say for posterity?

MS. LEVINE: [Laughs.] For posterity? I can't think of anything. Let me see, what else have we not covered?

MR. ADAMSON: It's really hard to be comprehensive about these things, but I think you've done a really good job.

MS. LEVINE: Well, you relayed me along.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, you're very well behaved. [Laughs.]

MS. LEVINE: No, I tend to jump ahead and back.

MR. ADAMSON: I guess the most important thing is, you know, what you're going to do next, or maybe you don't know that yet.

MS. LEVINE: Hopefully just get back into the studio and see what happens. I don't know what's going to happen next; I really don't know. But I do know I'm going to get back in the studio. And once I get the taxes done for this building for last year and the year before -- it was a complicated partnership the way it ran because the way the partnership was written makes the bookkeeping very complex, and then the partners don't behave the way the partnership -- you know, if you work with Peter Voukos -- Peter has Peter's way of working. I've got to straighten it all out in the books in the end, so it's been complicated. But when I get all that done, then this construction will be done, and I'll be able to get back to studio work.

MR. ADAMSON: Amen.

MS. LEVINE: I don't know where I'll go. I'll probably pick up right where I left off. I've got a cup that was half done; I started it in a workshop a year ago.

MR. ADAMSON: Time to finish it.

MS. LEVINE: Yeah, see if it's all moldy. That's where I'll start is just open that up and see what's happened to it. It's in a five-gallon bucket right now, trying to keep it damp.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, thanks very much for doing this. I think a lot of people will appreciate it. It was very nice of you to take the time.

MS. LEVINE: Well, it was my pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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