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Oral history interview with Raymond Charles
Pierotti, 2005 September 4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Raymond Charles Pierotti on September 4, 2005. The interview took place at the interviewer's home in Seattle, Washington, and was conducted by Lloyd Herman 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.

Raymond Charles Pierotti has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

LLOYD HERMAN: This is Lloyd Herman, on September 4, 2005, interviewing Ray Pierotti in Seattle about his background and his recollections pertinent to the history of the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts [Gatlinburg, TN].

And, Ray, I guess what I would prefer first is you tell me a little bit about when you were born and where, and your background leading up to being director of Arrowmont.

RAY PIEROTTI: Okay. I'll [try] to keep it brief, because I'm old. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Well, born when? Start there.

MR. PIEROTTI: I was born in 1932 in Bountiful, Utah, and grew up on a farm with a grandfather who was an ornamental plasterer from Italy and a father who was a musician farmer. I went to public school, and eventually ended up thinking that I was going to become a farmer, even though we had a ceramic studio on the property in the barn where my grandfather made all of his ornamental plaster models. And that was back before rubber molds and things like that were invented. So all of his molds were made out of plaster. And this is all of the decorative, ornamental stuff that we see in old theaters and things like that.

And Utah, being Mormon territory, even though I was born into Catholic and Mormon parents, I got caught up in the traditions of the community and ended up going to France as a Mormon missionary, where I spent two years. And at the end of that time I decided I did not want to come back to the United States, I had become so Francophiled. And I knew all of a sudden that music and art were going to be my life.

MR. HERMAN: Now, how old were you at that point? Had you already gotten through college?

MR. PIEROTTI: I had started-I had about a half of a year at Brigham Young University [Provo, UT] and a half a year at the University of Utah [Salt Lake City]. I had done my military service in Korea. And I had the GI Bill. So I ended up in France. And I guess I must have been about 21, 22 by then. And when I finished the mission, I found out that if I could pass the entrance exam to the University of Paris, La Sorbonne, they would let me study there. I was fluent in French by then, and so I did. And that is how I became involved with art and music, though my focus at that time was on becoming a composer and a musicologist. I stayed in France until about 1959.

MR. HERMAN: So there would have been how many years altogether?

MR. PIEROTTI: About eight years. I went there in 1952, '53 and stayed on until the end of the '50s, and ran out of the GI Bill. I had no money, so I decided to go back to Utah. And that is where I got my first undergraduate degree in an American university, the University of Utah. And I took it in musicology and composition. I finished a master's degree at the University of Utah in the same areas, and then went to Indiana to start on a Ph.D. in musicology and composition. And about halfway through that program, I said, this is not what I want to do. So I simply just got on the Greyhound bus and went to New York City.

MR. HERMAN: What had you expected to happen in New York?

MR. PIEROTTI: I had not the slightest idea. I just knew that I didn't want to be in Indiana any longer and I didn't want to be in school any longer. And then I figured, well, something will happen. You know, I'll find something. So I went and actually ended up opening up the record and music section of Rizzoli's Books that had opened up on Fifth Avenue just below-between 55th and 54th, right around the corner from the Modern [Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY], and right around the corner from the Contemporary Crafts Museum [now the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY].

MR. HERMAN: And in what year would that have been?

MR. PIEROTTI: This would have been in like '63. It is the first time they had opened up a shop in the United States. I walked in cold turkey off the street and said, this is my background. They said, oh, we need somebody to run our music and record department. Will you do it? I said sure. I had absolutely no experience in retail business or otherwise. I just was sort of gutsy.

MR. HERMAN: And how long were you there, and then where did that lead you?

MR. PIEROTTI: I was there for about a year, a year and a half, and then I got a teaching job at a private school called the Franklin Private School, up on the Upper West Side, where they needed a French teacher. And since I was fluent in French and I had had some art history background and music history background, they asked me to teach French and to start up an art appreciation course, which I did.

And after about two years with them, I thought, this is not what I want to do. I really want to paint. I found myself a loft down on 25th and Sixth [Avenue of the Americas], which is down in the flower district of New York at the time, and opened up a loft and started to paint full-time.

MR. HERMAN: How did you support yourself during that period, and were you able to sell paintings, sort of, right away?

MR. PIEROTTI: Yeah, I was fortunate. One morning I woke up to this God awful noise out on the parking lot in front of my loft building, and lo and behold, there was the thing-this New York antique market. So I put my loud speakers out on the fire escape and put a sign up saying "Artist in Residence." Come up. I sold my first paintings that year, enough to support me through the rest of the year.

And then eventually I encountered-and this is the more gullible part of my nature-I encountered a couple from Australia that wanted to open up an art gallery in New York. And they asked me whether or not I would consider doing that. And I said, sure, that sounds like a good idea. I'll put up half and you put up half. Well, as it turned out, I ended up putting all of it up.

And the day that we opened the art gallery, which was called the Kips Bay Art Gallery, over on Second and 34th, they said, Ray, we want you to buy us out. And I said, well, you haven't spent any money. How can I buy you out? I said, well, I'll do this for you. I said, if we sell anything at this opening, I'll give you half the proceeds from our profit, and we ended up selling about \$2,500 worth of stuff. So that was their end of the commission and our relationship.

MR. HERMAN: How long did you keep that gallery open then?

MR. PIEROTTI: Just about a year. During that year, I was asked by the Experiment in International Living, for whom I had done some summer work when I was in school at the University of Utah, whether or not I would consider going to Europe with a group of students who were from Cornell College [Ithaca, NY], and Carleton College [Northfield, MN], and Pomona College [Claremont, CA], and be their academic advisor while they were doing their junior year abroad.

And so I found somebody who would run the gallery for me, and I went off on that trip-it was about a six-month trip. When I came back, I realized that the gallery was not doing very well, and I saw this ad in the paper for an assistant to Paul Smith at the Contemporary Crafts Museum-as it was called back then-the Museum of Contemporary Crafts.

MR. HERMAN: Was he director then?

MR. PIEROTTI: He was director then, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: And what year would that have been?

MR. PIEROTTI: That would have been probably, like, in about '64, '65. All of this stuff happened in the early '60s. And I don't remember the exact dates. And so when he offered me the job, I decided, well, I think I probably ought to close the gallery, because that sounds like a conflict of interest to me. And so I did, and went to work for Paul.

MR. HERMAN: How long were you then in that job, and how did you progress then through the American Craft Council?

MR. PIEROTTI: I think I worked for Paul probably about four years, doing some of the more innovative shows like "Doors," "Made with Paper."

MR. HERMAN: Curating them? Organizing them?

MR. PIEROTTI: Curating and organizing them. "Sound," "Contemplation Environments."

MR. HERMAN: I remember all of those.

MR. PIEROTTI: Also "House-Rucker Live," where we had two Austrian artists come and live in the museum.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yeah.

MR. PIEROTTI: And "Feel It," was another show that I organized. And these were all sort of, like, things on the cutting edge, but there were always craft media works involved in it. In other words, I didn't do it simply because I thought the idea was good; I started to encounter a number of artists that were working in, like, a sound medium, but they might be using clay or metal or wood as the instruments. Or when it was, like, "Doors," I encountered all of these artists who were making handmade doors for private residences.

So I was there through that whole time. And then I think it was about in, probably about '69 or early '70, Don Wykoff decided that he needed an assistant with the American Craft Council.

MR. HERMAN: And he was executive director.

MR. PIEROTTI: He was executive director of the council. The museum and *Craft Horizons* were really umbrellaed under the American Craft Council. And so Don asked me whether or not I would consider coming and working for him, because he wanted to reorganize, or revamp, the American Craft Council's regional programs, which were loosely in existence, but not really what I would have called solidified.

And so my job primarily, under Don, was to go out and redevelop the regional programs, which had been started up by Lois Moran a few years earlier. But it had sort of just-it was very loosely organized, because at the time the original council came into existence-essentially what the council did was contact the directors of organizations like the Northwest Designer Craftsmen, or the Ohio Designer Craftsmen, or the Florida Designer Craftsmen, and ask them whether or not they wouldn't consider umbrellaing all of the artists and craftsmen that were working with them, or in their area.

So in reality, the regional programs were made up of organizations that were already in existence in the various parts of the country, and then they all became umbrellaed under the council. They all took on the title of the Northeast region, the Southeastern region, the South-Central region, the North-Central region, the Northwestern region, and the Southwestern region. There were six regions throughout the council.

My job during that time was primarily going out and meeting with the leadership in those regions, helping to develop programs where they could invite new people, or answer the needs of their particular populations, and help incorporate or integrate those into the larger picture at the time of what the American Crafts Council was to be.

So that is how I became involved with that. And that is how I first became acquainted with places like Arrowmont and Penland [School of Crafts, Penland, NC], and Haystack [Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME], and the Southwest Craft Center [San Antonio, TX], and the Anderson Ranch [Arts Center, Snowmass Village, CO], and the Northeast-it's called the Oregon Arts and Crafts School [Oregon College of Art and Craft, Portland, OR] or whatever. So that was my first introduction to all of these major teaching institutions that were independent of any academic institutions.

MR. HERMAN: So how did you move on? How long did you do the regional programs and where did that lead?

MR. PIEROTTI: Well, one of the other aspects of the regional programming was doing national conferences. And so at the last national-I think the council only had about three or four national conferences. I had organized one for them in '73, which was out in Colorado. We decided to do another one in '76, and we headquartered it in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. It was also Mrs. Webb's [Aileen Osborne Webb, founder of the American Craft Council] 80th birthday. So we made it a birthday celebration.

And the whole city of Winston-Salem basically became the conference. We managed to get-what was the vice president's-under Jimmy Carter?

MR. HERMAN: Oh, Joan Mondale.

MR. PIEROTTI: Joan Mondale-got her to be honorary chairperson for the conference.

MR. HERMAN: Which I remember was centered around Wake Forest University.

MR. PIEROTTI: Wake Forest was the headquarters for it. But what we did is we invited all of the states of the southeastern region to take over an old storefront street in downtown Winston-Salem that had basically been

closed off. There were like 15 or 18 storefronts that were empty. And so we managed to get the owners of those buildings to let us organize exhibitions in the windows of each of those buildings. And we gave each state a storefront. And then Joan Mondale did the opening, cut the ribbon on the street, and we had a big party, big bash down there.

And that is sort of when I met Marian [G.] Heard and Sandy [Sandra J.] Blain, who were, to me, Arrowmont personified.

MR. HERMAN: Because Marian Heard had been director for many years, and Sandy Blain was her assistant.

MR. PIEROTTI: I think Marian Heard opened up Arrowmont in like '37 or '38. My recollection is she came down to teach weaving at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. She was head of the crafts program, which was a part of the College of Home Economics. And so there was-it was called the College of Home Economics, Food, Nutrition, and Crafts-that was the name of the college. And Marian was basically the head of the craft section.

MR. HERMAN: Having gone around to different parts of the country, as, you know, running regional fairs for the ACC, how would you assess the craft schools-not the university programs, but the schools like Arrowmont, and Haystack, and Penland? Were there-did you perceive that there were specialties in any of them, or were they pretty much the same, or what was distinctive?

MR. PIEROTTI: I think across the board they were pretty much the same. What made the difference within each of those structures was who they had as part-time teachers. And most of them were seasonal schools; none of them were really year-round places. Penland came the closest to being a year-round school because it did have resident artists; people actually lived there year round. But all of the other places like Haystack, Arrowmont, Anderson Ranch, the Southwest Craft Center; they were really seasonal places or only opened during certain times of the year.

MR. HERMAN: Southwest Craft Center was only a part-time-

MR. PIEROTTI: It was only part-time when it first started up, until some brilliant ladies decided to open up a private club on the riverfront and put it underneath the aegis of the school as a nonprofit. It was actually a private club. And so all of the proceeds from that club underwrote the Southwest Craft Center.

MR. HERMAN: Amazing. I have never heard that.

MR. PIEROTTI: It was really a wonderful group of ladies. I mean, talk about brilliant insight. They were really quite extraordinary.

MR. HERMAN: Well, it is interesting, you bring up-you mention several women who are so associated with the relevant success of the American Craft movement in the 20th century, Aileen Osborne being probably foremost because she started both the-what was first-I think the American Craftsmen's Cooperative Council that became the American Craft Council. And Marian Heard, who really played such a significant role in getting Arrowmont started, and changing it over, really, from the settlement school and clinic where mountain people brought in their goods, I think, to sell-to support, really-to thank the teachers, I think, initially for teaching their kids.

MR. PIEROTTI: Now, I'm not exactly sure how that transition occurred between the settlement school and Marian, other than the fact that I am aware that Marian was Pi Beta Phi, and the Pi Beta Phi organization used the crafts as a way of supporting their chapter developments. And Marian was also there at the time when, like, Lucy Morgan of Penland and-

MR. HERMAN: Another strong and important woman.

MR. PIEROTTI: Another strong person-very strong person. And then Mary [Crovatt] Hambidge, who was starting up the Hambidge Center [now the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts & Sciences, Rabun Gap, GA], who would learn how to weave in Greece.

MR. HERMAN: Was that about the same time?

MR. PIEROTTI: It was exactly the same time.

MR. HERMAN: This would be in the '30s then.

MR. PIEROTTI: Yeah, she opened up the Hambidge Center in like '32, '33 [the center was actually founded in 1934]. And she revitalized weaving in the Appalachian region-Mary Hambidge basically did it. So Marian Heard and Mary Hambidge and Lucy Morgan, and all of those women basically were the ones who reinitiated the notion of people in the wintertime doing handicrafts, and in the summertime farming. And the school Arrowmont, I believe, was opened up with a notion of bringing in teachers to teach these mountain people how to rejuvenate

their arts and their crafts. So it was really opened up with an idea of a livelihood, not as an art school, or as a craft school.

MR. HERMAN: So it was really vocational.

MR. PIEROTTI: It was really vocational training. And that would make sense because that is why Marian was tied into the department of home economics.

MR. HERMAN: Well, and this was right after the Depression, too. So I think economic development was probably very important in those rural southern regions.

MR. PIEROTTI: And I think Eleanor Roosevelt was also very involved in the whole process, too.

MR. HERMAN: The Valkill Project [Valkill Medal Awards Program], certainly, she had pioneered.

MR. PIEROTTI: And the WPA projects-they all sort of tied in together during the Depression and before the Second World War. So that was a-

MR. HERMAN: Do you think that Marian Heard and Lucy Morgan at Penland and Aileen Webb and Hambidge all know each other?

MR. PIEROTTI: I know Marian and Aileen did. And I know Lucy Morgan knew Aileen Webb. Because Aileen, she was the kind of person that was very outgoing and gregarious. And she was not at all pretentious.

MR. HERMAN: Though she came from a privileged background.

MR. PIEROTTI: A very privileged background, whether or not she would speak the same language-I don't know enough about Lucy Morgan. Marian Heard certainly was an educated woman, too. Lucy Morgan was educated. I mean, she was not a mountain gal. She was bright and very lucid, and very far thinking.

MR. HERMAN: So you became acquainted with Marian Heard and Sandy Blain, her assistant-

MR. PIEROTTI: Through the regional program.

MR. HERMAN: Through the regional program. So how then did you progress to the point that you became the first male director of the Arrowmont School?

MR. PIEROTTI: About the time that Marian was thinking about retiring, they decided that they had better look for another director.

MR. HERMAN: That would have been about when?

MR. PIEROTTI: That would have been in like '75. I think Marian retired in '76, so '75, they had started the search committee. And Marian approached me personally, and she said, Ray, would you consider applying for the job as director of the Arrowmont School? It was really probably the farthest thing from my mind because here I was involved in the New York City art scene and I thought this was, you know, wonderful, this is where I should be, but the more I thought about it, I thought, well, you know, this would be a wonderful opportunity to go down, and I could go down-it was a seasonal school, so I could go down there in the summer and then back to New York in the winter and just do the whole sort of two places at once.

The only thing I hadn't realized was that attached to the role of director of the Arrowmont School was also the associate professorship in crafts at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

MR. HERMAN: And that was not your field.

MR. PIEROTTI: And that was not my field. I have no background in arts and crafts or anything like that. My whole background is musicology composition, and I have a native talent for administrative work.

MR. HERMAN: But it was because of your association at the American Craft Council that you were seen as someone who knew the crafts field and could do it.

MR. PIEROTTI: Right. And the fact that I had curated these exhibitions, and I always included within the structure of these more forward-looking exhibitions part of the historical nature of the crafts that were involved doing some of these concepts. Everybody sort of assumed that I had background in that and I really didn't. I was lucky.

MR. HERMAN: So you were offered the job?

MR. PIEROTTI: I was offered the job.

MR. HERMAN: And this was to succeed Marian.

MR. PIEROTTI: This was to succeed Marian. And my first reaction was to call up Sandy Blain. I said, Sandy, you have been Marian's assistant now for about 12, 14 years, 15 years. I said, Sandy, don't you really want this job, because I don't want to take the job if you really would like to have it. And she said, no, Ray. She said, I just want to make pots.

MR. HERMAN: And she was teaching at the university, too.

MR. PIEROTTI: And she was teaching.

MR. HERMAN: So she already had-

MR. PIEROTTI: She had a full professorship with the university already, and so she was into that sort of thing. And I understood what she was saying, and I said, well, if it's-if you don't object to my taking the job, I would be thrilled to have it, but I would want you to stay on as assistant, which she agreed to do. And so that is how I got introduced into the Arrowmont program.

MR. HERMAN: So tell me about how that transpired, because this was a school that had grown out of a settlement school and clinic, and through the introduction of crafts and summer programs and, I guess, the link to University of Tennessee Knoxville through Marian Heard and Sandy Blain, it had become much more identified in contemporary crafts than in non-crafts.

MR. PIEROTTI: Right, because both Marian and Sandy were very active with the American Craft Council. And the focus of the American Craft Council of that time was on contemporary trends. It wasn't really on traditional handmade items. And in a sense, that sort of got the council in trouble with a large segment of the craft-making population.

MR. HERMAN: I'm guessing that is because not everything had to be functional, to follow the traditional sort of relationships that people associated with the word "craft."

MR. PIEROTTI: And there was-I could see at the time there was a schism that was occurring between places like the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, some of the Tennessee Designer Craftsmen, some of the other guilds-the Piedmont Crafts Guild, which was headquartered in Winston-Salem. I could see a schism that was starting to occur between them and the American Crafts Council.

MR. HERMAN: Because they remained more tradition-based and function-

MR. PIEROTTI: More functional-oriented, whereas the council and the museum were getting less and less functional-focused. And so I took the job, really, at the Arrowmont School for a couple of reasons. One was to try to bridge that gap, because I couldn't see-I could see no reason for there to be an either/or relationship. There is no reason why you couldn't have one total spectrum, you know, and things that went into the spectrum feeding on the other end of the spectrum. And so I took it for that reason.

The other reason why I took it was I realized that here was a school that had great facilities but it was almost unknown outside of a small coterie of people who had actually gone there. And its reputation was that of a-amongst the craft schools at the time-was sort of like a dowdy, not very well known, or not very popular, not very forward-looking kind of place. And I thought, this place needs to be spruced up.

MR. HERMAN: Was that because things were more tradition- or function-based?

MR. PIEROTTI: Yeah, they were-

MR. HERMAN: They are teaching the people who are hired to teach?

MR. PIEROTTI: Yeah, they were down there in the middle of the Appalachian region, which, of course, is an enormous center of functional crafts. And so they were, in a sense, catering to that group of people, but there were not that many university professors or people teaching who were-had an opportunity to meet with those people. It was sort of like some of the teachers at the Arrowmont School were people who had no formal education and they had learned the craft from hand-to-mouth or from word-by-word [word-of-mouth]. And they taught, but they weren't really considered academic-credentialed. And so there was the need, as far as the university was concerned, to sort of upgrade that to make it more of an attractive place to bring people-teachers-from all over the country, and also attract students that could also get credit for the classes they took in the summertime.

MR. HERMAN: Was that described to you when you interviewed for the job as something they wanted?

MR. PIEROTTI: No, it wasn't what they talked about. They just basically-to me they said, you know, we need somebody to revitalize this place. They didn't tell me how to revitalize it, but that was primarily because I don't think that the Pi Beta Phi had any notion of what the contemporary craft scene was.

MR. HERMAN: Tell me how your-well, first of all, I guess I'm interested in knowing how you were interviewed for the job and what the Pi Beta Phi fraternities expectations of you were and vice versa.

MR. PIEROTTI: I think there was probably a disjunct between Pi Beta Phi and the Arrowmont School. Marian was an extremely clever woman. Brilliant politically and socially, and yet on the surface looked to be like a little old homemade, easy person to be around. She was extremely smart. And so she basically had taken the school-the Arrowmont School-from a settlement school focused on handmade-you know, making products that Pi Beta Phi could sell in their chapters-to a place that was more academically inclined, but not real top grade, but at least it was headed in that direction. And I don't think Pi Beta Phi knew what she had been doing all of this time.

And so my interview was primarily through the University of Tennessee. It was the faculty of the University of Tennessee-they were associated with the Arrowmont School-that did the interviewing. I think I had one interview with the Pi Beta Phi chairman of the board at that particular time. And my impression was that whatever Marian decided is what Marian got.

So if Marian chose me-

MR. HERMAN: So they really left it in her hands. They did not want to be bothered.

MR. PIEROTTI: They did not want to be bothered.

MR. HERMAN: But weren't they paying the bills?

MR. PIEROTTI: They were paying the bills, but they were perfectly happy to pay the bill because the bills were not very high at the time. I mean, it was a low-budget operation. And they had built this fine campus in Gatlinburg.

[Audio break, tape change.]

-they became the model for every craft school that developed after that, like the Appalachian Center for the Crafts. That was modeled on Arrowmont.

MR. HERMAN: And how did Arrowmont, run by Pi Beta Phi, come to have this facility that was so up-to-date?

MR. PIEROTTI: Marian Heard.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MR. PIEROTTI: Marian.

MR. HERMAN: And her colleagues at the University of Tennessee?

MR. PIEROTTI: And her supportive colleagues at the University of Tennessee. But the interesting little connection there was that if the university had this summer program, this summer arts program, and everybody that enrolled at Arrowmont became a student at the University of Tennessee, that increased the enrollment capacity of the university. So, of course, the university was thrilled to have all of these people coming from all over the different states to study at this little southern mountain school.

MR. HERMAN: How much oversight did the university have then of many of the instructors, who were not really academics but self-taught or even folk or traditional craftsmen?

MR. PIEROTTI: Well, I think in the beginning the university didn't really care because the craft program at the university was still considered under home economics, like sewing and stitching and crocheting and crafts and weaving. And, in fact, there was a sort of-at the university there was this sort of negative, derogatory concept that, well, anybody can take basket weaving and complete it. And you do basket weaving underwater and you get credit for it. And there were all of these negative connotations associated but-they didn't seem negative enough for them to overlook the fact that it was making them a lot of money.

So there was money tied into it. And Marian was smart about that. And Pi Beta Phi being an academic-associated fraternity, they saw the finance coming from the university as being very productive. And so they were more than happy to let it go on the way it wanted it to go on.

MR. HERMAN: So you-with only one interview with the chairman of the board of governors of the school, you

were hired.

MR. PIEROTTI: I was hired.

MR. HERMAN: With the expectation that you would simply continue on with their-

MR. PIEROTTI: That I would try-I think what they assumed was that since I was New York-based at the time, and that I had a national reputation amongst the craft community, given my affiliation with the museum and the American Craft Council, that I would raise the prestige, or bring the Arrowmont School into a more public position, which is basically what I did. And I knew that that was what I was supposed to do.

MR. HERMAN: Do you remember what the annual budget of the school was when you went to work there?

MR. PIEROTTI: It seems to me that it was around \$500,000. And that was for everything. That included my salary, everybody's salary, all of the teachers.

MR. HERMAN: And how much of that-were there requirements to get so much income generated from the classes? Is that part of that budget? Or was there a guarantee that the fraternity would pay X amount?

MR. PIEROTTI: They guaranteed-like Aileen Osborn Webb picked up the deficit every year for the ACC, so that the fraternity-if school didn't make money-

MR. HERMAN: You mean, it was like she picked up the deficit for the ACC? Pi Phi would pick it up for the school?

MR. PIEROTTI: Pick up for the school. And so that was sort of a given. So there was no idea that it was going to make a lot of money, but that it would at least break even. And Marian managed to make it break even for a number of years, but towards apparently the end of her stay, they were starting to lose money. Pi Phi was being asked to contribute more and more every year. That is actually how the sales through the chapters got started. Early on in the concept of underwriting the school was that all of the crafts that were being made by the mountain people around Arrowmont, and also around Gatlinburg or the city, and a lot of the people that worked for the school itself or were part of the school, they would sell their wares to the Pi Beta Phi chapters. The Pi Beta Phi would go sell that to their memberships or to their friends. They would have a fund-raiser ever year. And at the end of the year, the profits that came out of chapter sales of the all of the arts and crafts that were made would then come back to the Arrowmont School or the Arrowcraft shop to underwrite it.

MR. HERMAN: But didn't that almost necessitate a kind of a production item that would be produced, so that you would have identical things? Otherwise it seems to me you would have a lot of unique pieces and no, kind of, repeat orders or-

MR. PIEROTTI: Well, remember that this was all happening about the time that unique craft pieces were starting to become popular.

MR. HERMAN: So really, you know, placemats and things like that, production items.

MR. PIEROTTI: Still very production, pots or fruit bowls or teacups, or all of the stuff that was functional that you could think of, was still being produced.

MR. HERMAN: And the Arrowcraft shop, then, was the retail outlet for these products in Gatlinburg.

MR. PIEROTTI: Yeah, it was. And it was the collector of the all of the work that then would go out to the Pi Beta Phi chapters.

MR. HERMAN: Oh. So you really were overseeing the retail operation and the distribution system too, or did the fraternity do that?

MR. PIEROTTI: That was another little secret that I didn't know about when I hired on. I thought that I was being hired as an executive director of Arrowmont, which would oversee Arrowcraft and oversee the whole operation related to Pi Beta Phi. As it turned out, I wasn't. I was hired on to be basically academic advisor / administrator, which they called as the director of Arrowmont. But the whole Pi Beta Phi system was operated by another individual, who basically was the comptroller of the books.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MR. PIEROTTI: And so that created some tension, because here was this guy who came in who had nothing to do with Pi Beta Phi.

MR. HERMAN: But he was hired by them.

MR. PIEROTTI: But he was hired by them. And so there was this question about which of the two of us is actually the director of the Arrowmont School.

MR. HERMAN: A little bit of a power-

MR. PIEROTTI: A little bit of a power struggle that went on. So it was a very interesting dynamic.

MR. HERMAN: And who was that? Was it one person running-

MR. PIEROTTI: Her name was Caroline Riddle. She basically was the bookkeeper and the financial administrator for the whole operation.

MR. HERMAN: Was she a Pi Phi, or was she someone from the community?

MR. PIEROTTI: She was a Pi Phi. The other thing that became very clear to me when I took over the school was that there was a disjunct between the community of Gatlinburg and the school itself. In fact, the community almost had a hostile attitude towards the school, because they saw it as a recluse and a nonparticipant within the community itself; that it was sort of "hoi polloi," or untouchable. So one of the first things I did was I joined the Rotary Club and became connected back into the community, and then started to open up the school, the Arrowmont School, as a social function to the community of Gatlinburg.

MR. HERMAN: Oh. And how did you do that? I mean, what were some of the things-

MR. PIEROTTI: I met a couple of people in town and I talked about my being the director. And wouldn't they like to have a social event at the school or wouldn't they like to have a program for their kids in the school? Lots of summer programs and schedule in the Pi Beta Phi school in the summertime. And they all accepted that.

I also started up the Gatlinburg Arts Council with the help of community residents.

MR. HERMAN: So that had never been done before?

MR. PIEROTTI: That had never been done before. So in a sense what I was trying to do was-I saw the same work there that I dealt with with the American Craft Council. I was sort of like a joiner. I was like a coalescer [sic] of people of disparate interests, trying to bring them together and make everything bigger and better than what it was. And it worked. But as a result, we moved really quickly within the structure of the school itself.

And one of the first things that I recognized was that, in terms of prestige, as long as the Arrowmont School was in the College of Home Economics, it would never have any academic credentials in the art world. And so I set wheels in motion to talk about this idea that the crafts program really should be in the department of fine arts. And the College of Fine Arts was getting ready to build a new building there on the campus of the university. And I said, wouldn't it be great if you brought in art and architecture and the crafts all under the umbrella of the fine arts program? And the people at the university thought it was a great idea, except the chairman of the College of Home Economics, which she thought was just a terrible idea because, of course, all of the students that were bringing money into her college would then go into the College of Fine Arts.

MR. HERMAN: So she would be losing attendance in her program-losing a program.

MR. PIEROTTI: Losing a program was what she was doing. And so during my first year at the University of Tennessee and as director of Arrowmont, I had to go through that transition. And that was strictly university politics. And it went well. And Pi Beta Phi didn't seem to really care where the school was housed as long as it still had an affiliation with the University of Tennessee. So that was another sort of transition that occurred during the time that I was there.

MR. HERMAN: But were you teaching at the university?

MR. PIEROTTI: I was also teaching.

MR. HERMAN: What were you teaching?

MR. PIEROTTI: I was teaching a course in design, basic design-two-dimensional, three-dimensional design, which is something that I had picked up on my own and I had no credentials for.

MR. HERMAN: So, and was Sandy Blain then still remaining as assistant director and she was teaching ceramics?

MR. PIEROTTI: She was teaching ceramics, right.

MR. HERMAN: What was her attitude about moving from home ec to-

MR. PIEROTTI: She was very supportive of it. Actually, everybody there was-I forget the woodworker's name, and another potter, and a weaver. Everybody on the faculty wanted to make the move. The only person who was afraid to make the move was the chairman of the department. And she-

MR. HERMAN: Of home ec?

MR. PIEROTTI: Well, no, there was-the chairman of the College, the head of the College of Home Ec, and then there was the chairman of the crafts department within the umbrella of home economics.

MR. HERMAN: So they were both resistant.

MR. PIEROTTI: They were both resistant. And a number of people that had graduated as home ec majors who were involved in the craft within the community, they were sort of opposed to it because they somehow thought that being switched out of home economics that they would lose their accreditation or they would lose their credibility of where they came from. So there were a number of bloody fights that occurred all under the table for several months.

MR. HERMAN: But what were the other challenges you faced when you got into this very different milieu? [Laughs.]

MR. PIEROTTI: Actually, I didn't really know that I was facing any challenge at the time.

MR. HERMAN: Though, you identified the relationship with the community, the-

MR. PIEROTTI: Yeah, but that wasn't a challenge.

MR. HERMAN: Not a challenge.

MR. PIEROTTI: That seemed to be like-

MR. HERMAN: Well, let's just say change. Let's talk about change.

MR. PIEROTTI: That seemed like a logical thing to do. So in my own mind, what I needed to do was to somehow remarry Arrowmont back into the Gatlinburg community. I needed to upgrade its status among the craft schools throughout the country, raise it to a level where its people would say, oh, well, I want to go to Arrowmont because it's prestigious to go to Arrowmont.

MR. HERMAN: So these were goals, really.

MR. PIEROTTI: These were goals. And I discussed these with the board. And, in fact, one of the first things I did when I was there is I asked the board whether or not they wouldn't host a retreat for the board members and for some of the faculty on the school, and hire an outside consultant to come down and lead us through a goal-oriented process. And Don Wykoff, I asked him if he would come and work with us to-

MR. HERMAN: What we would call a board development workshop or seminar.

MR. PIEROTTI: So we spent a week doing that. And that is sort of how we started to define some of these other needs that the school had. And out of that group, sort of some long-range plans.

MR. HERMAN: Do you remember what those were?

MR. PIEROTTI: Primarily developing better studio space in wood and metal, improving the ceramics studios, getting a more-a broader outreach for publicity and promotion, doing better publications related to the schools so that, when we sent it out, it would make people attracted to the place. Also one of the other ideas was to further develop an exhibition program, because Arrowmont had always had an exhibition program, and they had a small permanent collection. I found the permanent collection stored up in the attic and it was-all of the fiber pieces were moth-eaten-they were all being eaten. And they had stored them up in the attics, and they had used a little section off the side of the auditorium as a woodworking studio.

And so we decided that what we needed to do was to build a new woodworking studio, take the old woodworks studio and turn it into a permanent collection, kind of storage space for the exhibition. And also we did think about building some new housing for the students. At that time, there was hardly any housing. I mean, there were two or three old houses there and the barn that was functioning as a dormitory.

MR. HERMAN: But all of the students stayed on campus. They didn't have to rent motel rooms. And, of course, Gatlinburg at that time was, I'm sure, less developed as a tourist destination than today.

MR. PIEROTTI: It was less than adequate. Actually, I would say that even during the time that I was there-the first year that I was there, I would say that at least a third of the students stayed off campus. They had to stay in hotel rooms because we didn't have enough room for them.

MR. HERMAN: Did any of them stay with any of the families, or were they hotel rooms?

MR. PIEROTTI: No, they were all in motel and hotel rooms. And, of course, there were family bed and breakfasts and things like that. So those were, sort of, the goals. And then my other-I guess my other personal goal was to bring a caliber of teacher and instructors into the schools that was more in sync with what was going on in the contemporary craft field. So-

MR. HERMAN: Who were some of those people?

MR. PIEROTTI: People like New York-Lenore-what is her name? She started up surface design. Bill Helwig and-

MR. HERMAN: Not Lenore Davis.

MR. PIEROTTI: Lenore Davis.

MR. HERMAN: Bill Helwig's wife.

MR. PIEROTTI: Right. And bringing in some, like-what is his name-[inaudible]-I have forgotten all of these names. It's been so long.

MR. HERMAN: Verne Funk.

MR. PIEROTTI: Verne Funk for ceramics, and actually the first glassblowing program there.

MR. HERMAN: Glassblowing?

MR. PIEROTTI: Yeah, we did glassblowing. We had a glassblowing workshop. And I got Mark Peiser to come to do that from Penland.

MR. HERMAN: And you had a glass furnace at that point?

MR. PIEROTTI: We had a portable glass furnace.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, a portable.

MR. PIEROTTI: A portable glass furnace. And I got John and what's his name-the guy that opened up the metal museum over in Memphis.

MR. HERMAN: Jim Wallace.

MR. PIEROTTI: Jim Wallace. I got him to come and do the first blacksmithing workshop at Arrowmont. And we had portable blacksmithing. And then I got Bob Koff to come and do the first really big wood furniture-making program. And I got Bob to help me design an old garage into a woodworking studio, which was the first woodworking studio.

MR. HERMAN: Well, just to back up for a minute, what were the disciplines that were being taught then when you came?

MR. PIEROTTI: Weaving, dyeing, photography once in a while, some enamel, ceramics, that was it.

MR. HERMAN: No glass.

MR. PIEROTTI: No. No metal.

MR. HERMAN: No jewelry even?

MR. PIEROTTI: Some jewelry, but it was very limited. But not metalsmithing in the sense of blacksmithing and things like that, and no major woodworking other than woodworking as more like collage or montage, but not furniture or-

MR. HERMAN: Not furniture.

MR. PIEROTTI: Or wood turning or anything like that.

MR. HERMAN: But there wasn't even a kind of a rural use of wood that-

MR. PIEROTTI: Wood whittling.

MR. HERMAN: Wood whittling. But it would be just whittling. Nothing constructed or using machine tools there.

MR. PIEROTTI: Right, none of that sort of thing, because we ended up-and that was-I have to grant the Pi Beta Phi credit for that-they gave me enough money to buy new equipment. That was one of the first-

MR. HERMAN: That kind of leads into my asking, then, your relationship with Pi Beta Phi and whether they were purely in a kind of a responsive mode, or an unresponsive mode, whether they had expectations of what you were going to do, or whether it was really up to your initiative and their response.

MR. PIEROTTI: I think it was primarily up to my initiative. And as long as I was making money and bringing in more students, they were perfectly happy to let me do that. And I think that is how they let Marian run the school. So she had, sort of, set the precedent. And so all that I had to do was fulfill the financial end and not bring any disgrace to the school, so to speak; they were perfectly happy to let me go ahead and do what I wanted to do.

MR. HERMAN: With the new programs that you were bringing in, even the temporary, portable glass workshops or iron forging, did that increase the enrollment?

MR. PIEROTTI: It increased the enrollment. And I also realized that there was another whole segment, since we were moving in the department of fine arts at the university, there was an opportunity to start teaching watercolor and painting and calligraphy and things of that nature that would deal with the graphic arts in a greater degree.

MR. HERMAN: What about sculpture?

MR. PIEROTTI: Sculpture was still under the umbrella of clay, or still under the umbrella of woodworking or metalsmithing. It was never thought of as a separate, independent kind of discipline.

MR. HERMAN: How did you go about, then, advertising and getting word out about the new programs?

MR. PIEROTTI: I started-I actually bought small ads in all of the craft magazines.

MR. HERMAN: That had never been done before?

MR. PIEROTTI: That had never been done before. And I started doing mailings to all of the university programs that had arts and crafts programs in them and sent out our brochures to all of them. I think probably the largest increase in their budget was in the publication part of the program, because I produced a flyer-I think I must have produced probably 10,000 flyers, which they had never done before. And they got sent all over the country.

MR. HERMAN: And did you get into conflict with the controller about spending this new money, doing things differently?

MR. PIEROTTI: Indirectly I got in-she never would openly criticize me, but I could tell underneath that she was, like, not entirely happy with the way I was redirecting the money. So there was that conflict. And then the other thing that I recognized was that we had a shop-you know, an arts and craft supply shop in the schools-and we had a kind of a bookstore within that arts and craft supply shop. And here was another opportunity to make money, but we had no facilities for it. So what I did was I actually built a bookstore, extended it out into this vast lobby that had nothing in it. And so that glassed-in bookstore-

MR. HERMAN: As it is today.

MR. PIEROTTI: -as it is today-is what I put in. And I designed that, and I brought the reception area out into the foyer and put the offices up in back for better articulation of the operation back there. And then I took in and I made the arts and craft supply store-real arts and craft supply store-

MR. HERMAN: Did that bring in more money then?

MR. PIEROTTI: That brought in more money and basically helped underwrite the whole program.

MR. HERMAN: What was your method of reporting to Pi Beta Phi then?

MR. PIEROTTI: At that time they had an annual board meeting, and that was the only time I reported to them.

MR. HERMAN: And that was at the school?

MR. PIEROTTI: That was at the Arrowmont School. What Pi Beta Phi would do is they would come-I think it was like the end of the summer school session, like the end of September, first part of October. And they would have a Pi Beta Phi board retreat on campus. And they would stay on campus and then have the board meeting. And that was the only time I ever reported to them. Otherwise, I was reporting basically to the head of the art department or the head of the crafts department at the University of Tennessee.

MR. HERMAN: Did you get any directives throughout the year from Pi Beta Phi, then?

MR. PIEROTTI: No, no, directives.

MR. HERMAN: In which they really didn't-it was kind of hands off.

MR. PIEROTTI: Hands off. One of the other notions that I had with Pi Beta Phi-and I discussed this with them at the time that we did that board retreat when Don Wykoff and some other people came in to help out-I said, you know, what would it be like if I, as director of Arrowmont, during the winter months, would go out and visit all of your chapters that are selling all of this stuff for us and help them understand exactly why they are supporting us? They don't realize it, but they have got on their hands a wonderful school that can influence the direction of design across America. And most of the Pi Beta Phi board members thought, well, that's a waste of time. We don't really care. And I said, well, I think you should care. And so I said, would you mind if I went and visited with these chapters? And they said, oh, you can go do that if you like.

MR. HERMAN: But did they provide money or allow you-travel money?

MR. PIEROTTI: They gave me a travel budget, but that was a part of my salary, you know, the whole part of the package, and I could use it however I wanted to use it. And so what I did is I spent generally from, like, October through March of the first year going to visit a different campus about every week.

MR. HERMAN: And what level of recognition of the school did you find in the sororities? Or were you meeting with alumni chapters, too?

MR. PIEROTTI: I was meeting with the alumni chapters and within the sororities together when they were having a special function. And most of them didn't know what the Arrowmont school was. They knew what Arrowcraft was because it supplied them with the goodies that they sold to raise their money, but they had no idea about the school. And so what I attempted also to do was to promote the notion that maybe they should give a scholarship to one of the sorority sisters to come and attend a session of the Arrowmont school. And some of them took me up on it.

MR. HERMAN: I wonder whether that continues today.

MR. PIEROTTI: I don't know.

MR. HERMAN: Were there any-at that time, I know there was a Pi Beta Phi weekend that takes place in the fall, just prior to our fall board meetings. Were there anything like that to bring their collegians to the Arrowmont campus when you were director?

MR. PIEROTTI: No.

MR. HERMAN: Or proceeding-

MR. PIEROTTI: I don't remember that, because my time at Arrowmont was relatively short.

MR. HERMAN: How long were you there altogether?

MR. PIEROTTI: I was there about two academic years. I moved there, I think, in '76 and I left in the fall of '78.

MR. HERMAN: Tell me about what you feel you accomplished there, and what you wanted to accomplish but didn't, and why. [Laughs.]

MR. PIEROTTI: Well, that is a big question, but it's a good question. I think what I-I think that I was basically a catalyst for change, which often happens when a person becomes director after somebody has been director for a long, long time. And Marian had been there from '37 to '76. That is a long time. And so I knew that there had to be some changes made, and I knew that I probably would suffer the consequences of making the changes, but somebody needed to do it.

And I think-I knew I had an accomplice in Sandy. Sandy probably would have liked to see those changes

instigated before I ever came. But since she was Marian's assistant and faithful and, you know, basically loved Marian profoundly-Marian was more of a mother to her than anything else. Sandy was not about to step out of the role as the assistant to Marian.

MR. HERMAN: But did she behave differently with you then?

MR. PIEROTTI: I think she did, because I allowed her to and I encouraged her to. When I had an opportunity to do something that needed some development, I kept saying, why don't you take this over?

MR. HERMAN: Was it Sandy, or you, or the two of you together who decided on who to invite to teach each summer?

MR. PIEROTTI: I always consulted with Sandy about that because I also knew that, as far as I was concerned, she was probably just as knowledgeable about who would be a good teacher as I was. She was far more educated in the field. And so I really had to rely on her greatly. The people that she wasn't familiar with and I knew through my association with the American Craft Council, I would explain to her who they were and if she liked them, then we would go ahead and hire them.

So it was-no, my relationship with Sandy was always cordial, and it remained cordial to the point of, when I left the school and Pi Beta Phi asked me who did I think ought to become the director, I said, well, you have got her. You need to just ask her directly.

MR. HERMAN: So you didn't get-you weren't involved in any power struggles with Sandy then because she had worked under Marian Herd. It seems like she could be resistant-could [resist] change, as often happens because "we have always done it this way."

MR. PIEROTTI: No, no. Sandy was just the opposite. Any change that I wanted to instigate, including the notion of going from the College of Home Economics over to the College of Fine Arts, she was proactive. She thought that was a great idea and she was very supportive of the whole notion.

MR. HERMAN: Well, tell me, since you were there only two academic years, what, sort of, transpired that caused you to leave?

MR. PIEROTTI: Do I do this off the record or on the record?

MR. HERMAN: I prefer on the record, but do you have enough-I mean, this is not-this could go to the Archives of American Art. I just think accuracy-it serves history better than omission.

MR. PIEROTTI: Than omission. Okay, well, there were two reasons why I left, neither one of them of my choice. I didn't leave Arrowmont because I wanted to leave Arrowmont. I left Arrowmont because I was asked to leave. The reason that they asked me to leave-the official reason they asked me to leave was that I was moving the school too fast and I was making too many changes too rapidly, and that they felt like this was not productive for the school. That was their official reason.

The real reason was that I am homosexual. I never hid the fact that I was gay. When I interviewed for the job, everybody knew who I was and what I was. The board-apparently the Pi Beta Phi board didn't. Everybody at the university-

[Audio break, tape change.]

MR. HERMAN: Ray Pierotti on September 4, 2005.

MR. PIEROTTI: So to pick up where we left off-with the cliffhanger, as you say-I got a call from the chairman of the art department, Don Kurka, and he said, Ray, sorry to tell you this, but you've been fired. I said, what do you mean, I've been fired? He said, well, I had a call from the president of the Pi Beta Phi, and she said to me, I don't care what you do, but get rid of that man. He is not our type. And he told me that, point blank. And I said, Don, well, what is your feeling about it? He said, as far as I'm concerned, you're doing a fabulous job and you should stay on. And I said, well, I'd be more than happy to do that. But he said, I would suggest, however, that maybe you consider the relationship with Pi Beta Phi, that you probably ought to resign. He said, I will give you a job here at the university, whatever job you want. We're opening up a new museum at the university. He said, I'll give you the directorship of the museum, if you want. And I said, well, Don, I said, thank you very much. But to me, the confidence between what I was hired to do down here and where I wanted to go have been broken, and I don't really feel comfortable about staying around people, you know, that don't want me to be there.

So then I eventually called up the president of the board, and I said, what's going on? Why didn't you have the courage to call me directly? And, of course, she was extremely apologetic and very meek and said, oh, well, Ray, nothing personal. But, I'll write you a letter of recommendation, you know, to whomever you want to go to or

whatever you want to do. And I said, don't you realize that is a slap in the face that you would even offer to write me a letter of recommendation after you fired me? And so that was sort of like the end of the relationship right there. It was very rough.

MR. HERMAN: How long did you stay on after that, though?

MR. PIEROTTI: This happened about March, I guess. It was when I was planning the 1979 year-academic year-for Arrowmont. This happened at the beginning of that. Fortunately, Sandy was in on all of the people, and so I could just simply turn to Sandy and say, you've got to take this over. And so that's-

MR. HERMAN: What was her response to this?

MR. PIEROTTI: She was-she was upset, but she had no-she couldn't do anything about it. Her job would have been in jeopardy at the same time.

MR. HERMAN: And I'm guessing there was not a good severance package, as many people expect in jobs when they leave. [Laughs.]

MR. PIEROTTI: Severance? The only severance was my getting out of town. In fact, to the point, and I'll share this with you, too, Arrowmont has never recognized [me] in any publication as being the interim director. It was Marian and Sandy, so, I mean, all of this stuff that you're doing may be for naught-

MR. HERMAN: No, I really-in working toward a book about the centennial of the school, I really want to have the clearest, most accurate picture that we can put out. Well, let's go back to what they said were the reasons that you were being let go. What were you moving too quickly? What were the excuses that you were given?

MR. PIEROTTI: Part of it, I think, was the program. I was moving the program more and more toward contemporary craft trends and away from production, or functional, stuff. I was also starting to introduce some ideas about what I would call performance art, related to the craft, because during the time that I was with the American Crafts Council, at the Crafts Museum, I did programs like "Houseruckers Live" and "Made with Paper," and these were more performance-related concepts rather than object-related, and so the school was beginning to feel, I think, that the board was beginning to feel that I was taking the school out of its original function.

MR. HERMAN: Was there-because of the performance aspects that you were beginning to introduce-was there a good response from the community, or was this primarily students and faculty at the school that were involved?

MR. PIEROTTI: The community was very supportive of whatever I wanted to do. In fact, when the community found out that I had been fired, they actually wrote letters to Pi Beta Phi asking why they were firing me. So the school had-the community and I had a very good rapport. And they knew that I was bringing in all of these people. I was bringing prestige to Gatlinburg along with Arrowmont, making it more of a national scene rather than a local scene. So for tourism and publicity, the community was very happy that I was there.

MR. HERMAN: And how was your relationship with the faculty?

MR. PIEROTTI: Excellent. I had a great time with the faculty. In fact, a tribute-and I always felt very humble about this-when the people that we hired for that next season found out that I wasn't going to be there, all of them volunteered to resign from teaching that year. And I said to them, no. I said, the school is-Ray Pierotti is not the school. The students are the school, and you should honor your commitment, and you're not teaching for Ray Pierotti. You're not teaching for Pi Beta Phi. You're teaching for Arrowmont, so your focus should be on that. So don't, you know, don't cut your nose off to spite your face just because I've been fired.

MR. HERMAN: Did Sandy continue any of the initiatives that you had started, or did she revert back to her routine?

MR. PIEROTTI: No, no. She and I had talked about a glassblowing studio, about a metalsmithing studio, and improving the living conditions. And Sandy carried right on through. And she was able to get things through better than I could have, because I think one of the drawbacks was that they couldn't make me a member of Pi Beta Phi, whereas immediately they made Sandy an honorary member of Pi Beta Phi, so all of a sudden the connection was back. And Sandy-that was the last thing Sandy wanted to be was a member of Pi Beta Phi, but she accepted the honorary appointment and was gracious about it and went along with it. Sandy and I had many conversations after I left along these lines-what should I do? I kept saying to her, you know, you've got the reins and you have the in with the Pi Beta Phi. Keep it up. Don't hurt them. Don't destroy them. Use them as long as you can.

MR. HERMAN: What did you take away from that nearly two-year experience?

MR. PIEROTTI: I took away from the experience an acknowledgment that when you follow someone who has

been in a directorship for a long time, nine chances out of 10, you're not going to last very long. I took away proof; that adage is very accurate.

MR. HERMAN: It is a problem of being what is later seen as the transitional person, because there is an assumption.

MR. PIEROTTI: So I took that away from that. I also took away from that experience how good of an administrator I am. Even though my inclination is artistic, my tastes are very artistically oriented, I also know that underneath it all, I am a very sound businessperson and a person that understands finances and how you make money, how you get things going.

MR. HERMAN: So there was never that conflict at the school, even though you said the comptroller was really looking at the bottom line, as money people are wont to do.

MR. PIEROTTI: But the conflict with her was not about money.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MR. PIEROTTI: The conflict with that was: who was in charge?

MR. HERMAN: Power.

MR. PIEROTTI: Power. And so I took away that understanding; how you deal with people who you come in and become director over the top of, or are supposed to be co-director with, but how do you deal with them? It's the first time in my life I had ever had that, too.

MR. HERMAN: And do you think it was a comptroller that outed you as a gay man?

MR. PIEROTTI: I think probably. Probably.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that was 25 years ago that you left the job?

MR. PIEROTTI: More than that; well, I'm 70-plus-

MR. HERMAN: [Nineteen] Eighty.

MR. PIEROTTI: I guess it was about 25.

MR. HERMAN: This is 2005.

MR. PIEROTTI: Right, I guess it was about 25 years.

MR. HERMAN: So in the 25 years since then, you certainly have continued to observe Arrowmont, and I'd be really interested to know if it has gone the direction or how it-what it is today varies from what you might have been striving for?

MR. PIEROTTI: No, I think it's probably fulfilled what level of mission I had in mind for it, because I have also realized that what I was involved in, in terms of performance art, things like that, Arrowmont was really not the proper venue for it. At the time, I wasn't aware of that. I was more, you know, gung-ho and more experimental. But when I stepped back from it and recognized what the actual history and the tradition of the crafts in the southeastern region was all about, I had to admit that I probably was treading on thin ice in that.

MR. HERMAN: So it's really kind of introducing what were, then, ideas that were then perhaps too new and different to-and we've often seen that.

MR. PIEROTTI: Yeah, but out of that experience also came the fact that when I was asked to take another organization, the Winston-Salem Arts and Crafts Guild, and turn it into a community arts school, which then became the Sawtooth Center for Visual Design-now called the Sawtooth Center for Visual Art [Winston-Salem, NC]-I had the skills to do that, that I had learned basically from Arrowmont.

[Audio break.]

MR. HERMAN: Well, I'd like to go on, Ray, with just where you went from Arrowmont, and what your career trajectory has been since then.

MR. PIEROTTI: Well, actually, immediately after Arrowmont, I was hired by a small college in Michigan to chair their department of fine and performing arts, which I never would have had the opportunity had I not been with the University of Tennessee as an associate professor; so that was a good thing out of it. And I guess one of the

things that occurred to me is that, though I was fired for the wrong reasons, in the long run, it was probably a blessing in disguise, because it did open up other doors for me, so I have no bitterness about Arrowmont or even the Pi Beta Phi. I still-I love the school and promote it constantly.

MR. HERMAN: So what happened in Michigan?

MR. PIEROTTI: That was basically, for me, a holding pattern. I really didn't want to stay.

MR. HERMAN: And you were there for how long?

MR. PIEROTTI: I was there for about a year and a half, until I was offered two positions simultaneously, one out here in the Northwest, at the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts, and one-

MR. HERMAN: As director?

MR. PIEROTTI: As director. And the other was to take over the directorship of the Winston-Salem Arts and Crafts Society that had just inherited a huge building and about \$12 million in money that they could use to rebuild the building, which is the Sawtooth Building. And so I thought, you know, of the two, I thought I've always liked challenges rather than following in somebody else's footsteps, and so I chose the Winston-Salem job.

MR. HERMAN: What year would this be?

MR. PIEROTTI: This was in 19-it would have been 1980, '81. And so my job, when I went to Winston-Salem, was primarily to build a new facility, a community arts school, in this old Hanes Hosiery factory, which had fabulous skylights throughout the whole place, and the space was about 20,000 square feet. And to basically develop that into a community arts school and to also upgrade the leadership role of the arts and crafts in the Winston-Salem area, which you probably know is also the headquarters of Piedmont Craftsmen, which is sort of a more contemporary form of the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild.

MR. HERMAN: So what was the mission at Sawtooth? What were the disciplines that you brought in there? Was it strong in the crafts field that you knew well?

MR. PIEROTTI: It encompassed everything to do with visual arts or visual design. In addition to a metal studio, the woodworking studio, and the clay studio, and the printmaking studio, we also had a painting studio.

MR. HERMAN: But this was also for community arts, not as a professional school the way Arrowmont had become?

MR. PIEROTTI: I did end up being able to tie in with the University of North Carolina at Winston-Salem, Salem College, Wake Forest University, and start to offer courses or classes for credit with those institutions. So even though it was a community-oriented school, and I was really geared towards getting opportunities for people that wanted to be amateur in the field, not professionals, a chance to take courses for credit, of course, I moved this arts and crafts association from maintaining that same sort of broadly community-focused activity, with the idea of bringing in teachers that were professionals in their field who were making a living as painters, as jewelers, or as woodworkers, or ceramists, and have them become the teachers in the school itself. So they were part-time instructors, but they were also people who knew how to make a living out of what they were doing.

MR. HERMAN: And was that part of what they shared then with the students? For those who aspired a more professional-

MR. PIEROTTI: More professional fields, and that worked out very well. And in fact, it sort of-you know, Winston-Salem is also the school for performing arts for-one of the few national schools for the performing arts-so this visual arts school ran in tandem with that, and essentially we were a good counterpart. We did for the visual arts what the performing arts school did for the performing arts, so that worked out really well. And then in like '87, I guess it was, the Hambidge Center-we talked about Mary Hambidge earlier on starting up the Hambidge Center, which essentially was founded as an artist retreat, even though Mary Hambidge was interested in weaving and taught women in the mountains to come down and take weaving courses at the Hambidge Center-her underlying idea was to build a-do basically a MacDowell Colony [Peterborough, NH] in the South, though she'd never been able to realize that. She'd had artists come and live on the property, on very loosely-

MR. HERMAN: And when had she started it?

MR. PIEROTTI: She started it in 1933, I think it was-'32 or '33. And she died in '83.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, oh.

MR. PIEROTTI: And a local woman took over this center-it's like a thousand acres of property, and it had like five

or six studios on it. But because of this woman's inexperience with running a center like that, they basically had gone into bankruptcy and had to close the place. So the board was out looking for somebody to revitalize it, and they came across me with my experience at the Sawtooth Center and asked whether or not I would come down and reopen the center.

MR. HERMAN: Sounds like fund-raising would have been a big part of that.

MR. PIEROTTI: Fundraising was a major part, because I basically had to, first of all, get them out of debt, and I said-because nobody is going to fund this place as long as they see their money being spent on closing out the debt.

MR. HERMAN: So how long were you there? And you did get them out of debt?

MR. PIEROTTI: I got them out of debt and I got them focused, because when I went to interview for the job, there were 12 members on the board. And I sat with them for about three hours talking about what their vision was for the Hambidge Center, and I heard 12 different opinions. At the end of the interview, they said to me, well, will you come and work for us? And I said, at the current stage, no. I said, because you don't know where you want to go, and if I come and work for you, you will either fire me or I will quit, because we don't know where we want to go together. I said, but what I will do is I will help you do some board retreats until we figure out what you want to do. Once you've got yourself focused, then I'll consider taking the job if you still want me to take it on.

And I had learned a lesson at Arrowmont, which I had also practiced at Sawtooth, and I said, by the way, there are two things you need to know about me. First of all, I'm not going to do this job full-time, because it's a seasonal place. I want to be able to do my own artwork in Atlanta. And secondly, I'm gay. And they said, so? [Laughs.]

So we did the board retreats, and once I got the board focused on the original mission of Mary Hambidge, as a retreat for artists to come and work unencumbered by having to teach, just to come and do their own thing and stay there for two weeks to two months in isolation, and that we would provide them with room and board and an evening meal, and they-

MR. HERMAN: In all disciplines?

MR. PIEROTTI: In all disciplines.

MR. HERMAN: But you didn't provide studio facilities?

MR. PIEROTTI: Yeah.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, you did? But, I mean, equipped with potter's wheels or-

MR. PIEROTTI: Yeah, we had a dilapidated pottery studio. It's functional. We had a photography studio, which was functional. We had, of course, importantly, that weaving studio. We had probably about 20 looms that were never being used. And we had a good painting studio. We had a grand piano in one of the studios.

So I was able to-the original name of the Hambidge Center was the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Sciences, and so I didn't limit the fellowships to just painters and poets and musicians; I also opened it up to botanists, to mathematicians, to anybody who was doing some kind of creative work within their discipline-in philosophy, and so as a result, the first year that I was there, we ended up with about 60 different fellows, and I would say half of them were in the sciences and the other half were in the arts. They have-since I left-I left there in '91-since then, they have sort of focused more and more on the arts, and I don't think there are any scientists or mathematicians or people like that anymore. But there are artists, you know, writers, poets, musicians, composers, painters, potters, and they have since I was there also built a Anagama kiln on the property, and they have one very kind lady who was very well-to-do who built two new painting studios for them on the property.

MR. HERMAN: So is it now pretty well funded?

MR. PIEROTTI: It's very well funded and it's endowed. That was one of the things. We had this thousand acres of property, and we were only really probably using 30 or 40 acres, and all the rest was just empty woods-wonderful, natural woods. I said, why don't we sell off some of this land and start an endowment? So we did sell off about 300 acres. The developers were ravenous. I mean they were in an ideal place to develop a retirement community.

MR. HERMAN: How far from Atlanta is it?

MR. PIEROTTI: It's about an hour and a half. It's about ninety miles straight up north, right on the North Carolina-

South Carolina-Georgia border, all three states come together right at the corner called Rabun Gap.

MR. HERMAN: Oh yeah.

MR. PIEROTTI: So, it's done very well. And now every year, they have anywhere from 70 to 120 different fellows come. And they come from all over the world.

MR. HERMAN: Why did you leave that job in '91? You'd been there what, about eight, nine years?

MR. PIEROTTI: Well, I'd been at Sawtooth for like eight years. And I was at the Hambidge Center for about five. I was already in my retirement years practically, and I said, you know, I think I would really like to go paint full-time, and so that's when I decided to quit and move on.

MR. HERMAN: And have you been involved with other craft organizations since the Hambidge Center or arts organizations?

MR. PIEROTTI: Indirectly. I'm still on the board of what is called the Southeastern Region of the American Crafts Council, which is loosely affiliated with the council. In fact, it's the only region that maintains its association with the Council, due to Vina Schermer, who was a friend of Aileen Webb's.

MR. HERMAN: That's interesting, because you've kind of come full circle-[laughs]-in about 50 years.

MR. PIEROTTI: In about 50 years. It took a while to get around to it.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that's great. Thank you very much, Ray.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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