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**Oral history interview with Harold Balazs, 2012
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Harold Balazs on August 13, 2012. The interview took place in Mead, Washington, and was conducted by Lloyd E. 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.

Harold Balazs has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

LLOYD E. HERMAN: Make sure that I can hear my voice, and I can't hear my voice. [They laugh.] So that's — hello. This is Lloyd Herman and I'm interviewing Harold Balazs in his home in Mead, Washington, just outside Spokane, on August 13, 2012.

Harold, hello. I first would like you to tell me when and where you were born and your full name please.

HAROLD BALAZS: Well, I was born — oh, yeah. Harold Richard Balazs. And I was born in Westlake, Ohio, which is a suburb of Cleveland, in 1928. And that was all farm country at that time.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that was part of what I was going to ask you —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — about, when we get to that, is what life was like. But who were your parents? Give me their names and —

MR. BALAZS: Cora and Harold. I'm a junior. His middle name was actually Ralph.

MR. HERMAN: But you were an R.

MR. BALAZS: But I was an R. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: And I should put in the spelling of your name as B-A-L-A-Z-S.

MR. BALAZS: Right. Hungarian.

MR. HERMAN: Hungarian. Were there siblings?

MR. BALAZS: I had a sister, three years younger, and a brother, 10 years younger. And they live here.

MR. HERMAN: And were you — was this a farm then that you grew up on?

MR. BALAZS: Well, the farm belonged to my uncle and my grandfather. And my father was in the sheet metal and air conditioning business. And he had a shop on our property. And then I worked part time there and then I also — when I was small, I spent a lot of time picking berries for various people in the area. And I think that's why I have a bad back, you know. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: But it was essentially farmland —

MR. BALAZS: Truck farming.

MR. HERMAN: — where people grew things, not cattle country or anything like that outside of Cleveland.

MR. RISOM: Yes. No. No. No. There were a lot of milk cows that people had around and a lot of hay grown for them.

MR. HERMAN: Did you have acreage?

MR. RISOM: We didn't, but I'm sure that the area of the people — they had at least a section, 640 acres or something. And they were mostly truck farmers. One of the delightful things was going with grandpa in the back of his truck to market. And we would go through pretty rough sections of Cleveland where starving people were. And we would sit in the back and whenever we'd stop at a corner or something, these kids would jump on there and try to steal stuff. [Laughs.] So we'd pepper them with rotten tomatoes. And when I think of doing that, I'm so ashamed. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: What sort of things did you pick then?

MR. BALAZS: Yes, just everything that farmers grew. And one of my grandparents raised a lot of fruit, you know, grapes, and we picked that on — you know, in season.

MR. HERMAN: How far out of Cleveland was Westport?

MR. BALAZS: Westlake.

MR. HERMAN: Westlake.

MR. BALAZS: It was — it was about 13 miles, something like that.

MR. HERMAN: Did your mother work out of the home or was she a housewife?

MR. BALAZS: She was a telephone operator for a long time.

MR. HERMAN: And was that in Westport or —

MR. BALAZS: Westlake. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Westlake. Why do I keep saying that? Yes.

MR. BALAZS: You live near Westport. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Yes. Yes. What kind of — did you have animals to care for on the farm?

MR. BALAZS: Well, we had — always had some sort of a pet. And then, there were — you know, feed the pigs and —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, you had pigs then.

MR. BALAZS: Well, we didn't, but grandpa did? And we'd go down there and the garbage was in a can and he'd banged on the fences — [inaudible]. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: What about chickens or cows?

MR. BALAZS: Well, they had all that kind of stuff too.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, but you didn't — your family didn't have that?

MR. BALAZS: No. But I — when called upon, we would feed them and so forth. But the marvelous story about my uncle, when he — you know, the Depression was wild. And one night, a cow kicked over the lantern, and he took the full bucket of milk, and he went up to a pile of bushel baskets, and got them nice and clean and poured the milk in that, and then took this pail out and filled it up with water, and brought it back to put out the fire. [Laughs.] But, you know, he did — you didn't want to waste a whole pail of milk in the Depression.

MR. HERMAN: Thinking about chores that you had around — besides — you would help take — help feed the pigs then, yeah?

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And we'd pick berries. Then we had our own garden. It was probably an acre. And then, we'd pick all — made all kinds of fruits and vegetables. And my mother froze them or canned.

MR. HERMAN: Canned them. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And it was — then, with what was sort of left over, my cousin and I would sit out in the street with a card table and sell these baskets of berries for a quarter, you know. And that made some money.

And then, on the street, my great-great-great-grandfather, when he settled this area — he was the first settler in northern Ohio in 1805 or something like that, and he planted this path with maple trees. And by the time I got in, they were, you know, two feet down there [ph]. So I had a sugar bush of about 50 trees and we made maple syrup during the war. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: So when you were picking things for others —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — you started making some money and —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah. You'd get five cents a basket.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes. Did you have a piggy bank or did you — how did you go about saving that?

MR. BALAZS: Well, I actually — actually, we had bank accounts and put that money in there.

MR. HERMAN: So you learned the value of money pretty early.

MR. BALAZS: Very early.

MR. HERMAN: And that was just before the Depression, so it was during the Depression that you were a boy.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: It's — '38, I guess, is when it really hit bad, wasn't it, or '36, somewhere around in there? So I was about —

MR. HERMAN: You should be about 10.

MR. BALAZS: Ten — eight, 10 years old.

MR. HERMAN: What do you recall about the shortages or deprivation you might have felt during the Depression?

MR. BALAZS: I remember my parents crying. But none of our family or the people in the area I lived went hungry because they were all farmers and, you know, canned their own stuff. And then, mostly, we butchered cattle. That was one of just the great things is that every fall slaughtering a bunch of hogs — and then our job was stirring the kettle of blood while it coagulated and they added rice and things to make blood sausage. And then, during threshing season, these little kids — straw was blown into the barn for bedding for the animals. And then we'd pack it all down uniformly. And that was another — these are chores — you never ask remuneration for those.

MR. HERMAN: But you don't remember being — don't remember shortages that affected you?

MR. BALAZS: The only thing I remember that came close to it is a horse died and we butchered it and divvied it all up. [Laughs.] And —

MR. HERMAN: What about your dad's business? Did it suffer during that time?

MR. BALAZS: Well, he got drafted. He had — he was blind in one eye and had a really gimpy leg. So he was drafted by the — and had to go work in the shipyards in Lorain, Ohio. And then he ended up on airplanes, B-29s, and he was in charge of making nacelles.

MR. HERMAN: Was that plant nearby then?

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Cleveland Airport was there.

MR. HERMAN: When you were a kid, I was thinking about the Cleveland Museum of Art, which was one of the great museums. And were you — did you go to the museum, that or other museums when you were a child?

MR. BALAZS: Well, yes. My mother was — her father was quite well placed, very intelligent man and well read. I think he was the president of Bowling Green for a while or something like that, in sort of high places.

I think when I was in maybe the sixth or seventh grade, there were three of us — myself, Jimmy Taubler and Genevieve Miller, and she would load us up and take us to these classes in the Cleveland Art Museum. And that went for a couple of years. And I just was enthralled with that.

MR. HERMAN: Is that when you first got an interest in artistic creation?

MR. BALAZS: Yes, although one of the things — the stairwell that took you downstairs to all the classrooms had on either side of it these two enamels about two foot square that were done by Edward Winter, who was the grand old man of enameling. And I just looked — I looked at those, and I went, I'm going to do that someday.

MR. HERMAN: Well, you know, it's interesting because I think of Cleveland as being one of the great centers of enamellists, you know.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Well, it was because they had a big plant there that did coatings for metal. And they took people under their wing and let them come in, and much the same this plant where I started working in Seattle was. And they charged a fee. And then, you know, Bates —

MR. HERMAN: Kenneth Bates.

MR. BALAZS: Kenneth Bates.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that was one of the names I was going to ask you if you were aware of his work.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. I remember when he was very, very old, I went to one of his conferences. And he and I just diddled away an afternoon because he'd reached a point where nobody paid any attention to him anymore, and it was pretty sad, I thought. But, yes. And our artwork in school was — just was — what do they call it? Mimeographs. And, you know, it smelled funny, those purple lines. That was our art class.

MR. HERMAN: You mean, and then you would color in the lines or —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And if you didn't color in the lines, then — so that's why I sort of became a hard-edge painter for a long time because if I make anything fussy, my knuckles would hurt. [Laughs.] But yes.

I really, really liked the Cleveland Art Museum and the chance to have done that. And one of the things — the Rouault stuff just grabbed my imagination. So instead of — I'd make these big half-inch wide lines on the lines.

MR. HERMAN: You couldn't go outside of those very easily.

MR. BALAZS: I did. Yes. [They laugh.] I made them so authoritative [ph] that the teacher would chastise me quite frequently for doing that. And I was probably the first conceptual artist.

And we finally got around to doing your own things and we were supposed to draw a pet shop. And I had all the pets I wanted, I didn't need any more. So my interest was model airplanes so I drew a model airplane shop. And then right next to it was a little — where you could see a tail. [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: Next door to the pet shop.

MR. BALAZS: Pet shop, right. And so I figured that was sort of conceptual art. I mean, I would claim that.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. How do you see your interest in art or making things progress, you know, by drawing, coloring, painting — as a child, just talking about it as a child?

MR. BALAZS: I just drew all the time. And I was always making stuff because my father was a very self-sufficient person. And, I mean, he fixed the refrigerators and he even started making big freezers. And so —

MR. HERMAN: Because he could do more than sheet metal, obviously. Yes. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah. Yes. And, you know, he was a jack of all trades and one of the most self-sufficient — and, of course, everybody during the Depression was self-sufficient, you know.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. I remember my dad could fix things or make things.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: I didn't inherit those genes. [They laugh.]

MR. BALAZS: But I just spent every hour I could trying to copy some of this stuff in the museum and everything. And I remember we'd go around and have quizzes about the exhibitions and stuff. And there was — I think at that time, the first 68 boxes of crayons came out or something. And I was the only —

MR. HERMAN: Sixty-eight colors. Yes. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And I was the only one that could identify Della Robbia blue. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Tell me about — I know that Della Robbia blue comes up.

MR. BALAZS: Well, the Cleveland Art Museum had a big collection of their stuff. It was the brothers. And I just really fell in love with those. And so I went around and tried to copy that stuff. And then, we did get to go to Florence and all that. And —

MR. HERMAN: But later. It was as an adult? Yes. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: Adult. Yes. And those guys made stuff on every corner. [Laughs.] It is a distinctive color. I just —

MR. HERMAN: From drawing and — were you — you were talking about doing the model airplane shop. Were your drawings realistic, I assume?

MR. BALAZS: Well, as realistic as could be in the sixth grade, sixth or seventh grade. But my real contribution to the war effort — by that time, I could do pretty well. On the one bank of blackboards, I did chalk drawings of Hirohito, [Benito] Mussolini and [Adolf] Hitler. These were four-foot square pictures of each of them. And then I would take very sharp chalk and I lined it all out so they were one-inch squares. And when you bought a 50 cents war stamp, you could blank out one of those squares —

MR. HERMAN: To erase their faces. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And then as soon as they got it all blanked out, I drew another bunch of them. But was sort of the richest kid in the class and he worked in his dad's garage. And the first thing he went for was the eyes, you know. That wasn't very good. So I started — we put a permanent grid [ph] on the board. So I'd made those eyes so that you had to buy four squares.

MR. HERMAN: Very clever. [They laugh.]

MR. BALAZS: But that was my contribution to the war effort.

MR. HERMAN: From drawing, did you work in clay or carved wood or any of those things that — when you were a kid?

MR. BALAZS: Not much clay. No. Oh, didn't do that kind of clay work.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: But we all did watercolor. And I did a couple of pigeon and a train engine. And I just thought very highly — but the Cleveland Art Museum kept those in their archives I guess. [Laughs.] I don't know what they ever did and I imagine they burned them out.

But, anyway, one of the saddest days is — there was a sculpture of [Auguste] Rodin's *Thinker* there, but somebody blew it up so they could sell the scrap. But they left it right there. To this day, as far as I know it's just these shards. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Besides the Cleveland Art Institute — I mean, art museum. I was thinking of the art institute, which had another great enamellist, John Paul Miller.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Oh, yes.

MR. HERMAN: And I don't know if you ever knew his work.

MR. BALAZS: I never saw him on show, but I knew the name.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. But the Cleveland Art Museum I know had a May show every year.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: And that's how I happened to see a lot of that early work.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Do you remember the May show?

MR. BALAZS: I was in it.

MR. HERMAN: You were? Yes.

MR. BALAZS: But I entered it from — when I was in college out here. And I got accepted into it, which I felt pretty honored.

MR. HERMAN: The museum has a lot of work that they've acquired for the May show, which is really important.

MR. BALAZS: True. Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Do they have anything of yours?

MR. BALAZS: Well, like I say, I think they do — no, they didn't keep it. I just entered the show. But the only thing is that stuff I did as a kid, which I'm sure they've thrown away by now.

MR. HERMAN: Thinking about working in different art processes, do you feel as a kid that you were beginning to achieve mastery in any of them that you really felt confident of what you were doing?

MR. BALAZS: No. No. I just did stuff.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: I didn't even think about that —

MR. HERMAN: You weren't thinking about art as a career.

MR. BALAZS: Well, I would look at those paintings in the museum. And it just — you know, with the exception — I wanted to be like Edward Winter, but I couldn't see how I would ever be a [Eugène] Delacroix or any of those things. But I — you know — and then when I went I went to college, I went to Chicago, and though I lost — I didn't lose interest in art. They just didn't have it. I was in mathematics. But I did go down to the Chicago Art Museum in Chicago.

MR. HERMAN: Well, I want to get to going to college in Chicago and then —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — move — as you moved west. But what about — were you thinking at all when you were a child about art as a career? What were your career aspirations?

MR. BALAZS: I really — well, I grew up — Cleveland Airport was the head of NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] when it first formed and the airplanes went over all the time. And the airplane races were there. And I fell in love with Roscoe Turner and all those things.

In fact, when I went to the Smithsonian, there were these older gentlemen who were being — [inaudible] — kind of things, and I said, "Is that Roscoe Turner's plane or is that just a copy"? They said, "No. That's the real thing." I said, "You guys want to shake hands with me because I shook hands with Roscoe Turner," and, God, they were just enthralled.

But no, I don't think so. It never occurred to me. Of course, my father was the last of the — what his age — well, the people that, you know, never said I love you or never hugged you. And I never did anything right. And, you know, I was always —

MR. HERMAN: You didn't get praised in other words.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. I was exhorted to try hard.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And although when I — finally, I became an adult, and he lived here in town also, he would tell his friends what a famous person I was becoming, but he would never say, "You're doing good."

MR. HERMAN: When you were in high school, what kind of — well, tell me about even before high school, friends — what did you and your friends do? What were your pastimes? Did you play sports or —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. I was — I lettered in track, basketball and football, you know, a nine letter man, and that was really — and I was pretty good at some things. And then on rainy days we'd play in one of our uncle's barns, all that hay stacked up and ropes you could swing. And that was an awfully interesting thing to do.

And then my dad showed me how to trap. So all during the war years, I trapped muskrats because

they were very high priced for those, that you could get 3 [dollars] to \$5 for them because it was — there's very few furs that don't build ice up on them. Around here, the muskrats were as close, but the best thing were wolverines. They will never built up — so you could get \$5 for a muskrat now, you know. [Laughs.]

But other than tackling corn shucks [ph] and stuff like that. There were a strange bunch of kids and I loved them all because we graduated in '46. And there was something about the end of the war. So the classes stayed in touch with each other and pretty close and everything. And it's — I went back there to install a big sculpture here four or five years ago and they had a little reunion for me.

MR. HERMAN: That was the big Westlake piece.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Piece.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And so they had a little class reunion. And there were about 20 of us. And this Genevieve Miller and I were great friends, never romantically inclined or anything, but we were the only two people that were on the honor roll and this sort of thing.

And so we got in this discussion over — they asked me what I was doing. And then she asked some pointed questions. And I started answering them. And one of the guys said, "Balazs, why in the hell don't you just quit thinking and go play golf"? [Laughs.] But that's the kind of world I grew up in, quit thinking and go play golf. And that's — every one of them were like that, you know.

MR. HERMAN: Well, probably, they were all retired by the time you went back for that anyway.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, sure.

MR. HERMAN: And you continued to work.

MR. BALAZS: I don't think any of my friends except Genevieve even read books until after they graduated.

MR. HERMAN: But you were on the honor roll. What were your best subjects?

MR. BALAZS: Well, all the sciences and — yes. I just egged — I was interested in everything, you know. And English literature, not English grammar — [laughs] — you know. And I was good in gym, of course, but mostly I was pursuing mathematics. I really wanted to be a mathematician.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that's one of the things that I was getting at, what you were thinking about then that you might go to college to do. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, Yes. And I — nobody in our acquaintance or family had ever gone to college, so I was the first one to do that.

MR. HERMAN: Your sister was how much older?

MR. BALAZS: She was three years younger.

MR. HERMAN: Younger. Younger.

MR. BALAZS: And she never got to go to college and my brother neither. It wasn't done.

MR. HERMAN: How did that come about then that you went to college?

MR. BALAZS: Well, during the war, there was a base there. And my folks would entertain on holidays and other weekends the soldiers that couldn't get home for the holidays and so forth and befriended one of these guys. And we'd talk about this. And he says, "I can get you into a junior college in Chicago and you won't have to pay a thing." So he gave me an address of a non-existent place. [Laughs.] And so I went to college and stayed in a brownstone walk-up for one year there. And then my —

MR. HERMAN: What was the college?

MR. BALAZS: Wright Brothers in — you know, the Wright Brothers airplane [Wilbur and Orville Wright] — Wright Junior College it was called. And I started taking mathematics there. And I was in calculus and the teacher accused me of cheating. And I said, "I don't cheat, sir." And he came back and punched me. And so he threw me out of the class. So —

MR. HERMAN: Will that —

MR. BALAZS: Rosemary.

MR. HERMAN: Is she going to —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. She's got it now.

MR. HERMAN: Okay.

MR. BALAZS: So I had to pick up another four or five hours and I walked by a classroom. And this lady in a bathing suit — they didn't have nude models — and I said, "God, I always wanted to try that." So I went in and started — really got interested. And I don't know.

Then after that first year, my folks moved out here because we had a relative here, my mother's cousins or something, and my dad's brothers euchred [ph] him out of his business so he come out here and set up another business. So then I moved out here and then went to Wazoo. And then they all packed up and went back home. So I just stayed on here and the last year —

MR. HERMAN: They went back?

MR. BALAZS: They went back, but then they'd come back again.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: So anyway, then I met Rosemary my last year at college, which was like '49 or '50 or something like that.

MR. HERMAN: She was in college here.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. She didn't — wasn't in college. But her family lived here and she went to school here.

Does Keegan [Shorey] need some help?

MR. HERMAN: No.

MR. BALAZS: OK. So that — you know, that's why I'm here.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And then I was down at — the thing — I think I started at Wazoo, Washington State, the year after — oh, God, what was his name? Big painter, he was a teacher there. And I can't remember — he also is just in the same millennial [ph] as — I can't think of the name.

MR. HERMAN: Well, you'll be able — you'll get a transcript of this back, Harold. If you can think of it then, we can insert the name.

How old were you then when your family moved out here and you started school at Washington State University [Pullman] as it is now?

MR. BALAZS: I think I was 18 or 19. And I started right out in a — saying I was going to major in art. I declared it my second year and — but then I had to pick up a lot of stuff I had at the — I had to pick up a foreign language.

MR. HERMAN: You mean a requirement, required subjects. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: What foreign language did you study?

MR. BALAZS: Deutsche. And Rosemary was the last year — Rosemary was heavy with child and we would go and see the foreign movies. And when there were German movies, we always sat behind my teacher. And so finally, towards the end of the year, she just took me inside, said, "Can you convince me in the last week here that you know anything about German?" And she felt sorry for us and gave me a C and let me go.

MR. HERMAN: So were your grades not as good in college as they had been in high school?

MR. BALAZS: I made the dean's list on more than one occasion.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And, in fact, I was a Phi Beta Kappa. Well, no. It was the arts version of Phi Beta Kappa. It was the Kappa Sigma — I don't know.

MR. HERMAN: What were you primarily making in college then?

MR. BALAZS: Well, the stuff I liked to do the best was sculpture, but they had — George Laisner was — I think he came out of the Bauhaus and then he went to the University of Chicago and got his degree there. But he was just sort of a mentor and a really neat guy. And I tried to emulate what his — but they had nothing to work with.

MR. HERMAN: I'm talking about sculpture. And would this be carved, carved sculpture or —

MR. BALAZS: Well, it would be mostly make stuff out of clay, and make a mold, and make it out of plaster of Paris and try to emulate — Yes.

MR. HERMAN: So it would be — [inaudible] — on making bronze sculpture.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, there was no way we could do that down there.

MR. HERMAN: Going that far. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And I did take a course in pottery, but the lady who taught was just a fussy budget. And I wanted to work like Rudy Autio. Rudy Autio was down there doing his master's degree in the last two years.

MR. HERMAN: At Washington State University?

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And we were great friends. And another guy, who's become a writer about northwest history of the fur trades, he and I and Rudy — we had a silkscreen. We blacked up the windows with paper and sneak in there. We all had keys to the rooms we weren't supposed to go in. And we'd run posters and things with theater and fraternity dancers. And the silver screen was — George Laisner was the only one who knew anything about. And that was only — [inaudible] — blue kind of thing, not the films they use today or anything. And it was —

MR. HERMAN: So did you say that he was Bauhaus trained?

MR. BALAZS: Well, I believe so but I could be wrong. But whether or not he was directly trained by Bauhaus people — he seemed to know the names and everything, but I think maybe he was second generation — his teachers were second generation Bauhaus, you know.

But I — the two main textbooks down that were by [György] Kepes, do you ever remember him?

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: You heard of Kepes? And then who's the other guy?

MR. HERMAN: Now, I'm garbled. I don't know why. [László] Moholy-Nagy.

MR. BALAZS: Moholy-Nagy. Yes. And I still have those textbooks. And a friend of mine was looking around on eBay or something. That Moholy-Nagy book's worth a couple of hundred dollars now. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Wait long enough and everything is valuable, I guess. [They laugh.] So after you married Rosemary Schneider, did she work outside the home?

MR. BALAZS: Yes. She had a job at a bank. She was a comptometer operator, which was an early stuff for adding real fast.

MR. HERMAN: Right. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And then her mother took care of our kid and my mother took turns.

MR. HERMAN: So you were still in college then when your first — when your son was born?

MR. BALAZS: No. We graduated two days before our first son was born. And then I started working in their basement just — well, actually, when I was in college, I started making enamel copper jewelry that I sold through a shop here in town called Joel's.

MR. HERMAN: J-O-E-L?

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And he was really interested in my work and just sort of helped us along very much. Rosemary would go in there with a little box of stuff.

MR. HERMAN: So you could make this at home? You had a home kiln that you could —

MR. BALAZS: No. No. I made this in college, which was verboten. But George Laisner cleared the path for me. They were going to throw us out of college.

MR. HERMAN: So did you have to come in after hours and sneak around to —

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.] A little bit, and that kind of thing and on Sundays and weekends. And I had a little show and a place to sell in Seattle called Hazel Hathaway. And she was down on 9th Street. And she was the first person to have a little artsy-craftsy gallery over there.

MR. HERMAN: So this would have been in the 1950s?

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Even I think maybe '49.

MR. HERMAN: So it was right after the war, during the —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And then was one in Portland that sold my stuff. And her husband was one of Seattle — Portland's big painters. And I can't remember his name.

MR. HERMAN: But you made all of this not at home, but in the facilities at the college.

MR. BALAZS: At the college.

MR. HERMAN: Did you worry about how — once you graduated, how you'd be able to sustain that?

MR. BALAZS: We were too dumb. [They laugh.] We just assumed it could be done, you know. And, like I said, Rudy Autio was there the last two years. And we just —

MR. HERMAN: Was he already working in clay, which he became so known for?

MR. BALAZS: Oh yes. Yes. And he got — he ran afoul of some of the people down there. His wife just hated that place. Yes, I have a big piece of his out in the other room that we traded it. I was going to donate it to Wazoo I think — you know, they would have liked it or something. And his wife said, "You do that and —" [laughs] —

MR. HERMAN: Well, I associate him with the Archie Bray Foundation in [Helena] Montana.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yes.

MR. HERMAN: I really — until I read some of what's been written about you and your friendship with him, didn't associate him with Washington State at all.

MR. BALAZS: Washington State, yes. He graduated and become the master he is in spite that everything that went on in Wazoo. And I felt the same thing. All of my best stuff — I had made an exceptional print. I've still got it upstairs. And it was — there were two people who were in a show from Washington in San Francisco at that time. It was about 1948. And the catalogue came back to the school, and there was me, and the whole faculty got rejected and I didn't. And that was — oh, oh, oh. [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: Well — and I'm interested in artists that — who you've admired, whose work you've admired and perhaps even considered mentors, maybe people that taught you, maybe other fellow artists.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. I never had any more teachers after I left. But certainly George Laisner was the most helpful person. Another man who — Keith Monaghan taught there and we did get along with him. And then [Andrew] Hofmeister, a really well known watercolorist. But from then on, I didn't have mentors other than my dad, technically.

MR. HERMAN: Yes, but what about artists whose work maybe you'd seen only in museums or books? Any of those that you particularly admired or maybe wanted to emulate?

MR. BALAZS: [Paul] Klee.

MR. HERMAN: Klee.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Probably the most. And then [Wassily] Kandinsky. I really bought into the modern art thing the minute I got in college — even when I was in — I don't know where I got the idea, but why make pictures of stuff that's already there?

And so early — late in the '50s, I ran across the gal who ran Holy Name — Sister Holy Name in LA. And she made little silkscreens with a lot —

MR. HERMAN: That wouldn't be Sister Mary Corita?

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And she put a newspaper called the *Sometimes Weekly* or the *Sometimes Now and Then*. And it was just full of little aphorisms and what's going on. And somewhere I got one of her prints for \$25 or something. And I just followed her and her aphorisms.

And one of them I'll never forget. And that's what probably changed my life I think is — there is — "The world will never suffer for lack of wonders, only the lack of wonder." And so I felt that had given me the excuse to make crazy things that everybody would say, "What in the hell is that"?

MR. HERMAN: Wonder. [They laugh.]

MR. BALAZS: And I really pursued that idea of non-objective art. And to me, you know, there was a lot of abstract art and whatever it was.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that's what I was going to ask you whether abstract expressionism — because I don't associate your work with that movement.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And, of course, you couldn't help but being impressed by the sheer volume of [Pablo] Picasso. But I wasn't all that — I mean, if I had the choice to buy a Picasso or a [Georges] Braque, I'd have bought the Braque and for whatever reason that amounts to. Delacroix was — and [Francisco] Goya and the guy with the big black line.

MR. HERMAN: [Georges] Rouault.

MR. BALAZS: Rouault.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. They were all figurative artists.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: It's interesting because I think of — even though you've said you admire the heavy lines that Rouault used, I can almost see that in your later figurative liturgical work —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — which leads me to ask, because you just mentioned Sister Mary Corita, about your religious upbringing and leanings or no. [They laugh.]

MR. BALAZS: Yes, or no. My mother was a strict Methodist and drug me to church. And I can remember the first day, I just thought, "This is all bullshit." But I kept going. And all the reading I did and everything. I couldn't help becoming a humanist. And I still — we go to the Unitarian Church when we go; we no longer do. But I just — like right now, I think religion is the bane of the world. And I don't know if you watched the Olympics or not, but the —

MR. HERMAN: Not very much of it.

MR. BALAZS: Well, we didn't either. But in the mile — women's mile, there was a lady, a Muslim who —

MR. HERMAN: I did see her. And I was very surprised she was from Saudi Arabia. And I've been there and I know how strict they are with what women may or may not do.

MR. BALAZS: She got — Yes. She got special dispensation. And she just got a standing ovation which makes you feel good about the world that there's a whole bunch of different kinds of people out there that think that was great.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. You've worked successfully in flat media — painting, stenciling —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — you know, everything from watercolors to — I think you've done silkscreens —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — drawing and various materials. I'm just wondering how that progressed because I don't think there's a medium — [they laugh] — in which you haven't worked.

MR. BALAZS: Well, the thing is just living in a small city, there isn't that big a market for watercolors or oil paintings. So I did — Ken Spiering, another artist here in town, just have — what do you do? Whatever comes in the door, you know.

So I early on — maybe '53 or '4, I started going skiing. And then, just serendipity, bumped into a bunch of architects and they had just moved to town. And they had been Bauhaus second generation. And, you know, "Have you ever made a — [inaudible] — this, that and the other thing"?

MR. HERMAN: Made a what?

MR. BALAZS: Where you store the relics in, baptismal font. And first, I did a lot of doors. I've done over 150, maybe 300 doors.

MR. HERMAN: For churches and synagogues?

MR. RISOM: Mostly churches. And a lot of them were in the Seattle area. And so then architects

here began telling people over on the other side of the state, Fred Bassetti, I did a lot of work with him.

MR. HERMAN: Who?

MR. BALAZS: Fred Bassetti.

MR. HERMAN: Fred Bassetti. Yes. Thanks.

MR. BALAZS: and some of the others ones over there. I can't remember the names. He was all crippled. I want to say King, but that wasn't his name.

MR. HERMAN: Well, you can insert that — insert that later maybe, but —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. So by 1960, half of the work I did was commissions in cooperation with architects and then the other half of it was speculation work that I sold through gallery shows. And I very seldom entered craft shows, only once or twice, and mostly they'd send my work home and say it was rejected because it wasn't enameled on the back, you know. What's that got to do with anything, you know? Although Charles Campbell [ph] — one of the very first things I did — I did an enamel whole surface. I've still got it out there. He wrote and told me, "You're going to be one of the greatest enamellists in the country."

MR. HERMAN: Charles Campbell? Who is he?

MR. BALAZS: Well, he was an art critic years and years and years ago.

MR. HERMAN: In Spokane or New York?

MR. BALAZS: No. Yes. No. I think he — he was very — what's that craft place down in — where they have the — you know where Dolly Parton-ville is?

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, you're thinking of Arrowmont.

MR. BALAZS: Arrowmont. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts [Gatlinburg, TN].

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And I think he was instrumental in that. I don't know, but he was quite old when he gave me that compliment.

MR. HERMAN: For the commission work, I've always thought that you seemed to like the direct confrontation with materials.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yes, yes.

MR. HERMAN: Am I right in saying that?

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. And of course, because of my father, I learned to master metals quite well. And then, the two, three — three years that I wasn't — I was still in college, I worked in construction. So I had a really good grasp of, you know, fastening devices and how to hang things up on walls and all of that. And so mostly — and then places like Washington — well, it's a brick outfit — Fred Bassetti — you know, he says, "Have you ever done carved brick?" And he had this friend who ran this brick plant, mutual materials, over in — outside of Seattle somewhere. And they

encouraged people — and Rudy Autio also was starting to do some of this carved brick. He did that over at the Archie Bray Foundation.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MR. BALAZS: But — so under the tutelage of this — it's really nothing to carving bricks, but —

MR. HERMAN: You do it before —

MR. BALAZS: They're fired.

MR. HERMAN: — before they're fired at all. There's no bisque firing for bricks as there is for ceramics.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And they — these jobs where I worked and I said I would — I'll do that for \$2,500 or whatever. And then they would squeeze out the bricks sans holes because, you know, bricks —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, sure, yes.

MR. BALAZS: And —

MR. HERMAN: So you'd have a solid piece of clay to work on, yes.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And I've even had them make me double ones so I'd get a little more relief. And then, they — I think they charged something like \$6 a brick or something because of the extra processing. It may be more now. But it's a real interesting process and the company kept track and they said I carved 80,000 bricks. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Eighty thousand bricks.

MR. BALAZS: And — like Tom Kundig used to come and help me inventory them and do little scut work for me.

MR. HERMAN: But that — the work with bricks would all be commissions from architects or did you compete for public art projects that —

MR. BALAZS: Well no. I've never — I've competed for a lot of public art projects, but I've never submitted an idea in brick form or the —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, they would come to you then once you —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that's of interest to me how you get established as — for being known for one kind of work and then how that leads to other jobs.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, and other kinds of work. And I've done a lot of Stations of the Cross and all kinds of weird stuff. [Laughs.] But doors was probably — I — the thing I did the most of.

MR. HERMAN: But you would carve the bricks yourself when you were working on other architectural things, if they're doors and things, would you do drawings and they would be fabricated by someone else —

MR. BALAZS: No, no, no.

MR. HERMAN: You do — you did all of that.

MR. BALAZS: The only thing I had done by outside forces is a wall at Seattle Pacific College. And what I did is made — it was all cast concrete. And I did all the forms out of Styrofoam and shipped them over to them and then they — and we discussed the process and how it was going to go and —

MR. HERMAN: I'm very interested in your use of Styrofoam —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yes.

MR. HERMAN: — because I think, to me that represents an, you know, a continuing exploration of process and material. I'd like you to talk more about that if you would.

MR. BALAZS: One of the things that I was always fascinated with is — when I have learned sculptures, you make a thing out of clay and then you make a mold of it and then you take it over here and pour something in that mold and then you take this all on. And I had built a number of flights of stairs when I was doing construction and you don't make a mold of the stairs, you make a mold — you just make the space around. So why not extend this — [laughs] — you know, idea. So Styrofoam just came into being and I saw that as, Holy Christ. I had done some stuff where I carved in dirt or heavy sand and poured the stuff on the sand.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes, like sand casting.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, yes —

MR. HERMAN: In glass, which —

MR. BALAZS: And so I just started using Styrofoam. And you know, there are so many ways to get it shaped. And I have been waiting and — to get the courage — they have a concrete now that'll set at freezing temperatures. It's not cheap, but I thought, Jesus, it's snow. Now, I'll make stuff out of snow, you know — [laughs] — and put the concrete on it, you know. But I never got around to doing that.

MR. HERMAN: How do you find out about these —

MR. BALAZS: Well.

MR. HERMAN: — things. What's your source of — [laughs] — information.

MR. BALAZS: Well, I just — you know, I just got my hands on an old Styrofoam chest somewhere and — it was just starting to be used as insulation. And I just saw it. Jesus, this stuff — so then I started fooling around with concrete on it. And then the first big job I did was at the Unitarian Church here in town.

And then, of course, now you're talking about — they put up one form and then I put all my Styrofoam over here. And I — there was a guy, an architect, who was taking and sawing blocks of Styrofoam on a band saw and then turned them 90 degrees and saw them again. I can't remember his name. But anyway, then you could take that stuff and put it on and it just made this nice textural thing. So we put that all up on — just nailed it up on this and then they'd put this other form

up and they'd put the tie twos [ph] in, of course. And then the contractor looked at it and says, "How do you know that's not going to get crushed pouring the concrete over there." [Laughs.] It's nothing that any of us had thought about.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, you mean the weight of the concrete on it.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, before it hardened. And so the wall's, oh, about 80, 90 feet long. So we got — I took a couple of bottles of whiskey and the guys that run the vibrators — the normal practice is just pile it all up and then cut it out.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes.

MR. BALAZS: So I had them go back and forth —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, you mean packing it — packing it into it. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, and showed them how to — please don't bump this and here's a bottle of whiskey. And it was perfect. Bottles of whiskey have solved more problems for me — [laughs] — than anything else.

MR. HERMAN: I think they could cause problems, too, if you gave them too much whiskey. [They laugh.]

MR. BALAZS: God, one of my favorite — there was a bank down on Fifth and Union, I think, someplace, and I did a bunch little wild birds in the region — or flowers and put them up there. And they were remodeling and had a boardwalk. And there was other things going on. And one of the black — African-American, one of the biggest guys I ever saw — my twins were in college at that time, so we got down there to mount it — well, I put a ladder up as far as it would go and then I had some block and tackles. And the rope ran against the block and I still had an inch to go. [Laughs.]

And there'd been a whole lot of, "Jesus Christ, can't you get that higher? Move this a little bit." You know. And we just got stuck at this point where this thing needed to go one inch higher. And this big black guy comes over and this scowl and says, "You guys, watch your language. It's bothering our" — and so he started — he was able to lift this whole 400 pounds. And he was just starting to do this. And — "Oh, the son of a bitch is too short over here — Andrea — [inaudible] — I've had it," she says. "You guys got to stop this." And this black man turned around and said, "Go fuck yourself." [They laugh.]

But he was able — so we've counted on all sorts of things. And then Tom Kundig helped me with a piece that was in the Kingdome. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: You mean when it was first made for the Kingdome, the enamel panels, yes.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, yes. But you know, and he worked for me for a year and —

MR. HERMAN: I remember that he said that and also in the book, he — and the video, he talks about that, too. Yes. Yes, that's very interesting. It's —

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: — such a successful award-winning architect as he became. You were — really played an important role in his development.

MR. BALAZS: Well, he credits me with mentoring. And his dad's a hell of an architect. And there was a little bit of this. And I think Moritz [Kundig] — I did a lot of work for Moritz, too, when —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes.

MR. BALAZS: But he was very meticulous, you know. The Swiss put on their dust boards with screws so they can take them off and clean behind there, you know. [Laughs.] That just floored more — Tom.

MR. HERMAN: Tom, oh. I'm curious because of the different materials you work very successfully in if you find yourself gravitating to one and work in that almost exclusively. And this, I guess, I'm saying would be apart from the commissions —

MR. BALAZS: Yes —

MR. HERMAN: — which would be more specifically steel or brick or whatever. Did you find that you're silk screening a lot or then you're doing enamel, or how does that work?

MR. BALAZS: I just — like I say, whatever come in the door. I did maybe 3,000 silk screens. There was some guy who made motels, Hans Janders [ph], down in the Southeast. And he commissioned me \$1,000 here for a motel and another \$400 or \$500 here for —

MR. HERMAN: I wondered if you'd gotten those kinds of jobs because those often can be very lucrative and a lot of artists will work just for those art consultants to try to get the hotel, motel —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — business like that.

MR. BALAZS: And a lot of — the architects, as Bob Price down in Tacoma and Fred Bassetti in — all the ones I worked with would sit down and really talk about this. And one of the problems that the percent-for-art thing had was the structure was all finished, and then you just come and hung something on it. You know. So I started working — that's why the Styrofoam started going real good and carving brick. You know —

MR. HERMAN: So to be integrated in a building, yes.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, it's just — this is it. The wall is this. It's not a wall that you hand something on. And that got me a lot of work. And I watched Mark Tobey hang a piece — I had a piece in the opera house during the expo and Mark was hanging a piece up — no — yes, I think it was Mark or somebody in that age group. And they didn't know what the hell they were doing, but they had to be these people and they were trying to tell them how to do it. And they were all wrong. And the people weren't artists — [inaudible]. And they got a little huffy and stompy of feet and I'd never pulled that off. The first thing I — when I got those big jobs, the first thing I want to find out is could you get a crane there, you know. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes, because you understood the technical—

MR. BALAZS: Aspects.

MR. HERMAN: — considerations —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — that many artists might not.

MR. BALAZS: And the architects and the clients really respected that.

MR. HERMAN: Did you feel that accepting commissions ever kind of limited your creative solutions for what —

MR. BALAZS: Not at all.

MR. HERMAN: — was required.

MR. BALAZS: Everybody says, well, you're compromising. And I — and this, I think, goes right back to the beginning when you asked, did I ever think of myself an artist? Of course, everyone that does this sort of thing hopes that one day his piece is going to hang — [inaudible] — you know. And maybe now and then what you did was — will be considered worthwhile. And so when I did public commissions, you know, we'd sit down with the architect and the client and talk about what is required. I'm not going to hang a crucifix in a damn synagogue, you know. And so I always consider myself an arranger of stuff. You know, that's — and I didn't make any kewpie dolls — [laughs] — you know, to hang up. But I really thought my job was to arrange their iconography and materials in a way that made a pleasant environment for those who had to use it.

MR. HERMAN: How much guidance did they give you, for example, if it was something for a church about which saints were to be in there or —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yes, yes —

MR. HERMAN: — if they had peculiar forms of dress? Did you have to do the research for that or —

MR. BALAZS: Yes, yes, yes. In fact, for some — I was — the Catholic [ph] magazine considered me one of the most — best liturgical artists in the region, you know, but I had no ego about that. You know. If they wanted — I remember the worst job I ever did was for a Protestant church down in the Tri-Cities area. And I'd made elaborate drawings. Because they're done in an area where there's a lot of farming, they wanted it called seasonal — fruits, vegetables —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes.

MR. BALAZS: — the trees, and stone, all that. And when I got it all done, here is this guy with all these drawings I'd made coming along — and this was a baptismal font, on each side of it was a season. And, "Well, look, here you've got more branches in this one than it shows here in the drawing." I said, "Well, that's just the way designs work. I mean, when the thing's this big and the thing's this big, you got to do different things." And he says, "Well, the — you changed that without consulting us means will bring suit and not pay you for that." And I said, "Is this some kind of an ugly joke?" And he says, "No." He says, "That's just legal matter. You signed up to do this and now we got this." I said, "You like it, don't you?" "Oh, yes, it's just beautiful." And I said, "What's the problem?" "Well, you didn't follow it." I said — so I just loaded up everything and — "Well, you can't" — and I'd just started the project — I said, "You can't do that. Our church opens this weekend." And that's —

MR. HERMAN: That's your problem. [Laughs.]

MR. BALAZS: I just picked up everything and left. About the middle of the week I got a phone call and it was a preacher all fumbly and mumbly and I said, "What you tried was gross in my book and I don't really give a damn if I get — I'll do it someplace else." And he says, "Well, what would it take" — I think the thing was about a \$8,000 job. And he says, "What would it take to get you to come down here?" And I says, "\$10,000 in my hand in cash before I even leave the shop." And by God, he come up the next day with \$10,000. But I — that's the kind of shit I won't take, you know. But —

MR. HERMAN: But you haven't had to very often.

MR. BALAZS: With a few Protestants, but not Catholics. You know — reasonable men. But, you know, that's always an issue and —

MR. HERMAN: But they generally tell you what iconography they want and you do it in your style.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes, that's mostly it.

MR. HERMAN: Have you done stained glass windows? I don't remember ever seeing them.

MR. BALAZS: No. I have designed some and there's an outfit over — you know, when they started making stained glass windows with concrete —

MR. HERMAN: Yes, yes.

MR. BALAZS: — yes, instead of lead — well, this guy did that and the church wanted that, and so I designed them all and went over and picked the colors and so forth then and he made them. And I've done three or four projects like that.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. I've got to ask you about other artists that you've admired because I've seen or read references to David Smith, Stuart Davis and Edward Gorey — [they laugh] — all of them I like.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yes. Well —

MR. HERMAN: They're all very different, so —

MR. BALAZS: I think I have almost every book Gorey did. I just — I just love the way that man's mind worked and — do you know his work?

MR. HERMAN: Yes, I do.

MR. BALAZS: Well, you sort of look like him. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: You know, I look at some of those pen and ink drawings you've done that are very Gorey-like. And —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah. I've been trying to come up with something that isn't copying him, but is a continuum of what he started, you know. In fact, I have a book — I've done — and I'm thinking of getting — I did when I was in the hospital. I'll show you. And thinking of getting it published. It's an accordion book like the Japanese things and —

MR. HERMAN: Well, that's — that sort of goes in another direction —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — I was going to ask you and that's whether you've ever done illustration, you know, or whether there has been a book of — whether they were pen and ink drawings that had been turned into prints or how you — how that work has —

MR. BALAZS: I've just done a handful of those things. I — there is about five people that I always did their Christmas cards for, you know, and that sort of thing. And there was a couple of out and out commercial art things I did, and they were successful. And I remember I did one — a bank wanted a picture of Abraham Lincoln on the wall, just an outline in iron. And they said, "How much would it be and blah, blah, blah." I said, "Well, let's look." And I said, "Well, where do you want it?" And — "Well, right up here." So there was a bonfire there and I put a real long stick in there and let it get charcoal on the end and I got out a penny and — I almost fainted. I mean, it was — I just drew Lincoln's outline, you know.

MR. HERMAN: That's very showy.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, it was. [They laugh.] And I just — I could — "What the hell? How did I do that?" So anyway, I was working through an interior decorator and I did the thing for \$350, you know, it was just about so big. And that iron strap, which is — blah, blah, blah. I took some paper up there and made a tracing of it and it ended up — she charged them 3,500 [dollars] and took all the difference. I paid her. So then I quit working with interior decorators. But —

MR. HERMAN: Well, you know, that comes up with another question about how do you price your work because you go with —

MR. BALAZS: Poorly. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: — you know, commissions and architects and, you know, like this woman and it must be very hard to figure out. It's not just cost. It's creative time.

MR. BALAZS: That's been the hardest thing for me. I think — I have a couple of friends that do this and the hardest thing to remember is you do some of this large work, the last four days' work is usually the most difficult for whatever reasons — the fuck ups and one thing or another. [Laughs.] But usually, I would say 90 percent of what I did, I had the budget going in before I even started.

MR. HERMAN: They gave you the budget.

MR. BALAZS: They'd say, "We've got \$5,000 to spend. What can you do?" And just — I've missed a few times, very seldom. I — you know — I didn't always make profits, but I didn't — huge profits, but I didn't lose anything. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Well, it's part of, I suppose, being able to accurately project how much time it will take and not only materials' cost, but your own time to feel that you're going to get paid an adequate hourly wage.

MR. BALAZS: Well, the thing — I have always worked very fast. And I won't take a job and do it. I usually had five or six things going at once.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MR. BALAZS: So I'd have a job just being in the sketch preliminary design, beginning phase and I'd have some where I'd just started work. And in that regard, you know, pretty soon you accumulate more tools than you can keep busy. [Laughs.] If — I mean, I've got all the tools to do concrete and

enamel and so, when those are idle — [laughs] — you know, they're not getting any return on their investment. And so that's — and one of the things my father always told me, "Buy the best tools you can because" — and I've got a couple of tools that just went tits up and — Jesus, at 84, I don't want to buy — [laughs] —

MR. HERMAN: Invest in more, yeah.

MR. BALAZS: So that's why I got our grandson working for — that he would come in here and — I've done a lot of metal work. But now I've got a pacemaker and those electromagnetic fields screw it up. So I've got him doing that.

MR. HERMAN: So your grandson's working for you.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: And I think both your wife, Rosemary, and your kids have all worked on pieces too, have they not?

MR. BALAZS: Well, one of the nice things about your own children, I had a bookkeeper and I'd pay him exorbitant, like \$40 an hour. And — well, not quite that much. But then, they paid for their own college.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, excellent.

MR. BALAZS: And that worked out very smart — [laughs].

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: So —

MR. HERMAN: Back to the artists I asked you about, you mentioned — you talked about Gorey. What about Stuart Davis and David Smith? I think David Smith — you've been asked about David Smith simply because of the metal sculpture —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — and what people may see as a similarity. I personally feel that you've dealt with curves and David Smith's dealt more with strict geometry.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: But that may be a simplification.

MR. BALAZS: I — welding is — was a fairly new process. My dad had the first welder in our town. And up until that time, acetylene was made in a big vat and it was a nebulous process. And every day in the paper, there was about some welder who blew himself up. So my dad was actually the first guy in our little town to make one you could plug in the wall and go to work. And then I taught myself from that.

And that — it's gotten so sophisticated with many kinds of metals and what they call wire feed and blah, blah, blah. And I'm probably a very good welder, but I couldn't get a job as a welder because, you know — now, that's one of the things that's killing the percent-for-art things. You can't even apply for a project using public funds unless you have \$3 million in insurance and a license to weld.

MR. HERMAN: Oh my God.

MR. BALAZS: And that just runs the ante up way high.

MR. HERMAN: So it's a liability issue I suppose —

MR. BALAZS: Oh sure. Oh yeah.

MR. HERMAN: Well — no, that's very interesting and that kind of leads me to think about how people working in metal now may do like laser cutting and things of that sort.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: And that's what I'm kind of perplexed how an artist working in a studio, you know, how you find out about and figure out what new processes will work for you —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah, well —

MR. HERMAN: — and whether you're going to afford to have them or whether you hire that out or how that works.

MR. BALAZS: Well, a little of both. The very fact that I weld — [laughs] — and I have to buy welding materials from Stage One, and every month you go in and buy supplies and you see this new toy sitting on the counter, you know. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Oh, that's —

MR. BALAZS: And like when I bought my first plasma cutter, Jesus, those things were expensive. But now I got one for \$900 that just does the job perfect. I wore the first one out. And so that you're always looking for those things, but then — this business of — so I quit doing — applying for big public art. And when I was — I was on a state arts commission for two terms and I helped write the state law. And one of the concepts of this art in public places thing was a sort of spread the wealth around.

Well, at some point — I mean, the commissions would be \$25, 10,000 [dollars], \$550. And then the goddamn galleries got in there that I spoke very highly against. Let's open up the system so the galleries can make the application for the artist, you know. And then — well, that means another foot in the door. So then pretty soon you're talking about 100,000 [dollars], 200,000 [dollars]. And as soon as you get over 100,000 [dollars], everybody's trying to get a piece of that. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Sure.

MR. BALAZS: And I just — I know — I have a couple of friends who just quit — you know, just break you.

MR. HERMAN: I wrote down a quote I got from something, "I got more from John Lennon than the Bible."

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Is that — did I get that down correctly?

MR. BALAZS: You bet.

MR. HERMAN: What did that refer to?

MR. BALAZS: Well, just every — he's got a song "Imagine there's no country and no religion." They sang that at the closing of the —

MR. HERMAN: Of the Olympic Games that just ended in London.

MR. BALAZS: — Games, yes. That song has always just, ooh, you know. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Now, when you've worked in things, you know, like you're talking about the drawings or even a lot of silk screens, have you worked in series and kind of explored an idea until you feel you've exhausted it or are you —

MR. BALAZS: No.

MR. HERMAN: — more kind of do one thing and then move to another kind of thing and —

MR. BALAZS: Yes, I — Rosemary and I got this place in '61. We had our first house in 1950 or something. And it was a little hard to get in here. It was \$35,000 if you can believe in '60 —

MR. HERMAN: That was a lot of money then, too.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, yes. But we almost missed a couple of payments. And one of the things that just ate at me is you go back there every freaking day, and I had to make something that I could sell and realize somewhere between 25 [dollars] and \$50 for. Well, then pretty soon it was up to \$100. [Laughs.] And then, of late, you've got to get \$500, you know.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that's really interesting because that's economics at its most basic.

MR. BALAZS: Most basic, right.

MR. HERMAN: Yes, really is.

MR. BALAZS: And it — and as a result of that, I had some things I wanted to explore. And it's — that — it was mostly — I can never remember whether Auits monoprint or monotype, but there was a person who came from one of the big printing houses. He went through and he set up out here and — east of town. And I can't — what was it called?

MR. HERMAN: But in any case, it's only one — it's a one-off process.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Well, then he told me about ghosts and — like if you make a monoprint, you take another print —

MR. HERMAN: Oh —

MR. BALAZS: — and, you know, what they call ghost. I did a lot —

MR. HERMAN: A very light second print.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, but then I used a lot of those ghosts as just the basis to start painting on.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes.

MR. BALAZS: And I've always been very casual about where my name went and so forth. So a week of that was about the only time I really pursued one damn thing. And I — and now, I don't know if I could do that — [laughs] — if I wanted to.

MR. HERMAN: Well, did you find that got kind of boring and that you needed the variety or —

MR. BALAZS: I need the variety. I look at these people who are potters and glassblowers and how — when you spend every day there making goblets. I couldn't do that. And people — right now, what I'm doing out in the shop, I'm not sure it qualifies as these are — I just try to use up all of detritus — [laughs] — around here. I've always been fascinated — and I think I wrote that to you — in outsider art and folk art and some of that stuff. And the one thing that — [laughs] — fascinated me was that they never get concerned about craftsmanship.

MR. HERMAN: That's another quote, but yeah. I like that one. [They laugh.]

MR. BALAZS: You know, just the idea matters.

MR. HERMAN: What was it, "I never let craftsmanship get in the way of a good idea."

MR. BALAZS: Idea, right. And so, now that I've got this —

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

MR. BALAZS: — I can't do the craftsmanship. So this gives me a good excuse to look for something else I can do. And I'm going to show some of that and ask if it's art because I don't know. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Today, I think, you know, people are often perplexed by contemporary art because if the person who made it says it's art, then it's art.

MR. BALAZS: Right, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: And sometimes a person who didn't make it says it's art — that's art. So it's —

MR. BALAZS: Well, did you ever read *The Painted Word* [Tom Wolfe. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York City: 1975]?

MR. HERMAN: I didn't. Never did, yeah.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, it was all about that.

MR. HERMAN: Some of the drawings that you've done look like collages. I'm thinking of one that's a pair of woman's legs with a sort of a head on top.

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Like a collage that might have been made from a Sears catalogue or something —

MR. BALAZS: Yes, right.

MR. HERMAN: Have you done collages or —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah, I've done a lot of that. But — and then found objects, but I've made tons of stuff that I just decided wasn't particularly good.

MR. HERMAN: I'm trying to look at that.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: How much time has elapsed and — I can't really tell. Could you turn the light back on? Oh, it's right there, yeah. I have on this an hour and 50 minutes. And — well, I can't really tell. Let's just keep going. It looks like 17. I know — you know it's — we've talked more than 17 minutes.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, right.

MR. HERMAN: Maybe that's — I don't know. I assume that will tell me when it's over. Anyway, you've done a lot of things with lettering for slogans and things.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: And I wondered whether you had ever studied calligraphy —

MR. BALAZS: Yes, I was —

MR. HERMAN: — because — have you ever created an entire typeface or —

MR. BALAZS: I have a person in Italy who designs typefaces working with my stuff to do — and I can say now my handwork is illegible. But I have always been interested and I'll show you some stuff out there of calligraphy and letter forms. And I ran into this guy down in Colfax. And he's internationally known. I can't remember his name just now. But he is — you know talking in tongues is?

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: Well, he does that —

MR. HERMAN: Writes in tongues. [Laughs.]

MR. BALAZS: And his work is so incredible, it's not to be believed. And then, when he saw me using letter forms as a point of departure, you know, he and I just sort of became joined at the hip. But his stuff is just — sort of searches the universe. And he publishes these huge books that sell for about \$5,000. Every page he does. And he's known all over the world. And he just happened to be operating out of Colfax. And I can't remember his name. I'll show you one of his books if you're interested.

MR. HERMAN: What sort of recurring themes or ideas do you find that you come back to and explore?

MR. BALAZS: Well, I — mostly it's the juxtapositioning of disparate ideas. It's sort of the idea that we're all here and we're all different. We've got to get along. And that disparate has been — I mean, joining disparate elements has been a — I saw Kandinsky is basically doing that. And — well, even this little thing here, you know, this isn't like that and —

MR. HERMAN: Yes, we're looking at a champlévé enamel.

MR. BALAZS: So I — I've never thought of what I produce as me. I don't know. I — all these afflictions that have hit me has really set me back.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. I want to go into that —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — because I think you've done a lot of work with risky materials — [they laugh] — and situations. And — but I think I'd better pause this because I'm a little uncertain how much time has elapsed. And — okay. Yes, we are resuming and it looks like we have 20 minutes left. We will check.

I made a note that though your most familiar style is bold with big washes of color, bright and abstract, that you've also made work of realistic flowers, birds and those Japanese — I want to say kabuki figures. I'm not sure that that's what they are.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, yes.

MR. HERMAN: And I think that's — those are too disparate, to use that term — [they laugh] — about your work.

MR. BALAZS: Well, in the book, there are some watercolors I did. And I had seriously wounded myself — [laughs]. I crushed four vertebrae in my neck, so I had a whole summer to figure out how I was going to make a living. So I started with cabbages in the garden. And someplace I found this marvelous phrase, "May death find me planting my cabbages." [Laughs.]

And so then, there was a lady who was a very accomplished artist and very good friends of ours. And she would come and drive. And she — you know — "I want you to teach me a little bit." And then we'd drive out and kind of start doing the landscapes. And I did probably 4 [hundred] or 500 landscapes that everybody tells me they are exceptional. [Laughs.] So I don't know and I sold them all anyway. But there's a part of me that still wants to get back to that.

It was — I've been in Alaska a lot of times and I went up to the museum there. And Laurence and another guy, I can't remember his name, they painted — did these night paintings. And I've always wanted to do some night paintings. They were just such magnificent things, you know. I —

MR. HERMAN: But you're — you know, I would think that someone who works in an abstract style would not be as adept at rendering as you are. I mean, those are meticulous drawings that you've done in enamel, not just the things on paper, but —

MR. BALAZS: Well, when I was in high school and the war was going on, my dad — one his job was to go work making war planes. And he had a big photograph. And it didn't work. And he was charging the cells, that thing that holds the motor in it. So I made an exploded drawing of that so he could help his people put it together. But part of that, too, I made these meticulous, very photograph-like drawings of all the war planes that I could get pictures of. And so I have a draftsmanship ability. And then, one summer, I worked for an architect drafting as we hit hard times and he needed a draftsman. And I had done that kind of thing in college.

So I used to be able to render when I chose to. But now, I've got a medication I can take and I think I'm going to start using it.

MR. HERMAN: Let's go back a minute just to talk about the health hazards and, you know — because you've dealt with acids and, you know, flames and being up on ladders. And so I'm guessing that you have had a fair amount of health consequences. You just mentioned having a pacemaker.

MR. BALAZS: Well, it's mostly trauma. I was very careful about inhalation of substances, although, when I was doing many watercolors or silk screens, I got a big job in the winter and I didn't open any windows in the shop, and I got a thing called toxic hepatitis. And that was a bummer. But most of them had all been, you know, falling down, dropping stuff and you know, this — [laughs] —

MR. HERMAN: Yes, I — I mean, I would think that that would be a particular problem if you were working —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: — on a project that then you'd have to delay it or something —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — knowing that deadlines are part of commissioned work particularly, and —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, you bet. And if — a lot of bigger commissions, if you do something to hold off the project, your actions had caused the project to be held up, you were responsible for the payroll.

MR. HERMAN: You could be sued, I'm sure.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: For sure, yeah. Well, just give me a little bit of a catalogue of the injuries that you've had. [They laugh.]

MR. BALAZS: Well, the first one that was sort of serious — there is a fountain on a wall — now, I don't know if the water still runs through it or not. And my daughters and Tom Kundig were helping me put it up and I fell off a ladder. And Tom and my two daughters had to finish it. But mostly this thing that happened to my neck was just I tried to restrain something that was not — was going in another direction. And I pushed it and crushed this. And those were the most serious ones.

MR. HERMAN: Crushing the vertebrae.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And yeah, I've been pretty careful. I — we used to have — for you know, cuts and bruises. We had a rubber stamp at the local ER, Emergency Room, so we could just come in and go — [they laugh] —

MR. HERMAN: You mean, a signature stamp if you were brought in for an injury.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, a lot of people who — that worked for me, you know, would get very anxious about my requiring or asking them to do something that they didn't think was safe.

MR. HERMAN: I don't really understand this recorder. I'm going to pause it again because it looks like we keep getting more time, rather — [audio break].

This is the end of card number one with the interview with Harold Balazs on August 13, 2012.

[End of disc.]

MR. HERMAN: This is memory disc number two, interview with Harold Balazs in his home in Mead, Washington, on August 13, 2012. I'm Lloyd Herman.

Harold, yes, we were talking about typography and your interest in the written word. And I was particularly interested because I thought it showed not only you're interested — interest in lettering, but your wit — and a Christmas card that you did that was reproduced —

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.] Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — that looked like an entire alphabet, except the message was no "L." [Laughs.] I thought that was —

MR. BALAZS: No "L." Well, that's not original — [inaudible].

MR. HERMAN: It's not, no, no.

MR. BALAZS: But I can't — I couldn't resist it when I saw it. The problem I think I have, if I do have problems, is the only things I'm not interested in are creamed carrots and Lawrence Welk music, you know. [Laughs.] And I just — [they laugh] — I'm just absolutely — but I'm always just skipping around like a — I — some place, years ago, I read Picasso was the last eclectic that managed to make a living. And you look at what goes on and you've got to really walk a pretty narrow path. I — Charlie Rose interviewed the guy who paints the big portraits, Chuck Smith, Chuck —

MR. HERMAN: Chuck Close, yes.

MR. BALAZS: — Close. And he says, "I'm a one note guy, basically," and he says, "but I've been very lucky." He says, "Here is the main stream of everything going along here and some people cross it like this and other people cross it like this. But I crossed it like this." [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Straight ahead, yeah.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that's interesting because, you know, your mentioning Picasso makes me think of, oh, we talk about his blue period and the rose period.

MR. BALAZS: And the rose period, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: What will art historians in the future —

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: — how will they try to categorize your work? Can you see different periods or different stylistic characteristics that might group things from several periods?

MR. BALAZS: Well, I — yeah, I hope that happens, of course. And I think — I must have been in my 50s before it occurred to me that I was making stuff as good as anybody around. Well, I remember — the painter I mentioned that — [inaudible].

MR. HERMAN: Chuck — not Chuck Close — no.

MR. BALAZS: The one from the Northwest. Kenneth —

MR. HERMAN: Tobey — Mark — Kenneth Callahan?

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And he says, "I'm going to give you one warning." He says, "All my life, every

morning I look in the newspaper for my name." [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: I've heard that said by someone, but I don't know who, but —

MR. BALAZS: But the idea is get over that as soon as you can. You know, it's not about me. And I pretty much — I've done things, I think, merit posterity, let's say, but I just don't think of myself as producing work to glorify myself, but trying to create a little wonder and let people puzzle over what I make, but goddamn it, I wish I was rich and famous. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Well, you know, it's — other people have said that if you were in New York, maybe you would be.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: And I know that it can be kind of a curse being a, quote, regional artist, unquote, because you're very well-known and respected in the Northwest and have a lot of commissions, a lot of work in Alaska, certainly in Washington state, all the way down into California, I believe. And that's a kind of respect that a lot of artists, probably, who are duking it out in New York and other places may not get.

MR. BALAZS: Right. And the other thing — I don't want to be a celebrity.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: I look at that arena — that just — but I think — I have been very, very fortunate and there was always something there. There's only been two or three times where we were really desperate for the next check in the mail. But mostly there — because I work in a variety of mediums and kept six or seven things going on, we've always managed to hold it together.

MR. HERMAN: It does sound, though, like you felt pressure, though, at times —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — to keep it going and to keep income from your art.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And I — everybody — the guy that runs the gallery where I sell my stuff over in Coeur d'Alene, says — everybody — says, "No matter what you do, people know you did it." You know, and —

MR. HERMAN: Well, yeah, I think you know —

MR. BALAZS: — I have a very distinct style, but it gets all kind of mushed up in other things.

MR. HERMAN: I think your distinct style, though, that's the reason I was asking about the meticulous figurative pieces, because I don't think of that as your signature style.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Right. Right.

MR. HERMAN: But that's something that's very awe inspiring because you do that so well, too.

I'm interested in what has become more and more in the crafts field, and although you kind of have a foot in that, but again, that's always one of those things — are you an artist or a craftsman.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: That's — I never thought that was any kind of a sensible argument.

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.] Yes.

MR. HERMAN: But thinking of enamel as a material that is more considered a craft —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — even though you do it in like any flat medium that could be painting or stained glass or anything. But in recent years, as they've tried to intellectualize the craft field —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — more talk has gone on about content —

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.] Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — in art and I wondered, is that something that has ever been a concern of yours because you've dealt with things that are immediately engaging and pleasant to look at and live with.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: And I've never felt that content had very much to do with it, except for the liturgical commissions —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — which clearly have that purpose. But I shouldn't be talking about my attitudes —

MR. BALAZS: Yes — no, no, no, but that's —

MR. HERMAN: — [inaudible] — getting your attitudes.

MR. BALAZS: It's — I think — well, like I said, I heard Wayne Thiebaud say once, "Our artists [ph] are just thrown around to" — and one other thing I railed against in the public art medium was — arena rather — the wishings of the people who were commissioning you that there's some great big story here. And I think there are so many occasions — and that's why so long — well with — along so well with architects was that I think there's just too goddamn much art. I mean, is it appropriate to make every damn little — it's nice to walk in Europe and look at all the stuff that somebody articulated, doorknobs and hinge butts and everything, but at some point, you just can't gussy up every goddamn inch of things and there's — rather than have a great big work of art here, wouldn't it be just nice to have a nice handrail that goes down here or an elegant door that invites you in? Why does it have to have content and be art, you know?

MR. HERMAN: Well — and I think often, as public art commissions have gone in recent years, sometimes, it is just a door knob or a door pull —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — and not trying to cover an entire wall or some big sculpture that's plunked down.

And that's, I think, a very good movement.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: And of course, Washington State has been on the forefront really of public art for a very long time. And I'm guessing that that's been — I know artists who have moved here because they hoped to get commissions. So obviously, that's been something that has been important to you, even though it's not what you started out going after.

MR. BALAZS: You do know. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Yes. I remember, you were talking a few minutes ago, on the last memory card, about found object art and yet, all I can think of that I've seen are the clothes dryer lids —

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: — that you said you told some person who sold, I guess, used appliances — that you could use some of those and tell me that story again.

MR. BALAZS: Well, he met me — we met at the dump or the tip. And he says what am I doing with those. And I explained it to him. And he was a young man just hauling appliances to the —

MR. HERMAN: Oh. Oh.

MR. BALAZS: — to the dump because the city garbage people won't pick them up. And I showed him what's required and how to tell a difference from just paint and enamel and told him I give him a buck and a half for any — well, a week later, he showed with 1,500 — [they laugh].

MR. HERMAN: Did you accept that many?

MR. BALAZS: Oh, God, yes. But the nice thing was, it gave him enough money to buy something better than his beat-up truck he was using. And — yeah — I'm a humanist, like I said, and who in the hell am I to say I shouldn't create your environment, you know? I think I — if we're going to — if I'm going to create an environment for you somewhere, you have a right to have a say in that, you know. And I've always operated that way.

MR. HERMAN: Well, tell me how you've used the dryer lids, though. I think —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, well, enamel comes in two forms — there's porcelain enamel and vitreous enamel. One is glass and then the other one is porcelain. A lot of things are covered with glass — pots, pans, kettles. For years, gas stations were entirely covered — and that plant in Seattle, where I worked, that's what they did for years, meat counters, meat — [inaudible] — and so — and that's been going on for years. And they — until the 1930s any enamel like we talk about artist enamel, I think it was all up to you to figure how to make them or maybe it was a little longer though, but in the old days, the guilds controlled it. And, I mean, it's a very complicated way — the guilds and their formula for this vitreous enamel were —

MR. HERMAN: That would be grinding glass into powder —

MR. BALAZS: Glass and then turning chemicals and keeping the formula right. Because what you're after is a kind of — how much expansion. That — what you're putting on the metal has the same coefficient of linear expansion as the material or it won't stay there.

So that formulation was all taken care of by the '30s. So it was no longer — so for enamel work for so long was very precious because, shit, you'd have to spend all day to making that much enamel, you know.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. Yes. Yes, just getting your materials.

MR. BALAZS: So when these appliances started being covered and thrown out, it was one of the highest grade of enamel you could imagine. And so why —

MR. HERMAN: That was on appliances.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And the thing that you do is — I had the thing called ground coat on iron. That's the first layer down. It's like a primer or something. And then — [laughs] — [audio break]. This is Lloyd Herman. This is — he — [audio break].

MR. HERMAN: You're talking about the enamel on —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah —

MR. HERMAN: — [inaudible] — as being a base coat on —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. So here's this material that just getting dumped. And so I had them shove the things aside at the place and I'd go there and take them off. And some of those got to be, you know, three by two feet, and things like that. And they're only costing me \$1. A panel that big with ground coat on it, made by a manufacturer is going to cost me \$150, \$200. So that was just the natural — and then the nice thing about them is you can cut them with a plasma cutter or a band saw and make shapes and outlines and figures. And —

MR. HERMAN: And those were already formed into rectangles —

MR. BALAZS: Right. [Laughs.] Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — even though they didn't have a little notch in one side, but I'm guessing that you could probably also have taken a whole side of the dryer, unless those are not painted and on enamel.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yes. Yes. Well now, a friend of mine had somebody bringing those to him and the guy didn't know the difference — most of the sides of the panels — [inaudible] — is what they call baked enamel, enamel being a special kind of just paint.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, you know, more like an automotive —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. So that's — withstands maybe 400 degrees. So I got — I'll show you some — I take those panels and then grind off the enamel. I had my granddaughter doing that, she needed a job. I — you know, sketch a design and then she'd grind all that enamel off and then we'd throw it outside and let it rust. And then, we would take another area and just grind down where it's silver and then put a protection on it. So now, I've got these — and the same thing, I've got these panels like this that cost me nothing.

And then, I started doing more intricate things where I'd grind off the paint and then I'd put flux on and then take lead solder. And lay this lead —

MR. HERMAN: This is amazing to me. I mean, this is what I was talking about experimenting always with —

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.] Well, you have to.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: You have to.

MR. HERMAN: You know, it just occurred to me that it's a shame you don't live in San Francisco. They have an artist in residence program at the city dump there.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Oh, sure. [They laugh.] Sure.

MR. HERMAN: What fun that would be.

MR. BALAZS: You know, I always said the purpose of — or the object of my life has been to earn enough money to avoid incarceration —

MR. HERMAN: [Laughs.]

MR. BALAZS: — or you know, for not being — become a ward of the state and to be able to get enough money to build my house reasonably far away from the dump. But now, God, if I was just coming out [ph] of school, I'd get a place closest that I could to the dump, you know. [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: What other kinds of found objects have you used in your work? I'm just trying to remember what I've seen.

MR. BALAZS: Well, I'm very interested in all parts of tools. But what I did a whole show, had about 300 or 400 pieces in it. It was all this stuff that looked like it might be useful for something. And it was a monster hit. And we were on a trip down the Snake River, where you'd hike up to the hills and see these early homesteads. And one of them had a building — it was about 20, 30 feet square — that the walls were festooned with the most wonderful forged objects that appeared to be tools. And the only conclusion there was he hated his wife in the wintertime and he'd could go out there and make this stuff. [They laugh.]

So I just covered the walls with this crazy stuff and I sold every piece. And so anything that seems to fit my psyche, but a lot of the found objects are stuff I've made —

MR. HERMAN: Oh —

MR. BALAZS: A lot of times, when you're working, especially with the architects or churches, they want to see a little sample of what this is going to look like. So I made hundreds of these things and they just got thrown in a corner. And then I —

MR. HERMAN: They'd be like basically material and process samples.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, just process samples. And so I've started picking up those and use —

MR. HERMAN: But you forged steel and —

MR. BALAZS: I never could learn the hammer well, but I have — I've done a lot of repousse work and light gauge steel and copper. I had a couple of shows down at the art center — Seattle Center, where I —

MR. HERMAN: Northwest Craft Center —

MR. BALAZS: Yes —

MR. HERMAN: — which used to be. Yup.

MR. BALAZS: But now, I've got to spell my — out my elbows and shoulders.

MR. HERMAN: Well, tell me how as you've gotten older and had sustained these injuries, how your physical limitations have influenced —

MR. BALAZS: You bet.

MR. HERMAN: — your work.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, people always ask you, "What influences your work?" Budget, health and weariness. [Laughs.] You know, it's just — yeah, I've never been the — well, I don't think I'm a prima donna, but if you're a fool if you think you can beat these limitations, you know. And the time I tried to beat these limitations, it's just not served me well. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Well, it's interesting. You've progressed from making jewelry to really big commissions. And I'm guessing that that huge sculpture, which I think I heard was 16 feet high in Westlake, Ohio, is that the biggest one you've made?

MR. BALAZS: No, the fountain.

MR. HERMAN: The fountain.

MR. BALAZS: It's in here.

MR. HERMAN: Oh and where is the fountain?

MR. BALAZS: Downtown.

MR. HERMAN: Downtown Seattle?

MR. BALAZS: No, Spokane.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, Spokane. Oh, the fountain, of course, in the river. Yes — no, that is a magnificent piece, yeah.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Yes. And the funny part of this whole experience for me is people say, well, why didn't I take — I'm so sick and tired of the piece by the time I get it stalled up and all of fuck ups and the crazy people and — I just get away from there. I just don't want anything to do with it — [laughs] — so I've taken very few pictures —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, I know the fountain, and not the piece in the river —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — but the one that the water converges in a dome. I thought that was just a brilliant idea.

MR. BALAZS: Well, there's —

MR. HERMAN: And I'm sure you enjoy the fountain — just going down and seeing kids there in the summer.

MR. BALAZS: Kids playing.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: But there were some bureaucrats — it's the closest I've ever come to striking someone. I mean, these guys want to put in their penny worth. They don't know nothing. You know, they never made nothing, but they feel because they've got this badge or some goddamn thing, they can tell me what to do, you know.

MR. HERMAN: Were they — I'm guessing that probably in a public fountain like that, that then there were a lot of discussions about liability. And is that — would that be so?

MR. BALAZS: Well, the Rotary Club paid the bills on that. So they handled all of that. But there were a couple of times, there were a few confrontations. My thought was, Jesus, there's that river, you know, so why pay for — you know, just suck the water out of the river, push it through all kinds of stuff and dump back in the river? Well, it has to be as pure as a swimming pool. And I says, "Between and Coeur d'Alene, there are 10,000 people swimming in that river every day." [Laughs.] You know. But it got nowhere with that. And that's what I have no toleration for it all anymore.

MR. HERMAN: I'm guessing that that's how you came up with your slogan and a rondo, transcend the bullshit.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, right. [They laugh.] Yes. I've sold that all. I've probably sold more of those than anything I ever did.

MR. HERMAN: I'm curious, though, about this whole kind of progress from jewelry to big public commissions and how that must have always been kind of a learning curve that you'd —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, God, yes.

MR. HERMAN: — keep ahead of because you were dealing with new processes, new scale of work, dealing with bureaucrats —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: — just as you had described. And what was the first commission?

MR. BALAZS: Let's see. It was for Tom Adkison and Royal McClure.

MR. HERMAN: So it was an architectural commission.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, it was —

MR. HERMAN: That's how you really got started with those. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, it was the first piece. And I think it was a baptismal font, as I —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, tell me — I don't remember now. I've read about the commission that you had applied for and the panel wanted to see a shop drawing.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, God. [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: Which I think —

MR. BALAZS: And that's in there.

MR. HERMAN: It's in the book, but I'd like to refer to and just in the description because it's brilliant.

MR. BALAZS: Well, a shop drawing, as you know, is a drawing that has to be submitted so the committee can see how this piece of architecture's going to be made and how it'll —

MR. HERMAN: How it will look. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And so somebody — I had to do a job for the University of Washington. It's in a building for cultures [ph], about a 24-foot square piece and I had this band saw business. And —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, band saw with Styrofoam — that —

MR. BALAZS: Yes — well, no, actually wood.

MR. HERMAN: Wood, oh.

MR. BALAZS: And the — somebody on the committee, and there's about 18 people, asked Bob Price, the architect, for a shop drawing. And he kept putting it off and putting it off and putting it off and finally, towards the end of the project, item 18, next meeting, shop drawings of this project. And so he called me up and said, "They want a shop drawing." So I just — [laughs] — drew the —

MR. HERMAN: Drew your shop.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, and sent them 19 or whatever number of copies. And item 18 come up and everybody lowered their drawing and Bob Price said, "You could have heard a pin drop."

MR. HERMAN: [Laughs.]

MR. BALAZS: And he says, "I really thought I'd lost the job." He says, and finally, the president of the college, Debriding [sic] or whatever his name was, says, "Well, Bob, we've been had," he says. [Laughs.] And everybody, you know, just, oh, the hell with it. It ain't worth talking about. Of course, everybody was just tickled pink with it.

MR. HERMAN: I hope that somebody who have the sense of humor about it. [Laughs.]

MR. BALAZS: Well, yeah, yeah. And that — but every now and then, you get somebody who doesn't. That's the — I had —

MR. HERMAN: I've seen pictures of banners that you made for the Spokane Public Library with the title *The Magical Thing in the Attic*.

MR. BALAZS: It was really more like a *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, you know. It was a kind of a crazy

flying machine with sails and — there was all sails —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, oh, but what I was clicking on is because you've done almost everything yourself. Did you do the sewing and cutting for that, too?

MR. BALAZS: Rosemary —

MR. HERMAN: Rosemary did that?

MR. BALAZS: — did all the sails.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. Because — and that made me wonder if you've done other work in fabric.

MR. BALAZS: I've — I've done a few rugs.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MR. BALAZS: And — but I — when we were in college, I did a series of hooked rugs — [laughs] — just to keep busy. And they had a little machine looked like an egg beater and you'd go, go, go, go. And my wife would do those. And then — I still have some of those. And then I made some, like, collages out of just pieces of cloth and sewed them up. And that was a handful of things while I was still in college. But then I have done, oh, six or eight various rugs, but they were made in Japan.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that — yeah, that's really part of what I was thinking about, too, is that instead of making all these things yourself, as you've begun to have physical limitations, that would be a way to have, you know, a limited edition piece or rug or whatever it might be. And I'd wondered whether you'd actually done that.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, I — but that one — you know — is the first one. My wife made that. And of course, my grandmother's attic was the most wondrous place in the world, but I wasn't quite allowed to go there unless I was, you know —

MR. HERMAN: Which probably made it more wondrous.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah, there were just wonderful things up there in that attic. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Did the receipt of the American Institute of Architects Craftsman Award in 1966 open more doors for —

MR. BALAZS: Yes, it did. Yes, because —

MR. HERMAN: — your work? Because I would think that would be important national recognition. And —

MR. BALAZS: Yes, yes, that was — the one thing I remember about that, I was up in the — I was with Ben Shawn and — who's the other guy that was a big — decorated airplanes and — but anyway, we had coffee [ph] —

MR. HERMAN: Calder?

MR. BALAZS: Not Calder —

MR. HERMAN: Not Calder.

MR. BALAZS: — but sort of a name like — but anyway, and then up here on the dais were all these people and John Kenneth Galbraith addressed this thing. And here's the bishop of whatever and everybody's — and I've never bowed my head. And I just was standing and I happened to look up there and John Kenneth Galbraith doesn't bow his head. He just sits there. [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: You really did thumbs up back at each other?

MR. BALAZS: Yes, we did, yeah. [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: What came out of that directly, if you can remember?

MR. BALAZS: Well, I went there, and then there was a couple of architects from the South who actually knew a couple of — well, they knew Bob Price out of Tacoma and we got introduced at that dinner. And he says, "I — would you be interested in doing it." And so he sent some plans and I ended up doing a kind of a small job, but it was, you know, a job. Yes. And it probably also spread the range of carved brick I did that —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, oh.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And —

MR. HERMAN: What do you do to relax?

MR. BALAZS: Hunt, fish, ski. I can't ski anymore. But that's what's hit me the hardest. There's a certain amount — Rosemary has been so supportive of me and she's done without a lot of times so I could go play my game. And —

MR. HERMAN: Rosemary's been really important in making —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, very important, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: — your work, too.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: I can't imagine a more supportive wife that any artist I know has had.

MR. BALAZS: Well, there's this thing where they have artists come from — the artist of the month club, I always call it. And you go to these talks and they're all there. And one of the things that's always gets mentioned, male or female, is how they dumped their spouse and left them with three kids and to pursue their vision of the world. And it gets pretty tiresome. And I've always felt that, you know, I'd have been an entirely different person if I had never married and had children. And the realization you're a responsible person — you have a wife and three children. You've got to keep making money. That's your job to take care of them first, and then you take care of yourself. And I — so few of those great big name artists that have come here to lecture are just — real boring and —

MR. HERMAN: Have your son or your two twin daughters pursued art?

MR. BALAZS: One twin daughter is a nurse practitioner in cancer care. And she just really looks out for us in that area. The other one's a lawyer, writes some of my contracts. And my son lives right up there, he is a structural steel person and he just retired last year. [They laugh.] Goddamn kid. But I

did a lot of — he had a big punch press — power. You know, I could — whenever I wanted a compound form [ph] — shape on stainless steel, I had — I'd made a couple of just simple molds that would be essentially like hammering something, but I just — you know — so that was a — and then, when it came to some rather large work that I was just not capable of handling, I'd go down there and work with him. And then, his help would usually end up helping me. And so — and then, there's a couple of other places that I had stuff that was even too big for him to deal with, so I went to another steel business — [inaudible].

MR. HERMAN: Something that you haven't mentioned that I think often particularly high school age boys are interested in is fussing with cars. And you haven't mentioned that at all. And I think that whole kind of hot rod culture and —

MR. BALAZS: Yes, well, I was really interested in midget auto racing. And I went to this track quite frequently and got really interested and go down to the pits and talk to these guys. Oh, he says, "You want to learn to — oh, shit, man, I want to learn." Those things — it was midget autos they — direct drive — there's no clutch or —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, oh.

MR. BALAZS: And you're just always in second gear and all this. And I went three times. And mom says, "What you — God, you've been over there — what are you doing?" I said, "Oh, this guy's giving me lessons." "No, he isn't!" [Laughs.] And that was the end of that.

But I have marvelous — well, Rosemary and I, when we first got married, we had an old 19-something or other — something or other — and I was always trying to repair it. And one time, the wrench slipped and it cracked open — [inaudible]. That — the biggest day of my life was when I started hiring people to fix my cars, you know. [Laughs.] But I've always kind of wanted to make one — an art car or something. That's a whole other field in the world.

And also, you say what — I loved to make model airplanes. That was what I did in high school. We had a couple of — there're two or three of us that made these, what they call, free flight airplanes. And they'd be pretty good size and bust your finger about 20 times a day trying to get the motor started.

MR. HERMAN: But you've — and you built boats, too. And I think I've — it occurred to me that, you know, there were such rules about model airplanes or boats, you know, with the aerodynamics and weight and structural things that seem so alien to the way you work on art projects —

MR. BALAZS: I'm not as —

MR. HERMAN: — which is totally free.

MR. BALAZS: I'm not as free as everybody would think. I love jerking people around and create things that look like they might be part of something else, but what in the hell is that. No — am I still uptight, hon? [Laughs.]

ROSEMARY BALAZS: What?

MR. BALAZS: Am I still uptight? Well, ever since she's —

ROSEMARY BALAZS: Are you uptight?

MR. HERMAN: Uptight.

MS. BALAZS: I don't know. I just — he just marches to another drum. [They laugh.]

MR. BALAZS: People listen —

MS. BALAZS: Would you like something to drink or — a glass of wine —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, thanks, I'm fine. Yes.

MS. BALAZS: — or something?

MR. BALAZS: [Inaudible.]

MR. HERMAN: A glass of wine, did you say?

MS. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MS. BALAZS: Some white?

MR. HERMAN: Either way.

MS. BALAZS: You're okay?

MR. HERMAN: Sure, that's good.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. I'll have a little, too. Both of them said I was an artist's artist, which I never quite understood until rather recently. I have more luck getting other artists enthralled than I do — [laughs] — people like in your position.

MR. HERMAN: That's interesting, that's — yeah.

MR. BALAZS: Like, I say, you — [inaudible] — are the first people from the intellectual community that have paid me any attention.

MR. HERMAN: Have you read much art criticism or do you read reviews or is that — no. [Laughs.]

MR. BALAZS: Oh, God, I — a friend of mine — there's a website where you can get artist statements and this guy got one. There's a continuous amalgamation when you are working with — [inaudible] — you know, and stuff like that. One of the sentences didn't even have a noun in it. [Laughs.] You know, God. And —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, it's — I understand that perfectly. As a curator, getting statements from artists for catalogues and how fatuous they — [laughs] — have sometimes been.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, God.

MR. HERMAN: What do you hate to do?

MR. BALAZS: Dig ditches. [Laughs.] Work on sewer systems, which we have so much —

MS. BALAZS: Clean up his shop. [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: Rosemary said cleaning up his shop from the other side of the room.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, right.

MS. BALAZS: He never does it [ph]. [Inaudible] — 60 years since he cleaned up his shop. [They laugh.]

MR. BALAZS: And I say, Lawrence Welk and creamed potatoes and — [they laugh].

MR. HERMAN: Carrots, I thought it was — creamed carrots.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, carrots, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: You've mentioned reading before. Do you read much now? And if so, what?

MR. BALAZS: Too much.

MR. HERMAN: What do you read?

MR. BALAZS: Well, I just finished a book by Lucretius, third century B.C. And he opens up his book, "There's two things, matter and void." And the matter is really little tiny things we can't even see and they're constantly arranging themselves. And we have learned how to arrange some of them ourselves. And that's all there is. And it wasn't any God or anything necessary to make the universe, it just happened, but if you want to believe this — and then it goes — it's a very long poem.

And he is — down through the centuries, he was picked up — dropped — somewhere after Christ is born. And then, he was picked up again during the Renaissance and he disappeared. And now, some E. O. Wilson and people like him are beginning to pick up on him. And then Bill — not Bill Moyers, but — the guy at night —

MR. HERMAN: Charlie Rose?

MR. BALAZS: Charlie Rose had an interview with some guy that just happened —

MR. HERMAN: Thank you.

MR. BALAZS: — to pick up his book and read it and he was just enthralled with it and wrote a great big long tome. It was from Harvard English Department. But it's tedious in places, but it's one of the most fascinating books I ever read. And it just made me think that we're all — that's our heads up our asses and we're making a mess of everything. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: It doesn't sound like you read trivial stuff.

MR. BALAZS: Well, you know, one of my favorite authors is [Nikos] Kazantzakis and then Loren Eiseley. Have you ever read any of his stuff?

MR. HERMAN: Mm-mm. [Negative.] I know the name, but I never —

MR. BALAZS: Anthropologist. And he has some ideas about art and stuff that are just wondrous. But Gabriel Garcia Márquez, I read — I read almost all of his work. And — but I try to read a lot of variety stuff and I really like people like what's her name — the black lady that didn't talk for years?

MR. HERMAN: That didn't talk for years, did you say?

MR. BALAZS: Well, no, she did — well, she was — she was traumatized and never speaking — spoke at — I'm just falling apart —

MR. HERMAN: It'll come to you and we can add it to the transcript.

MR. BALAZS: But she's written — well, and then, Toni Morrison and those kinds of —

MR. HERMAN: That's who I thought — that was the name that I was trying to bring to my mind, but — have you traveled much and has that influenced to your work?

MR. BALAZS: Well, we got to go to Italy, in '72 —

MR. HERMAN: Hence, the della Robbia experience?

MR. BALAZS: Yes, yeah. And we went in '72 and we went to Spain and Rome, and then to visit Rosemary's relatives, where her folks come from, in Switzerland. But yeah, it just blew my mind. And I had borrowed my father's camera, done a single picture — the light meter broke — [laughs] — I didn't get a single picture. But yeah, and I think the [Museo del] Prado [Madrid, Spain] was really it as far as — because after a while, I just — I wouldn't look at the pictures on the wall. I'd just look at the floor and where the boards had been replaced or worn and there was the good art, the great stuff. You know, and then I went into the Uffizi [Gallery, Florence, Italy] — yeah, Uffizi —

MR. HERMAN: Uffizi, in — yeah —

MR. BALAZS: And here's just — it's just row after row of important people. And they're all lousy painting — well, they're not lousy, but Jesus, I mean who — and so I did a whole series of — on these big panels, some of the biggest enamels I did, very important people with a halo, but they're totally — you know, you couldn't recognize them or know them. But they were figures — that's probably the most figurative stuff I ever did. And, God, and then you stand there in front of that Michelangelo statue and, shit —

MR. HERMAN: *David* [1501-1504]?

MR. BALAZS: Yes, you said, "What in the hell am I doing here?" This guy, you know, was so incredible. But I — but somewhere, I — you looked at all — we got to see all of the painters and, you know — well, all of them. Then I ended up — the ones I'm most interested is Caravaggio. And then, I loved them all, the Renaissance.

MR. HERMAN: Have you seen any contemporary work recently that you really admire or any artists that kind of have struck a chord?

MR. BALAZS: I have, but I don't remember. We have a little — there are three guys here in town that I think are very — a guy named Mel McCuddin, a couple of other guys; an Indian fellow, Ric Gendron. He's just having a national touring show. And another guy, Bob Grimes, who just looks like he came from another planet. It's low relief, incredible intricately woodwork. I can — I have a piece of his.

But years ago — did you ever read — God, he was a philosopher and — God, everybody knew his work. But anyway, he did a dissertation on fame and — God, but anyway. He said the road to fame is to be recognized by people who are very capable or something. And they would get in a

relationship with you and make you make more money, but they'd make more money than you do, you know. [Laughs.] And he says that that is — if you look at all famous people, they've gone down that road. Somebody picks them up and turns them into something. And he says, "The one thing to remember about fame is that" — let's see how does it go again? "You can't rise to the top of any discipline without being part rascal." [Laughs.] And now, I think you'd say despot or something.

It's harder even — but Jacob Lawrence and — no, not Jacob Lawrence. He's a painter. Loren Eiseley, this world-famous, one of the most important anthropologists — I mean, he had a way of writing that just got at your guts. If — his — most of his writing is really lectures he gave at college, and so they're short and you could read them in an hour or so. But it's just an amazing grasp of the language and being a human in this world. And he was highly revered.

And as he grew older, he started writing. And as soon as his writing became immensely popular; it was selling everywhere and turning on intellectuals, he was — his peers wouldn't talk to him. And Jacob Bronowski, who was a great scientist — and I've read about three scientists, some of these their last treatises, and as soon as you make the laity in your discipline, understand what you're doing and revere what you're doing, you'll be dropped by all of your fellow scientists because you're making the common man be able to understand what the hell we're all talking about.

MR. HERMAN: We need mystery? Is that what that's about?

MR. BALAZS: We need — and of course, I think that's — every discipline's got it. And these guys who articulate the resonant substance of a — you know, you've read it — do you take a *New Yorker*?

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: Did you read — I think it was just the last issue about this guy who's not making things?

MR. HERMAN: I'm about a year behind. [Laughs.]

MR. BALAZS: Well, he doesn't make things anymore. And he's just a darling. And he gets — he grabs friends and acquaintances, but he tries to find intellectual people, and gets six, seven of them and then they're just put in a room and start talking. And that's the art.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yeah.

MR. BALAZS: There's no object. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: That almost seems to go back to the idea of the salon —

MR. BALAZS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. HERMAN: — which maybe it's time that we did revive that, getting people from different disciplines who are thinkers —

MR. BALAZS: Yes, right. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — in the same room together.

MR. BALAZS: Well, I read a book years ago called — well, it doesn't make any — but the thesis was

these two guys found everybody in every discipline you can imagine and asked them what was considered impossible 10 years ago? What did you do to overcome it, resolve that? [Inaudible.] And now what is now considered impossible?

It was the most fascinating book I read. And it hadn't — I don't pretend to understand solid-state physics, but you get an idea what's being discussed. Then they said — they named what was wrong, and what they tried to overcome, and how they overcome it. They name such and such — etch is what it was — and then what overcame it was crosspollination with other disciplines, mostly people in the arts.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that's interesting because I think just as you found ways to use Styrofoam and materials, that is — you've had a crosspollination with science —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. [Laughs.] Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — in that way and industry that has, I wouldn't say informed your art, but made perhaps changes in your art possible.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And when I worked in this plant that allowed people like myself to come and — they only — there was only about four or five of us, you know, because there would be these artists would come in and — "I am an artist and I want to try this and I want you to — as your duty to our species, you will do it for me free," and that kind of thing.

And these people had no concept of manufacturing. They couldn't look at this room full of people processing this material to make this, that, and the other thing. And then it had to go here and be sprayed. And they would make no effort to fit into that system. They would just go up and demand that their panel be sprayed right now.

MR. HERMAN: They didn't really care about learning something new that they could from the factory workers.

MR. BALAZS: No. No. They just wanted — they — out the door with those guys, you know. You can't stop a whole goddamn production line. You just — when your system is doing this —

MR. HERMAN: You know, that reminds me. I think there have been programs of artists in the factory.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, boy. Kohler.

MR. HERMAN: And I haven't heard of that for a long time. But I think that that probably requires the kind of artists as you are who is receptive to seeing how things are made and what they're made of and —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Kohler still does that.

MR. HERMAN: Of course they do. Yes. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: That's — yeah. And another — I can't remember — was it Taliesin that did the

prints? You know, they would print — I could go down there with ideas and they'd —

MR. HERMAN: Taliesin West in Arizona — I don't know —

MR. BALAZS: I think that's — I think that's what they did. And there was one in — one or two in Seattle for a while. And there was this one that moved here, but he charged \$200 a day, which was fine by me. But, boy, I mean, these guys got all the — and, again, one of the problems with — if I bought tools for everything I wanted to do, I wouldn't have anything left over, you know.

MR. HERMAN: Well, I was — I was just thinking about, you know, hearing about things — [inaudible] — if manufacturers are approached by, say, an arts council saying, "Would you take an artist in residence for two weeks?" or whatever it might be, the manufacturer would be most concerned about how that will disrupt production. Not what the —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yeah or liability for injuries.

MR. HERMAN: Yes, what the outcome might be that might then benefit him or her. It's a very different concept. I forgot about the Kohler program, which has been really an interesting one.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Well it's — one of the reasons is lawyers.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, sure.

MR. BALAZS: You know, he falls down, and I know the brick plant and —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, at Archie? Oh, no — you're not — I was — when you say brick plant, I think of Archie Bray Foundation and how that started as a brick plant.

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.] But they finally just — because I'd done — the guys really knew me and knew how careful I was and everything, they still took me, but they weren't supposed to, you know. But the man upstairs, Fred Bassetti, had started — he was talking — he was a real art lover and a convert. So he didn't pay too much attention to his lawyers either, but more and more, as I've been involved in those things, you've got to have the head man really simpatico. You know, that fountain downtown was a classic example, very simpatico people at every level except the city bureaucracy.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. For something like that, I would think you would need a whole bunch of people with quite different skills and ideas because you were dealing really with moving water and pumps and —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Yes. [Laughs.] You know, I didn't even have a contract for that job. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: I remember when I was here a number of years ago, you were working on an idea for — I don't think it was that fountain, but you wanted to engage the community. And I don't remember now whether you were going to make handprints in concrete or —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: It wasn't that project, though. I don't think it was.

MR. BALAZS: I've engaged in a number of those. And I wish I was an activist because I have a whole series of essays by people talking about the importance of art in the human experience and

education. And they're very profound tomes. I've lost them — given them away and then nobody ever sent them back.

But I think probably the most — one of the really important days of my life was — Coeur d'Alene was a neo-Nazi headquarters.

MR. HERMAN: Right. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: And they —

MR. HERMAN: They could still be. I don't know.

MR. BALAZS: They don't last very long over there anymore.

MR. HERMAN: No.

MR. BALAZS: But they were going to have a big day of parades, and nobody went except the people — the voices —

MR. HERMAN: You mean, the neo-Nazis were.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yeah.

MR. BALAZS: And the only people who come to raise a stink came over from Seattle, and they were ugly and yelling and bitching. The whole town and area went down and they had ethnic food platforms, tents, whatever, all through this park.

MR. HERMAN: It seems alien to the whole neo-Nazi idea.

MR. BALAZS: But then, along the waterfront, there was a Tibetan monk here doing — showing kids sand painting. So we got gallons of dried pigment, wheelbarrows, and a big stack of white sand. And everybody come, everybody come, and we're going to make this great big thing on the beach in colored sand, which was — had to be non-toxic.

So, anyway, he came along and sort of showed everybody how to get started. And so what's going to be the idea? What's the concept? There's a marvelous saying I use in a lot of my work, join the hands — I use this so much, I can't remember — join the hands of men in other lands. So I says, "OK, we're going to get all these kids and try to — let them stress their ethnicity in some way." And I did a great big statue. We used black sand to outline everything. And then I made a Statue of Liberty and with her arm stood out. And then I — about 10 feet, I put a couple of rocks and that was to be where the hands joined. This was about 100 yards long down the beach.

And the first question — the committee over there — the first question, "Well, don't we have to set up some people to judge these design submittals so we keep it good quality"? And so I said, "Ma'am, you aren't thinking right. There's going to be no designs submittals at all." [Laughs.]

And these people come from — with their kids. And we had — you know, volunteers were mixing up this colored sand and we had a million coffee cans so everybody would get. And there were hundreds of people there. And they would — and I — and I sort of said, "Oh, people —" and somebody said, "I want to make a crazy cat. Make crazy cat. What the hell." So wherever these

rocks land — and that was where a hand was, the two hands.

MR. HERMAN: That's a great idea.

MR. BALAZS: And these kids and their parents — it was just — it just tore your guts out. And they brought over — from a Catholic church that was a sanctuary for a whole bunch of people from Madagascar or South America someplace. And they had about 15 of these kids that they rescued from some these terrible instances.

MR. HERMAN: This was in Coeur d'Alene?

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And they won a big prize for this in humanist circles or something. But anyway, they were mostly little kids. And they says — they come up and — "What can we make? What can we make?" in Spanish, which I vaguely recognize. And the only thing I could think of is cucarachas. [They laugh.] And these little kids running around —

MR. HERMAN: Only word in Spanish.

MR. BALAZS: Yes and the only word I knew. And I just had these cucarachas all through the thing. But then, one little —

MR. HERMAN: And they all knew what they looked like.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. [They laugh.] One little girl made her church. Jesus Christ, you know. And I've never seen so many people just caught up in something. And I knew right away that art has a very important place in everything. But how do you do it?

MR. HERMAN: But, you know, the trick is unleashing creativity from these boundaries —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, yes.

MR. HERMAN: — of coloring between — inside the lines.

MR. BALAZS: Right. And the committees to choose which are the better. Yes. I went down to Texas once and did a workshop in printmaking. And then they had this program where the really hard to do children every Thursday are sent to this one school, and they do elevating things, that you learn stuff and so forth.

MR. HERMAN: You mean, they're kids with ADD or — oh, yeah —

MR. BALAZS: You name it. Yes. You name it. So I went there. And there's about 35 of them. And I looked over around — there were three policemen with guns and clubs. And I just said, well — so what I did with the kids — I brought a bunch of potatoes and I showed them how to cut potatoes and print them, you know. And then I did a silkscreen. I let them tore paper, make up designs, and then they — and then we just laid it on the silkscreen. They laid the pieces of paper they cut or tore on a piece of paper and then we just — here's your picture, you know.

And that went on for about three hours this afternoon. And when the time — they all went home and these policemen came over and said, "We've been doing this for several years," and he says, "This is the first time we haven't had to get our guns out," you know.

MR. HERMAN: Because you engaged them.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. It's — we — Ken Spring [ph] and other — and the opera house has a three-story atrium or whatever, place where people go have there — and —

MR. HERMAN: Opera house where?

MR. BALAZS: Opera house here in town.

MR. HERMAN: In Spokane?

MR. BALAZS: And we had — there's a place down in Coeur d'Alene that makes — or in Idaho — that makes paper. And this paper that they make egg crates or ice cream cartons and milk cartons out of is really thick and waxy. And they — every now and then they — you can go down there and get these huge rolls of this stuff for public causes. So that's what they have.

And we had then colored paper, five colors of paper and we divided these kids — as they came in the door, they had to pick a color of paper so that the group from North Central got broken up and everybody that was blue had to — of what — but they can — so there was none of that going on. And then, "OK, now, you're going to make a village of your group. Get together and see what you want to do. And the teachers all said, "Oh, you can't do something like that." They said, "Our kids — you've got to do watercolor — our kids' attention span is 45 minutes and you're going to have to spend the whole day doing 45-minute things. We won't do it if we've got to do that." Those kids, you couldn't get out of there at the end of the day.

MR. HERMAN: [Laughs.]

MR. BALAZS: And one guy — one class, they took this — made an arm that was 15 feet long. It stood on this —

MR. HERMAN: Out of this paper.

MR. BALAZS: Out of this paper.

MR. HERMAN: Whole paper pulp.

MR. BALAZS: And then it went up and held a rose that went on up to the third floor.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, my gosh.

MR. BALAZS: And the stuff those kids made was — and nobody ever took any pictures of it. But the most wonderful thing — we had some eight-foot paper and they had an eight-foot ceiling in the — where you went in to check your coats and things, and there's these cans up there in the sky. And these kids — I says, "You think about this." And so this kid comes up and they would take an eight-foot piece of this paper, roll it around — roll it down the floor until they had maybe four or five layers that was this big in diameter, and then they'd tape that. And they had X-ACTO knives and stuff. And they stood them up and then started cutting in there. And then they could down one, two, three —

MR. HERMAN: And how old were these kids?

MR. BALAZS: High school kids. They went down one, two, three or four slices, layers of paper and created this forest that was unbelievable, this — all these limbs had bent out and — Jesus —

MR. HERMAN: Wow.

MR. BALAZS: — it just knocked your mind out. And, again, all these teachers says, "Well — you know, watch Johnny and watch Jimmy and watch Ellen. They are real troublemakers." They were the most creative and the most energetic and the most bestest kids of the lot.

MR. HERMAN: It's really sad that we've eliminated art from schools now.

MR. BALAZS: Everything.

MR. HERMAN: And that there really isn't even that opportunity anymore except through workshops like that where those kids can get access to it.

MR. BALAZS: Well, they just — the new mayor just said, "What has art ever done for the community?" and cut the budget and fired the girls that was art commissioner and everything, you know. I don't know why that can't get sold. God, when you see what these kids become when they're in a — in a place where they can just do and be. You know, it just —

MR. HERMAN: I think because there's no one who really speaks for that.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: It's interesting. That reminded me a little bit of something else I'd read about the artists you admire, and that Simon Rodia, who built the Watts Towers. And I was involved with something a few years ago to bring together a group of artists to Rock Hill, South Carolina, where they've closed all the textile factories and shipped the work off to Asia or South America. And they were trying to figure out what to do with these factory buildings. So they got together a bunch of craftspeople who worked with recycled materials or who otherwise had brilliant ideas —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — to bring to these factories with all the glut of recycled stuff that was produced in that area to figure out what could be made of this that could be — could reengage these factories again and the community to make it? It was a very interesting — I was —

MR. BALAZS: Oh, Jesus, yeah.

MR. HERMAN: — there only because I had written a book called *Trashformations [Recycled Materials in American Art and Design]*. Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, WA: 1998]. [They laugh.] You remember — I think you were in that show with one of the dryer lids.

MR. BALAZS: That's right.

MR. HERMAN: Anyway, it was really interesting because they had seen the potential for art to reinvigorate that community economically.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. I participated in enough of those to know I should probably take myself to task and devote the rest of my life to organizing that on a grander scale, but I don't have that energy anymore.

But, God, I have been involved in so many of those things where you just — it's all you can do to keep from crying because somebody has paid attention. And I hate to say it but men have better

luck than — at it than women because most kids — I did some of this in Alaska. And these kids have had no experience of playing with a man. Their dads and the men are all drunk, laying in the house.

MR. HERMAN: Well, there are lots of regions of the country that that's true, but for different reasons.

MR. BALAZS: Well, yeah. But one of the things we did, we — they have a kind of berry that grows very straight stalks. And they have a kind of kite that takes three of those and a piece of paper and tapes them down and flies, and we'd make a kite that flies. And those kids just went nuts flying those kites. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: You had mentioned the Coeur D'Alene project. Nobody had taken pictures of it. Have — has there been documentation of some of these other projects?

MR. BALAZS: Oh, the Coeur D'Alene thing has, but not the one downtown here in Spokane.

MR. HERMAN: Oh. Oh. Because I think that that — you know, somebody should wake up and do a whole — if not a video, a book about that kind of reinvigoration of art in kids where it's not otherwise exercised.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. I just get sick to my stomach when I see — I just said, "One more hour, can I save that kid," you know. And these little Alaskan villages, the Tlingits and the Haidas don't get along. And then, there's talk about races. You know, they have a hierarchy.

And the first time I went to a — made the mistake of befriending a kid that was suffering from having got chicken — or measles, you know, when he was in the uterus. And he was always somebody who was the one that really showed interest in everything. And so I went to his house and they were a really nice couple and they had me for supper. And the next day, the mayor of the town, who was a woman — 400 people in town — she says, "You went to the Joneses last night for supper." And I said, "Yes." "Here's a list of children in this community and at the school that you won't associate with."

MR. HERMAN: You won't associate with?

MR. BALAZS: I won't associate with.

MR. HERMAN: Because you'd visited that.

MR. BALAZS: Because they're in the lower — they were lower class. They were the slave class. And they were descended of the slave class and you're not to waste your time on those kids.

The next town I went to, I was met at the airplane with a lady who handed me a list of the people I was not to associate with in that town. And being one —

MR. HERMAN: Boy, isn't that a dare?

MR. BALAZS: Oh, shit. And when you're one of four white people.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: You know, and the first town I went to was — they were away on vacation. They

forgot the schedule or something. And so I went to a bar. And the first — there were two bars for the good people and the bad people. And I went to the bad people one just because it was closest, and befriended — started playing pool with this guy. And he was a fisherman, mackerel fisherman for bait. And everything had gone wrong — he broke his strut for his engine. And I said, "Well, you still have it"? So we stuck it together with glue because there was a little foundry in the art department and nobody had ever used it. And I set it up, and got some sand down, we poured — [inaudible]. Well, shit, I didn't buy beer the rest of the time I was there. And I says, you know, "What's going on here"? I says, "I've run into this thing. Your folks were slaves and you've got all this stuff" — and he said, "Oh, Balazs," he says, "everybody's got their niggers." [Laughs.] But, oh, God. There was another thing that came out of this, it was so powerful.

MR. HERMAN: That has to do with pecking order?

MR. BALAZS: Pecking order? Pecking order? Yes. We had — oh, shit, I wish I could remember the next — we built — the school had no playground equipment. And so we got driftwood and everything that we could find and made playground equipment, which was mostly for kids that weren't in high school.

And the day I left — oh, God, everybody was so happy to have — you know, it was really pretty imaginative stuff and I could tell that something was going on. The upper grades were amassing. They were getting together and so forth. So I went down and got in the airplane and then the airplane took off. And they know right where you're sitting. And as the plane came over their heads, all those bigger kids smashed it all. And the little kids were all hanging on and trying to get them to stop it, you know. God.

MR. HERMAN: Who has usually sponsored these visits for you?

MR. BALAZS: That one — the Alaska experience is all by the Alaska art commission. And these other things have —

MR. HERMAN: Yes. They should have money to do a lot of stuff.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. And then some — the ones in Coeur D'Alene, is they just have a very active group that sponsors art things. They put this book together. And then, I've had different schools who had people within them that really understand. And, of course, this 40-minute module that they have or 45-minute module, they said, "What could you make." I said, "Well, pick 10 kids or whatever." I said, "Ten is probably a nice number, 12 and I'll come over there and I'll work in concrete and Styrofoam and we'll make these things and I'll have a certain amount of control and they'll design their own section. But — they'll have to be" — and they were. They were allowed to be out of class for the week I was there. And they made this — these wondrous things, you know. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: That's amazing. You know, that story reminds me of artists I've known who have gotten grants to go to some community in South Africa or some place.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Oh, God, I'd love to do that.

MR. HERMAN: And, you know, Lynn Di Nino.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, Yes.

MR. HERMAN: And Lynn went to Uganda, I think, last year.

MR. BALAZS: Oh, my God.

MR. HERMAN: And worked — she and several other artists worked with these women in the community. I thought, and it's amazing the innate creativity that humans encompass that just needs something —

MR. BALAZS: Creativity, oh Jesus — have. A little push, but not much.

MR. HERMAN: — to release it. Yes. Yes.

MR. BALAZS: This business of painting with the sand didn't take any — let's all — let's all get together here and do — that wasn't necessary. And I almost got suckered in that *Three Cups of Tea* [David Oliver Relin and Greg Mortenson. Penguin: New York, 2006] thing. [Referring to the exposed financial mismanagement of the Central Asia Institute charity in 2012.]

MR. HERMAN: I know. You've referred to the — and —

MR. BALAZS: And I really was ready to write and say, I'd like to go over there and let the kids do things —

MR. HERMAN: You know, even now — even if it was embellished, the idea is a good one.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes.

MR. HERMAN: As much as I know about it. I mean — [inaudible] — tried to build the schools and —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. There — it's — I've had so many good experiences with the little kids come up and, "Thanks, mister," and all that sort of thing. Rosemary and I did a big school up in Anchorage and we hung everything — it was a grade school. We hung everything — instead of 16 inches, "Thanks, mister, for hanging this so we can see it," you know.

And — but the people in high places just — like our mayor just said that art has — what good is art, you know — [inaudible]. Probably the most poignant one was, again, we divided up a whole bunch of kids into clubs — five clubs. And there's a retreat out here where we went for about four days. And five people — you had to pick up — agree on a village color and a village symbol and then everybody had to come up with the village's — it was — this involved songs and poets and —

MR. HERMAN: Oh, my God.

MR. BALAZS: Yes, and everything. And then we did it all — you had to make this sand painting on this — there was this place where there was this huge mound of rock, you know, granite. And they all — we divided this thing into a pie and then everybody had to decorate their pie. And then we had an alpenhorn made out of this heavy paper. And as the sun was coming up, we all went — they went through this thing they made the day before, like to burn the prayers on a thing.

And, my God, without even ever making a plan, the shadow of that thing went across the axis of this pie we had made. You know, it was just sort of — and it was just — everybody of — but there was one kid there who was just a fucking nerd, he couldn't believe, why was he involved in this thing.

[Phone rings.]

Is it 5:30?

[Audio break.]

MR. HERMAN: Start again, Harold.

MR. BALAZS: One of the things about this little project was the — there were three rolling hills, the — [inaudible] — outcroppings. So — and we were by a tree there and we had this colored sand. So I sat there and directed these kids. So if you were in the right place, you'd see this as one drawing going all across. It was a spectacular little project. But, anyway, the last thing in this ceremony was to recite the composure of your poem that was important to you. And they were all kind of fun.

And this kid, who was the nerd and he couldn't believe it, he got up and you could see he was sort of choked up. And he read this thing about the death of his brother, which he was partly responsible for. You know, it just — God, there wasn't a dry eye there.

MR. HERMAN: Wow.

MR. BALAZS: And then you get — okay, you did this over four days with a group of children. What's your analysis of this? And we had — I just wrote — "We had one guy who made all of us cry," or something and that's enough for me, you know. [Laughs.]

And, God, you know, it just — the potential that's out there for people to understand one another is endless, but we've got a whole bunch of goddamn leaders of the world who will not do it.

MR. HERMAN: A need for a method to release what's inside.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. [Laughs.] Yes. Yes. You know, the world's religions are acting very poorly.

MR. HERMAN: You know, I think that times have changed, too, with respect to the openness of creativity.

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: We went from the freedoms of the '60s and the excesses to a degree, too —

MR. BALAZS: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: — to a kind of straight-laced conformist era after that. And I'm not really sure where we are now. And it's kind of troubling. But I think what you're going to say is that that need probably is always there for particularly the disenfranchised to find an outlet for their creativity.

MR. BALAZS: Find an out for — yes.

MR. HERMAN: And if they're troubled by something, they can find a way to express it, maybe, that way.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Well, Moyers has always sort of dealt with those issues very succinctly and whatchamacallit too, Charlie Rose. You know, they — [inaudible].

MR. HERMAN: So many people I know watch Charlie Rose and I never had. And now I just discovered, in trying to turn on to something other than the Olympics on NBC, that Charlie Rose has the morning show on —

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Show now. Yes. It's not as —

MR. HERMAN: — CBS or ABC. I don't remember.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. I don't think he — it's such a short bite. It's not a good format for him at all.

MR. HERMAN: It's not the best format for him, probably. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Harold, is there anything else that you would like to talk about because I think I've exhausted all my questions, a line of questioning about your work.

MR. BALAZS: So are you coming tomorrow? Is that what you're telling me?

MR. HERMAN: I don't know that I need to.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. Well, I think —

MR. HERMAN: I could go over, you know, that again. And —

MR. BALAZS: Would you like to see what I'm doing in the shop at all?

MR. HERMAN: I would indeed.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. I think my biggest concern is not about me as an artist but about me as a human being and trying to make the world a little better place, you know.

But I had — I did a thing over in one of the schools where they had this really outstanding teacher that they wanted — he died and they wanted to do something. And he apparently had written and preached and so forth. I don't know if preach is the right word, but, anyway, this is diagonal, crossword — writing, but not writing words.

MR. HERMAN: Calligraphy? No. Oh, yeah. Gestures.

MR. BALAZS: Yes. There were just calligraphic things that suggest — gestures that suggested and it was just called *Writing on the Wall*.

Well, then, we got that up. They liked it so much, they asked if I'd do the eulogy. And this guy apparently had really helped a lot of people. So I — on the absolute spur of the moment, I just — I said, "Things all the time, damn things are changing, but there must be one thing that shall never change and that is that every generation must have in its number those who by their example ask us to be the best we can become." And I think that's probably a pretty profound thing, you know. [Laughs.] And I've used it in many cases at funerals and so forth. But that's true.

MR. HERMAN: Who in your generation did that for you?

MR. BALAZS: Oh, George Laisner, you know.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, yes.

MR. BALAZS: But I look at people like Bill Moyers, Charlie Rose, and just Loren Eiseley. Loren Eiseley I think probably — I read him probably more than anything I've ever read. And then I have one book that I've read about four times now. God, I can't remember her name [Beryl Markham]. *West with the Night* [1942]. She was the gal — she was — they did a movie about her. Oh, God. And she only

wrote the one book. And she was the first woman bush pilot in Africa. And the movie was *Out of Africa* [1985] or something it was called.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, right.

MR. BALAZS: And — but that book — oh, who's the guy that wrote about Spain?

MR. HERMAN: [Ernest] Hemingway?

MR. BALAZS: Hemingway did the — he said this is one of the best writers of our time, he said. But it's nothing great, but it's just somebody who does the job they have to do without whining and carrying on and trying to screw somebody.

MR. HERMAN: I think you're kind of like that, too.

MR. BALAZS: Well, I want — I hope I am.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. BALAZS: I hope I am because I — times are changing. Have you married — [inaudible]?

MR. HERMAN: Not yet. When this is all resolved this fall, we thought, well —

MR. BALAZS: Let's try then.

MR. HERMAN: On our — in two years, a year and a half, next January — I'm going to turn this off now. Now, this is the end of the interview with Harold Balazs.

MR. BALAZS: [Laughs.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]